Literacy Achievement and Retention Activity

# Final Performance Report

April 7, 2015–April 6, 2021

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# PROJECT INFORMATION

| | |
|---|---|
| Activity Name | USAID/Uganda Literacy Achievement and Retention Activity |
| Activity Start Date and End Date: | April 7, 2015 to April 6, 2021 |
| Name of Prime Implementing Partner: | RTI International |
| Contract/Agreement Number: | AID-617-A-15-00009 |
| Name of Subcontractors/ Sub-awardees and Dollar Amounts: | Sub-awards:<br>• World Vision, $345,137<br>Subcontractors:<br>• Bantwana/World Education, Inc., $300,195<br>• Development Links Consult, $77,176<br>• MAAD Advertising Limited, $184,812<br>• Viamo, $148,036<br>Subgrantees:[1]<br>• Appropriate Revival Initiative for Strategic Empowerment (ARISE), $208,198.07<br>• Centre for Governance and Economic Development (CEGED), $144, 600.01<br>• Child Rights Empowerment and Development (CEDO), $338,733.84<br>• Community Awareness and Response on AIDS (CARA), $210,147.66<br>• Community Driven Network-Uganda, $174,682.23<br>• Community Integrated Development Initiatives (CIDI), $358,372.56<br>• Environmental Conservation and Agricultural Enhancement Uganda, (Eco-Agric), $115,435.77<br>• Family Strength for a Better Child (FASBEC), $430,244.18<br>• Joy Initiative Uganda, $115,648<br>• Literacy Action Development Agency (LADA), $480,341.39<br>• Masaka Green Light Impact Program (MAGLIP), $244,206.54<br>• Multi Community Based Development Initiative (MUCOBADI), $156,174.24<br>• Network for Community Development (NCD), $356,860.72<br>• Proactive Approaches for Children and Community Transformation (PACT), $156,223.22<br>• SHED, $96,053.03 |
| Major Counterpart Organizations: | Ministry of Education and Sports |
| Geographic Coverage (Districts): | 43 Districts |
| Reporting Period: | April 7, 2015–April 6, 2021 |

[1] The final amounts of subgrants is different from previous reports as a result of the project's final reconciliation, which was carried out in its grants management.

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# ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| AIDS | Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome |
| ART | Antiretroviral Therapy |
| BE | Basic Education (Department) |
| BFA | Books for Africa |
| BOCY | Better Outcomes for Children and Youth |
| BWG | Basic Education Working Group |
| C | Cluster |
| CBO | Community-Based Organization |
| CC | Coordinating Center |
| CCA | Community Change Agent |
| CCT | Coordinating Center Tutor |
| CDCS | Country Development Cooperation Strategy |
| CDO | Community Development Officer |
| CIM | Communication and Information Management |
| CLA | Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting |
| COP | Country Operational Plan |
| COU | Church of Uganda |
| COVID-19 | Coronavirus Disease 2019 |
| CPD | Continuous Professional Development |
| CPTC | Core Primary Teachers' College |
| DAC | Day of the African Child |
| DEAR | Drop Everything and Read |
| DEO | District Education Officer |
| DREAMS | Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-free, Mentored, and Safe |
| EGR | Early Grade Reading |
| EGRA | Early Grade Reading Assessment |
| FA | Field Assistant |
| FAS | Focused, Actionable and Simple |
| FGD | Focus Group Discussions |
| FY | Fiscal Year |
| GBV | Gender-Based Violence |
| GPE | Global Partnership for Education |

| | |
|---|---|
| HIV | Human Immunodeficiency Virus |
| ILEAP | Improving the Learning and Educational Attainment in Primary |
| IMU | Instructional Materials Unit |
| IP | Implementing Partner |
| IR | Intermediate Result |
| IS | Inspector of Schools |
| IT | Information Technology |
| LARA | Literacy Achievement and Retention Activity |
| LQAS | Lot Quality Assurance Sampling |
| MEO | Municipal Education Officer |
| MoES | Ministry of Education and Sports |
| MGLSD | Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development |
| MSS | Monitoring and Support Supervision |
| NCDC | National Curriculum Development Centre |
| NGO | Nongovernmental Organization |
| NORC | National Opinion Research Center |
| OGAC | Office of Global AIDS Coordinator |
| ORF | Oral Reading Fluency |
| OVC | Orphans and Vulnerable Children |
| P | Primary (grade) |
| PC | Program Coordinator |
| PEPFAR | U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief |
| PS | Permanent Secretary |
| PSS | Psychosocial Support |
| PTA | Parent-Teacher Association |
| PTC | Primary Teacher College |
| R | Result Area |
| RTRR | Reporting, Tracking, Referral and Response |
| SBCC | Social and Behavior Change Communication |
| SCA | School Change Agent |
| SEL | Social and Emotional Learning |
| SHRP | School Health and Reading Program |
| SMC | School Management Committee |
| SMS | Short Message Service |
| SRGBV | School-Related Gender-Based Violence |

| | |
|---|---|
| T | Time |
| TOR | Terms of Reference |
| TP | Teacher Patron |
| TOT | Trainer of Trainers |
| UPE | Universal Primary Education |
| USAID | United States Agency for International Development |
| UTSEP | Uganda Teacher and School Effectiveness Project |
| VACiS | Violence Against Children in and around Schools |
| VCCMC | Village Child Case Management Committee |

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Literacy Achievement and Retention Activity (LARA) was a United States Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded project designed to support the Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) to achieve improved reading abilities for young children and improved primary-level retention. The project was expanded to include US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) programming in 2018. Initially, LARA was a 5-year program, but was extended in 2019 for 12 months for a complete period of performance running from April 7, 2015 to April 6, 2021. The extension aimed to explore innovative approaches to accelerate reading gains. Due to coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) and the MoES' subsequent closure of schools in March 2020, LARA's planned extension pilots could not be continued because pilot activities were dependent on the interactions between the head teacher and teachers, among teachers, and between teachers and pupils in the target schools. Instead, LARA, in consultation with USAID, responded to the MoES COVID19 Preparedness and Response Plan by redirecting funding from the cancelled activities towards activities that supported the MOES' COVID 19 response.

LARA was implemented by RTI International, in collaboration with subpartners, World Vision, World Education/Bantwana, Books for Africa (BFA), MAAD Advertising, Viamo Communications, and 15 local community-based organizations (CBOs).

**LARA by the numbers**

1.4 million learners reached with improved reading materials and instruction

18,902 teachers trained to teach reading, 32,343 teachers trained to reduce school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) and 7,923 teachers trained on HIV and AIDS prevention

3.6 million pupil books and teacher guides distributed to 3,479 government primary schools

104,602 adolescents empowered with HIV and AIDS information and life skills

During the life of the project, approximately 18,902 teachers and head teachers were trained on effective reading instruction, 32,343 teachers were trained on SRGBV, and 7,923 on human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) prevention education. More than 1.4 million learners at 3,479 schools were reached with reading interventions, while 1.7 million learners were reached at 2,869 schools with SRGBV interventions, and 104,602 boys and girls, of which 3,381 Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-free, Mentored, and Safe (DREAMS) girls from 1,122 schools received targeted, layered support on HIV and AIDS and SRGBV prevention. A total of 3,479 schools were reached with aspects of the LARA intervention.

During its lifetime, the project revised 32 early grade reading (EGR) teacher guides and pupil books in three local languages and English and developed four Journeys Activity Handbooks: one each for teachers, one for communities, and two for pupils. LARA printed and distributed 3.6 million books to project-supported schools, including 347,027 supplementary reading books that were donated to school libraries.

Major findings from LARA's results are below.

- Local language oral reading fluency (ORF) in Luganda and Runyankore-Rukiga was significantly higher in project schools than control schools by the end of primary (P)3.

- English ORF was significantly higher in Runyankore-Rukiga-speaking schools than in control schools by the end of P3. Luganda-speaking schools had better English ORF scores than control schools, but the difference was not statistically significant.
- Learners in project schools were more likely to identify correct letter sounds in English than learners in control schools.
- By the time pupils reached P4, pupils exposed to the EGR program right from the start of their primary schooling were more likely to become fluent readers than those exposed to the program one grade later.
- Pupils in LARA-supported schools had a slight gain in the composite index score on perceptions of school climate than pupils in control schools, but the effect size was very small (effect = 0.13). Qualitative data from pupils and teachers suggested that the interactions and relationships between and among teachers and pupils had improved in LARA schools. Although these qualitative findings indicate that some attributes of the school climate were positively influenced by Journeys, quantitative results suggest there is room for further progress in improving the school climate.
- The pupils' social and emotional learning (SEL) index scores were slightly greater for pupils participating in the Journeys program than for control-school pupils, but the effect size was negligible (effect = 0.11) and, thus, non-conclusive on the Journeys impact on pupils SEL overall. However, individual interviews and focus group discussions with pupils and teachers pointed to some positive shifts, including improved pro-social behaviors and interpersonal interactions between and among teachers and pupils as a result of Journeys.
- A comparison of changes in the extent of pupils' experience of bullying in LARA versus control schools after one year of exposure to the Journeys program did not yield statistically significant differences. However, the second analysis, which compared LARA and control schools on the prevalence rates of girls and boys experiencing bullying multiple times in a school term (i.e., as opposed to once in term), showed that for boys, in the LARA schools only, there was a notable drop in the multiple-time bullying prevalence from the end of P2 to end of P3.
- Results also indicate that a greater number of LARA schools demonstrated a statistically significant reduction in the prevalence of corporal punishment as a result of participating in the Journeys program for one year.
- From P2 to P3, there was a drop in sexual violence in both the LARA and control schools. For both LARA and control schools there was a significantly larger drop in the reported experience of sexual violence from P2 to P3 for girls compared to boys. These changes may be a result of the influence of age.

A major focus of LARA was to support the Government of Uganda (GoU), through the MoES, in expanding a successful approach to reading instruction and introducing SRGBV education in schools where LARA worked. This was done to ensure government ownership and sustainability of all project activities by planning and implementing within and through government systems. LARA supported the MoES to build institutional capacity in the planning and management necessary for sustainability. At the national level, the project provided technical support to MoES counterparts on setting and communicating expectations, monitoring and accountability, and directing resources where needed. At all levels, the project used experiential, empathetic, and advisory approaches to enable national, district, school,

and community stakeholders to promote reading and create positive, supportive, and safe learning environments for Ugandan school children.

Working through existing systems, LARA implemented a large-scale reform effort. Data showed consistent gains in EGR, prior to COVID-19, over the project's implementation period. LARA was the first program in Uganda to take an SRGBV intervention to scale. At LARA's close, the social norms and complexity of SRGBV programming, while yielding marginal results, were beginning to realize positive shifts. The findings indicate that it takes time for large-scale programs to take root; therefore, much more needs to be done for SRGBV programming.

The project also took on PEPFAR programming, a third large-scale intervention, in Year 3, which integrated gender-based violence (GBV) and HIV education content and delivered it to schools. Within PEPFAR, the DREAMS program provides a core package of interventions to vulnerable girls to address the interconnected challenges that they face. The project offered GBV prevention and HIV infection prevention education. The DREAMS programming found that more needs to be done to layer the different services offered under the DREAMS program. The PEPFAR data from 2020 shows that DREAMS implementing partners (IPS) reached between 0% and 32% of the DREAMS targeted adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) with the full primary package of services (PEPFAR/Uganda, Implementing a robust AGYW program with fidelity. April 2020).

In the early grades, reading scores between girls and boys were similar, with girls in project-supported schools performing slightly better than boys. The project provided new opportunities for girls and boys to access improved teaching instruction and materials, which contributed to their learning and reading skills and supported their primary school progression and completion.

In addition, the project provided new opportunities for all teachers—regardless of gender—for professional development through teacher training and support supervision activities. Within the SRGBV programming, violence remained high for both boys and girls and was differentiated by age and gender, highlighting deeply rooted gender inequities and unequal power balances. The Journeys program provided new opportunities for girls and boys to learn about and challenge societal norms and stereotyping, teaching that boys and girls can be equally successful. The project's longitudinal study showed that pupils were more gender conservative than teachers and schools need to continue implementing curriculum content that explores gender and power equity. Both boys and girls were able to identify support systems and referral networks; however, strengthening the integration of services and confidentiality protocols remain important aspects to protect and respond to violence.

Future programming should continue or strengthen the following programming:

1. Having safe, separate spaces for girls and boys to discuss issues of violence and how to manage these challenges, including collaborative problem solving on response, seeking help, and reporting.
2. Inviting service providers to communities to talk about what services they can provide to child survivors of violence and community members can help each other with cross-referrals or through "one-stop shops", i.e., a centralized place where children who have experienced any kind of violence can receive care and support, including legal, health, psychosocial, faith-based responses, HIV testing, and antiretroviral therapy (ART).

# 1. INTRODUCTION

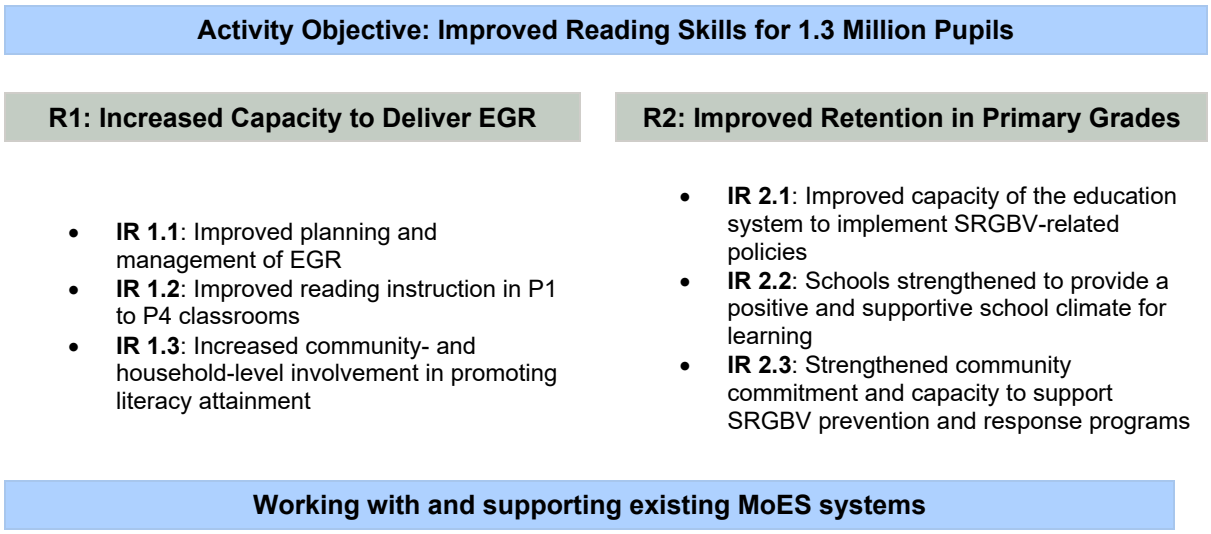
## 1.1 Overview

LARA's objective was to improve the reading skills of 1.3 million learners. Its results framework is summarized below.

- **Result 1 (R1)** focused on strengthening the capacity of the MoES to deliver EGR. The main activities under R1 included training teachers and instructional leaders about EGR methodology, providing classroom pedagogical and instructional material support, and conducting Early Grade Reading Assessments (EGRAs).
- **Result 2 (R2)** focused on improving retention in the primary grades by promoting positive and supportive school climates and preventing and reducing incidents of SRGBV. The main activities under R2 included training school staff, community members, and pupils to build positive learning environments; prevent violence; and strengthen the recognition, response, reporting, and referral processes.
- **PEPFAR** programming focused on GBV, HIV, and AIDS prevention for priority populations, including AGYW and orphans and vulnerable children (OVC), contributing to the goal of HIV epidemic control.

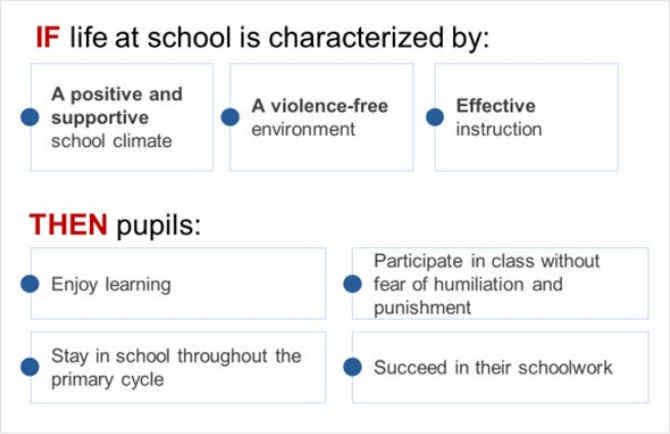
The Intermediate results (IR) under each of the result areas are outlined in the LARA results framework (see **Figure 1**). The LARA results framework illustrates the project's emphasis on systemic capacity building of the education system, as well as providing school-, community-, and household-level support and encouraging community- and household-level participation in their children's academic success. The framework defines the expected results of LARA and how, together, the results build a positive and supportive school climate for learning, which leads to improved system capacity for EGR delivery, better pupil retention, and, ultimately, enhanced reading outcomes for all pupils in the early grades. The results framework guided the operationalization of LARA's theory of change (ToC) and provides a point of reference to track the delivery of key inputs and progress toward meeting expected results.

### Figure 1. LARA Results Framework



A simplified representation of LARA's ToC is provided in Figure 2. The ToC maps out the project's long-term outcomes and describes the key outputs or conditions necessary to achieve those outcomes. LARA posited that when a school is characterized by a positive and supportive environment that is free from violence and has effective instruction, then pupils look forward to attending every day and feel safe traveling to and from school. Pupils enjoy learning because their teachers are confident, the quality of instruction is high, and they are able to participate in the classroom without fear of humiliation or punishment when their answers are not correct.

**Figure 2. LARA ToC**




To ensure effective instruction, LARA focused on literacy attainment and built teachers' capacity to use teaching and learning materials for reading instruction effectively and deliver quality instruction in both a local language and in English. With these competencies, teachers see their pupils succeed, develop confidence in themselves and the new approaches, and are more likely to enjoy teaching. LARA reinforced quality reading instruction in the classroom with efforts to encourage parental involvement in their child's reading practice at home. In addition to quality schooling, the LARA team recognized that strengthened commitment and capacity of the education system and the school community is also needed to improve children's retention in school and to prevent and mitigate the impact of SRGBV. Thus, the project designed an intervention to ensure pupils felt safe, cared about by their teachers, respected by other pupils and teachers, and had avenues to report and obtain assistance when acts of SRGBV were perpetrated against them or they witnessed acts of SRGBV perpetrated against others. LARA also envisioned that success of instructional support and activities to establish positive and supportive schools where SRGBV was not tolerated. This greatly depended on (1) national and subnational management systems and (2) the policy environment that gives these initiatives government credibility and a framework within which to work. Therefore, LARA worked with and through government structures to strengthen the policy environment surrounding EGR to eliminate violence against children in schools (VACiS).

## 1.2 Links between Project Results and USAID's Education Policy and Country Development Cooperation Strategy

LARA complemented USAID's Education Policy[2] support to partner-country education systems, furthering USAID's efforts to enable all children to acquire the educational skills needed to be productive members of society. Specifically, LARA supported USAID's key priority area—focusing on strengthening children and youth literacy and social and emotional skills that are foundational to future learning and success—which is critical to supporting Uganda's journey to self-reliance. In addition, LARA supported the USAID/Uganda Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) 2016–2021 as described below.

[2] USAID. (2018, November). USAID education policy. Available at https://www.usaid.gov/documents/1865/2018-usaid-education-policy

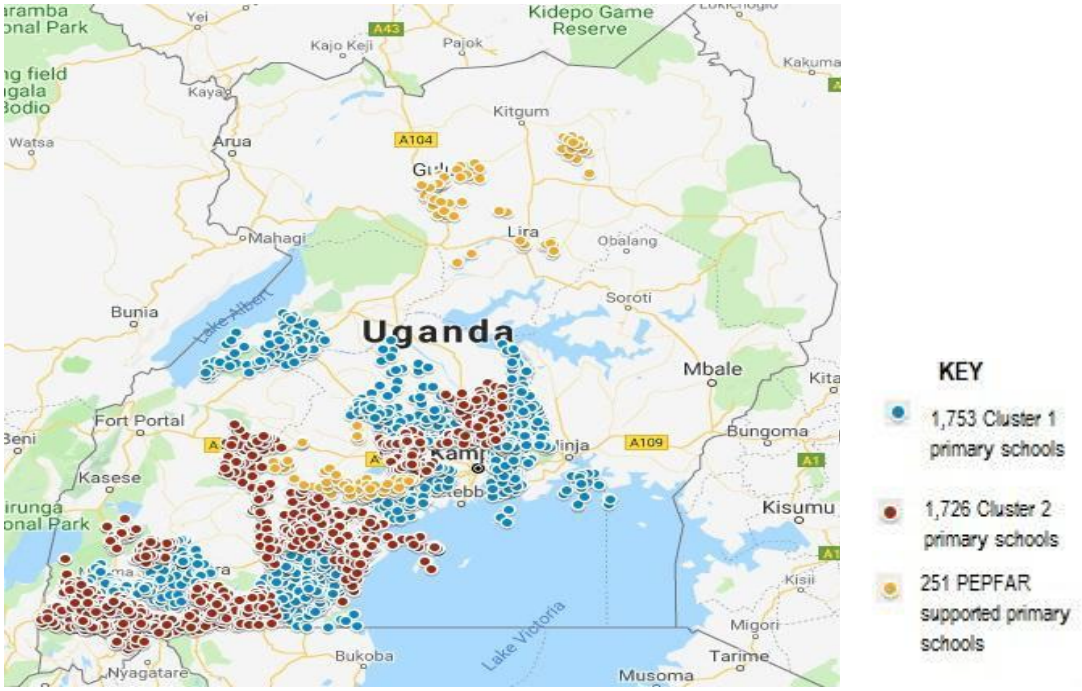
- USAID's CDCS Development Objective (DO) 1, improved community and household resilience in target population was supported by LARA's IR 1.2 activities which directly improved reading instruction in P1–P4 classrooms through training and support of teachers, the distribution of teaching and learning materials to schools, and regular reading assessments. Learners' ability to read improved family and individual resilience by increasing the potential of children and youth to complete primary education.
- USAID's CDCS DO 2, demographic drivers affected to contribute to long term trend shifts was responded to by LARA) by improving the learning environment for girls through its work strengthening school and community commitment and capacity to support SRGBV prevention and response, as well as make improvements in primary education quality and relevance (CDCS IR 2.2.5).
- USAID's CDCS DO 3, key systems more accountable and responsive to Uganda's development needs was supported by the project's national education system's strengthening activities including the provision of technical assistance, knowledge generation, and collaboration to the MoES, all of which strengthened the system's ability to implement EGR and violence prevention and response programs.

The project also supported the GoU's Education Sector Strategic Plan's (2015–2020) strategic objectives toward achieving equitable access to relevant and quality education. LARA directly responded to the government's key result area of improved learning achievements, improved competence of learners, and efficient and quality service delivery. LARA's activities aligned directly with key strategies in the plan: improving literacy competencies and learners' retention in the schooling system; improving the provision of instructional materials; and creating a positive, gender-responsive, and supportive learning environment free from all forms of violence against children.

## 1.3 Coverage: Geographic Area (Districts) and Schools

The project worked in 43 districts, including 12 municipalities and 3,730 schools, as shown in **Figure 3**. The project's PEPFAR programming reached a total of 1,372 of which 1,122 schools also received education programming, and 251 schools received only PEPFAR programming.

**Figure 3. Map of LARA School Coverage**




The project worked through the MoES, alongside the USAID-funded School Health and Reading Program (SHRP), and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE)'s Uganda Teacher and School Effectiveness Program (UTSEP), to expand the EGR program. In addition, the MoES was supported by Build Africa's Improving the Learning and Educational Attainment in Primary (ILEAP) Program, to roll out the EGR program in Ngora district. In 2020, the MoES extended the EGR program to Jinja and Nakasongola districts. In total, these four EGR programs have reached more than 6 million P1–P4 learners, trained nearly 66,000 teachers and head teachers, and provided more than 8.4 million pupil books and teachers' guides in 12 local languages. The combined efforts of LARA and its partners has ensured that more than 10,000, or 80% of government schools, in 104 of 146 districts in Uganda introduced a systematic approach to improve literacy in the country, as shown in **Table 1**.

**Table 1. Ugandan Districts Receiving EGR Support**

| SHRP: 43 Districts 2012–2019 | LARA: 31 Districts 2015–2021 | UTSEP: 27 Districts 2015–2020 | ILEAP: 1 District 2015 to date | MoES: 2 Districts 2020 to date |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Apac, Arua, Budaka, Bugweri, Buikwe, Bunyangabo, Bushenyi, Butebo, Gomba, Gulu, Ibanda, Iganga, Kaabong, Kabale, Kabarole, Kamuli, Kasese, Katakwi, Kibuku, Kiruhura, Kitgum, Kole, Kumi, Kwania, Kyenjojo, Lira, Manafwa, Masindi, Mbale, | Buhweju, Bukomansimbi, Butambala, Buvuma, Hoima, Isingiro, Kalangala, Kalungu, Kanungu, Kayunga, Kiboga, Kikuube, Kyegegwa, Kyotera, Luwero, Lwengo, Lyantonde, | Amuria, Soroti, Bukedea, Oyamu, Alebtong, Dokolo, Amolator, Kibale, Kamwenge, Agago, Lamwo, Nwoya, Amuru, Maracha, Bududa, Bulambuli, Kotido, Bundibugyo, Bugiri, Kaliro, Buyende, Mayuge, Namayingo, Namutumba, | Ngora | Nakasongola, Jinja |

| SHRP: 43 Districts 2012–2019 | LARA: 31 Districts 2015–2021 | UTSEP: 27 Districts 2015–2020 | ILEAP: 1 District 2015 to date | MoES: 2 Districts 2020 to date |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Moroto, Nabilatuk, Nakapiripirit, Namisindwa, Napak, Omoro, Otuke, Pader, Pallisa, Rubanda Rukiga, Serere Sironko, Wakiso | Masaka, Mbarara, Mitooma, Mityana, Mpigi, Mukono, Nakaseke, Ntungamo, Rakai, Rubirizi, Rukungiri, Rwampara, Sheema, Sembabule | Luuka, Mubende, Kyakwanziria | | |

The project received PEPFAR funding in 2018 to implement the Plus Up activity, which worked with communities on SRGBV prevention and response. LARA received additional funding in subsequent years to support PEPFAR's Country Operational Plan (COP) in fiscal year 2019 (COP 18) and FY 2020 (COP 19), which integrated HIV education into the SRGBV programs. Each PEPFAR year covered one FY from October 1 to September 31. PEPFAR programming was conducted in the PEPFAR-designated DREAMS and non-DREAMS districts. The project's assigned districts each year are identified in **Table 2**.

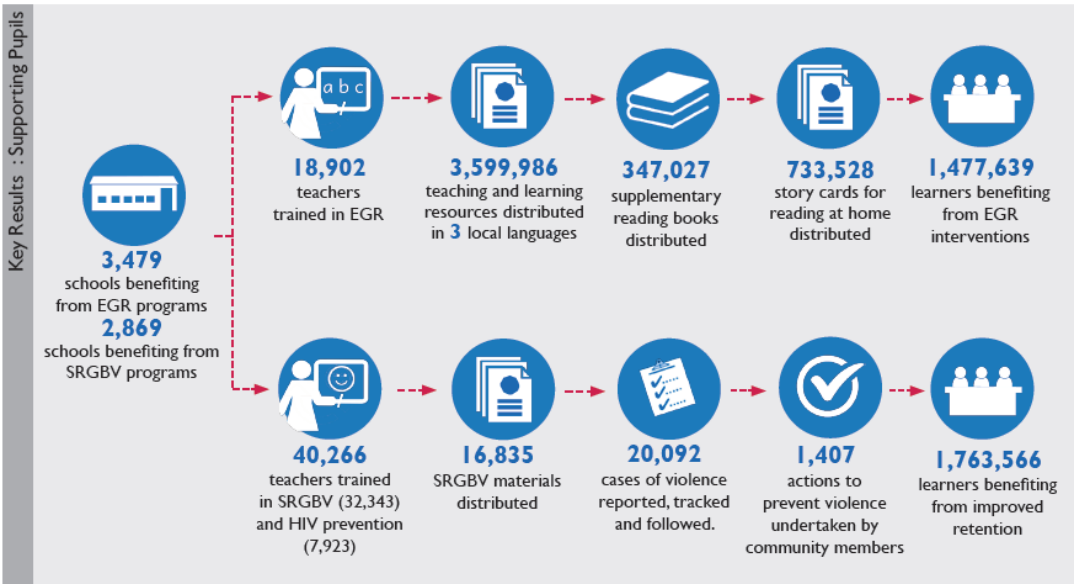
**Table 2. Ugandan Districts Receiving PEPFAR Support by Year**

| | Plus Up (2018) | COP 18 (2019) | COP 19 (2020) |
|---|---|---|---|
| DREAMS Districts | Lwengo, Bukomansimbi, Mityana, Ssembabule Luwero, Mubende, Mukono, Oyam, Gulu, Omoro, Lira, Agago, Apac, Kwania, Gomba, Lyantonde, Rakai, Kyotera | Lwengo, Bukomansimbi, Mityana, Ssembabule, Luwero, Mubende, Mukono, Oyam, Gulu, Omoro, Lira, Agago, Apac, Kwania, Gomba, Lyantonde, Rakai, Kyotera | Lwengo, Bukomansimbi, Mityana, Ssembabule, Luwero, Mubende, Mukono, Oyam, Gulu, Omoro, Lira, Agago, Apac, Kwania, Gomba, Lyantonde, Rakai, Kyotera |
| Non-DREAMS Districts | — | Masaka, Mubende | Hoima, Nakaseke, Mbarara, Rwampara, Mitooma, Sheema, Butambala, Kiboga, Kanungu, Ntungamo, Kalungu, Kyegegwa, Kalangala, Rukungiri, Kassanda, Iganga, Bugiri |

# 2. PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS

**Figure 4** highlights EGR and SRGBV intervention achievements according to type of support. Overall, 1,477,639 learners benefited from EGR interventions, and 1,763,566 benefited from SRGBV support. Overall, almost 19,000 teachers were trained in EGR, and just over 40,000 teachers were trained in SRGBV across 43 districts and 12 municipalities. Additionally, nearly 3.6 million teaching and learning resources were distributed in the three local languages supported by the project.

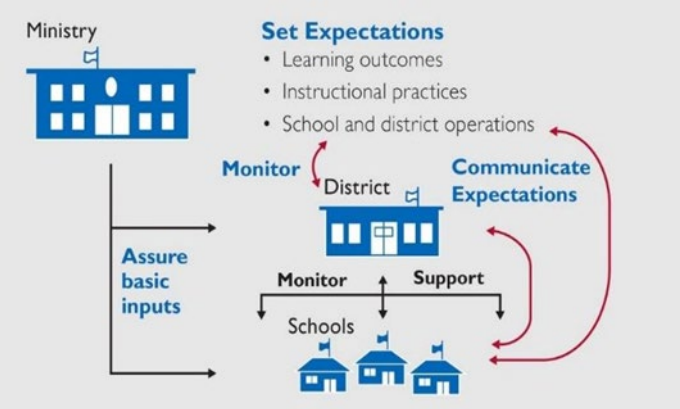
**Figure 4. EGR and SRGBV Achievement Highlights**




The project worked on two results areas: R1, which focused on increasing the education system's ability to deliver EGR, and R2, which aimed to improve retention in the primary grade. Each result area had three IRs and the achievements under each are presented below.

## 2.1 Result 1: Increased Capacity to Deliver EGR

**Figure 5. Education System Strengthening**




Evidence indicates that supporting children to read early in life lays a strong foundation for their success in school.[3] Therefore, throughout its lifetime, the project worked to increase national and district education system leaders' capacity to deliver a national EGR program. LARA initiated a number of education system enhancement activities to strengthen national ownership of the MoES' EGR program, with a focus on systemic opportunities to promote pupils' reading outcomes and overcome challenges hindering these same outcomes. Strengthening stakeholder engagement, collaboration, and coordination was the key strategy to better ensure that MoES and district officials set and communicated clear EGR and retention expectations, held leaders accountable, and monitored the progress of learning outcomes (see Figure 5.).

With support from LARA, education system leaders have an enhanced understanding of the requirements and investments required to sustain a national EGR program. LARA's technical assistance enhanced the MoES' ability to plan the functional and technical requirements of a

[3] Nag, S., Chiat, S., Torgerson, C., & Snowling, M.J. (2014). *Literacy, foundation learning and assessment in developing countries. Final report*. Department for International Development.

nationwide EGR program rollout, championed by the GoU. In May 2020, the MoES committed to scaling up the EGR program methodology as a key achievement and publicly announced the EGR program on Uganda Broadcasting Corporation news on August 14, 2020.

Despite the success in institutionalizing the importance of EGR, LARA's progress was held back in some instances by systemic challenges that are faced by MoES senior leadership, including inadequate teacher management and deployment systems, inability to replenish EGR teaching and learning materials, and coordination mechanisms that create competing priorities. Additionally, COVID-19-related shutdowns and school closures added to these challenges as the project had to redirect resources to support MoES' priorities and response to COVID-19, in concurrence with USAID.

As discussed above and illustrated in the results framework, R1 included three IRs:

- **IR1.1**: Improved planning and management of EGR
- **IR 1.2**: Improved reading instruction in P1 to P4 classrooms
- **IR 1.3**: Increased community- and household-level involvement in promoting literacy attainment

Activities and accomplishments under each IR are discussed below.

## *IR 1.1: IMPROVED PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT OF EGR*

Improved planning and management of EGR requires effective management and financing to ensure all pupils have improved learning outcomes. To this end, the project guided system actors to take greater ownership of EGR implementation and to work more strategically to improve it. The project provided technical and logistical support to the MoES by guiding it from behind, i.e., improving the capacity of the MoES to implement, sustain, and mainstream the EGR model. Improved EGR planning and management is illustrated by LARA's work in the following areas: the development of the Literacy and Numeracy Advisory Committee; support to the MoES Foundation Bodies; and support to functional working groups, including the Basic Education Budgeting Working Group, the Basic Education Working Group, and the Monitoring and Evaluation Working Group.

### *STRENGTHENED NATIONAL LEADERSHIP TO MANAGE AND SUSTAIN THE EGR PROGRAM*

To strengthen the management and sustainability of the EGR program at the national level, the project supported the MoES to establish the EGR and Retention Advisory Committee which in later years of the project was renamed as the Literacy and Numeracy Advisory Committee. Committee members included senior and mid-level MoES professionals who were leading different units in the MoES. The Advisory Committee was established to sustain EGR gains and to contribute to the expansion of the EGR program into districts not yet covered. To this end, the project placed significant attention on working with MoES leadership to draft specific terms of reference (TOR) outlining the committee's purpose, membership, scope of work, meeting duration and frequency, secretariat functions, authority, resource requirements, and review process. A major outcome of the group was its leading the discussion and action around much-needed EGR book replenishment during the FY 2017/2018 budgeting activity. In addition to the Advisory Committee's work, the Basic Education Budget Working Group worked on restoring previously restricted funds that had been curbed for instructional materials by writing position papers justifying the need for material replenishment. The project supported the Budget Working Group to develop budget position papers and a coordinated presentation to the Ministry of Finance during the annual budget cycle.

The project provided technical assistance to the commissioning of the Literacy and Numeracy Advisory Committee recognizing the link between the MoES Uganda National EGR Literacy and Numeracy Improvement Framework and the committee as the legitimate coordination mechanism. Consequently, the Permanent Secretary (PS) appointed the Director of Education Standards as the chairperson. Members reviewed priority measures for sustaining EGR that emanated from the December 2018 top management seminar. The MoES acted toward implementing several EGR sustainability activities, including applying the 2019–2020 budget for book replenishment to the 2020–2021 budget, commissioning the advisory committee, and sending a circular to districts banning the use of commercial examinations. However, due to COVID-19, the MoES has registered little progress on most of its priority measures for sustaining EGR as it refocused its efforts on preparedness and response to the pandemic.

Although the Literacy and Numeracy Advisory Committee has a strong chair and a functional secretariat, monitoring the progress of the implementation of top management EGR priorities remains weak. Lack of clarity, transparency, and accountability from the leaders of the various functional areas hinders the MoES' implementation progress. LARA worked to strengthen accountability for the implementation of the EGR priorities and presented the core functions model in two simple, short, animated videos, which summarized the core functions approach and the five programmatic features (Ts) needed to improve teaching and learning.[4] The videos were used to guide the December 21, 2020 committee discussion on implementing its mandate. LARA used the core functions model as a refresher to improve the committee's function. For example, the Instructional Materials Unit (IMU) is responsible for book replenishment. Therefore, the questions that need to be discussed and answered included: How does the IMU set and communicate expectations about when books will be received and how often?, How does it monitor distribution and hold each unit staff accountable?, and How does the unit know where books are most needed?

Recommendations and action points that the committee developed are below.

1. Strengthening the collaboration between the MoES; Ministry of Local Government; and Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development around school management.
2. Revising the Local Government Act to separate politics from the technical management of schools.
3. Reviewing the 2008 Education Act, sections 58 and 59 (Education Management Committee regulations). The MoES drafted new versions of sections 58 and 59.
4. Recentralizing the District Education Department from Local Government (LG) to the Basic Education (BE) Department.

### *STRENGTHENED ENGAGEMENT OF SCHOOL FOUNDATIONAL LEADERS TO SUPPORT EGR AND RETENTION*

The MoES focal person and component managers supported LARA's engagement of school foundational bodies to harness their power to promote EGR and retention activities. As many schools in Uganda are founded by religious denominations, these foundational bodies have a strong leadership role at the schools and within the school management committees (SMCs).

[4] Working across countries, RTI identified five elements (5Ts) of effective literacy instruction that, when present, can promote literacy development in even the most challenging environments. The five elements are (1) Time: Reading instruction can only happen if there is sufficient time in the school day allocated to it; (2) Teaching: Teachers must be trained to provide systemic reading teaching instruction that builds a child's reading skills; (3) Text: Children must have plenty of opportunities to have eyes on text to master their reading skills; (4) Tongue: Children learn to read best in the language (or tongue) that they speak most freely; and (5) Testing: Testing should be used regularly throughout each lesson to know if pupils are learning what is being taught.

In addition, through their congregational activities, the foundational bodies have direct access to communities and households through their churches and mosques, which can enhance the engagement of parents in their children's education.

The project worked with founding body leaders at national and district levels to develop their understanding of the foundational bodies' institutional structures and how they might support the MoES' goals of mobilizing and influencing change at the community, district, and national levels to support EGR and keep children in school. At the founding body leaders' invitation, LARA made presentations during national workshops and the annual general meetings of the Catholic Diocesan Education Secretaries, Religious Advisors, and the Church of Uganda Diocesan Education Coordinators.

The leaders were empowered with knowledge and skills to help them monitor EGR and SRGBV prevention in schools and communities. As monitors, they submitted reports that demonstrated a good understanding of EGR and SRGBV. They engaged with activities that improved reading and created positive and supportive school climates. For example, the Church of Uganda (COU), after participating in the project's Journeys and EGR training, used the Journeys handbooks to train its 36 district-level educational secretaries on positive and supportive schools using its own resources. The COU also shared its positive and supportive school campaign during church services. The Islamic faith representatives shared their work and progress in shifting parental attitude toward children learning using the local language. The executives of the foundational body leaders reflected on the extent to which they utilized their influential positions as religious leaders within their congregations and their management roles within the schools to support positive change. Primary school children read in church, which delighted community members and helped them appreciate reading as a foundational skill. This also led parents to gain more confidence in government-aided schools.

LARA also continuously engaged foundation body leaders as a strategy to influence social norms around reading and reduction of violence. The project and the MoES Communication and Information Management (CIM) unit discussed the role of foundational bodies in the Uganda Literacy Campaign. The MoES and foundational leaders worked together to harmonize the implementation and monitoring plan for the Uganda Learning Campaign. Foundational leaders reviewed key messages and circulated them to their constituents using various platforms, such as sermons, home visits, cell meetings,[5] and radio talk shows. Some Uganda Learning Campaign key messages encouraged parents to take time every day to read with their children and to listen to their children as they are learning to read because "readers are leaders". After the meeting, the COU incorporated the Uganda Learning Campaign messages into its training for educational representatives who monitor and support the SMC chairs. Others focused on disseminating messages on radio stations, including Radio Sapencia, KFM, and Bilal.

The education foundational leaders also participated in 2018's 16 days of activism against GBV, which had a theme of reducing violence in schools. This was a successful strategy, as foundational leaders developed messages on child well-being at school and in their communities. The elimination of violence in schools resonated through foundational body media and congregation platforms.

### *IMPROVED DISTRICT-LEVEL COLLABORATION AND PLANNING*

Quarterly dialogue meetings with district-level partners were an important collaborating, learning, and adapting (CLA) activity. District dialogue meetings brought together district

[5] Cell meetings refer to small church communities normally comprising no more than 20 people.

officials and other education stakeholders, including District Education Officers (DEOs), college outreach personnel, foundational body representatives, child protection officers, police officers in charge of family and children's welfare, and community development officers (CDOs). The district dialogue meetings created a termly collaborative reflection and learning practice around the improvement of children's learning outcomes and school-level support supervision data. The quarterly meetings introduced a new district-level practice: end-of-term review of support supervision data. Through this practice, stakeholders found new strategies to improve children's learning outcomes. For example, field assistants (FAs) and coordinating center tutors (CCTs) jointly shared their work plans with the college deputy principals of outreach (DPOs) and the DEO's office. District officials committed to intensifying oversight of monitoring and support supervision (MSS) to ensure that teachers were supported. Journey's activities were prioritized in schools and districts committed to using the available LG inspectorate funds to organize district-led support supervision. Finally, head teachers and head teacher chairpersons committed to prioritizing support for teachers and change agents. Through the quarterly dialogue meetings, the project learned that engaging district-level stakeholders to discuss and reflect on existing evidence results into pragmatic actions that foster learning and contribute to improved learning outcomes over time.

### *STRENGTHENED CAPACITY OF THE BE DEPARTMENT IN BUDGETING*

To effectively budget for EGR and other programs, the MoES BE Department officials needed training in financial management. Therefore, the project trained a BE team in 2016 on public financial management to strengthen their understanding of GoU budget processes at the national and local levels as an added task to the annual work plan. Participants agreed that the BE budget requests lacked coherence on priorities and justifications linked to learning outcomes. To this end, the budget team learned how to build an agenda focused on developing a choice of competencies. The project completed a topical needs assessment with BE staff through the after-action-review process, which reviewed the department's participation in the FY 2018/2019 budget cycle and found several challenges to securing financing for early grade priorities. The most significant challenge was overcoming the department's lack of strategic, consistent, and informed participation in the budgeting process.

To this end, through a series of consensus-building meetings, BE staff requested technical help to prepare the FY 2019/2020 budget to secure funds for replenishment of pupil books and teacher guides. The project held a 2-day reflection workshop in 2017 to help the BE Department identify budgeting strengths, weaknesses, and priorities to promote during the budget cycle. Most significantly, the BE Department reached consensus on the way forward to (1) set up a BE Budget Working Group and (2) improve the visibility of the BE activities. The department developed draft ToRs for the BE Budget Working Group, which held its first meeting on March 17, 2017. The BE Budget Working Group drafted activities and timelines for developing position papers, a shadow budget milestone schedule, and agreed on short- and long-term priorities. Thereafter, BE Department staff developed draft position papers and a shadow budget for FY 2018/2019. Position papers were meant to clarify the education outcomes and budget requirements for the early grades and the BE requirements to build on and sustain the EGR investments made by education development partners. As budgets tend to remain the same year after year, the position papers focused on building a case for budget commitments and showed how the budget impacts learning outcomes and children's learning to read.

During the later budget cycle, the BE Department's leadership expressed appreciation of the process and the increased participation of its technical staff in the budgeting process.

LARA also attended BE Working Group meetings to provide technical support, make presentations on accomplishments, such as annual EGRA baselines and end-of-year assessments, and to learn about other partners' activities and plans. This support helped harmonize plans and minimize activity duplication.

### *SUPPORT MOES' COVID-19 PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE PLAN*

When the COVID-19 pandemic reached Uganda in March 2020, the government responded rapidly and decisively to minimize its spread: one such action was to close schools.

The closure of schools and other pandemic control measures in Uganda had a significant impact on the project and necessitated halting planned Year 6 activities, including action research, the associated teacher training, school-level MSS, and data collection activities. Two hundred and twenty-two control schools did not receive the EGR interventions because of school closures. In addition, the opportunity to test innovative pedagogical approaches to accelerate reading achievement in schools was not possible. The long-term impacts on learners' reading and social and emotional skills development and the additional stress brought on by school closure and the loss of social networks are likely to exacerbate inequitable learning gaps.

In response to the pandemic the MoES, with input from education development partners, developed a COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plan and a road map. The MoES requested technical and financial support from education partners, including LARA, to implement the plan. In consultation with USAID, LARA revised its work plan in June 2020 and redirected funds to support the following two objectives in the MoES COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plan:

- **Objective 1:** To minimize the adverse effect of COVID-19 on learners, teachers, and the education system at large.
- **Objective 2:** To maintain communication among teachers, DEOs, Municipal Education Officers (MEOs), and the MoES and provide guidance regarding EGR instructional processes to maintain teachers' and schools' readiness to reopen.

LARA activities to support the MoES COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plan started with the project working in collaboration with the Guidance and Counselling (G&C) Department to review and respond to the psychosocial support (PSS) needs of the teachers. The project worked with the Ministry to design and conduct a PSS needs assessment to gauge the emotional and psychological well-being of teachers and then used the results to develop messages that the MoES disseminated through COVID-19 response activities, such as radio talk shows and short message service (SMS) messages. The project also provided the following support:

- Helped establish and operate a call center for the MoES G&C Department (run by technology service provider, Viamo)
- Trained 10 call center assistants in PSS and call center technical operations
- Supported the MoES to develop four 30-minute radio scripts for DEOs to inform parents and communities about school re-openings and school preparedness
- Assisted the MoES to develop messages on continuity of learning
- Compiled and provided teacher and DEO's contact information for SMS messaging
- Developed 16 EGR radio scripts (for P1–P4, Term 1 weeks 5–11) and

- Participated in task force subcommittees on take home packages, radio programming, and e-learning.

Through these activities, LARA achieved the following:

- Supported the MoES to develop a PSS support training facilitator's guide, which the project handed over to the MoES to disseminate to pre-service tutors and CCTs to train teachers.

*Photo: Midress, call center assistant/counselor responding to caller. Photo credit. RTI International*

- Through the call center, sent out the four targeted interactive voice response messages, reaching a total of 34,380 teachers. The messages focused on COVID-19 safety measures, re-opening schools, continuity of learning, pupils' health and safety, and the availability of counseling support. During the call center's four months of operation, there were 1,120 call attempts from the teachers. However, only 219 were successfully connected to an operator at the call center and received PSS. About a half of the teachers called outside the call center's operational hours, while other teachers hung up before getting connected, which are the two main reasons for the low number of successful connections to the call center. For the teachers who called outside operational hours, Viamo dispatched a call back to them. Some of them accepted the call and got connected but many were unavailable.
- Sent out 25 COVID-19 related SMS messages (out of the targeted 48). The main reason the target number of messages sent was not achieved was because of cost. Viamo had to reduce the number of messages sent between November and December to remain within the budget, as the SMS service provider was charging $0.10 per message, while Viamo had budgeted for $0.03 per message. Viamo decided to reduce the frequency of the messages until it found a suitable alternative, which was done by the first week of December 2020. Further, Viamo experienced an internet blackout for nearly two weeks at their data center in Kampala after the 2021 general elections. During this period, the company was unable to send SMS or interactive voice response calls.
- Through SMSs, the project reached 95% of the targeted teachers (34,261 out of 35,942) with COVID-19-related messages.
- Printed and distributed 28,914 posters supporting the MoES' COVID-19 response, which were distributed to 3,724 schools. The posters included information on the Sauti 116 Child Helpline, MoES messages on COVID-19 protection and disease control and contact information for the PSS call center.
- Supported the MoES to organize 32 radio talk shows on eight radio stations in four regions where LARA intervention districts were located. The project planned and presented four talk shows per station.

- Utilized CCTs to communicate to parents, through megaphones, to send children back to school after schools reopened for the P7 candidates' classes. The project purchased and distributed 199 megaphones to the 12 primary teacher colleges (PTCs) for CCTs to use. After the community mobilization exercise, the CCTs returned the megaphones to the PTCs for use in future college mobilization activities.

To sustain the call center for the future, the project supported the G&C Department to determine the needed operational funds to sustain the service with call center assistants. In the project's final meeting with the G&C Department on February 1, 2021, the Commissioner stated that the Department would look for funds, through the MoES COVID Task Force, to operate the call center.

## *IR 1.2: IMPROVED READING INSTRUCTION IN P1 TO P4 CLASSROOMS*

The key components of the EGR intervention were to train and support teachers to use the EGR methodology, provide EGR teaching and learning materials, and conduct EGR assessments. Over its period of performance, LARA realized the results that are discussed below.

### *TEACHERS TRAINED USING EXPERIENTIAL, ADULT-BASED TRAINING METHODS*

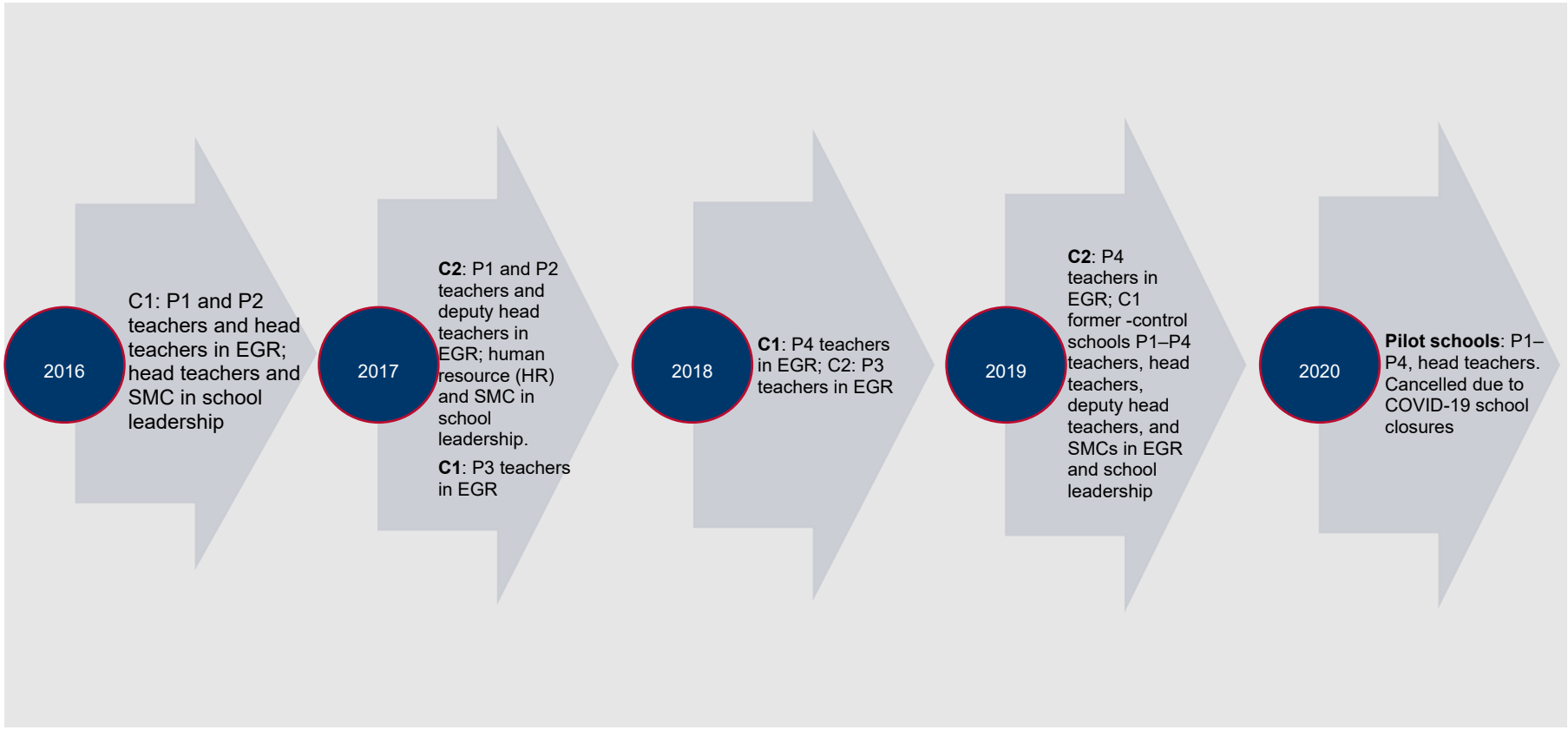
LARA's training was designed as a cascade training model to reach a large number of teachers during school breaks. The cascade model used the existing system of college outreach tutors from PTCs who were trained as lead facilitators. These lead facilitators then trained college tutors and DEOs, who in turn trained teachers, thereby cascading the training from one group to another. Although generally the cascade training approach reduces training effectiveness, over time as system trainers became more skilled at each level of the cascade, training fidelity improved. Prior to each training, the project reviewed the training content and facilitation methodologies that improved training effectiveness, including experiential, adult-based training methods with a focus on teacher practice and modeling. To improve training fidelity, the project identified teachers competent in the EGR methodology and used them as master trainers and champion teachers. This approach helped motivate teachers as they learned from colleagues who used the EGR methodology themselves and who were recognized as champion teachers within the district. The unanticipated result was that many of these champion teachers began supporting teachers in their classrooms or answering teachers' questions when they reached out. The project built a strong cohort of system trainers. Each district recognized the trainers as a resource to their ongoing professional development activities to sustaining the EGR program.

Below are the key achievements of the teacher training component.

### *STRENGTHENED TEACHERS' CAPACITY TO DELIVER EGR LESSONS*

The project rolled out the EGR methodology in different phases for a different class each year as shown in **Figure 6**.

**Figure 6. Training Plan**



Overall, the project trained 18,902 teachers (5,536 men and 13,366 women), 4,582 head teachers and deputy head teachers (3,575 men and 1,007 women), 3,253 SMCs, and 128 CCTs (97 men and 31 women).

To carry out effective training, the project continually revised the facilitator guides based on the after-action-reviews held after each training. Revisions included adaptations to the training approach and content, and a continual effort to increase teacher practice. In addition, LARA, together with other reading program implementers (SHRP, Red Earth, STiR Education, and Aga Khan Foundation), collaborated to improve the training. This led to the project increasing the focus on phonics and included educational games during the teacher training. Because the training was structured so that teachers demonstrated and practiced each of the foundational EGR teaching techniques, the overall impact was that the training was more engaging.

*"This training almost involved all stakeholders in the learning of the child. I got guidance on how I could work with other stakeholders to support my teachers."*

*-Teacher*

*"It opened my eyes—this type of learning should be extended to all teachers and through this way they will be exposed to EGR through this mode."*

*-Head teacher*

*"I was interested in the activities that you gave us most especially the way you wanted us to learn. We admired the language used and the way we were being assisted whenever we could call for assistance."*

*-Head teacher*

LARA also collaborated with the USAID/Kenya Tusome Activity to learn how to increase the amount of practice time during the training by integrating group and pair practice, as well as demonstration and reflection techniques. This gave teachers ample time to practice and engage with the content. The project also trained head teachers and SMC leaders on educational leadership and support for EGR, which focused on building their capacity to support teachers in the classroom. Head teachers are the pedagogical leaders at school; therefore, it was important to train them in the EGR methodology so that they could provide support supervision to teachers from an informed point of view. Many head teachers began to coach teachers and zonal head teachers were able to inspire head teachers to provide pedagogical support to EGR teachers in their classrooms. The project also adapted the training to provide shorter, more frequent professional development opportunities, with training serving as just one part of a teacher professional development continuum. In 2017, the project adjusted its training plan to include three iterations each year, one before each term. The training days were adjusted to a 3:2:2 days training model (3 days in term 1 and 2 days in terms 2 and 3). This model provided remediation before introducing new content and had the advantage of addressing errors before they became practice, which had the overall impact of encouraging higher teacher fidelity.

With the shorter, more frequent training, the project also changed the training location from residential (at primary colleges) to nonresidential cluster-based training. This had the advantage of a smaller number of participants at each training site, which helps promote more active participation. In addition, this approach ensured that the training participants were from the target grades/schools during each training. Additionally, each CCT was part of the training team at their CC and knew the teachers in their schools. Overall, this adaptation improved implementation as it more readily ensured the right teachers were trained. The change from residential training also freed funds that were used to conduct midterm continuous professional development (CPD) sessions.

LARA also worked with SHRP and other EGR programs to improve the content and standardize the CPD approach by developing scripted CPDs. The project worked with CCTs and zonal head teachers to organize CPDs at the CCs during the school term, utilizing the scripted CPD content. The project, along with its district partners, introduced the idea of a continuum of professional development for teachers over an academic year with a structured approach to improving teaching practice.

In October 2019, USAID extended the project for 12 months to pilot innovations to accelerate reading. The pilots included field testing (1) revised teacher guides, (2) a remedial instruction intervention based on the Teaching at the Right Level approach, which tailors instruction to each student's skill level, and (3) intensive coaching of EGR teachers by head teachers. The pilots were a unique opportunity to expand the EGR program to what had been LARA's control schools and measure changes in learning outcomes based on the pilot interventions. However, the pilots were disrupted after only five weeks with the closure of schools in Term 1 due to COVID-19. As school closures continued and in-person learning halted, in consultation with USAID, the project began adapting materials into an e-learning platform. The project made the following adjustments:

- **Field** test revised teacher guides: The project trained teachers in the pilot schools during Term 1 using revised teacher guides and gave them copies to use in their classes to field test the new materials. After schools closed, LARA contacted teachers by phone to gather their experiences using the revised teacher guides and incorporated their suggestions into the revised versions.
- **Remedial instruction**: The project developed a facilitator guide and a tool kit to train teachers on the remedial instruction program, assessment guidelines, and tools. With school closures, the project adopted e-learning sessions to train the teachers. This involved sending summarized content weekly to teachers using WhatsApp and SMS. The project also followed up the content with a reflection question, to which teachers responded via the same electronic platform used to share the content. LARA staff summarized the feedback, shared it with teachers, and added clarifying content where needed. As a professional development innovation, the project noted that teachers engaged in the WhatsApp and SMS platforms. In addition, CCTs and district education officials also became actively involved, adding to the conversations and encouraging teachers' discussions. CPD can be done virtually and remotely, although in combination with face-to-face training for new content.
- **Intensive coaching pilot:** This pilot focused on strengthening the capacity of head teachers to coach and mentor EGR teachers. To this end, the project developed a facilitator guide and a manual, "Intensive Coaching Manual for Pedagogical Leaders". However, because of the COVID-19 school closures, it was not possible for the project to organize face-to-face training and coaching sessions. Therefore, the

*"This is a wonderful support to the teachers. They can continuously listen to this and get supported. Teachers do not like to read but listening and observing is what they want."*

*-Student teacher*

*The way we have been teaching has not been interactive. I have loved the way of using the animation to teach students. It makes learning real and meaningful. Using the videos can also help passing on information without going to students especially in this COVID 19 era. Seeing the videos helps students internalize what they have learnt.'*

*-In-service PTC tutor*

project used e-learning to train the targeted head teachers on the intensive coaching content. A total of 101 head teachers (64 men and 37 women) participated in this training. Head teachers were enthusiastic to learn using this new model and expressed their appreciation of learning from home and at their own pace. They also had an opportunity to share their experiences with head teachers from other CCs on a weekly basis within the remote WhatsApp group.

### *EGR TEACHERS REACHED WITH REMOTE TRAINING*

As schools prepared to reopen, the project once again pivoted to explore blended approaches to teacher training and support. In preparation, LARA's innovation included using e-learning refresher/support to supplement the face-to-face training received by the teachers and CCTs. To this end, the project developed animated EGR videos and audio clips with content on the seven foundational EGR methods: (1) phonemic awareness; (2) alphabetic principle; (3) fluency; (4) vocabulary; (5) comprehension; (6) 'I do', 'we do', 'you do' method; and (7) differentiated instruction. LARA first developed scripts, which were then used to develop animated videos using PowToon software. The project, in collaboration with Shimoni and Ndegeya core primary teacher colleges (CPTCs), pre-tested the videos and audio clips in two PTCs. This was followed by seven days of sending audio clips to teachers without smartphones and sending the animated videos to teachers with smartphones.

During the pilot, the tutors engaged student teachers in PTCs to get feedback on the remote training and use of visual and audio content. Tutors found the animations package to be a user-friendly approach that consolidated the foundational EGR teaching and learning concepts. The student teachers engaged with the videos and audio clips and suggested other content areas they thought should be developed, such as the steps for teaching vocabulary, addressing high order skills (e.g., synthesis, creation, evaluation), think-pair-share techniques, and learner assessment.

The project identified the Kolibri site as a sustainable, long-term location, used by the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC), to house learning materials, including the animated videos. In addition, the project also uploaded the videos on YouTube and sent the videos and audio clips to targeted PTCs that have well-functioning computer laboratories with trained information-technology personnel so that the materials can be used by tutors for pre-service teaching and by CCTs for in-service support.

### *STRENGTHENED AND STANDARDIZED PRIMARY SUPERVISION SYSTEM*

One of the key elements of LARA was support to teachers in the classroom, with an emphasis on coaching and mentoring the EGR teachers and SRGBV change agents. MSS tracked the quality of learning and teaching and assisted teachers in gaining competence and confidence in delivering the EGR model and implementing the Journeys program.

During its first two years, the project deployed 110 FAs and nine program coordinators (PCs) to support the newly trained teachers in all 3,479 schools. This was meant to complement the support given to teachers by the instructional support coaches that include head teachers, CCTs, and district education officials. The FAs and PCs coached and mentored the teachers following the lesson observation cycle, which included a pre-observation meeting, lesson observation, and a post-observation review. The classroom observations were followed with a review of key techniques with all observed teachers. In subsequent years, the teachers continued to receive CCT support and participated in CPDs.

The project also collaborated with DEOs, inspectors of schools (IS), and the CCTs, who are the education system's actors dedicated to pedagogical outreach support to teachers. The

project introduced a clinical support supervision model where all teacher support agents, including DEOs, CCTs, and ISs, observed literacy lessons, administered learner checks, conducted CPDs, and held school-level meetings with SMCs or parent-teacher associations (PTAs).

The project focused on building the capacity of DEOs, CCTs, DISs, FAs, and PCs to provide effective support to EGR teachers. It became the responsibility of the districts and PTCs to ensure that the EGR methodology was effectively implemented in schools. The project supported the MSS exercise in all 28 initial LARA-supported districts (which became 31 districts with the administrative division of districts) during its first two years. In Year 3, the project began transitioning to district-led support supervision, which was actively taken up by 15 districts. This demonstrated that districts had started committing to the ownership of EGR activities. Three districts even received budget allocations to support zonal head teacher trainings.

LARA worked with SHRP on an approach that would help districts maximize the school visits. The projects ensured that district officials, project staff, and PTCs met on a termly basis and prioritized the district-led MSS activities. Using data collected throughout the term, the districts tracked progress in schools implementing Journeys and EGR activities, uptake of the EGR methodology, and curriculum coverage per district. The DEOs presented this information during the termly planning meetings, and the results stimulated discussions and action points for the future. The districts planned and scheduled these activities, although their coverage was constrained by budgets at the LG level.

The project adopted the Lot Quality Assurance Sampling (LQAS) approach, which later changed to the Focused, Actionable, and Simple approach (FAS), to enable the districts to set priorities; decide on high performing areas to learn from and low performing areas to invest in; and identify knowledge, attitudes, and practices to adopt for the low performing areas. The FAS approach was used in seven districts and two CPTCs, with each identifying six schools to monitor implementation and performance of reading and retention activities. Each district shared its findings and noted actions it would undertake, such as leading the coordination with head teachers to use part of the school's Universal Primary Education (UPE) capitation grant and providing lunch and transport for their teachers to attend CPDs.

The project used every forum in districts to discuss the relevance and importance of support to EGR uptake in schools and its impact on educational outcomes. LARA facilitated the biannual support supervision meetings and district dialogue meetings with Chief Administrative Officers, Local Council 5, school foundational body leaders, MoES representatives, DEOs and MEOs, district and area ISs, teacher training college principals, and deputy principals (pre-service and outreach). Participants met to discuss findings and challenges of teacher support and determine and agree on plans of action. Districts agreed to solicit internal and external assistance to CCT-led CPDs and teacher support.

The project gradually ended FA engagement and increasingly encouraged district and CCT support. However, it became evident that only a few CCTs visited EGR implementing schools due to limited funds, which are often most prevalent at the end of the school term. CCTs had competing priorities, including teaching pre-service student teachers. Overall, the CCT system offered limited support to newly trained teachers, reaching only 16%–50% of teachers each term. Each term, the project reviewed with the districts and colleges the MSS data to improve their understanding of the level of support teachers were receiving and to identify mitigation measures to resolve this issue.

Through a grant from Google won by RTI, the project, in collaboration with SHRP, piloted the use of tablets with 10 CCTs in 2018. Tablets increased CCTs' accountability and effectiveness in supporting teachers and supporting more teachers per day. Tablets also increased data management and provided a quick response to teachers and transparency about support supervision visits.

In its later years, the project continued to strengthen school-level support to teachers. This was done by training head teachers and deputy head teachers from selected schools on intensive coaching. Head teachers and chairperson SMCs were trained in leadership skills to equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills to monitor and support the use of the EGR primers and teacher guides.

### *TEACHING AND LEARNING MATERIALS DISTRIBUTED TO TEACHERS AND PUPILS*

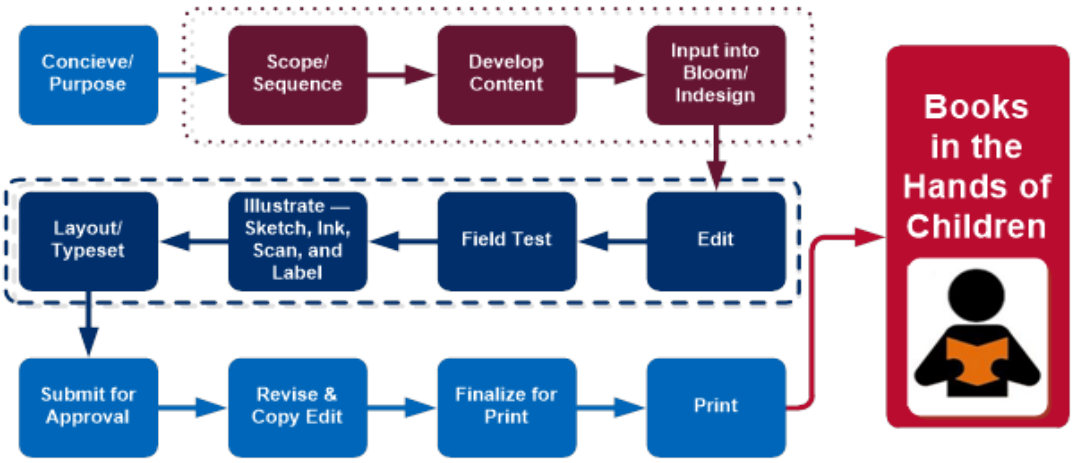
The project printed and distributed EGR materials throughout its lifetime, including 2,151,290 pupil books, 60,432 teacher guides, and 8,530 early childhood development materials. In addition, the project fabricated and distributed 6,200 metallic storage boxes for cluster (C)1 and C2 schools to use as book storage. LARA also developed and distributed a total of 733,528 English and local languages story cards to C1 and C2 schools.

LARA distributed 347,027 supplementary reading materials to schools. These supplementary materials comprised a wide variety of English reading books that were donated through project partner BFA. The books helped provide learners with a selection of reading materials outside of the classroom pupil books so that they could enhance their reading skills and develop a greater love for reading. To ensure the books were utilized and managed well, the book distribution was accompanied by training school staff on library management services. In total, LARA distributed 347,027 supplementary reading materials to 15 districts and 1,104 schools in Uganda and trained 1,929 teacher librarians in book management and lending practices. The project, in partnership with Stanbic Bank, developed and distributed 733,528 story cards in the three project-supported local languages to support the Uganda Literacy Campaign and increase the numbers of story cards in schools.

### *MATERIAL REVISED TO SUPPORT EGR*

**Planning.** Planning for the book revision began in 2019 with writing the add-on strategy as outlined in the materials development chain (see **Figure.**)

**Figure 7. Materials Development Chain**



Planning included mapping the recommendations in the RTI and NCDC teacher guide study reports to understand teacher concerns about the existing teacher guides. The EGR teacher guides and pupil books that were developed by SHRP had been in use since 2014. In 2018, RTI carried out a multi-country teacher guide study to review a range of teachers' guides developed under 19 RTI-implemented EGR projects across 13 countries, including Uganda. The study aimed to determine the effectiveness of various teacher guide formats and levels of scripting and provide recommendations on the design of effective teachers' guides. The study team evaluated 34 teachers' guides across a large number of quantitative measures, analyzed the content of selected lessons, undertook structured classroom observations, interviewed teachers, and reviewed project impact evaluation documents to determine the causal impact of the projects on the year-on-year gains in learning outcomes. This study provided research-based evidence to RTI project teams on how to design their teachers' guides. The RTI multi-country study was followed by another study undertaken by the NCDC, in collaboration with SHRP and LARA. The intent of the NCDC-led study was to obtain primary data from teachers on the effectiveness of the teachers' guides to inform possible revisions that would improve the EGR instructional materials. This study collected data through lesson observations and teacher interviews. In both the RTI and NCDC studies, the teachers said that they appreciated the teacher guides but also pointed out areas that needed improvement, including the need to address the following:

1. Translate from English to local language
2. Eliminate the need for a teacher to cross-reference between different sections of the teacher's guide (i.e., from lesson's content to the step-by-step section, weekly support, and pupil book)
3. Put Literacy 1 and Literacy 2 lessons in separate places
4. Cut down length of lessons
5. Integrate remedial activities into the lessons

The project also considered issues it had gathered over its period of implementation and suggestions made by NCDC. These included:

- the poor capacity of learners to use English as a medium in P4,
- omission of some lesson steps, and
- teachers experiencing difficulty teaching sounds.

The project discussed with the NCDC the implications of these issues with respect to the level of scripting needed for teachers and the general format of the teacher guides and pupil books, including book size. This resulted in the NCDC and project agreeing to revise the books during LARA's extension year (Year 6).

The NCDC developed a memorandum of understanding to outline the roles and responsibilities of each partner in the review process. Meanwhile, LARA planned to work with 32 writers, two per class and language, as identified by the NCDC. Although the project and NCDC had agreed to work with the NCDC English and local language specialists, the English specialist was not available and the local language specialist only available to a limited extent throughout the process. The project mitigated this issue by utilizing its internal staff. NCDC provided the writing space, while LARA provided the stationery; technical guidance; and fees for writers' transport, meals, and professional fees.

The project planned to write 32 books with 10 weeks of content per term, a reduction from 12 weeks of content, to allow for an additional week for pupils' review and assessment at the

beginning and end of each term. However, there were some gaps in the planning, as noted below.

- The scope and sequence were not ready by the start of the writing and the project was not able to find the original scopes from SHRP.
- The project underestimated the level of effort required to write the books. Therefore, there was a constant demand on the project to adjust timelines and budgets when targets were not reached, especially when writers began to write remotely.
- The design decisions (i.e., 10 weeks content with a review week, the number of scripted lessons per term, etc.) with project and NCDC technical staff were not consistently documented and signed off by both parties and NCDC leadership. In addition, joint planning could be improved with more consistent and regular monthly meetings to discuss outstanding issues.
- The project did not anticipate the extent of the new illustrations required, including changing stick figures in the English books to full illustrations, or NCDC's request to change the illustrations from black and white to color. These requests only came up as the writing progressed.
- The project had not planned to have a technical person for each language as it understood that NCDC staff or writers could provide this oversight across books and languages. However, adjustments were also needed across grade levels. LARA assigned reviewers for each language. In addition, LARA also provided two project technical staff and a book production manager to coordinate the revision process.

**Scope and Sequence.** In 2019, the NCDC changed the timetables for P1, P2, and P4, increasing P1 and P2 time to include three phonics lessons, while P4 English lost time in the school timetable to Swahili. P4 also lost two lessons leaving the class with four English lessons, one library lesson, and one assessment session. The P3 timetable did not change. These changes made it necessary to review the content so that it fit within the newly allocated times. For P4, this meant a reduction of the content.

- **P1**: The P1 timetable in the revised guides has a phonics lesson Monday–Wednesday (3 lessons), an English lesson Monday–Thursday (4 lessons), and an assessment session on Friday.
- **P2**: The P2 timetable in the revised guides has a phonics lesson Monday–Wednesday (3 lessons), an English lesson Monday–Thursday (4 lessons), and an assessment session on Friday.
- **P3**: The P3 timetable in the revised guides has a phonics lesson Monday–Thursday (4 lessons), an English lesson on Monday–Thursday (4 lessons), and two assessment session on Friday.
- **P4**: The P4 timetable in the revised guides has an English lesson Monday–Thursday (4 lessons), a library lesson on Monday, and an assessment session on Friday.

**Content Development.** The project set out with the following objectives regarding the revision of the teacher guides:

- Simplify the design and format, eliminating the need for teachers to cross reference within the teacher guide.
- Simplify the Continuous Assessment Monitoring guidelines for teachers to use them to evaluate instruction and learning.

- Adjust scripting to include more in early lessons and gradually decrease over the course of the year.
- Combine Literacy 1 (reading) and Literacy 2 (writing) into integrated lessons.
- Prepare for the transition from P1 by including explicit instruction on oral and written grammar in the English lessons.
- Increase instruction time for English from 30 minutes to 1 hour each day.
- Include phonics in English starting in P1.

The NCDC emphasized including children with special learning needs while writing the books. Therefore, the writers included content/stories that discussed issues related to economic, gender, physical, or cultural attributes to reduce the stigma associated with these topics. Writers were constantly reminded to be inclusive with the content so that all learners were represented in the materials.

**InDesign (layout, typeset, illustrations)**. The project hired 16 typists and eight InDesign artists to typeset and layout the revised 32 books. The project also hired seven illustrators to draw and color new and existing images.

The production manager and designers researched EGR books that were well designed for usability by children and teachers, keeping in mind the requirement that the new pupil and teachers' guides be more intuitive and user-friendly.

To this end, in the pupil books, the project created new images to replace those that did not adhere to the cross-cutting issue of gender and inclusiveness. In addition, new images were created for new stories and new weeks in the pupil books. The project also colorized 2,484 images to make the pupil books more appealing to children and to adhere to NCDC EGR publishing guidelines. In the P1 and P2 pupil books, the letters "y" and "t" were changed to adhere to curriculum handwriting guidelines. Altogether, the illustrators worked for 5,984 hours to sketch and design new images.

The teachers' guides were completely redesigned. The format was changed from B5 size to A4 size to enable a lesson to fit on one page and for teachers to easily photocopy pages. This decision was guided by feedback from teachers under USAID/Tusome (in Kenya). The project removed the need for a teacher to cross reference, instead placing each lesson in chronological order on the day it is taught for the three terms at the primary level. Longer scripting of teacher instructions was provided for weeks 1–4, while shorter scripting was provided in weeks 5–12. The longer scripting gives teachers detailed instructions, while the shorter scripts is lighter instruction that builds on the first four weeks. The project was conscious of the guide's size and number of pages with the goal to keep print costs as low as possible. Thumbnails of the pupil books were included on each page, like had previously been done, but they were now bigger to allow teachers to see them more easily and understand what the pupils see without having to refer to a pupil book. The project included an assessment within each lesson to not only ensure its use but to also reduce the need to cross reference the assessment sections. Finally, the project highlighted competencies in a standout box at the beginning of each lesson.

The typist and InDesign artists typed and laid out 8,143 pages that composed the 16 pupil books and 16 teachers' guides in three local languages and English. The 16 typists worked 6,648 hours and eight InDesign artists worked 5,968 hours to complete the 32 books. This included multiple rounds of changes once every term was completed.

In the end page numbers were reduced in 5 of the 32 books. Both teachers guides and pupil books are in full color but can be printed in black and white for reduced printing costs.

**Field Testing**. The project planned to field test the books on a termly basis and use teacher feedback to make improvements to subsequent terms. Accordingly, the project included reflection questions after every lesson to measure the accessibility of the teacher guides. The project also planned to carry out lesson observations to collect real-time data on how teachers used the revised books, which would be followed by refresher trainings/CPDs to address areas where teachers struggled. The project trained teachers and head teachers from 30 pilot schools in January 2019 and completed writing the Term 1 teacher guide that same month. Teachers in pilot schools used the revised materials for five weeks before schools were closed because of the pandemic, deterring the project from following through with its original plans. Therefore, the project adapted the data collection procedure and gathered teacher feedback during the school closure by telephone. Teachers who participated in the mini study said they liked the following about the revised materials:

- elimination of cross-referencing
- separation of steps
- materials being in the local language
- steps being easy to follow.

Other major improvements noted by the teachers included:

- competences clearly stated
- homework for pupils provided
- activities for struggling learners.

The teacher comments show that the revisions made their work easier because it made the books more user-friendly.

**Approval Process**. The book approval process had the following steps:

- **Quality Assurance Committee reviews the books**. The NCDC identified 32 reviewers to review the books in November 2020. The NCDC assigned two reviewers per class and language. The reviewers examined the teacher guide and pupil books independently. The NCDC returned two sets of books with separate comments per grade to the project in December 2020. The NCDC also requested that the project hire language specialists to merge the various comments before making them final. This took some time and delayed the approval process because different reviewers provided different and, at times, contradictory comments. In addition, reviewers requested an additional 12 weeks of content. The project made the changes and resubmitted in February 2021.
- **Review by the Academic Steering Board**. The NCDC convened the Academic Steering Board so that two members reviewed the teacher guide and pupil book for each class and language. The reviewers examined the teacher guide and pupil books independently. The NCDC returned the books in March 2021 and the project worked with the NCDC to decide and clarify which changes should be incorporated. The project completed changes and resubmitted the books to NCDC that same month.

- **Presentation of books to the Academic Steering Board**. The NCDC requested that the Academic Steering Board complete a report on each of the books for presentation to the NCDC Governing Council for final approval.

### *IR 1.3: INCREASED COMMUNITY- AND HOUSEHOLD-LEVEL INVOLVEMENT IN PROMOTING LITERACY ATTAINMENT*

The project had four main activities to support and promote literacy attainment:

1. Support the MoES' CIM Division
2. Support the MoES' Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) Day
3. Use of media and other fora, such as conferences
4. Conduct a national literacy campaign using SBCC to increase parents' involvement in their children's reading practice.

The project carried out activities to strengthen the capacity of the CIM Division to use MoES platforms (e.g., web page, newspaper, and radio fora) to communicate with its different stakeholders, particularly parents. The project supported the CIM Division to develop an EGR communication strategy, which was incorporated into the MoES communication strategy. The CIM Division took a lead role in coordinating MoES EGR and SRGBV messages on the MoES website and with the media.

LARA also held meetings with the MoES Communications Technical Working Group and quarterly meetings of the EGR and VACiS Communication Subcommittee to agree on strategies to strengthen the education system toward the promotion of literacy and reduction of violence. Key activities of the literacy and violence prevention campaigns are below.

1. **16 Days of Activism** (November 25–December 10, 2018 and 2019) was an international event against GBV, run in partnership with the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD). The project and the MGLSD used these 16 days to galvanize action to end violence against women and girls in Uganda with a focus on creating positive and supporting school climates.
2. **International Mother Tongue Day** (February 21, 2016, 2017, and 2019). LARA staff joined the MoES and MGLSD officials to discuss the importance of mother tongue instruction.
3. **DEAR Day** (March 15, 2016–2020) was a national event promoting a culture and love of reading. Activities included a 20-minute reading activity at every school, with teacher, parents, and project staff.
4. **International Day of the African Child** (DAC; June 27, 2016–2019). The project supported different activities toward raising awareness for child protection.

These activities raised public awareness and support on issues affecting the education sector. The project realized, with other advocates, significant shifts in support to SRGBV prevention and response through 16 Days of Activism and the International Day of the African Child. In addition, the project also saw a shift in parental attituded on learning to read in mother tongue. The project worked with the CIM Division to write success stories from teachers and parent perspectives and to plan and execute the Uganda Literacy Campaign.

The project used social and behavior change communication (SBCC) theory to design and implement the Uganda Literacy Campaign to increase parents' involvement in their children's reading practice at home. LARA worked with MAAD Advertising Limited on the SBCC campaign. It piloted the campaign in Mityana around four themes: (1) the value of reading, (2) parent-child relationship, (3) role of parents/guardians in a child's literacy, and (4) time for reading at home. During a creative workshop with key stakeholders from the community and

MoES, LARA also developed a logo and slogan, four posters, four radio spot scripts, and four draft drama and theater concepts for each of the thematic areas. The project also developed story cards for the four classes in Luganda, Runyankore-Rukiga, and Runyoro-Rutooro. Additionally, as part of the campaign, the project trained head teachers and teachers in charge of the library to manage the lending practice at their schools. Through this practice, learners were encouraged to borrow the cards, take them home, and read to their parents. After the pilot, the campaign was rolled out to 31 districts over an 8-week period using multiple communication channels every day. The endline study showed a significant impact on parental behavior as a result of the campaign; however, after two years NORC was not able to measure any long-lasting change. SBCC theory suggests that campaigns need to be repeated at regular intervals.

## 2.2 Result 2: Improved Retention in Primary Grades

### *IR 2.1: IMPROVED CAPACITY OF EDUCATION SYSTEM TO IMPLEMENT SRGBV-RELATED POLICIES*

Findings from the 2012 MoES report on child protection and security found the disturbing fact that children in Uganda's primary and secondary schools experience all forms of violence at high levels, including bullying, corporal punishment, and sexual violence. In response, the nation released the National Strategic and Action Plan on VACiS[6] and the MoES Reporting, Tracking, Referral and Response (RTRR) Guidelines[7].

Under IR 2.1, the project provided systematic and systemwide support to build the capacity of the MoES to carry out the National Strategy and Action Plan on VACiS. In fact, all LARA's R2 initiatives serve to strengthen the education system's ability to respond to VACiS by building awareness about VACiS and how to prevent and respond to VACiS among a critical mass of MoES officials, administrators, and service providers. Project initiatives specifically dedicated to systems strengthening for an effective response to VACiS focused on supporting national- and district-level structures required to ensure continuous stakeholder dialogue and collaborative action on VACiS, action research and policy development, and MSS of school-level activities addressing VACiS.

#### *POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT*

In September 2015, the MoES held the first VACiS stakeholder working group so that the different approaches to combating VACiS in Uganda could be shared and inform an effective and integrated national response. Officials from the MoES presented findings from the MoES Assessment Report on Child Protection, Safety and Security Issues for Children in Uganda Schools (2012; see footnote 6), provided an overview of the national response, discussed the National Strategy and Action Plan for VACiS (2015–2020; see footnote 7), and provided an overview of the MoES RTRR Guidelines. Representatives from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United States Peace Corps discussed the Uganda Child Friendly Schools program and the Student Friendly Schools, respectively. Representatives from Raising Voices presented the Good Schools Program and representatives from SHRP discussed the School Family Initiative.

[6] MoES. (2015, July). National Strategic Plan on Violence Against Children in Schools [2015–2020]. Available at https://eprcug.org/children/publications/health/protection-and-participation/violence-against-children/national-strategic-plan-on-violence-against-children-in-schools-2015-2020

[7] MoES (2016) Reporting, Tracking, Referral and Response Guidelines. Available at https://hivhealthclearinghouse.unesco.org/library/documents/reporting-tracking-referral-and-response-rtrr-guidelines-violence-against-children

Throughout the Strategic Plan Period (2015–2020), the Gender Unit led the inter-ministerial committee on VACiS. The project contributed by providing updates on data and implementation progress. In addition, LARA supported the Gender Unit to organize and host the National Learning Symposium on creating safe schools in 2018. The purpose of the symposium was to deliberate on the approaches used by stakeholders and share their learning to reduce violence in schools. As a result, the project supported the MoES to develop a road map of future priority actions, including strengthening inter-ministerial coordination, enhancing LG engagement and coordination mechanisms, and strengthening the coordination of government and IPs. The road map was shared with the Chairperson of the VACiS Education Consortium and the MoES plans to use the road map as a guiding document to review the National Strategic Plan on VACiS 2021–2026.

The project worked with the MoES to develop a set of district guidelines to support and monitor the implementation of Journeys at all project -supported primary schools. These guidelines were included in the MoES circular No. 16 (October 2017), which required a mandatory district response to protect children from all forms of violence, including corporal punishment, in government education institutions. The circular announced the development and importance of the Journeys program, directed SMCs and head teachers to ensure its implementation, and instructed head teachers to allocate from 3:20 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. on the school timetable each week to undertake a Journeys activity. Further, the circular instructed DEOs to meet with college principals and DPOs to monitor the implementation of Journeys and for tutors and district staff, "to hold zonal head teacher meetings to provide guidance and support to head teachers in order *to enhance their understanding of and commitment to the Journeys program and to help them plan and ensure the implementation of Journeys and to assess progress*."[8]

The project also shared its learning in national and international fora (see **Table 3**), which not only allowed LARA to share findings, but to also learn from others and ensure alignment with global trends.

**Table 3. Engagements in National and International Fora**

| Date | Forum Description |
|---|---|
| October–December 2015 | Launch of Better Reading, Safer Schools in 13 districts. |
| June 16, 2016 | DAC Symposium and Child Conference in Kampala. LARA supported the printing of the Children's National Position Paper, which highlighted rights and responsibilities of all those responsible for protecting children, i.e., "duty bearers".[9] |
| November 24–December 16, 2016 | 16 Days of Activism. Official launch of Journeys to 15 districts took place in Ntungamo district with media coverage Minister of Education. |
| March 27–21, 2017 | African Evaluation Association (AfrEA) International Conference. Presented SRGBV instruments used in LARA and questioned compatibility of definitions, tools, and findings. |
| June 27, 2017 | International DAC with Children's Conference. Launch of Journeys by Minister of Education in Iganga district. |
| August 22, 2017 | National TV program on VACiS and the Journeys program aired in the Central region. |

[8] MoES. (2017, October). Mandatory Response Required–Protection of children from all forms of violence including corporal punishment. Circular No. 16/2017. Available at https://shared.rti.org/content/protection-children-all-forms-violence-including-corporal-punishment-ministry-circular

[9] Duty bearers refers to adults who have a responsibility to protect and care for children in their various capacities (e.g., policymakers, teachers, health workers, parents, etc.).

| Date | Forum Description |
|---|---|
| March 25–29, 2018 | Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) Conference in Mexico City: Muyingo, P., & Randolph, E present their paper, "Measuring SRGBV: tools, resources, and lessons learned". |
| March 27–28, 2018 | National Dialogue on Safe and Positive Learning Environment in Kampala. Sempa, H presents on empathetic approaches to behavior change. |
| September 18–19, 2018 | Children and Youth Facing Violence in Africa in Addis Ababa. Presented tools for measuring violence in Uganda and findings from LARA baseline. |
| October 8–9, 2018 | INSPIRE (see https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/inspire-seven-strategies-for-ending-violence-against-children) Conference on Ending Gender Inequality: Evidence to Impact Conference (Gender Unit)–Keeping Girls in School in Johannesburg. MoES Gender Unit presents Uganda experience in reducing VACiS. |
| October 29–November 1, 2018 | Intensifying Learning to Maximize Impact: Reflections on Evidence-Based Programming to Reduce VACiS and Communities in East Africa in Kisumu, Kenya. |
| November 30, 2018 | 16 Days of Activism with USAID team in Luwero. |
| February 13–14, 2019 | National Symposium on Girls' Education in Kampala. |
| March 11–15, 2019 | AfrEA International Conference-Abidjan (virtual). |
| April 14–18, 2019 | CIES Conference in San Francisco (Virtual). |
| September 5, 2019 | USAID Webinar: SEL in LARA in Washington, DC. |
| September 19–20, 2019 | National Learning Symposium on creating a safe and positive learning environment. |
| December 10–12, 2019 | 16 Days of Activism with US Ambassador in Iganga and Bugiri. |
| December 10–11, 2019 | Education Conference in Luwero district: Presented on VACiS implementation. |
| February 11, 2020 | Launch of the USAID SRGBV Measurement Toolkit[10] at a USAID hosted meeting. |

The project also supported the development of knowledge products as outlined in **Table 4**.

**Table 4. Knowledge Products Developed**

| Date | Knowledge Product |
|---|---|
| September 2019 | Randolph, E., Burkholder, G., & Sempa, H. (2019). "The Journeys approach to building a safe, inclusive and positive school and fostering SEL culture and climate in fostering SEL: Evidence from Malawi and Uganda." In Smart, A., et al., NISSEM Global Briefs: Educating for the social, the emotional and the sustainable, 250–263. https://www.scribd.com/document/424176469/NISSEM-Global-Briefs |
| March 24, 2021 | Punjabi, M., Norman, J., Edwards, L., & Muyingo. P. (In press). Audio Computer-Assisted Self-Interview (ACASI): Surveys of a sensitive nature require a sensitive method of data collection: A study from Uganda. RTI Press. |

The project also supported the inclusion of SRGBV prevention and Journeys into the primary teacher training college curriculum through the development and approval of the additional

[10] Dexis Consulting Group. (2020). School-Related Gender-Based Measurement Toolkit. Available at https://impaqint.com/sites/default/files/files/SRGBV%20Toolkit_online.pdf

content  to the existing curriculum. LARA provided all core and non-core PTCs with copies of Journeys and trained 175 trainers using the Journeys Facilitator Guides.

The project also coordinated termly review meetings with district and college personnel to review the fidelity of Journeys' implementation and progress toward results using its monitoring data for evidence-based action planning.

## *IR 2.2 STRENGTHEN SCHOOLS TO PROVIDE A POSITIVE AND SUPPORTIVE CLIMATE FOR LEARNING*

### *INTRODUCTION TO THE JOURNEYS PROGRAM: DEVELOPMENT AND ROLL OUT*

As part of this larger nationwide GoU response, and in support of the National Strategic Plan for VACiS, LARA staff began working with Ugandan experts in and outside of the MoES to develop an integrated evidence-based approach to reduce and, ultimately, eliminate VACiS in Uganda's primary schools. To this end, LARA worked with representatives from the MoES, especially representatives from the MoES Gender Unit and organizations working to combat VACiS in Uganda. LARA hosted a 1-week co-creation workshop to finalize the program with the MoES (e.g., teachers, head teachers, college principles, and national and education district officials), nongovernmental organization (NGO) representatives, and school foundational body representatives. On the last day of the workshop, participants agreed on the name of the program, Journeys. The MoES approved Journeys as a mandated program and the Minister of Education and Sports officially launched the program on June 27, 2016 during celebrations of the DAC in Iganga district.

### *GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND ASSUMPTIONS*

The Journeys approach places the school culture and climate at the center of violence prevention. Only in schools where children are cared about and respected, where interactions are positive and supportive, and where there is zero tolerance for VACiS can there be any hope of eliminating VACiS. The characteristics of school life, i.e., the school climate, is also an important mediating factor in pupil achievement.[11] Evidence from Schindler and his colleagues[12] suggest that "the quality of the [school] climate appears to be the single most predictive factor in any school's capacity to promote pupil achievement."[12]

The Journeys approach is grounded in the belief that personal reflection and dialogue—an empathetic approach—is the most effective approach, if not the only approach that holds promise for shifting the societal norms known to produce and maintain VACiS. Considering the normalization of violence in schools, an effective approach requires shifting teachers, parents, and pupils view to recognize the seriousness of VACiS in any form, including bullying, corporal punishment, and sexual violence. To this end, it is necessary to inspire heartfelt understanding

[11] Aber, J. L, Torrente, C., Starkey, L., Johnston, B., Seidman, E., Halpin, P., & Wolf, S. (2016). Impacts after one year of 'healing classroom' on children's reading and math skills in DRC: Results from a cluster randomized trial. Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness, 10(3), 507–29. https://doi.org/10.1080/19345747.2016.1236160; Shindler, J., Jones, A., Dee Williams, A, Taylor, C., & Hermenia, C. (2016). The school climate–student achievement connection: If we want achievement gains, we need to begin by improving the climate. Journal of School Administration Research and Development; Schweig, J., Hamilton, L., & Baker, G. (2019). School and classroom climate measures: Considerations for use by state and local leaders. RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR4259.html; Smylie, M., Murphy, J., & Louis, K.S. (2020). Caring School Leadership. Corwin Press, Inc; Thapa, A., Cohen, J., Guffey, S., & Higgins-D'Alessandro, A. (2013). A review of school climate research. Review of Educational Research, 83(3), 357–385. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654313483907.

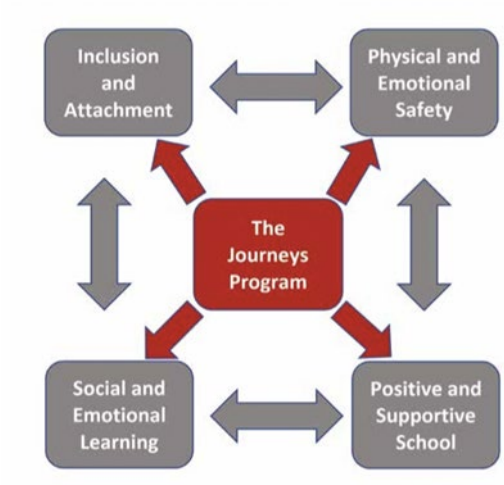
[12] Shindler, J., Jones, A., Dee Williams, A., Taylor, C., & Hermenia, C. (2016). The school climate–student achievement connection: If we want achievement gains, we need to begin by improving the climate. Journal of School Administration Research and Development, 1(1), 9–16.

of the nature and consequences of VACiS and the critical influential role that a positive and caring school community can have in eliminating it.

The Journeys approach involves the application of awareness-building activities involving guided reflection, dialogue, interactive games, art and drama, and action research to inspire staff, community members, and pupils to work individually and together to establish a positive school climate, which is free from violence and where SEL flourishes.

### *JOURNEYS THEMATIC CONTENT AND ACTIVITIES*

**Figure 8. Integrated Thematic Content of the Journeys Program**




Thematic content is introduced through interactive activities on certain forms of violence in schools. It is done in a way that is safe for participants to openly discuss ideas and make meaning for themselves. For example, the source and impact of experiencing violence in schools might be introduced through a story, in which participants read, reflect on, discuss, and solve a social problem. Another example is role-playing or drama, which helps participants see a social situation from perspectives other than their own. To ensure a safe space for sharing ideas and opinions, Journeys' facilitation "ground rules" call for intent listening and making sure all voices and differences of opinion are heard without judgement. The thematic content encompasses four broad areas, as shown Figure 8

The first theme focuses on building a positive and supportive school by engaging teaching and non-teaching staff, community members, and pupils in reflection, visioning, and discussions about the attributes of a positive and violence-free school (see bottom right box in **Figure 8**).

Second, there is physical, emotional, and academic safety. The Journeys program engages school staff, pupils, and parents in open discussions about emotional and physical violence encountered by children in school and traveling to and from school. Importantly, activities help build understanding about how VACiS impedes pupil learning and their positive social and emotional development. District, sub county, and community systems for managing cases of VACiS reinforce the shared learning on violence prevention.

A third area of content promoted by Journeys is that of equity and inclusion and how this is integral to a safe and positive learning environment. The Journeys activities include content that tackles the damaging gender norms that limit opportunities for girls and vulnerable children, such as the poor and marginalized, and that allow violence perpetrated against children to go unchecked.

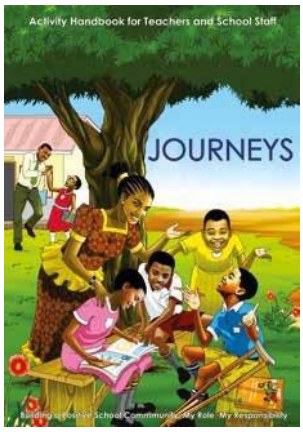
The fourth thematic content area builds on the successes of the first three and involves content dedicated to nurturing pupils' SEL. As depicted in **Figure 8**, the learning environment, and pupils' SEL are interdependent. Social and emotional skills are naturally supported by environments that are violence-free, accepting, and supportive. In addition, the Journeys pupil program was developed to provide a dedicated safe space for pupils to engage in more child-centered activities that promote the development of social and emotional skills in general; the

agency they need to navigate their world; and avoid, challenge, and report violence they witness or personally experience.

### *DEVELOPED AND IMPLEMENTED THE JOURNEYS PROGRAM*

Based on the content themes described above, the project developed three Journeys Activity Handbooks providing a set of scripted activities to be conducted in group meetings. The handbook is the guidebook for school change agents, teacher patrons (TPs), and Community Change Agents (CCAs) who are the Journeys leads and group facilitators. Three handbooks were developed: (1) Journeys for Teachers and School Staff, (2) Journeys for Pupils, and (3) Journeys for Communities. For each of the handbooks, the project developed an accompanying facilitator's guide to help the trainers implement the activities.

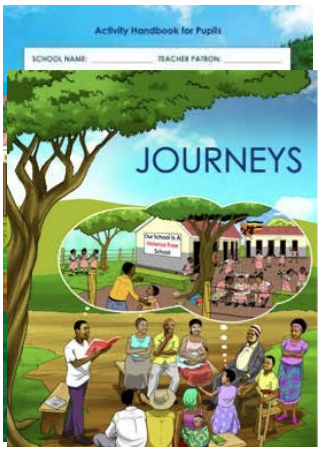
### *THE JOURNEYS MATERIALS: THREE ACTIVITY HANDBOOKS WITH INTEGRATED CONTENT*




**Journeys Activity Handbook for Teachers and School Staff**. The objective of this handbook is to mobilize teachers and school staff to take deliberate steps to increase, foster, and promote a safe and a caring school that is free from violence. A positive school climate includes norms, values, and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally, and physically safe. This activity is normally conducted by a SCA, who is typically a teacher or deputy head teacher, who mobilizes all the teachers and school staff to participate. Two or three SCAs are trained on how to facilitate the activities in the handbook. In many instances, the senior male or senior female teacher constitute the school's SCAs. Through the activities that make up the Journeys Handbook for Teachers and School Staff, teaching and non-teaching staff develop a deep understanding about the characteristics of school life that promote pupils' positive social and emotional and academic development and, importantly, develop a deep understanding about the nature, extent, and impact of SRGBV. Activities also are intended to mobilize staff to work together on actions that will establish conditions that best support children's learning and positive social and emotional development and prevent VACiS.

**Journeys Activity Handbook for Pupils**. This handbook consists of an administrative guide and a series of 39 pupil activities to help schools organize and hold weekly pupil discussion groups or United Kids Unite (UKU) teams to inspire pupils to become more directly engaged in contributing to a safe and positive school environment. Pupils from P3 to P7 are assigned to a UKU team, consisting of 20 to 25 pupils each. Each team is assigned a TP who supports their assigned team and leads the activities in the Journeys Activity Handbook for Pupils. Every teacher in the school is trained to be a TP for one of the UKU teams in a school depending on enrollment. Journeys teams provide a safe space for pupils to engage in a variety of social activities that both mobilize them to be active members of building a positive school environment, preventing violence in schools, and nurturing their development of important social and emotional skills. Targeted social skills are those that strengthen pupils' ability to navigate their world, challenge and prevent violence in their schools, and seek assistance when they witness or personally experience violence. The activities help strengthen pupils' sense of self and others, build individual and collective agency to become active in building a positive school and preventing violence, enhance communication and reporting skills, and foster a sense of belonging, among others. The safe environment of the UKU team meetings enables pupils to share with each other the many challenges they face every day—personal and academic—and be an empathetic and supportive listener and peer. Over time, pupils

develop the social capital that helps build the confidence and resilience needed to deal with past and future challenges in their school and personal life.




**Journeys Activity Handbook for Community Members**. The objective of this handbook is to mobilize community members to take deliberate steps to increase, foster, and promote a safe and caring school community that is free from violence, especially to ensure that children are safe walking to and from school from their community. In a community where children are cared for, encouraged, and supported, children know that they and their education is valued. They will feel protected and always feel free and safe to travel to and from schools. Activities in the Journeys Handbook for Community Members provide an opportunity to directly involve the community in achieving the goal of creating a safe learning environment for pupils. LARA commissioned and supported a variety of CBOs as subgrantees to roll out the Journeys program in school communities. The subgrantees were responsible for training the CCAs (see Figure 9): two in each community. The CCAs are selected by community leaders and are charged with mobilizing community members to attend weekly dialogue meetings, during which they facilitate a variety of group activities that serve to deepen parents' and other community members' understanding about the nature, extent, and impact of VACiS on the lives of pupils. The activities also teach participants about the role the community can play in preventing VACiS by building a positive and caring environment where VACiS is not tolerated.

## *CAPACITY OF DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS TO IMPLEMENT JOURNEYS*

The development of the human resource capacities needed to carry out and sustain a national response to VACiS involved, first of all, the direct involvement of the national-, district- and school–level education officials in the design and implementation of the Journeys Program.

The project adopted a three-tiered cascade training on Journeys implementation by following the activities in the Journeys handbooks. First, the project trained lead facilitators to train a cadre of Journeys facilitators who would be responsible for training the end users, SCAs, and TPs. Change agents or TPs led activities at the school and community levels. The project also trained education leadership from the Ministry level, districts, and school level to establish institutional capacity for sustaining the Journeys program.

Recognizing that facilitation is a technique new to education personnel, the project took an adult learning approach and provided guidance on a facilitation approach that was specifically tooled for Journeys. The five facilitation principles shown in the text box are the hallmark of the Journeys empathic approach. This approach was reinforced during all trainings.

**Five guiding principles of Journeys facilitation**

1. **Listening, not talking**. Listen to participants, fellow school staff, community members, and pupils, rather than talking.
2. **Understanding, not judging**. Understand the views and behaviors of participants, honoring the differences and withholding judgment.
3. **Allowing discovery of meaning, not telling**. Allow participants to make meaning from activities and discussions rather than telling them what they need to know.
4. **Encouraging responsibility, without blaming**. Encourage shared responsibility. For example, when discussing violence against children, do not assign blame to the pupils or others.
5. **Following the script, not doing your own thing**. Follow the project instructions rather than just summarizing in your own words or doing your own thing.

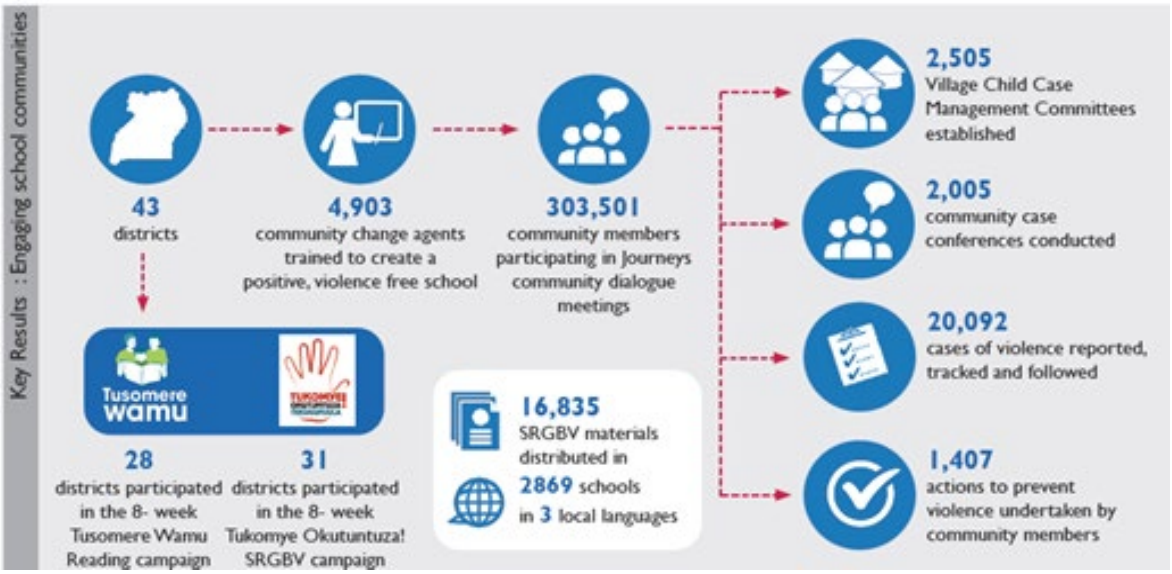
The rollout of the training was planned to ensure that the SCA-led Journeys for School Staff and CCA-led Journeys for Community members were ongoing before introducing Journeys for Pupils. This way, school staff had already participated in the Journeys activities and were familiar with the Journeys facilitation methodology prior to becoming TPs and leading a UKU team at their school or facilitating the Journeys for Pupils activities. Of paramount importance was their learning about how to foster a safe space for pupils to share personal experience and have open discussions with their peers. All training events took place during school breaks, per the MoES guidelines.

After training, the project provided support through the CCTs and district education officials, supplemented by FAs to support SCAs and TPs to plan, implement, and document the activities being conducted and collective actions that emerged to prevent and respond to violence in the school. Head teachers, as the administrative leaders of the schools, were encouraged to document and respond to incidents of bullying and corporal punishment and to notify parents and teachers in accordance with the MoES' RTRR Guidelines.

### *IR 2.3: STRENGTHENED COMMUNITY COMMITMENT AND CAPACITY TO SUPPORT SRGBV PREVENTION AND RESPONSE PROGRAMS*

A summary of community-level engagement in IR 2.3 activities is shown in **Figure 9**.

**Figure 9. Supporting Community Engagement**




### *COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN VIOLENCE PREVENTION*

The community program involved three interrelated activities that engaged community members in collective action to help establish safer and more caring school environments and to prevent VACiS and violence while traveling to and from school. These interrelated activities included:

- Journeys for Community Members dialogue meetings, which were led by CCAs
- Village Child Case Management Committee (VCCMCs), which were supported by a mapping of local referral networks
- Rollout of the SBCC campaign for reducing corporal punishment (see description below).

The community program was implemented by CBOs that competed for and were awarded subgrants by LARA to carry out the community activities. A total of 15 CBOs received subgrant awards to cover, in total, 28 districts (13 Cohort 1 districts and 15 Cohort 2 districts).

Each subgrant had an 18-month period of performance. The subgrantees were responsible for training and supporting the implementation of all three community initiatives, the Journeys community dialogues, development of the referral web, implementation of the VCCMCs, and carrying out the SBCC campaign to end corporal punishment. The subgrantees and respective district assignments are provided in **Table 5**.

**Table 5. CBO Partners and Districts Supported**

| | Partner | C1 Districts (Districts LARA began with in 2016) | C2 Districts (Districts LARA expanded to in 2017) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Community Integrated Development Initiatives | — | Isingiro, Bukomansimbi, and Rubirizi |
| 2 | Network for Community Development | Mukono | Lyantonde and Buhweju |
| 3 | Family Strength for a Better Child | Buvuma, Kiboga. and Butambala | Kalungu |
| 4 | Masaka Green Light Impact Program | Lwengo | Masaka |
| 5 | Literacy Action and Development Agency | Mitooma and Sheema | Rukungiri and Kanungu |
| 7 | Child Rights Empowerment and Development | Nakaseke | Sembabule and Kyegegwa |
| 8 | Appropriate Revival Initiative for Strategic Empowerment | — | Ntungamo |
| 9 | Community Driven Network-Uganda | — | Mityana |
| 10 | Multi Community Based Development Initiative | — | Luwero |
| 11 | SHED | — | Kalangala |
| 12 | Joy Initiatives Uganda | Mpigi | — |
| 13 | Environmental Conservation & Agricultural Enhancement Uganda | Hoima | — |
| 14 | Proactive Approaches for Children and Community Transformation | Rakai | — |
| 15 | Centre for Governance and Economic Development | Mbarara | — |

## *CAPACITY BUILDING FOR SUSTAINED COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT OF POSITIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION*

Project staff trained representatives from CBOs and provided ongoing support to the CBOs by ensuring consistent planning and implementation fidelity across districts. CBO subgrantees trained selected CCAs, who were responsible for organizing and leading the Journeys activities with groups of community members. Three CCAs in each school community were identified and trained to lead the Journeys community dialogues, but also to support the other project-supported community programs (e.g., the VCCMCs and the SBCC campaign).

Community-selected CCAs organized and facilitated weekly community dialogue meetings during which time the Journeys activities were carried out. The Journeys activities focused on the thematic content integral to all of Journeys: safe and caring school community environment, violence prevention, gender equity and inclusion, and SEL. Parents and community members attended meetings where CCA-facilitated a Journeys activity.

Based on feedback from C1 CCAs, the Journeys for Community Activity Handbook was translated into three local languages using language board members recommended by the NCDC. In March 2021, the NCDC requested that the translated versions be reviewed by secondary language board members. The project-supported CBOs used the translated versions during the C2 district roll out.

The CBO's provided support and supervision to community implementers, as well as limited financial resources for implementation (e.g., stipends for CCAs to organize and carry out the community dialogues, registers, and limited airtime for the VCCMCs, and SBCC campaign materials, such as posters and dramas).

### *VCCMCS AND LOCAL REFERRAL NETWORKS ESTABLISHED*

The project worked with the Uganda Bantwana NGO, an affiliate of World Education, and the CBOs to assist participating school communities to establish a VCCMC. Prevention of VACiS can only be productive when there is effective reporting and response to children who have experienced violence. Not only do the VCCMCs provide a formal mechanism for reporting, tracking, referring, and responding to cases, they also provide a platform for mobilizing shared responsibility by the school and community to protect children against VACiS and ensure that children who do experience violence receive the care and treatment they need. Committee membership consisted of seven permanent members, which included one or more of the following: the vice chairperson of the village local council, selected teachers or head teacher, religious leaders, local opinion leaders, and a para-social worker if they were present in the community. The VCCMC initiative reinforced the MoES' RTRR Guidelines by providing a formal structure for school staff and community members to identify and manage cases of bullying, corporal punishment, and sexual violence.

An integral part of any case management system is to ensure access to viable sources of referral for health, psychosocial, and legal support to children and their families. To this end, working with subgrantees, the project helped participating school communities develop a network of service providers, both formal and informal, at the village, subcounty, and district levels to which children and their families could be referred to for assistance. The VCCMCs were supported by higher level structures for child protection at the subcounty and district levels, including CDOs; the district school inspectorate; probation officers; the police; and other formal and informal local structures, such as health clinics, faith-based organizations, and NGOs.

In partnership with World Education's Bantwana NGO, a set of child case management training/facilitators manuals were developed to accompany the training of district and subcounty officials on child case management at the district, subcounty, and community level. To support viable referral and response, guidance and technical assistance were provided to district, subcounty and community officials to map out a referral network, including both formal and informal referral sources for providing health, psychosocial, and legal support. Beneficiaries of the case management training included DEOs, ISs, probation officers, and CDOs. Subgrantees assisted school and community leaders in developing the referral network, trained VCCMC members, and monitored the progress and outcomes of the VCCMCs in their charge.

CDOs with support of Bantwana worked with communities to identify and train VCCMC members in violence prevention and response. The committee held mini-case conferences at the school-community level to review documented SRGBV cases submitted by the head teacher or community members, resolve minor cases through counseling and guidance, and follow-up on cases referred to subcounty or district officials. The subcounty CDOs provided technical supervision to the VCCMC and the VCCMC worked closely with the CDOs to refer cases they could not resolve.

### *SBCC*

In Year 3, LARA implemented a proof-of-concept research trial for an SBCC campaign to eliminate corporal punishment in Uganda's schools. The campaign slogan, *Tukikomye* (Let's End It!), promoted collective action to eliminate corporal punishment and underscored the urgency of action. The pilot SBCC campaign was directed toward shifting the behavior of teachers and head teachers, addressing myths and social norms that reinforce and maintain the practice of corporal punishment, and encouraging and providing guidance on the use of positive discipline.

### *SBCC SHIFTING OF SOCIAL NORMS*

The project developed SBCC communications messages that were developed and delivered across targeted districts. These were delivered via community theater dramas, TV commercials, radio advertisements, radio programs, radio spot messages, T-shirts, posters, banners, talking points provided to community leaders for discussion, and pocket booklets with key campaign messages, as well as one-on-one interpersonal communications sessions with teachers and parents.

The proof-of-concept research activity was conducted in 20 schools during June and July 2018. The project determined that after the campaign, teachers engaged in more conversations with their peers about different types of discipline and they increased their use of positive discipline methods. With the findings from the SBCC campaign in place, the project's partner CBO subgrantees, working with their community constituents, selected campaign materials and launched the communications campaign to fight corporal punishment in their respective school communities.

## 2.3 PEPFAR (Plus Up, COP 18, and COP 19)

The Uganda Population-based HIV Impact Assessment 2016–2017 outlined the significant HIV disease burden in Uganda. HIV prevalence among children was 0.5%, which corresponded to approximately 96,000 children living with HIV, of which 54.3% were on ART.[13] In addition to high rates of children who are not on treatment, there is a high default rate for adolescents within the first six months of ART due to drug side effects, weak family and social support systems, poor treatment literacy, disclosure, and stigma. In addition, widespread poverty, harmful cultural norms, and gender inequity are key determinants of the epidemic and contribute to high incidences of GBV, early sexual debut, teen pregnancy, and high school dropout, especially for girls. In Uganda, AGYW engage in transactional sex at high rates (25%), 35% of girls experience sexual abuse before adulthood, and one in four girls give birth by age 19.[14] Boys and girls experience high rates of violence, which contribute to poor life trajectories and high-risk behaviors that amplify HIV vulnerability and diminish long-term resilience. It is within this context that the United States Government PEPFAR program supports the GoU to meet the 90-90-90 epidemic control targets. HIV and GBV education are

[13] Ministry of Health. (2019). Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (PMTCT) Report.

[14] Ibid.

a key component to achieving the targets for children and adolescent youth. Through the three years that LARA implemented PEPFAR programming, emphasis was on increased collaboration and coordination of multiple services for vulnerable populations, with a special emphasis on AGYWs. The aim was to provide a package of services, one of which was HIV and GBV education.

LARA implemented PEPFAR activities from February 2018 until March 2020 under Plus Up, COP 18, and COP 19. Under Plus Up, LARA worked with community members to strengthen SRGBV prevention and response, expanding the geographic reach of the BE programming. Under COP 18, HIV education was introduced into the SRGBV programming and expanded to pupils in northern districts, including girls participating in the DREAMS programming. This continued through COP 19 with greater emphasis on integrating DREAMS girls' participation in HIV and GBV education services in primary schools to complement their completion of the primary package of services (e.g., HIV testing and economic strengthening).

### *STRENGTHENED COMMUNITY-LEVEL HIV AND GBV EDUCATION ACTIVITIES*

Between February and September 2018, the project expanded GBV programming to 17 DREAMS districts, of which nine districts (i.e., 180 schools) were new to the programming, and extended community support in eight existing project districts (i.e., 250 schools). The project strengthened community-level understanding of child protection, case management, and referral support to areas not reached under the SRGBV program. The project worked with USAID's OVC IPs and their local partners to identify and train CCAs who undertook the following activities:

- Engaged community members in Journeys dialogues to respond to the needs of children and adolescents in their communities.
- Catalyzed and supported community-designed collective actions to prevent and respond to GBV.
- Established viable community-based referral networks that worked with and through community case management systems and processes.

As a result, the project

- Conducted CLA events and provided mentoring support to 1,967 CCAs (1,071 women and 896 men) to conduct Journeys dialogue meetings with community members.
- Distributed 9,391 copies of Journeys materials and case-registers and trained CCAs on how to use them.
- Established VCCMCs and supported them directly and through subcounty and district CDOs or para-social workers to document reports of SRGBV and hold case conferences. Village, sub county, and district leaders began to secure additional social services for children in need.

### *SCHOOL-LEVEL HIV AND GBV EDUCATION ACTIVITIES*

LARA's activities were in line with the *SEL and Soft Skills USAID Education Policy Brief*, [15] which recognizes the importance of social and emotional skills and soft skills for all children and youths regardless of their level of education. Using Journeys curriculum, LARA focused on integrating SEL skills into PEPFAR programming as a foundation to support children and youth

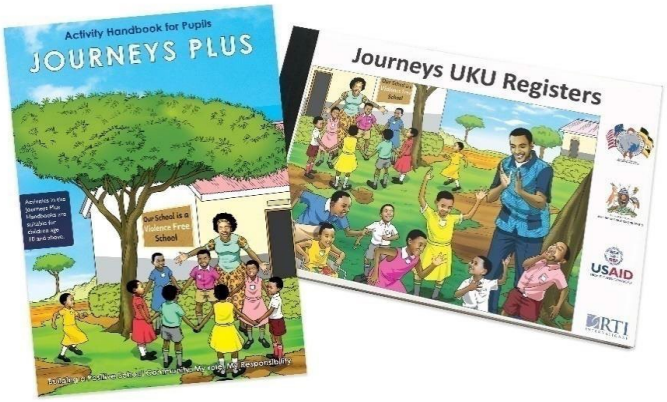
[15] USAID. (2019). *Social and Emotional Learning and Soft Skills USAID Education Policy Brief*. Available at https://www.edu-links.org/resources/social-and-emotional-learning-and-soft-skills-usaid-education-policy-brief

resiliency and agency skills, which are critical for AGYW's well-being. The project designed or revised activities focused on HIV and GBV education, described below. Each activity has a core SEL skill and supports the development of others.

### *STRENGTHENED MOES' HIV CURRICULUM*

The project worked in collaboration with the MoES, Straight Talk Foundation, SHRP, and USAID/Uganda Sustainable Outcomes for Children and Youth to revise the MoES HIV curriculum utilizing the empathetic, reflective approaches from the Journeys program. The final outcome was the creation of the Journeys Plus Activity Handbook for Pupils. Activities in Journeys Plus are aligned to the Office of Global AIDS Coordinator (OGAC)-PEPFAR Primary Prevention of Sexual Violence and HIV among 9–14-year-olds.

In addition, the project designed the accompanying teaching and learning materials:




- Journeys Plus Facilitator Guide
- Journeys Plus Miniature Booklet for Pupils
- Journeys Attendance Register.

The development of Journeys Plus emerged out of a request from USAID and PEPFAR efforts to integrate GBV into the existing HIV awareness and prevention programming. Although there is a multitude of program content used in Uganda's PEPFAR program, including SASA!, Stepping Stones,[16] and the School Family Initiative, the purpose of developing Journeys Plus was to

- build on GBV content that integrated current research on SRGBV,
- strengthen attention to SEL skills into HIV education,
- adapt HIV education to the Ugandan context, and
- ensure coherence between the MoES National Sexuality Framework with OGAC guidance.

In addition, the project sought to maintain the innovations of the original Journeys content using the guiding principles and empathic approaches that characterize the program. Equally important was to ensure that any new content used in Ugandan schools received the required MoES approvals.

PEPFAR also requested a proposed minimum package of contents that all children, especially DREAMS girls, complete as one service in the primary package of services. Journeys Plus recommended a minimum package of GBV and HIV prevention activities for girls and boys to complete in one academic year. Educators recognized that children's social and emotional

[16] Stepping Stones was developed for South African young men and women. It has 10 sessions and 57 exercises (Medical Research Council, 1995). Stepping Stones Plus was developed in Uganda for adults. There are 19 activities. The copyright is held with Salamander Trust and Alice Wellbourne, 2016, https://steppingstonesfeedback.org/wp- content/uploads/2016/11/ StStStPlusContents.pdf. Stepping. Stones for children was developed between 2011 to 2017 and field tested in three communities in Tanzania. There are 29 activities. The program is copyrighted by Salamander Trust and Gill Gordon and sold by Practical Action Publishing. https://steppingstonesfeedback.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/StStwC_Impact_BriefUpdated_September_2018.pdf

competencies develop over time and the minimum package covered key messages for HIV and GBV prevention, response, and care. Journeys Plus includes new instructions to help teachers navigate the delivery of the content over multiple years, with attention to the minimum package for primary pupils in high epidemic areas.

In January 2019, OGAC reviewed and provided feedback on the existing School Family Initiative content and requested that SHRP revise its HIV primary school content. SHRP, with the MoES HIV revision team, reviewed the content and integrated selected GBV, gender, and power differential activities from Journeys. The MoES HIV revision team was also guided by the MoES' 2018 National Sexuality Framework which provided age-appropriate curriculum guidance for educators. The framework had been approved by parliament; however, its implementation launch was halted due to objections from religious and cultural leaders, as well as parents and community members, who felt the content was too sexually explicit. Although there have been attempts to strengthen sexual health content into the school curriculum, cultural and social norms present resistance to change.

After the HIV content was reviewed by the MoES, with support of SHRP, the project reviewed the process of each HIV activity and began field testing the content. The Journeys Plus Activity Handbook for Pupils was adjusted several times to integrate feedback from various stakeholders. In February 2019, OGAC provided content guidance in its "Primary Prevention of Sexual Violence and HIV among 9–14-year olds". The project re-aligned, reformatted, and cross-walked the Journeys Plus content to the OGAC guidance and field-tested versions of the proposed new activities as part of the development process. Activities were simplified to match the English language capabilities, experience, and educational levels of Ugandan primary children and more time was provided to cover new concepts. In April 2019, the project engaged Straight Talk Foundation to independently review the HIV content and customize it to the 9–14 age target. LARA also engaged a curriculum and SEL consultant from University of Georgia to review all developed activities to ensure the five SEL categories were well integrated into the overall package and the content aligned to Uganda's Thematic Curriculum Life Skills and Values for the same age group. USAID comments were integrated, and the content was resubmitted to USAID in May 2019.

Following resubmission, in May 2019, field testing began to validate if the content used was appropriate to the Uganda primary school context, taking into consideration the cultural, religious, and ethical sensitivities. The project conducted four field tests of the activities developed and after each pilot activity, the materials were revised to incorporate the feedback from trainers and teachers.[17] The project also incorporated feedback from other PEPFAR IPs to further revise the activities.

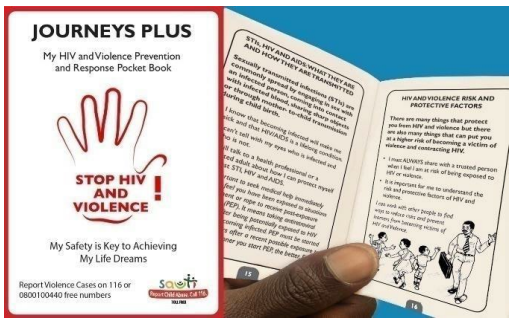
During field tests, the project encountered negative responses from the MoES and other participants to any explicit discussions of sex, sexual acts, sexual fluids, types of sex (vaginal, anal, oral), and the use of contraceptives and romantic relationships, including delaying sexual

[17] Different testing phases are summarized as follows: (1) April–May 2019, Journeys activities field tested with DREAMS girls in boot camps led by USAID/Uganda Better Outcomes for Children and Youths (BOCY). (2) June 2019 conducted field testing during the boot camps with AGYWs that did not attend the first camps in schools. The major element that raised concern was the definition of sex as per the OGAC module 2 which defines sex and types of sex. Teachers refused to talk about types of sex with children and stated that these were private issues between adults. Teachers also rejected some ideas as "foreign behaviors" that do not resonate with Ugandan cultures like anal and oral sex. Feedback from teachers also led to dropping the human anatomy images included in the Body Image Activity, instead they recommended focusing on the physical changes young people experience. Therefore, the project reworked the body image activity to focus on the visible and physiological changes without the human anatomy images. (3) July 2019, BOCY patrons and matrons were comfortable with the activities and feedback indicated it is age appropriate and user-friendly. (4) August 2019 conducted a pilot of the materials with teacher patrons in 512 schools with positive feedback from teachers.

debut for primary school children. Activities with explicit sexual content, as recommended in OGAC guidance, were rejected by parents, religious leaders, and educators; some parents went so far as to prohibit their children from participating in any USAID activities because they equated said activities having sexual content. For example, a parent came to the school during the field test and informed the teacher that their child was not permitted to participate in any USAID activities because of the sexual content. Therefore, the project revised language that was considered explicit, even if used in the OGAC modules, to a culturally acceptable language.

After working with the relevant MoES structures to review the Journeys Plus content, beginning with the Gender Unit, G&C (responsible for HIV education content), and BE Departments, the project attempted to present the revised content to the MoES' PS for MoES approval. However, the March 25, 2021, meeting was rescheduled by the PS and the project was not able to secure final MoES approval of Journeys Plus before closing.

### *ENHANCED CAPACITY OF DEOS AND SMC MEMBERS TO SUPPORT HIV AND GBV PROGRAMMING IN SCHOOLS*




To build DEOs and SMCs capacity to sustain a SRGBV/HIV program, the project engaged and trained the district leadership, SMC members, and head teachers on key concepts of supporting and monitoring school-level activities. In three years of PEPFAR implementation, the project

- Trained 127 national and district officials
- Trained 209 (112 women and 97 men) head teachers and SMC members on the Journeys model in the new districts of Iganga and Bugiri.

### *STRENGTHENED CAPACITY AND SKILLS OF TEACHERS TO FACILITATE HIV AND GBV PROGRAMMING IN SCHOOLS*

The project trained TPs to deliver Journeys Plus to primary pupils in targeted schools. The data below highlights unique beneficiaries reached in each COP FY.

In COP 18, the project trained

- 3,670 UKU TPs (1,810 women and 1,860 men) on GBV prevention activities for pupils
- 2,897 TPs (1,467 women and 1,430 men) on HIV/GBV prevention activities using Journeys Plus
- 389 patrons and matrons (168 women and 221 men) from USAID/Uganda Better Outcomes for Children and Youth (BOCY) on HIV and GBV prevention.

The teachers, in turn, reached 97,162 adolescents with the Journeys program and 2,639 DREAMS girls.

In COP 19, the project trained

- 162 SCAs (103 women 59 men) in Iganga and Bugiri districts
- 4,295 TPs in 436 out of the 554 new schools
- 4,608 TPs from the 493 continuing schools.

The teachers reached 143,700 pupils (69,630 boys and 74,070 girls)[18] in addition to 742 DREAMS girls with the Journeys Plus package before schools were closed in March 2020 due to the pandemic.

### *IMPROVED HIV KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES, AND PRACTICE AND GBV PROTECTION AND RESPONSE*

Shifting social norms around HIV stigma and discrimination and VACiS begins with changing the attitudes and beliefs of a critical mass of adults and children. As a result of LARA-supported school-level training, adults and children bolstered collective actions that created positive and supportive schools. This included recognizing HIV support services as positive and responsible health seeking behaviors. The shifted social norms led to outcomes, such as

- schools increasingly became places where pupils could speak up to protect themselves and others,
- teachers and school staff began to respond and protect children, and
- children's guardians were put in contact with health workers for HIV referral services.

In such an environment, all school and community members work together to prevent HIV and AIDS and the related stigma, as well as learn how to respond when violence occurs.

### *REINFORCED GBV EDUCATION CAPACITY WITH USG HIV IP*

LARA worked with a US Government HIV program IP to discuss each other's programming and ways that GBV could be integrated into existing services provided to DREAMS girls and other vulnerable children. Together with district IPs, the project conducted inception meetings to ensure that district officials were aware of the PEPFAR intervention areas and the integration of activities within the existing government structures and between the programs. LARA trained IP staff on GBV and how it links to HIV prevention. The project also trained 388 BOCY matrons and patrons on how to strengthen field staffs' capacity to reach out-of-school youth. The project also participated and presented in USG IP regional and district monthly meetings, which strengthened collaborations among IPs.

# 3. PROJECT IMPACT

## 3.1 Progress toward Improved Reading Skills for 1.4 Million Pupils

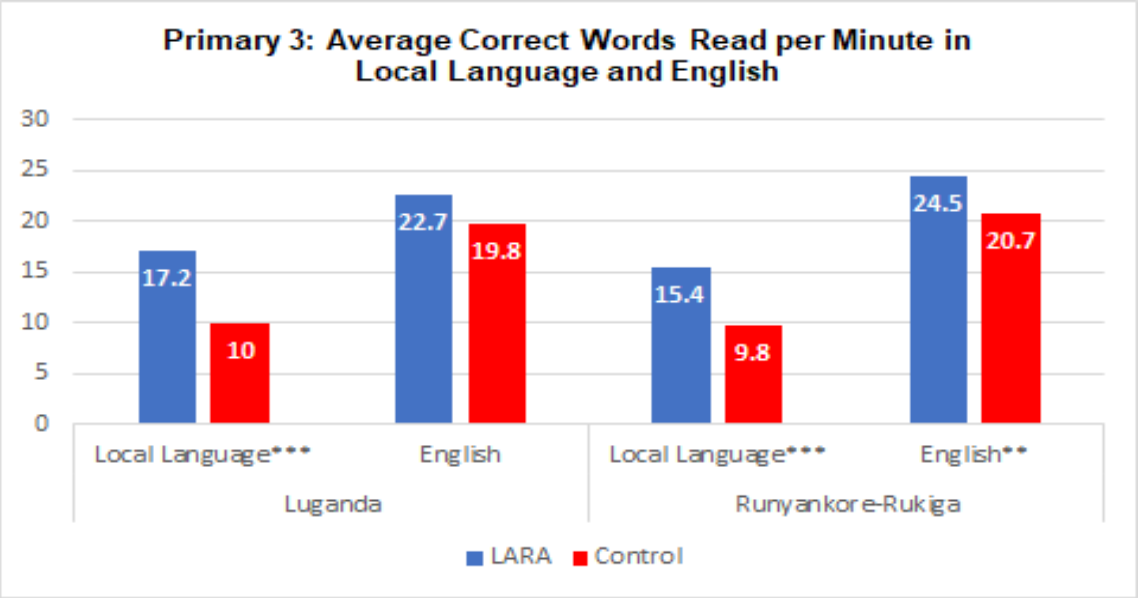
The National Opinion Research Center (NORC) was contracted by USAID to undertake LARA's impact evaluation in C2 districts. At baseline in 2017, NORC assessed pupils at the beginning of P1 and at midline in 2019, assessed P3 pupils across a total of 264 schools. Pupils were assessed in Luganda, Runyankore-Rukiga, and English. The evaluation was not done in Runyoro-Rutooro because only one district, with three CCTs, used the language, which made it an insufficient sample size. The endline was planned for the end of P4 in 2020, but this was not carried out due to COVID-19-related school closures. Key findings of the

[18] During COVID-19, the project attempted to validate the number of girls and boys participating in the Journeys Plus program as submitted by FAs; however, only 1,004 out of 1,045 COP 19 schools were reached. As schools were open only to P7 classes, of the 1,004 schools visited, 381 schools did not have registers. In the 133 schools with registers, the assessors were not able to review all the registers because teacher patrons had either taken the registers home or they were locked away without an available key.

midline impact evaluation are summarized in **Figure 10** (results with asterisks are statistically significant).

**Figure 10** indicates that by the end of P3, local language ORF was significantly higher in project schools than control schools in Luganda and Runyankore-Rukiga. In addition, pupils in Runyankore-Rukiga project schools read significantly more correct words per minute in English than pupils in control schools at the end of P3. In Luganda project schools, English ORF results were better than results in the control schools but the difference was not statistically significant. Overall, girls performed slightly better than boys on ORF. Even though more still needs to be done, i.e., more than 25% of P3 pupils could not read a single word in the local language, these results are impressive.

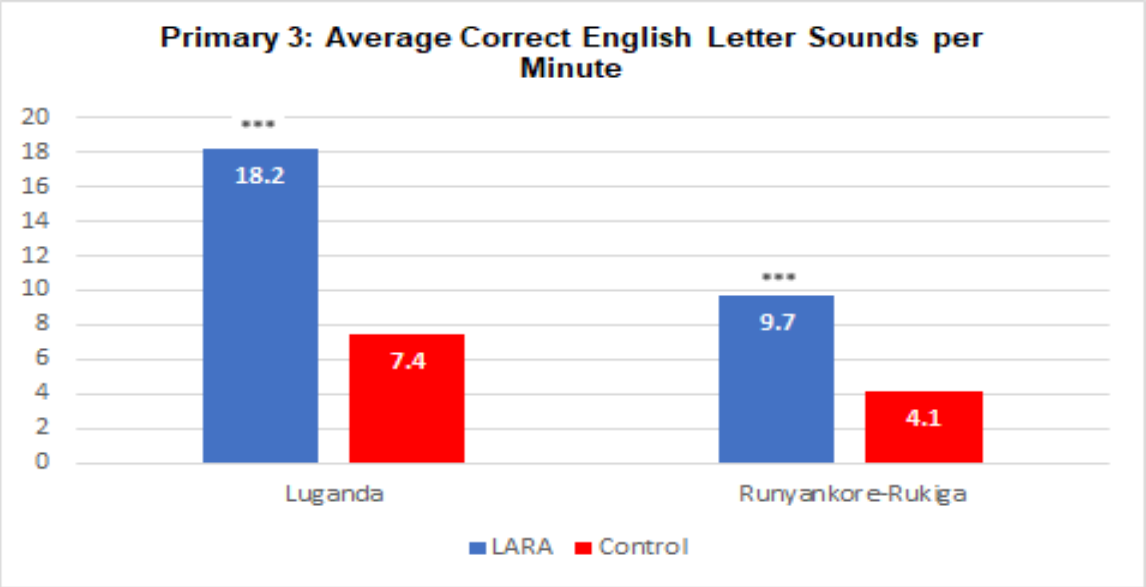
### Figure 10. P3 Average Correct Words Read per Minute in Local Language and English




**Significant difference between LARA and control schools: 95% CI ($p<0.05$)
*** Significant difference between LARA and control schools: 99% CI ($p<0.01$)

The impact evaluation further indicates that pupils in project schools were more likely to identify correct letter sounds in English than pupils in control schools. The number of correct English letters sounds identified by project pupils was more than double that of control pupils in both Luganda and Runyankore-Rukiga schools (**Figure 11**).

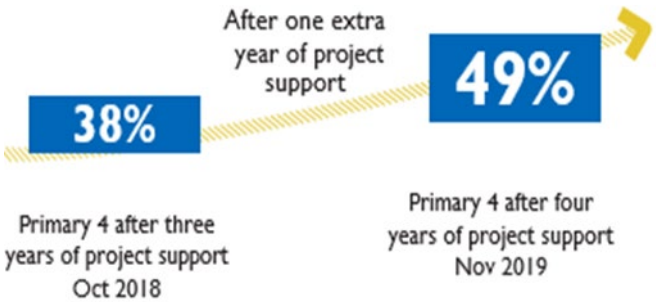
**Figure 11. Primary 3 Average Correct English Letter Sounds per Minute**




*** Significant difference between LARA and control schools: 99% CI (p<0.01)

In addition to the impact evaluation, LARA undertook a quasi-longitudinal study in a sample of 63 C1 schools (21 school per language) to monitor the evolution of reading performance. In 2016, the EGR program was rolled out in two grades (P1 and P2) simultaneously, so the project followed up pupils in two groups (a group that began the program in P1 and a group that began the program in P2). At each data collection point, pupils were sampled randomly. The group that began in P2 was assessed at the end of P4 in 2018, and the group that began in P1 was assessed at the end of P4 in 2019. **Figure 12** shows that by the time pupils reached P4, 38% of those that began the EGR program in P2 and 49% of those that began the EGR program in P1 became fluent English readers. Therefore, pupils exposed to the EGR program right from the start of their primary schooling were more likely to become fluent readers than those exposed to the program one grade later.

**Figure 12. P4 Reading Achievement: Pupils that Began the Project in P1 vs. Pupils that Began in P2**




Overall, project schools had better reading outcomes. Factors that contributed to this included teacher training on explicit EGR instructional practices; ongoing support to teachers through coaching by head teachers, CCTs, and project staff; getting books in the hands of the pupils; head teacher training; school leadership and management providing support; and encouraging parents to read with their children at home through the Uganda Literacy Campaign. However, teachers faced difficulties in practicing the new instructional routines and behaviors due to limited time allocated for practice during teacher training. As a result, the project made changes to the teacher training methods and continuous teacher support (see the R1 learning and adaptation section). Another challenge was reduced participation of LG and MoES officials in project activities due to the implementation of the Local Development Partners' Group

Updated Schedule of Rates of Allowances (September 18, 2019), which eliminated the remittance of allowances directly to government officials. Some districts were also unable to fund support supervision activities, which limited the amount of support available to teachers. Other factors that constrained EGR implementation include high pupil and teacher absenteeism, which affects continuity of learning, as well as the MoES' decision to transfer teachers trained in the EGR methodology and replace them with untrained teachers.

## 3.2 Impact of Journeys: What Increased and What Was Impeded?

In addition to specifically addressing the capacity of the MoES to deliver an EGR program, the project also worked toward improving retention in primary grades by reducing SRGBV. In 2018, the project embarked on a mixed-model longitudinal study to better understand the influence of the Journeys intervention on improving the school climate, reducing prevalence of violence in schools, enhancing SEL, and improving learning outcomes and retention. As a longitudinal study, at each data collection point, data were collected from the same pupils. During occasion 1 (July 2018), pupils were in P2, while at occasion 2 (July 2019), these same pupils were in P3 (unless they repeated a grade). The planned data collection scheduled for July 2020, when pupils were to be in P4, was canceled because of school closures due to the pandemic, which introduced a serious limitation in the study. To evaluate growth trends, it is important to have more than two data points. Because the school closures prevented a third data point collection, rather than depicting growth trends, the findings below provide information on 1-year shifts—from P2 to P3—on key variables, i.e., school climate, experience of SRGBV, SEL, and reading fluency, among pupils in a sample of project schools and a sample of control schools.

### *READING GAINS*

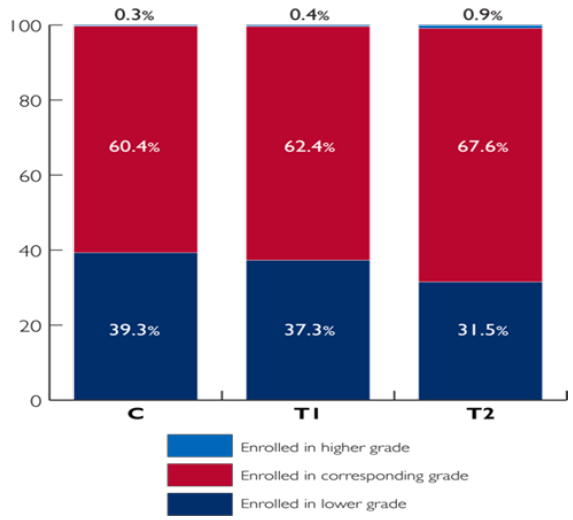
Gains in ORF from P2 to P3 were almost double for pupils in project (i.e., treatment [T]) schools versus control schools, with a statistically significant difference in gain scores ($p<0.001$) and a medium effect size (0.385). Approximately 25% more pupils in LARA schools than control schools progressed from a low reader at the end of P2 to higher levels of reading proficiency (emerging or fluent reader) at the end of P3 (63% versus 48%). This advantage was not as strong for pupils who could not read any words (zero readers) at the end of P2. Pupils in both the control and treatment schools who were not able to read one word at the end of P2 were much less likely to shift to higher levels of reading proficiency (e.g., to low, emergent, or fluent readers) by the end of P3. This finding underscores the critical importance of helping children achieve, minimally, the ability to read some words by the end of P2. Pupils who have some reading ability in P2, even at limited proficiency levels, were much more likely to increase their reading proficiency levels in P3 than those who remain non-readers in P2. Pupils who are still unable to read a single word by the end of P2 will struggle to become a reader in the early primary grades, which will, in turn, seriously impede learning in the mid and upper primary grades.

### *IMPROVED ATTENDANCE, PROMOTION, AND RETENTION*

The most promising finding related to retention was that children who had been exposed to the Journeys program (see T2 in Figure 13 below) were significantly more likely to be promoted to the next grade and less likely to repeat a grade than pupils who participated in the project's EGR intervention only (see T1 in **Figure 13** below) or were enrolled in control schools ($p < 0.01$).[19]

[19] NORC. (2018). *Retention and Attendance Data Report 1*. USAID/Uganda Performance and Impact Evaluation for Literacy Achievement and Retention Activity.

**Figure 13. Comparisons of Promotion Across Study Groups**




During structured interviews, most head teachers and deputy head teachers reported that as a result of the Journeys for Pupils program, school enrollment increased and the number of pupils who dropped out of school decreased. These findings were not backed by quantitative results, however, as this type of data was not collected.

### *IMPROVEMENTS IN SCHOOL CULTURE AND CLIMATE*

School climate refers to the characteristics of school life and how those characteristics feel to the school staff and pupils. School climate is an important mediator of learning outcomes and social and emotional growth and development.[20]

Although there was slightly more gain in a composite index score on perceptions of school climate for pupils in LARA versus control schools, the effect size for the difference in differences test was very small (.137) and the difference was not statistically significant. Data from FGDs with pupils and teachers suggested that the interactions and relationships between and among teachers and pupils had improved, which is an indication that some attributes of school climate were positively influenced by Journeys, but not all.

### *IMPROVED SEL COMPETENCIES*

SEL is developmental and improves with age; therefore, one might expect that pupils' SEL index scores—a composite score based on pupils' responses on all 25 items that make up the Survey of SEL and Agency—increased from P2 to P3. Although the positive shifts on the SEL index were slightly greater for pupils participating in the Journeys program than for control pupils, the effect size was negligible (.11) and the difference between the SEL gains was not statistically significant.

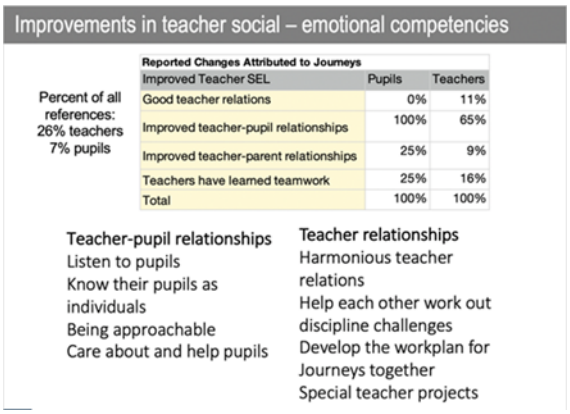
During the qualitative study, pupils and teachers alike discussed improvements in teacher and pupil SEL skills that were, they said, a direct result of the Journeys program. Most of the comments were about improvements in the interactions and relationships between and among pupils and teachers, either as a result of personal experience or observations of others' behaviors.

***Improvements in teacher SEL skills***. The longitudinal study included both quantitative and qualitative methods. The qualitative component of the study involved individual interviews and FGDs with pupils and teachers. Twenty-six percent of all teacher comments during the FGDs were testimonies about the improved relationships that they had experienced as a result of their participation in the Journeys program, especially their relationships with pupils. Teachers indicated that they listen to and understand their pupils more and take pride in being more approachable than they had been before Journeys was introduced. Because of their ability to listen and understand their pupils, they said they had either reduced or eliminated their use of

[20] Thapa, A., Cohen, J., Guffey, S., & Higgins-D'Alessandro, A. (2013). A review of school climate research. *Review of Educational Research, 83*(3), 357–385.

corporal punishment. Teachers also shared that they have developed better relationships with fellow teachers and enjoy stronger teamwork because of Journeys, especially teacher relationships across grades.

**Figure 14. Teacher social and emotional skills**




*Approachable*

*"Not all of us were able to talk to our children and consider that they also have problems. But today, any child can go to any teacher they feel comfortable with. I myself am a case in point because I was a harsh person, for every issue I would be tough but am now a convert." – Deputy Head Teacher*

*"Teachers are more approachable and friendly with pupils" –Pupil*

*Pupil Relationships*

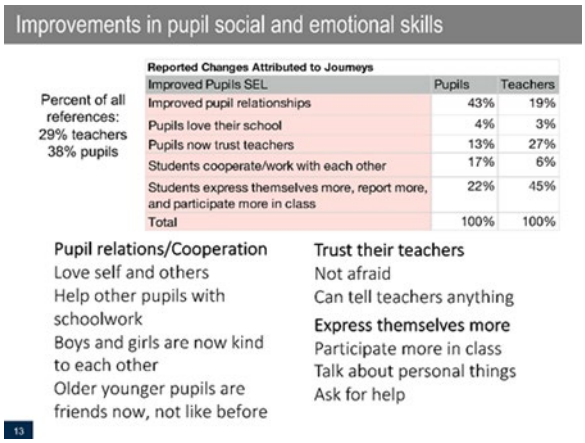
*"….teachers at school started to notice that learners of the early grade class started to make friends with learners in the higher classes which was rather very rare until Journeys was introduced." –Teacher*

*"Before UKU, learners did not support each other because if you were a smart learner you didn't want others to be as smart as you, but now they help others." –Pupil*

*Trust and Freedom to Speak Openly*

*"Before Journeys pupils in the school used to fear their teachers. If they had an issue, they would keep it to themselves. Even in class few children participated actively but after Journeys children gained confidence and are more free with their teachers. Participation in class has increased." –Teacher*

**Figure 15. Pupil social and emotional skills**




***Improvements in pupil social and emotional skills.*** Twenty-nine percent of teacher comments and 38% of pupil comments during the FGDs highlighted improvements in pupils' SEL skills as a result of the Journeys program. These comments included more kindness and collaboration among pupils, more trusting relationships between pupils and teachers, and more pupil participation in class and ability to express ideas. Pupils and teachers alike noted that there was more friendliness, cooperation, and kindness between girls and boys and

between older and younger pupils, something that was rarely observed before the Journeys for Pupils program was introduced.

### *DECREASES IN REPORTED EXPERIENCE OF SRGBV: BULLYING, CORPORAL PUNISHMENT, AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE*

One confounding factor in measuring the impact of any violence prevention intervention like Journeys is that increasing reporting behavior is an integral part of violence prevention. After the initial exposure to such interventions, participating individuals feel safer disclosing their experiences and prevalence rates typically increase as a result.

Study findings suggest that in both LARA and control schools, P2 pupils experienced all forms of SRGBV (i.e., bullying, corporal punishment, and sexual violence) at higher rates than P3 pupils, both girls and boys. This suggests that experiencing SRGBV is, in part, mediated by age.

**Bullying.** Comparing changes in the extent of bullying experienced for pupils in LARA versus control schools after one year of exposure to Journeys did not yield a statistically significant difference in differences. A second analysis compared LARA and control schools on the prevalence rates of girls and boys experiencing bullying multiple times in a school term (i.e., as opposed to once in term). For boys in the LARA schools only, there was a notable drop in the multiple-time bullying prevalence from occasion 1 to occasion 2 (i.e., 93% to 84%, $p<.01$). During FGDs, one of the most frequently mentioned school changes pupils attributed to the Journeys program was that they and their peers fought less and were kinder to each other and that they refrained more from name calling and using abusive language. Although not conclusive from quantitative findings, after one year of access to the Journeys program, these comments suggest that there is an emerging change in behavior that will reduce bullying. Given the prevalence results, the decreases in bullying mentioned in the FGDs may be particular to the male pupil population.

**Corporal punishment.** A greater number of project than control schools demonstrated a reduction in prevalence of corporal punishment after participating in the Journeys program for one year, and this difference was statistically significant (48% versus 26%, respectively; $p<.01$). Qualitative results corroborated this finding.

During FGDs, when teachers and pupils were asked about changes they had observed in their schools since the introduction of the Journeys program, 40% of all teachers' comments and 38% of pupils' comments referenced a reduction in violence. Of the comments about violence, 66% of teachers' and 20% of pupils' FGD comments mentioned that there was less use of corporal punishment or use of positive discipline by teachers. Some teachers spoke proudly that they now listened to their pupils and talked through issues together rather than using the cane, while some pupils mentioned that they were no longer afraid of teachers. Only 20% of the pupils' comments about violence changes since Journeys referenced reductions in caning. Most of the pupils' violence-related comments were about their observations of reduced bullying, fighting, and use of abusive language. In many schools in Uganda, including project schools, children are still fearful of corporal punishment, as shown from pupils' responses on the Pupil Perceptions of School Climate Survey, Fearfulness of Violence Sub-scale.

**Sexual violence.** A drop in sexual violence from P2 to P3 was observed in both the LARA and control schools. Like other forms of SRGBV, this finding may speak to the influence of age on the perpetuation of VACiS. For both LARA and control schools, there was a significantly larger drop in the reported experience of sexual violence from P2 to P3 for girls compared to boys.

## *JOURNEYS DOSAGE*

Following Occasion 2 of the longitudinal study, LARA collected dosage data to determine the uptake of Journeys activities in the schools. Dosage refers to the number of school staff and pupils Journeys activities implemented by schools. To accomplish this, LARA collected dosage data from a sample of 47 schools in the longitudinal study by counting the number of Journeys for Staff and Journeys for Pupils activities that had been implemented in the schools. We also conducted focus group discussions (FGDs) with teachers and head teachers to identify factors that supported and impeded Journeys implementation.

There are approximately 11 to 13 weeks in a school term. The project advocated for schools to undertake one Journeys activity per week. However, not all school weeks were available for Journeys meetings, as there are a variety of competing activities at the schools.

Findings show that on average, schools that implemented the program conducted about half of the school-level Journeys activities planned for the year (i.e., 17/35 for staff activities and 21/39 for pupil activities). There was considerable variability in uptake, from no implementation to full implementation. Five of the 47 schools in the sample (10%) failed to implement any of the staff Journeys programs, while two (4%) schools failed to implement any of the pupil Journeys activities. The maximum percentage of staff-focused activities implemented was 85% (i.e., 30 out of 35 activities), while the maximum percentage of pupil-focused activities implemented was 100% (i.e., 39 out 39 activities). CCAs implemented 100% of the community activities.

## *WHAT SUPPORTED IMPLEMENTATION?*

LARA found several factors that supported implementation.

- **Journeys for Pupils**: The most overwhelming response to the question, “What went well?” was “Pupils love it!”. Teachers mentioned the way the program helps pupils interact with their peers and teachers, and the openness and freedom that pupils feel to express themselves. One deputy head teacher put it this way,

  *“*The pupils got interested in the UKU program, they love it, and they can demand for UKU activities because it’s full of games and taught in their local language*.”*

  According to TPs, the three main factors that supported implementation, in order of importance, were (1) placing the Journeys for Pupils (UKU) program on the school timetable, (2) ensuring space was available for the Journeys for Pupils (UKU) meetings, and (3) conducting the Journeys for Pupils (UKU) team meetings in the local language.

- **Journeys for Staff Members**: What teachers and head teachers highlighted the most about what went well during the implementation of the Journeys for Staff activities was the improvement of teachers’ attitudes about the activities. Teachers developed an interest for and enjoyment in the Journeys for Staff meetings. Teacher cooperation and teamwork were also spotlighted as something staff found to be meaningful.

  Five factors that supported implementation according to head teachers and/or deputies and SCAs, in order of importance, were (1) early communication about the Journeys for Staff meetings, the topic of each activity, and deliberate mobilization of teachers; (2) activities being scheduled on the teachers’ timetable and per each

term's work plan; (3) support from FAs or the CCTs; (4) collaboration with other teachers in developing the work plan; and (5) support from the head teacher.

- **Journeys for Community Members**: There were three factors that supported the implementation in communities: (1) CCAs were selected by community leaders, which provided an incentive to perform well; (2) the CCAs were paid stipends by the subgrantees based on Journeys activities completed; (3) the community dialogue meetings attached to ongoing community activities, such as village savings and loan meetings or sports events, helped increase the number of community members attending.

### *WHAT IMPEDED IMPLEMENTATION?*

LARA found several factors that impeded implementation.

- **Journeys for Pupils**: According to discussions with TPs, there were a number of obstacles to implementing the program for pupils, with no single factor standing out as the most serious. These were (1) lack of materials, (2) TPs missing the meeting and not being motivated, (3) difficulty of some activities, and (4) teachers' heavy workloads.
- **Journeys for School Staff**. Head teachers, deputy head teachers, and SCAs underscored the following barriers to implementation, with the first being the most problematic: (1) competing activities that arose unexpectedly and took over the Journeys time slot, (2) teachers' workload and personal commitments that interfered with their attendance, (3) lack of materials, and (4) negative teacher attitudes, which were prominent when the program just started but improved over time.
- **Journeys for community members.** Most of the barriers to the Journeys dialogues were addressed through learning and adaptation. However, three main barriers were as follows:
    1. The initial handbooks were in English, which was a burden to the CCAs (the project eventually translated the handbook into local languages).
    2. Initially, in some communities, it was difficult to get the necessary 25–30 community members to attend. Attendance by men in the community was particularly challenging. This challenge was addressed by attaching the dialogues to other ongoing community events, particularly the village savings and loans meetings, faith-based activities, or sports activities.
    3. Community members wanted snacks at the meetings and compensation for attending, which was not possible due to cost constraints. However, even this latter challenge did not keep some community members from attending, and their attendance improved over time. The community attendance averaged between 12 to 20 participants per meeting.

The most challenging aspect of implementing Journeys in communities were the competing demands and lack of incentives to attend. As mentioned, adding the project to other ongoing events was a promising solution but did not replace the desire from community members to have a snack. However, the constant presence of two respected CCAs was a significant factor in the community program's success. Furthermore, community members were inspired by the opportunity to work together as a group to design and implement low-cost community projects for building a more positive, supportive school environment and preventing violence. The Journeys step-by-step model for such collective actions provided a practical framework to support these collective actions. Community activities included low-cost activities, such as

clearing bushes to impede predators from hiding and violating children or stopping bullying when it is observed, to completing larger scale actions, such as building fences to secure school grounds and developing community-supported feeding programs.

### *IMPACT OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TO IMPROVE THE SCHOOL CLIMATE AND PREVENT SRGBV*

As mentioned earlier, subgrantees trained and supported CCAs to lead Journeys dialogues, establish VCCMCs, and implement SBCC to reduce corporal punishment in school communities in 28 districts.

**Community dialogues.** One of the outcomes of the community dialogues was that they inspired community activities to improve the school climate and prevent violence. Over 1,407 communities developed and implemented community projects, including contributing to school feeding programs, classroom construction, closing down gambling halls, convening parent-teacher meetings, and holding meetings with local authorities about sexual harassment and violence against children.

**VCCMCs.** VCCMCs were established in all participating communities to improve the reporting, tracking, referral, and response of children who had experienced any form of SRGBV; to include bullying, harsh punishment, and sexual harassment and assault. One of the important impacts of this work was the improved communications and processing of cases of violence against children across the system: between schools and communities and on up the system to the subcounty and district. As a result of this coordinated effort, more than 10,680 cases were documented and managed through the VCCMC program.

**SBCC for reducing corporal punishment.** The LARA SBCC campaign sought to improve knowledge, shift attitudes, and change behavior related to the use of corporal punishment. It also sought to change the way teachers think and feel about corporal punishment, inspire them to stop using corporal punishment, and try alternative positive methods of discipline. The SBCC campaign targeted teachers in Kiyumba CCs in Masaka District with a matched control group of teachers in Sekanyonyi CCs in Mityana District. An SBCC impact study involved a quasi-experimental evaluation study, which took place from October 2017 to August 2018.

The campaign was successful in reaching teachers in the Kiyumba CCs. Ninety-five percent of the teachers recalled seeing or hearing the messages on corporal punishment, while 56% of teachers recalled accessing messages from four media channels (e.g., radio spots, dramas, posters and other printed materials, and face-to-face teacher discussions).

Teachers indicated their understanding of the messages and their intention to change behavior because of hearing the messages. The following provides evidence of the influence of radio programming and community dramas on teacher feelings and behavioral intentions (also see the SBCC Endline Report, page 2):[21]

- radio spot messages made teachers more likely to use alternatives to corporal punishment (99%),
- radio program messages made them discuss corporal punishment and positive discipline with fellow teachers (92%),

[21] USAID/Uganda Lara. (2019). *Social and behavior change communication to reduce primary teachers' use of corporal punishment in school—Endline report*. Available at https://ierc-publicfiles.s3.amazonaws.com/public/resources/SBCC%20Corporal%20Punishment%20Endline%20Report_Final.pdf

- radio program messages made them stop subjecting learners to corporal punishment (73%),
- theater performances made them concerned about the way they punish learners in school (98%),
- theater performances made them consider stopping the use of corporal punishment (96 %),
- theater performances made them discuss corporal punishment and positive discipline with fellow teachers (97%), and
- theater performances made them stop using corporal punishment on learners (99%).

Teachers developed a better **understanding** of corporal punishment and positive alternatives to corporal punishment. For example, an 8% increase in the numbers of teachers in the intervention correctly identified non-violent forms of discipline compared to the control, where an 11% decrease was observed. The intervention helped to maintain teachers' support for the practice of discussing problematic behaviors with their pupils compared to teachers in control schools, in which teachers lost support for this practice.

Teachers' *beliefs* about the necessity of corporal punishment shifted positively during the campaign, as evidenced by a 16% increase in the number of teachers agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement, "corporal punishment is unnecessary for parents to properly raise children". Findings showed a 10% increase in the disapproval of the practices of putting children in stressful positions for punishment (e.g., kneeling on rough surfaces or sitting in the sun) among teachers in the intervention compared to the controls, where there was negligible change.

Significant differences in teacher use of positive disciplinary behaviors following the campaign was evidenced by 22% more teachers in the intervention stating that they "asked learners to apologize", up from 37% at baseline compared to the control group where this response declined by 12%. More teachers in the intervention group maintained their practice of "advising learners to behave better" (with a decline of 4%) compared to the control group, where there was a 23% decline in teachers reporting this practice.

# 4. LEARNING AND ADAPTATION

This section highlights the learning and adaptations that the project undertook throughout its implementation period. These are presented under Result areas. Under R1, the project made adaptations in teacher training, data collection methods, book distribution, MSS, teachers' CPDs, and EGR materials. For R2, the adaptations made included changes in Journeys Activity Handbooks; training of SCAs, CCAs, and TPs; community dialogue meetings; and support to Journeys' implementation.

**Table 6** highlights the research and evaluation studies conducted by the project across its 6-year implementation in support of learning.

**Table 6. Summary Studies**

| Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Studies | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| R1 | — | P2 annual reading performance assessment | P2 annual reading performance assessment | P2 annual reading performance assessment | P2 annual reading performance assessment | Expanded EGRA baseline | Curriculum review |
| | — | Quasi-longitudinal study of P1–P4 reading skills—beginning and end of P1 | Quasi-longitudinal study of P1–P4 reading skills—end of P2 | Quasi-longitudinal study of P1–P4 reading skills—end of P3 | Quasi-longitudinal study of P1–P4 reading skills—end of P4 | — | — |
| | — | — | SBCC to increase parental engagement in their children's reading practice at home<br>Baseline study<br>Endline study | — | Runyoro-Rutooro action research | Analytic research into contextual factors that impact reading outcomes | — |
| | — | — | Appreciative inquiry into factors that contribute to better EGRA gains | — | — | — | — |
| R2 | SRGBV Baseline<br>SRGBV Formative Assessment | — | — | Uganda SRGBV Longitudinal Study–Occasion 1 | Uganda SRGBV Longitudinal Study–Occasion 2 | — | — |
| | — | — | SBCC to reduce the use of corporal punishment in primary schools—baseline study | SBCC to reduce the use of corporal punishment in primary schools—endline study | — | — | — |

## 4.1 R1 Learning and Adaptations

Throughout implementation, the project made a series of modifications to the teacher training techniques informed by evidence from MSS data, and the teacher training needs assessment. For example, teachers were not adequately following the steps in teaching procedures (e.g., skipping the "You Do" step); they were struggling with phonemic awareness, alphabetic principles, and writing; and some had reverted to the old way of teaching instruction (e.g., syllabic method). Discussions with the teachers revealed that they were struggling to implement the methodology in the classroom mainly because the content of the teacher training was too much to be absorbed in one 5-day residential training at the beginning of the academic year. It was against this background that the project implemented adaptations to the teacher training techniques including the below.

**Shorter and more frequent training.** In Year 3, the project moved from having one 5-day training at the beginning of the academic year to training teachers three times a year. The project trained teachers for three or four days at the beginning of first term (January), two days at the beginning of second term (May), and two days at the beginning of the third term (September). This adaptation is affirmed by Guskey's model[22] for teacher change which states that sustainable change in teacher practices only occurs after teachers' beliefs and attitudes have changed. Teachers' beliefs and attitudes change as a result of the teachers seeing improvements in the pupils' learning outcomes as a result of the changes in teaching practices. The new training design improved teacher uptake and fidelity of the EGR methodology; however, with more frequent training, the cost of training increased. To help mitigate increased costs, the shorter and more frequent trainings were carried out at CC schools, which also helped increase attendance. Even though training at the CC schools helped cut down colleges' costs for accommodation of teachers and improved attendance, the project still experienced challenges, including:

- an increase to the project's logistic arrangement and transport refunds because teachers commuted from their homes to the training sites,
- less content covered as trainings started late and ended early since teachers had to travel back to their homes
- some teachers still missed training since they were upgrading their qualifications during the holidays when trainings occurred.

**Integrated adult-based approaches in teacher training.** The project revisited the teacher training methodology; omitted lecturing as a method of delivery; and included adult-based approaches, e.g., training approach based on experience, reflection, generalization, and application stages. The project also introduced pair-practice into teacher training as recommended by RTI's teacher development study.[23] This enabled all teachers to practice the skills and steps during actual training, which increased the chance of them trying out the new skills and steps in their classrooms.

**Focus on phonemic awareness.** To support teachers in letter sound instruction, the project adapted RTI's Papaya letter sounds mobile application into three local languages and shared it with staff, trainers, and other stakeholders. Papaya is loaded with the alphabets of 12 local

[22] Guskey, T.R. (2010). Professional development and teacher change. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice, 8*(3), 381–391. https://doi.org/10.1080/135406002100000512

[23] Piper, B., & Mejia, J. (2019, April). *Teachers professional development study* [PowerPoint slides]. RTI International. Training teachers or robots: Unexpected findings of a 7-country teacher professional development study [CIES 2019 Presentation] | SharEd (rti.org)

languages and English. Selecting a letter reveals the correct letter sound, letter name, and an example of how the letter is used in a word. This application helped coaches and teachers practice hearing and pronouncing the letter sounds that they find most challenging. This enabled the teachers to instruct the learners correctly and develop learners' foundational reading skills.

LARA also collaborated with partners, including SHRP, STiR Education, Red Earth Education, and Aga Khan to refocus the teacher training with greater emphasis on letter sound instruction. This included incorporating practical exercises like sound games into the steps outlined in the teacher guides. The project also trained teachers on how to use locally available materials to supplement the lesson content, thereby making the lesson enjoyable and easier to understand.

Other adaptations that the project implemented to further EGR outcomes are detailed below.

**Change in data collection method.** During the district stakeholder meetings, the project realized that plans and some decisions related to teacher CPD (e.g., schools to be prioritized, focus of in-school teacher support, and CPD topics) were being made without evidence. To provide timely data to the districts, the project changed its method of data collection from manual (using paper) to electronic (using tablets). This enabled the project to gather timely data that was packaged and shared with the districts during the termly district stakeholder meetings. Additionally, electronic data collection came with other benefits like minimizing data entry errors, which improved the reliability, completeness, and validity of the support supervision data.

**Change in the book distribution strategy.** In Year 3, the project changed its book distribution approach from last mile distribution (i.e., delivering books at the school) to a centralized strategy (i.e., delivering books at the district and facilitating the head teachers to collect them). This adaptation was done as a result of challenges that distribution contractors reported where many schools were hard to reach by vehicle due to a poor road network and bad terrain. A lot of time was spent finding the location of the school, as well as moving from one school location to another. The project also noticed that contractors would drop the books at the school without school authorities verifying the materials and quantities. This adaptation reduced the time taken to distribute materials in schools and the costs involved (31% less expensive on average). This also improved the verification of book quantities since project staff and head teachers were present at the distribution point.

**Change in MSS.** Initially, the project used to plan and fund the MSS activities in the districts. By Year 3, all district officials had been trained in EGR, Journeys, leadership, and clinical support supervision so the project took a step back and allowed the districts to embark on their journey toward self-reliance regarding school-level MSS. However, although the districts planned and scheduled these MSS activities, there were budget constraints that would not allow them to reach a substantial number of schools as it had been possible with the funding from the project. The project adopted the LQAS to enable the districts to set priorities; decide on higher performing areas to learn from and lower performing areas to invest in; and identify knowledge, attitudes, and practices in the high performing areas that they could adopt for the low performing areas. LQAS also had an added advantage of requiring a very small sample (19) and only "pen and paper" analysis making it very robust and sustainable for the districts. The project rolled out the approach to 31 districts and they have been able to conduct efficient MSS visits to their schools. Furthermore, the districts use the findings from the LQAS as a precursor to CPD activities (e.g., if the LQAS shows that the majority of P4 teachers are struggling with the transition lesson, the district schedules a CPD with P4 teachers to address the challenge).

**Reinforcing teacher training and support through CPDs.** In addition to modifying the training design to shorter and more frequent training in Year 3, the project introduced CPDs to increase EGR support to teachers. This was after learning from support supervision data that many teachers were relapsing to the old methods of teaching, including the whole word approach, "repeat after me", syllabic teaching approach, and using the literacy hour to teach other subjects other than Literacy 1 and Literacy 2. The project conducted cluster-level CPDs for literacy teachers from all project schools with content focusing on Literacy 1 and 2 activities for P1–P4 teachers. In addition to project organized CPDs, LARA PCs and FAs worked in collaboration with CCTs, cluster chairpersons, and head teachers to organize school and zonal level CPDs. Individual schools financed the CPDs, including money for refreshments and transport for teachers. One of the interesting aspects in these CPDs was the use of champion teachers who understood the methodology and could demonstrate it for others, which promoted collective, peer-to-peer support. The CPDs were beneficial because they not only addressed teachers' challenges, but also reached some teachers that missed the major training.

**Revision of the EGR pupil books and teachers' guides.** The NCDC's study on the efficacy of the primary school curriculum in supporting UPE[24] recommended, among other things, (1) reducing the curriculum content and unnecessary overlap within and across subjects, (2) presenting curriculum content relevant to the level of learners in various classes, and (3) enhancing literacy and English. RTI also undertook a study on the effectiveness of the teacher guides,[25] which found that teachers in Uganda made the most modifications to their teachers' guides (24 modifications per 30 minutes) and 59% of these modifications were negative (e.g., the teacher deliberately skipped a fundamental teaching procedure). The study also found that the teacher guides had too many words per page, e.g., average words per page: P2 English (189.5), P1 English (184.0), P1 Runyankore-Rukiga (154.2), and P3 Luganda (151.0), which led to teachers struggling to read all of them, let alone teach them. Furthermore, the number of activities per lesson were too many (P1 Runyankore-Rukiga: 10.8 activities, P3 Luganda: 10.2 activities, P2 English: 7.5 activities, and P1 English: 7.25 activities), which led to teachers skipping activities toward the end of the lesson. All these findings, coupled with studies from NCDC and feedback from teachers during trainings, led to the revision of the teacher guides and pupil books. In a bid to increase fidelity and quality of the EGR lessons, the books were revised with a focus on the following:

- simplifying the design and format to remove cross-referencing,
- scripting in early lessons and gradual decrease in lessons over the year,
- putting Literacy 1 and Literacy 2 into integrated lessons,
- making differentiated instructional strategies more explicit throughout the teacher guides,
- revising the content for English to enhance pupil practice in classrooms.

**Change in allowance policy for teachers.** In its first few years of implementation, the project used CCTs, head teachers, and other DEOs as facilitators in its trainings and workshops. However, in Year 4, the project adapted the use of FAs and PCs as training facilitators in

[24] NCDC. (2018, November). Comprehensive evaluation of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) Policy; Efficacy of the primary school curriculum in supporting the realization of UPE. Available at http://docplayer.net/187353005-Comprehensive-evaluation-of-the-universal-primary-education-upe-policy.html

[25] Piper, B., Sitabkhan, Y., Mehia, J., & Betts, K. (2018). Effectiveness of teachers' guides in the global South: Scripting, learning outcomes, and classroom utilization. Available at https://www.rti.org/rti-press-publication/teachers-guides-global-south

teacher training. Around the same time, the Local Development Partners' Group updated the schedule of allowance rates and excluded all civil servants from receiving sitting allowances for workshops, meetings, and trainings. Further, transport refunds, meals, and accommodation where necessary had to be preapproved by USAID with confirmation from LG and MoES officials that resources did not exist to support government participation in a LARA event otherwise. In light of this change, LARA's decision to have FAs and PCs as trainers helped ensure the continuation of training while following guidelines, because the FAs and PCs were already trained as lead trainers and they were able to conduct the trainings.

## 4.2 R2 Learning and Adaptations

To capture complete, accurate, consistent, and timely data for progress reporting, the project ensured the availability of registers and data capture tools in the supported schools. The project integrated the CLA approach into its planning and management of the project overall, including the Journeys initiative, through continuous monitoring of recorded implementation data, consultation, and collaborative decision-making about modifications that could improve the fidelity and uptake of the Journeys program.

A variety of project hosted CLA events were dedicated to deepening project understanding about implementation and making adaptations to materials or the delivery process, as needed. These were (1) cluster-level learning events and refreshers, (2) district- and school- level reflection meetings, (3) reflection meetings with CCAs, (3) after-action-reviews on training events, and (4) quarterly reflection meetings with subgrantees to review the opportunities and challenges.

Through these learning events, the project made specific and critical adaptations to materials, support structures, and monitoring processes. More information on qualitative and quantitative findings of Journeys uptake and impact are reported in **Table 7**.

**Table 7. Learning and Adaptations**

| What was learned | How Journeys was adapted |
|---|---|
| The initial Journeys Activity Handbook for School Staff was detailed, and teachers found the volume of the Handbook intimidating. Teachers in Cohort 1 schools stated that implementation was seriously impeded due to usability of the Handbook. | • The Journeys Activity Handbook for School Staff rolled out to C1 was completely overhauled to ease implementation. The handbook was simplified in language and content.<br>• The Journeys Activity Handbooks for Community Members and the Journeys Activity Handbooks for Pupils initially developed for C1 were also streamlined following the C2 adaptations from the Journeys Handbooks for School Staff. |
| SCAs were not specifically trained in facilitation methods and, therefore, resorted to general sensitization with little reference to the Journeys activities. | • The training of SCAs, CCAs, TPs, and school heads was changed dramatically to specifically teach facilitation techniques and provide ample opportunity for participants to practice the activities.<br>• Journeys facilitation guidelines were developed, taught, and reinforced through a peer review of practice and dialogue. The guidelines include listening and not talking, understanding, and not judging, allowing discovery and not telling or sensitizing, taking responsibility and not blaming, and following the project scripts and not doing your own thing. |
| Some of the teachers who were not trained as SCAs resented the SCAs. | • Head teachers and SCAs provided opportunities for teachers to be coached on specific Journeys for School Staff activities and to rotate leading activities in the Journeys meetings. |

| What was learned | How Journeys was adapted |
|---|---|
| The training covered an enormous amount of information in one week, without the opportunity for job-embedded learning. | • Refresher sessions or SCA learning events were scheduled at the CCs to reinforce the initial training and hear and address SCA challenges.<br>• The training of TPs for Journeys for Pupils was improved by providing three 2-day between-term trainings, taking place at the CCs cluster. This allowed for TPs to try new activities at their schools, reflect and discuss challenges, and at subsequent between-term trainings. The local training was also more cost effective. |
| The CCAs were challenged by the English text of the Journeys Handbooks for Community Members. | • The community member handbook was translated into the three languages: Luganda, Runyankore-Rukiga, and Runyoro-Rutooro. |
| Community attendance in the Journeys Community Dialogues was less than ideal in some communities, especially by men. | • CCAs attached the meetings to ongoing community activities, such as the village savings and loan programs.<br>• LARA deliberately mobilized representatives from the village council, SMCs, and church leaders to take an active role in the program. |
| SCAs and TPs leading Journeys events in the school stated that they require much more hands-on assistance. | • Developed an improved tool to guide school-level reflection and collaborative problem solving. Trained project staff, including PCs and FAs, in this practice.<br>• Trained head teachers at project schools on how they can coach and mentor SCAs.<br>• Deployed FAs to ensure TP and SCA had the capacity to implement Journeys. Increased FA support to once a month in each of the 43 (randomly selected) LARA schools participating in the longitudinal study.<br>• Added school-level reflection meetings with stakeholders (e.g., teachers, SMC members, and pupils) in all schools implementing Journeys. |
| SCAs and TPs requested assistance from multiple sources, including CCTs, district officials, head teachers, and project staff. | • Developed an improved tool to guide school-level reflection, coaching, and collaborative problem solving.<br>• Trained PCs and FAs in the new practice (rather than relying on limited MSS visits to check documentation of practices). |
| Teachers reported that “they feel abandoned and not supported by the head teachers and other system support people”. | • Trained head teachers at project schools on how they can coach and mentor SCAs. Training content included how Journeys for School staff can create a positive and supportive workplace and benefit pupils and staff. Training also focused on reflection on leadership roles in the change process. For example, head teachers can ensure that Journeys is scheduled within the school timetable, help inspire the implementation of low-cost collective actions, and help teachers reflect on program progress. |
| District officials felt that their orientation to Journeys was not sufficiently detailed and they lacked the knowledge of how to oversee SCA and TP activities. | • Hosted district meetings to re-orient district and subcounty officials on the Journeys program, using district data to underscore some of the successes and challenges of implementation in the district.<br>• Included national district officials in all of the Journeys training of trainers. |
| There was some misunderstanding about the school and community activities expected as outcomes of the Journeys program. | • Developed new training content to strengthen understanding about the project assignment and |

| What was learned | How Journeys was adapted |
|---|---|
| | documentation of activities at the school by teachers and pupils and in the community. |

In addition to the events dedicated to learning (CLA events) described above and the subsequent initiative modifications described in the table above, certain Journeys materials were developed to ensure effective planning and documentation of the implementation outcomes and lessons. These include the following:

- Planning and evaluation forms were built into the Journeys Activity Handbooks, which supported the planning and documentation of each activity by SCAs, CCAs, and TPs.
- Journeys for Pupils UKU team meeting attendance registers captured individual pupil attendance, which was summarized by sex and grade.
- Hardback notebooks or "blue books" were given to all SCAs, head teachers, DEOs, District ISs, and CCTs to document observations and assess Journeys activities. They also provided a platform for communication and discussion about implementation in the school. The blue books were invaluable as an avenue for collaborative learning, bringing district officials, head teachers, and SCAs together to discuss and address challenges in implementation.

# 5. CONTEXTUAL CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The project worked through government systems to implement the reading, SRGBV, and HIV education interventions at-scale. This strategy was implemented from the onset to better ensure the local capacity needed to sustain the intervention. Working through existing systems presents challenges, as well as opportunities, to collaborate, learn, and adapt within government systems. Some major challenges that LARA faced resulted in improved systems and capacity to address issues in the future. A few of these are described in the following section.

## 5.1 Result 1

### *LEADERSHIP ISSUES*

Setting and communicating clear expectations for reading outcomes are complicated by existing assessment practices and the lack of EGR benchmarks. There is an opportunity for MoES leadership to set clear expectations in four key areas:

- **Set EGR benchmarks for each grade**. The EGR programs (SHRP, LARA, and GPE) articulated reading outcomes in ranges (non-readers, emergent readers and fluent readers). EGRAs measured various reading skills, i.e., letter sound identification, words read per minute, and comprehension. This approach enabled the project to measure learner progress in both the local language and English. This understanding may also help the MoES establish benchmarks in each language that are reasonable and achievable at each grade level. The ranges defining non-reader, emergent reader, and fluent reader may be helpful if articulated clearly by MoES to districts and schools to guide instruction.

- **Articulate EGR competencies at each grade in the thematic curriculum.** The thematic curriculum does not articulate reading competencies for the foundational reading skills at each grade level. Any future revision of the curriculum can be informed by the EGRA and the measurement of the foundational reading skills. Clear competencies and measurement tools in the curriculum will guide teachers.
- **Align the priority and indicator in the Education and Sports Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP).** There is a need to align the ESSP EGR priority with an expanded indicator that measures both the local language and English. The National Assessment of Primary Education tests English reading competency in P3 where the local language is the language of instruction. Education stakeholders stated that the focus on testing English reading competencies reduces teachers' focus on local language.
- **Provide guidance to schools on early grade assessment**. During much of the project, schools procured English examinations for early grade assessments. Many examples were not linked to the EGR books and aligned to the thematic curriculum. Education stakeholders stated that teachers' instruction is guided by the examination. While the MoES issued a circular banning the sale and procurement of examinations, the practice continues at school-level. There is a disjoint between issuing circulars and providing adequate resources so that district and school education stakeholders monitor achievement of educational targets.

In every engagement around the sustainability of the EGR program, leaders at all levels are clearly able to identify the challenges and solutions but are unable to gain compliance to existing policies and guidelines at any level. Without the MoES commitment to review financing and implementation of assessment, setting clear expectations for learning outcomes and teaching practice, provision of resources to enable schools and teachers to meet those expectations will remain elusive. The organizational culture of complacency and a lack of leadership efficacy are challenges to journey to self-reliance.

### *PROVIDING QUALITY AND CONSISTENT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT TO TEACHERS*

LARA and other EGR programs have worked with the MoES to identify how the teacher development and management system can be improved to provide more frequent and relevant training and support to teachers. Essentially, the schools and their teachers are supported by CCTs. However, over time the number of schools have increased within the CC and the number of CCTs have remained the same. CCTs are no longer able to provide all the teachers within a school the classroom coaching and support that would help improve teaching practice, especially when introducing new teaching practices. LARA and other EGR projects were working with the Teacher Instructor Education and Training departments (TIET) and the PTCs to identify potential solutions. For example, in 2019 the projects supported many of the PTCs to remap their CC and CCT. Through this process, PTCs identified the need for additional CCTs to support the teachers and schools within the CC and reorganized the number of schools under each CCT. Other solutions may include identifying and training other education officials closer to schools (e.g., zonal leaders of head teachers, champion teachers) to provide additional coaching and support supervision to teachers. Lesson observations by MSS teams, FAs, and assessors revealed that the lack of follow-up "coaching" support and large class sizes—which necessitate many learners sitting on the floor—contribute to challenges teachers face in using the teacher guides and pupil books. NORC also identified lack of teacher support as a barrier to continued improvement in teaching practice. Future

education programming needs to continue to support teachers to use the EGR methods, as outlined in the teacher guides consistently and with fidelity in the classroom.

### *REVISING EGR MATERIALS*

LARA worked closely with the NCDC to revise the teacher guides and pupil books developed under SHRP in English and three local languages. Due to the closure of schools, these revised materials were not piloted; therefore, there is still the opportunity for the MoES to field test and make adjustments based on the feedback of teachers. The project also provided technical guidance and supported writing panels, reviewers, illustrators, and designers, thereby building local capacity to revise the remaining languages. Therefore, the MoES has the opportunity to utilize this capacity to revise the remaining nine languages. Finally, through the revision process the visual presentation of the books and the level of scripting was identified and future revisions will not have to undertake this process.

### *PRINTING AND REPLENISHING TEACHING AND LEARNING MATERIALS*

Before each round of book distribution, the project conducted school-level data collection that included, among other things, the number of learners enrolled in each grade. The project used the enrollment data to determine the number of pupil books to be distributed in each school. However, at the time of book distribution, the project would notice that enrollment numbers increased in the majority of the project schools. Enrollment changes may be due to a number of factors, including project interventions, children moving in and out of public and private school systems, internal migration, access to schools during different seasons, and agricultural cycles that pull children into the seasonal work force. Changes in enrollment data resulted into schools receiving less books than they needed, while others received more. In cases where schools received less books, the project completed a second-round distribution. In addition, NORC in the midterm evaluation findings indicated that despite the numerous books distributed by LARA, in many P3 classes they observed reading books were not in the hands of pupils thus undermining the full potential of the project.

LARA was able to print the initial round of books for all project schools at a 1:1 pupil to book ratio. The shelf life of the books is three to five years; thus, many of the books printed in the early years of the project are now worn and tattered, often beyond use. The MoES was able to include enough funds in its annual budget to print nearly 500,000 books; however, NCDC has advised the MoES to hold replenishment until the revisions are complete.

### *ADDRESSING MANAGEMENT ISSUES, INCLUDING TEACHER AND PUPIL ABSENTEEISM, TEACHER TRANSFERS, UNSTAFFED POSITIONS, TEACHER PERFORMANCE, AND LARGE CLASSROOMS*

There are many issues beyond the scope and control of the project that impact what happens in the classroom and pose challenges to pupils learning to read. These challenges are detailed below.

**High dropout rates:** There is a high dropout rate of pupils in primary schools. LARA impact evaluation data, collected from a panel of 3,505 pupils that was created in first term of 2017 (February 20–March 29, 2017) and followed up every term until the first term of 2019 (March 11–22, 2019), indicates that the percentage of dropouts was 7% after only one year of following the pupil panel. By the second year, the percentage dropout had reached 10.5%. Findings further showed that boys dropped out of school in statistically significant higher proportions than girls. By the first term of 2019, the percentage drop out for boys was significantly higher at 12.5% compared to 8.4% for girls.

**High pupil absenteeism:** The average pupil attendance is 82% each school day according to LARA impact evaluation data. This implies that 18% of pupils are not in class each school day. Girls show slightly better attendance than boys. The major reasons for absenteeism are sickness (reported by 50% of the pupils) and work at home (reported by 21% of the pupils). On the other hand, parents mentioned unpaid school fees and lack of scholastic materials as the main reasons for pupil absenteeism while school staff attributed pupil absenteeism to work, particularly for boys.

**High teacher absenteeism:** Teacher absenteeism is still high. LARA impact evaluation data showed that during an average visit day, 8% of the assigned teachers were absent from school, 7% were in school but not teaching, and 2% were teaching another class. These findings indicate that, overall, 17% of the classrooms visited did not have a teacher (assigned or substitute) present. Interviews with parents also pointed to high teacher absenteeism and when parents report specific teachers to the school authorities, their children are targeted for retribution.

**Teacher transfers:** Teachers who had been trained in the methodology were often transferred to different classes or schools and replaced with teachers who had not been trained to use the new materials. This required additional resources, as these new teachers must then be provided with the proper training.

**Expectation of per diem:** Although the participation of government staff in LARA activities increased over time, it remained unreliable because of their expectations of per diems and allowances. This was especially true among district officials, who expected to be paid a per diem while supporting schools in their districts.

**Lack of comparative EGRA data:** With the external evaluator conducting EGRA among C2 intervention and control learners, USAID recommended that the project reduce its evaluation level of effort and eliminate project data collection in C1 control schools at the start of the performance and impact evaluation agreement in 2017. This had two consequences on the project. The first was that the timing of the Performance, Impact, and Evaluation (PI&E) data did not facilitate CLA. The project received the NORC baseline in 2019 (two years into the project), and the midterm was received at the end of the project in 2021, the end of project data was received in March of 2021 during the project closeout. The second consequence was that although the project was able to measure reading gains, it was not able to measure against control or comparison schools. This disabled the project's ability to measure impact annually with comparative data and compare the data with SHRP data. The lack of comparative data hampered the project to make corrective measures based on comparison with controls.

## 5.2 Result 2

### *CHALLENGING ATTITUDES*

The success of the Journeys program rested on its success in changing a number of long standing beliefs and practices. For example, teachers often believe that they must maintain all authority in class and that a class that is too friendly or social may undermine their authority, even more if teachers were to develop a positive relationship with their pupils. This presents an obvious barrier to the goal of establishing schools and classrooms where positive teacher-pupil relationships prevail, and pupils are free to have voice and agency to pursue their learning independently. Furthermore, the longstanding belief that corporal punishment helps children learn better must be expelled before one can expect teachers to choose positive disciplinary practices.

The Journeys program currently includes activities that address the gender discriminating norms and power imbalances that serve to normalize violence and perpetuate VACiS. New activities and ensuing dialogue among teachers, community members, and pupils could be increased to address some of the impeding attitudes discussed above, such as the belief that corporal punishment is good for learning or that positive relationships with pupils undermine the teacher's authority.

Investments could be increased to more actively engage education officials at the national and district levels early on, with an aim to deepen their understanding about the needs to both shift attitudes and behaviors related to positive and supportive school and classroom climates and to eliminate all forms of SRGBV. This measure was started under the project by promoting district dialogue during the district-level cross-sectoral committee meetings on VACiS. This is a potential entry point to further enhance the capacity and leadership of district and subcounty officials on establishing safe and positive schools and eliminating VACiS.

Data from teachers and pupils revealed that pupils were much less positive about their perceptions of the school climate than teachers. Thus, these findings could be used to enlighten teachers about the fears that pupils have of facing bullying and other forms of violence among their fellow classmates and the persisting fears of harsh punishment. The data could be used as a basis for targeted reflection and dialogue about the feelings that children have about feeling safe and the consequences to pupil learning. This may, hopefully, deepen the understanding among teachers about the fears of pupils and promote collaborative problem solving and teacher support to address the issue and build a more friendly, caring, and supportive learning environment.

The change agents for the schools are central to implementation of the various Journeys programs. In LARA's FGDs, participants mentioned that change agents were not always motivated to hold meetings and sometimes did not even show up. The attitudes of some change agents may also be inconsistent with the target messages and learning. Thus, the change agents must be carefully selected to ensure that they understand their roles, how beliefs and attitudes can shape their facilitation, and that they have the personality and commitment to facilitate the Journeys program among their peer teachers.

### *TRAINING AND SUPPORT CHALLENGES*

Shifting of social norms requires reaching a critical mass—from high-level officials across sectors to school staff, pupils, parents, and other community members. Therefore, one of the greatest challenges is to effectively identify, train, and support local-level leaders, who have not only the understanding and capability to facilitate group dialogues or pupil groups, but who also have the access, time, and commitment to ensure that the Journeys program is implemented as they were trained, with fidelity. This can feel insurmountable, and resource requirements are great. When there are system changes, efforts to shift norms are the long-term investment in establishing commitment and capacity. Within the education system, especially at school- and district-levels, shifting social norms demands that teachers think and then act in new ways. It is not enough for one teacher to think and act differently; all staff must begin to think and act differently, and the head teacher and school leadership is required to provide the leadership that supports the change.

The project made enormous steps in building systemwide capacity to carry on with the education programs supported: Journeys school and community dialogues and pupil UKU groups; the VCCMCs; and SBCC methodology. With MoES fully embracing the need for safe and positive learning environments, there is great opportunity to reinforce, build upon, and improve these successes. Following are some suggested next steps, many of which revisit

and reinforce the commitments, collective self-efficacy, and capacity to scale up the existing program.

- Reinforce commitment and shared responsibility for establishing safe and positive school communities across Uganda, beginning with the active engagement of national and subnational officials in the MoES and LG. Investigate the additional investment that would be needed to place the leadership for Journeys' functions into these systems and make that investment.
- Investigate the availability of viable incentives to ensure that this work is placed in a priority position in the school and classroom, e.g., private-public partnerships for materials support and district-level and LG recognition for performance in improving the school climate and reducing VACiS.
- Enhance, through additional training, support, and recognition head teacher and deputy head teacher leadership in setting the school culture to value well-being, positive interpersonal interactions and relationships, more pupil participation and group work in class, respect, and response for diversity, and zero tolerance of violence. Ensure that there is some form of "official" district-level recognition for head teacher leadership in these areas and schools that have successfully shifted their school culture and climates toward a more positive, supportive, and violence-free learning environment.

Head teachers, change agents, and TPs need to have opportunities for cross-school dialogue and support, and the cost of large district-level trainings are prohibitive. Enhancing the capacity of zonal- or cluster-level centers to offer regular check-ins or refreshers may increase the likelihood of more frequent cross-school exchanges, peer support, and maintained commitment to the Journeys practices (as well as some healthy competition).

In some instances, the team learned that schools and communities cooperated and shared information about their Journeys programming. Encouraging more school community dialogue would be valuable. This could involve a more active role for SMC chairs, ensuring school representation on VCCMCs, or involving members of the local council.

### *PARTICIPATION*

As mentioned above, reaching a critical mass is essential to successfully shifting norms and achieving systems change. Regular participation of teachers, parents, and pupils in the Journeys programs was impeded for a number of reasons discussed earlier in this report. In schools, implementation of the weekly meetings was impeded primarily because of competing and often unplanned school events. At the community level, community members attending group dialogues were sometimes limited, and the lack of attendance of male community members was a particular problem. However, there were still successes, which have opportunities to build upon by more fully operationalizing and expanding some of the practices meant to increase participation and celebrate improvements in children's protection and referral practices.

In schools, head teacher and deputy head teacher leadership—along with their support and recognition—is critical. Through this leadership, the Journeys dialogues can be placed and protected on the school calendar. Head teachers and teachers should decide together the number of Journeys meetings in a term that can feasibly be implemented and be fully protected from competing activities. This collaboration enhances ownership and commitment to the program. Evidence suggests that schools on average are successful in implementing half of the Journeys activities (i.e., 17 out of 35 staff events and 21 out of 39 pupil events).

There is an opportunity to explore how to integrate one Journeys activity into the music, drama, and dance class in the lower grades and social studies in the upper primary grades. While the benefits of mixed-age grouping would be compromised, the Journeys content could be covered in each academic year.

Some head teachers organized for the SCAs to share responsibility with other teachers to lead the staff meetings on school climate and violence prevention. This was considered effective in getting more staff committed and in attendance at the meetings; thus, this is a good practice to extend to more schools.

As part of the Journeys program, school staff, pupils, and community members were guided to come together to initiate targeted school activities, to improve the school climate and to prevent violence. For example, one school planted fruit trees, and another group of pupils lobbied the community to provide firewood. One community put a canteen in place to keep girls from leaving the school at break to get snacks. These activities do more than just improve the school. Group activities reinforce the commitment to building a safe and positive school and establish the collective will and agency to achieve this goal. Shared responsibility toward a common goal introduces a social expectation for school change and helps establish the new norm around a positive and safe learning environment. Therefore, school, pupil, and community projects need to be encouraged in all contexts, supported, and recognized by head teachers and district leaders undertaking collective actions. Where possible, parents and teachers should be encouraged to conduct integrated projects (e.g., community and school; pupils and schools; and collaborative pupil projects across UKU teams) to strengthen shared commitment to building positive school culture.

## 5.3 PEPFAR Challenges

USAID approved the LARA basic award modification number 4 to include $2,698,874 in PEPFAR funding. In each of the three years of PEPFAR programming, the project received USAID approval of funds obligation in Q2; this timing reduced the implementation period by 25% and was a significant challenge to the project. Therefore, the project recommends obligation of funds to be aligned with the beginning of Q1 to allow implementation to start as early as possible.

The Uganda academic year (February to December) does not align with the COP FY. COP quarterly and annual targets create data collection challenges with the academic calendar. For example, the end of COP Q1 (December) is the break between one academic year and another. Compiling data on individual pupil completion of minimum package bridges two data sets (two different registers and academic years). To accommodate for this, the project carried over some schools over two years. The project recommends that during the May COP planning that some discussion between USAID and the implementer occurs to define annual targets rather than implementers being dictated targets without any discussion.

The education sector responded to multiple stakeholders in the creation of the Journeys Plus curriculum. In 2018, the MoES developed the National Sexuality Framework; however, religious, and cultural leaders negatively reacted to the content of the framework. Simultaneously, the project was responding to OGAC progressive curriculum guidance with the development of Journeys Plus. There is a disjoint between a conservative and a liberal sex education curriculum. The MoES, although shifting toward more openness with the framework, continues to be constrained by education stakeholders. There is an opportunity to continue to engage the MoES, NCDC, and Kyambogo University in curriculum development.

The project experienced that engaging parents in socially sensitive topics, such as GBV, helped to change social norms. However, parents remain concerned about any sexuality

content and need to feel comfortable about how the content is adjusted to be age appropriate. HIV programming should include parents with the aim of shifting social norms toward HIV education as a morally positive addition to the learning content.

As a school-level program, COP19 was interrupted by the closure of schools on March 20, 2020, due to COVID-19. As a result, the project was not able to ensure that the beneficiaries completed the HIV education service package.

# 6. PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Effective programming at-scale requires robust and adaptive management systems to respond to changes in project timings and ensure fidelity across large geographic areas. The project benefited from the presence of SHRP for a rapid start up and sharing of expertise, especially for operations functions, such as human resources, information technology, logistics, procurement, and financial management.

The overall cost ceiling for LARA was $43,684,035 with a cost share requirement of $1,934,943. The project spent a total of $41,702,090. Cost savings of $1,981,945 were realized in LARA's final year due to a reduction in activities as a result of pandemic-related closures. In addition, the project had initially planned to print and distribute the revised learning materials in 2020, but ultimately, were not able to do so because of pandemic-related delays on completing the revisions. The program was funded by basic education ($41,489,169), OVC Plus Up ($757,196), COP 18 ($778,929), and COP 19 ($611,739) funding. Overall, LARA spent 49% on activities directly related to R1, 43% on R2, and 8% on management-related costs.

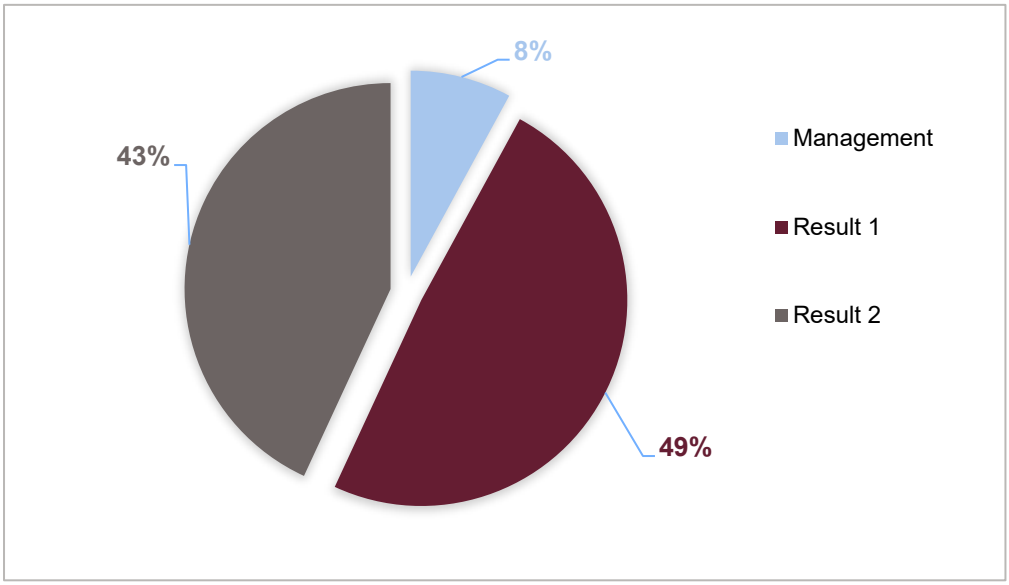
The project financial report is provided in **Table 8** below.

**Table 8. Final Financial Report**

| | USAID Approved Budget (in US Dollars) | Total Expenses (in US Dollars) |
|---|---|---|
| **LINE ITEMS** | | |
| Labor | 5,322,312 | 5,394,137 |
| Fringe Benefits | 702,542 | 679,099 |
| Travel | 1,619,476 | 1,578,987 |
| Allowances | 562,334 | 525,701 |
| Equipment, Vehicles, Freight, and Supplies | 3,577,473 | 3,810,965 |
| Training, Meetings, and Workshops | 12,479,918 | 9,426,554 |
| Other Direct Costs | 6,948,310 | 8,024,217 |
| Subgrants | 3,014,046 | 3,208,934 |
| Indirect Costs | 9,457,624 | 9,053,497 |
| Total Estimated Costs (excluding cost share) | 43,684,035 | 41,702,090 |
| Cost Share | 1,934,943 | 1,934,943 |
| TOTAL PROGRAM COSTS | $45,618,978 | $43,637,033 |

Costs were distributed across IR areas as show in **6.1.**

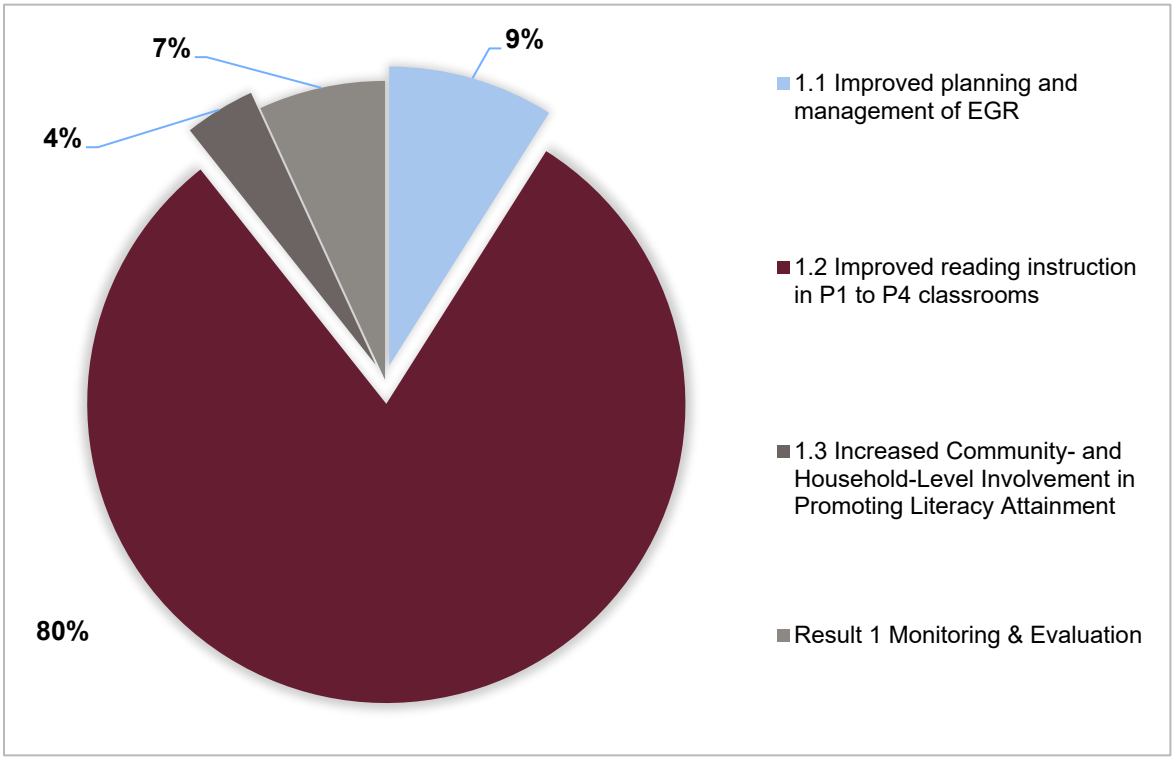
**Figure 16. Overall Financial Review**




## 6.1 Percentage of Costs by IR

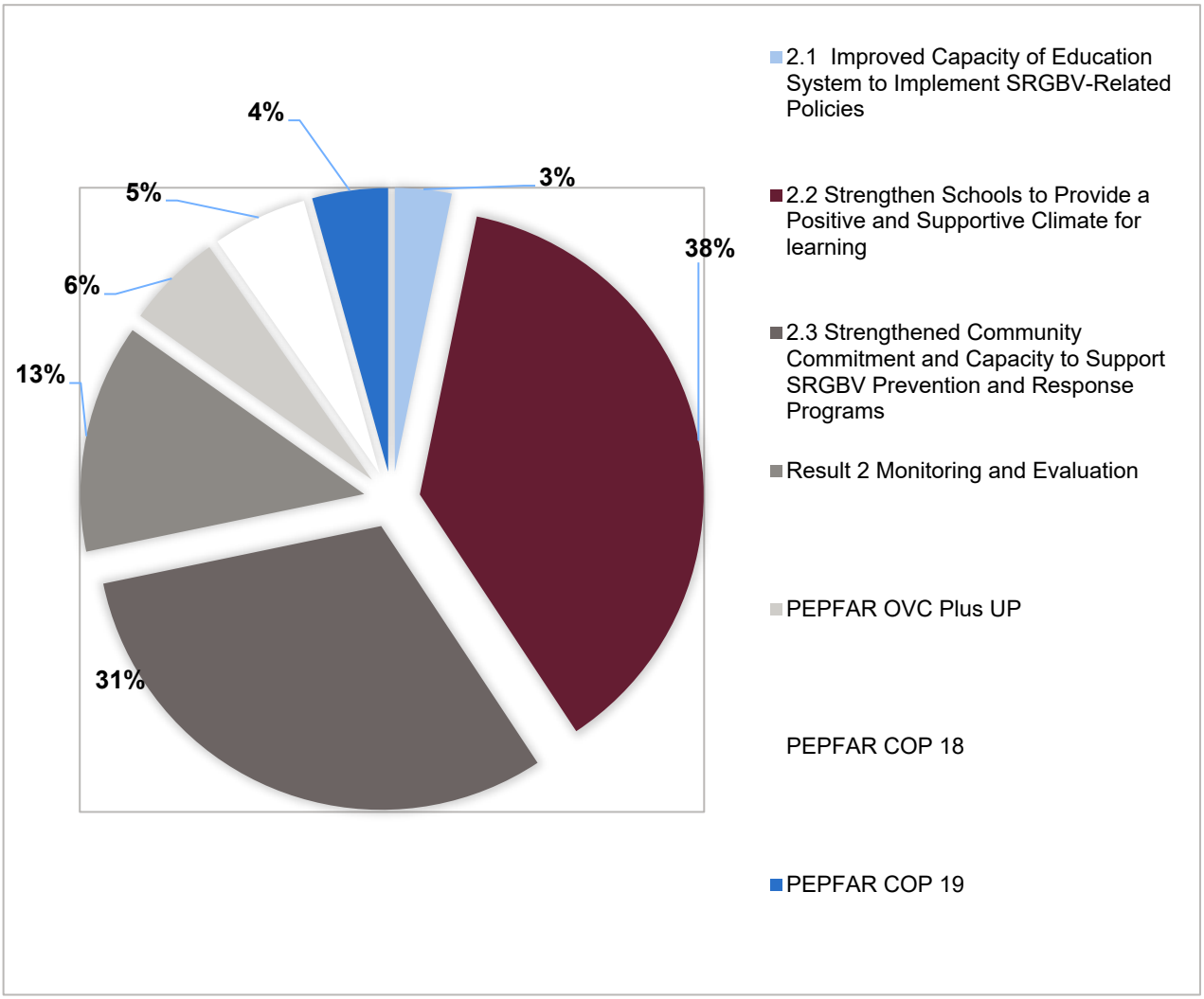
**Figure 17** shows the breakdown of R1 costs by IR. The majority of the total result cost, 80%, was associated with IR 1.2: Improved reading instruction in P1 to P4 classrooms. Cost drivers under this IR included large-scale teacher trainings, grantee costs, and materials development, printing, and distribution.

**Figure 17. Cost Expenditures on R1: Increased Capacity to Improve EGR**



Under R2, IRs 2.2 and 2.3 made up 69% of R2 costs. These costs included the activities related to the development of the Journeys program, the training of district and school officials on Journeys, and the development and implementation of the SBCC campaign (**Figure 18**).

**Figure 18. Cost Expenditures on R2: Improved Retention in Primary Grades**




## 6.2 COST SHARE

The project reported $1,934,943 in cost share. This was made possible by contributions from BFA, Cotton On Foundation, Stanbic Bank, and Spouts of Water as outlined in **Table 9**.

- Cotton On Foundation, an Australian clothing company that builds and operates schools in partnership with the MoES, supported the expansion of EGR with training and by providing pupil and teacher books in nine schools in the Rakai District.
- Stanbic Bank supplied reading cards to P1 through P4 classrooms, increasing the reading materials for the early grades in selected schools in Mityana and Kanungu districts. They also supported media events to promote reading in local languages.
- Spouts of Water provided water purifiers and filters to nine LARA-supported schools in Mpigi and Mukono district.
- BFA provided new supplementary reading books and educational materials.

- World Vision contributed to cost share during their subaward period of performance (April 2015–September 2016).

**Table 9. Cost Share Partners**

| Partner | Total Cost Share Received (US Dollars) |
|---|---|
| Cotton on Foundation | 40,167 |
| World Vision | 1,922 |
| Spouts of Water | 3,848 |
| Stanbic Bank | 5,445 |
| BFA | 1,883,561 |
| Total | 1,934,943 |

The project's partnership with BFA significantly contributed to the project's cost share obligation. LARA ensured proper inventory management and technical support in the selection of books, facilitating the delivery of the sea shipments, and distributing the books at the school level. The project managed a warehouse where all the supplementary readers were inventoried on arrival, sorted, labeled, repackaged, and distributed to schools by trained staff. LARA also trained school staff in book care and library management prior to the arrival of books.

## 6.3 Financial Management

The project's financial management functions focused on transparency and accountability (CDCS and GP 13 and 14). The finance team maintained integrity and compliance with RTI and USAID policies and procedures. The finance team focused on developing and maintaining adherence to financial procedures and ensuring that all staff adhered to organization policies and guidelines critical for segregation of duties and good internal controls. One mechanism the project utilized to ensure robust controls was to follow various review and audit procedures, as summarized below:

- Finance staff processed monthly financial reports and compliance reviews in coordination with regional and home office finance and accounting personnel.
- RTI completed an internal audit from September 27, 2020, to February 9, 2021. The audit report concluded that policies and procedures were being followed with effective internal control systems in place.
- Statutory external audits for all RTI programs in Uganda were conducted each year, with the last audit completed for the period October 2019–September 2020.
- USAID conducted two assessments, one in 2018 and a second in 2020. The assessments were valuable in helping the project to modify its policies and procedures. LARA recommends that these assessments be conducted earlier in the project period. The second risk assessment commenced on November 9, 2020. No exit meeting was conducted and as of the writing of this final report, the project was still awaiting the outcome report.
- Project staff attended USAID's Finance Director's roundtable meetings throughout the program period. Staff were updated on USAID's financial requirements, such as

new requirements regarding the submission of VAT, fraud controls, and were able to collaborate with other USAID IPs operating in Uganda.

Key transparency and accountability measures are summarized below.

- The finance team participated in the planning and review processes to ensure that the technical needs of the project were aligned with the budget. The finance team tracked expenditures against the approved activity budgets using charge codes linked to IRs, which allowed activity managers to monitor the project budgets and adjust, as necessary. In addition, the project held biannual budget review meetings with all staff (in March and August of each year) to update the work plan and timelines and realign budgets, as necessary.
- The finance team provided financial oversight on subcontractors and subgrantee partners. LARA's subcontractors included Bantwana/World Education, MAAD Advertising, and Development Link Consult, which supported the subgrantees. The project also issued 23 grants to 15 subgrantees for a total value of $3,585,921 to support community mobilization.
- The use of online banking was effective in reducing risk and errors in financial reporting by paying vendors electronically and tracking payments in real time. In addition, the project used a mobile money platform to pay beneficiaries and vendors mitigating the financial risks associated with handling cash. One of the challenges early on with the platform was that the system lacked the capability to extract monthly reports, which required the project to manually reconcile thousands of payments. However, this was resolved when the service provider upgraded its system to generate monthly statements and integrate them into QuickBooks.
- To this end, to strengthen accountability of the FA, the finance team trained them on financial guidelines and provided quarterly updates during quarterly meetings. The trainings included guidance on proper and timely accountability and enforced RTI's zero tolerance for fraud. In addition, the team established standardized transport rates between schools and coordinating centers, based on distance and hard-to-reach areas, to reduce the potential for falsifying receipts and promoted good accountability of the project's resources.
- Working at-scale and responding to shifts in technical activities had a substantial impact on financial management. For example, in Year 3, the project shifted to shorter, more frequent cluster-level teacher training, thus requiring the finance team to process more smaller payments. The finance team overhauled its procedures by improving site managers' mandatory training on timely, complete, and accurate payment documents. The finance team also established a new mobile money review protocol and hired temporary labor during large trainings to supplement the initial documentation review. These changes substantially improved the turnaround time for processing payments for participants and invoicing costs to USAID. As part of the shift to cluster-level training, the project developed memoranda of understanding with food vendors to clarify expectations around quality and timeliness of food service in advance thus reducing the need for on-site negotiation by site managers.

## 6.4 Human Resources (HR) and Performance Management

The project opened its MoES office in Legacy Tower and main office in April and August 1, 2015, respectively. Both were closed in March 2021. LARA also operated 10 hub offices that were opened in district education offices from July 2016 to December 2019.

The project maintained a consistent level of staffing throughout its period of performance and is detailed in **Table 10**. Offering opportunities for leadership development and professional development proved to be key in staff retention. In its entirety, project staff benefited from a wide range of training opportunities through internal online RTI University courses, technical webinars, and international conferences, where they were able to showcase successes of the program. In addition, RTI rolled out an employee-led performance and development program. Staff worked with managers on setting goals and monitoring progress toward those goals. This system provided dedicated time for supervisors and employees to have quality conversations about the work and an opportunity to identify areas of growth.

Key operational positions (e.g., finance, grants, procurement, HR, and IT) were provided with capacity building and training, with guidance by regional and home office staff. Staff were exposed to USAID compliance procedures and operational guidelines through internal and external meetings and training sessions. Technical and operational staff held weekly, monthly, and quarterly meetings to share progress, learnings from events, identify areas where they needed support, and celebrate achievements.

**Table 10. Staffing Levels**

| Year | Number of staff |
|---|---|
| 2015 | 25 |
| 2016 | 40 |
| 2017 | 48 |
| 2018 | 51 |
| 2019 | 60 |
| 2020 | 50 |
| 2021 | 47 |

Early staff departures were largely in response to the timing of the receipt of PEPFAR funds and school closures due to COVID-19. Delays in the obligation of PEPFAR funds each year meant that staff were released at the end of one FY on September 30 and rehired when funds were obligated for the next PEPFAR cycle, which was often in the second quarter. In the final year, teacher and school support activities were reduced due to pandemic-related school closures, and consequently the project reduced its staffing levels accordingly.

## 6.5 Information and Knowledge Management

Using the CDCS as guidance, LARA emphasized the use of science, technology, and innovation in its work. As a result, the information technology team focused on ensuring that staff had the tools needed to achieve their goals. This included using secure cloud-based software to share and store files, using new programs to communicate and collaborate, and developing and using innovative applications to deliver reading lessons and capture data.

Examples of how LARA used new technologies to enhance program work are described below.

- The project developed Papaya Phonics for Uganda, (available on Google Play Store) an educational application that aids primary school teachers and pupils in learning

the relationships between the letters of written languages and the sounds of spoken language. Papaya helps beginning readers to blend the sound-spelling patterns, practice the alphabetic principle, and prepares the pupils to read. LARA, in coordination with SHRP, included lessons in nine local languages.

- The project conducted a virtual leadership training using Zoom and trained district and college personnel to use tablets to connect to the training. Participants appreciated the delivery of the training and felt that using tablets would aid future socially distant meetings and workshops. Using tablets allowed the participants to safely collaborate with the larger team without incurring transport and other costs associated with in-person meetings.
- The project used the Tangerine™ application on tablets to collect data. Tangerine, previously developed by RTI, was used to collect data for EGRAs and longitudinal studies and to monitor teacher performance. Tangerine is an open-source electronic data collection software that is used to record and capture responses from learners, teachers, and school administrators. MSS tools designed in this software were used to collect real-time data and support the EGR teachers, SCAs, and TPs. The project monitoring and evaluation team analyzed data from these tools and developed information packages that the technical team shared with district officials during the district leadership meetings.
- LARA also used PowToon, a cloud-based animation software that allows users to create animated presentations by manipulating pre-created objects, images, music, and user-created voice-overs. The project used PowToon to create seven animations tailored to address gaps in teacher's knowledge of key teaching methodologies. During COVID-19 school closures, the project worked to find an innovative response to reach teachers. The animations use characters, graphics, and voice-overs to explain teaching methods in succinct 3-minute videos. The project also developed audio clips and piloted teachers' access, preference, and message effectiveness. Teachers were able to access the videos on their phones and laptops at their leisure and at PTC computer laboratories. The animations encouraged teachers to refresh their practice by revisiting the animations and noting down the key messages they should put into practice to improve instruction and literacy outcome.
- The project also developed a logistic and operational team that was able to coordinate resources for large-scale teacher training, book procurement, and distribution and assessments.

# 7. CONCLUSION

During its lifetime, LARA accomplished significant achievements. The project reached 1.4 million learners with improved reading material and instruction, trained 18,902 teachers to teach reading, and distributed 3.6 million books to the 3,479 targeted government schools. The relationship between the three IRs remained relevant throughout the project. The strengthening of the education system through EGR program coordination and collaboration within MoES structures and between SHRP and GPE was significant. The MoES took ownership of the national EGR program and reached 80% coverage of government schools, while the EGRA results began to show improvement in reading outcomes. LARA directly improved reading instruction in P1 to P4 classrooms by providing materials, training teachers, and strengthening support systems. In addition, increases in community and household

support to promote literacy began with the parents' support of local language instruction and practicing reading with their children. It should be noted that although LARA laid the foundation to sustain the EGR program, more support to teachers is needed, along with book replenishments to accelerate reading gains.

More than 1.7 million learners benefited from school-related, GBV prevention and response programming, which led to increased reporting of violence, which in turn increased the preventative actions undertaken by community members. The project's SRGBV intervention was the first at-scale intervention of its kind in Uganda. By the end of the project, shifts toward more positive and supportive schools had begun in schools with high implementation fidelity. Districts and schools that have succeeded in implementing the Journeys program may serve as a starting point for a positive deviance study. It is worth nothing that although the project began to see some shifts in pupil and teacher perceptions of school climate and the number of incidences of violence (e.g., bullying and corporal punishment) prior to schools closing, these shifts were marginal. Further, there may be a weak link between retention and levels of violence, which needs to be explored further.

Although the introduction of PEPFAR programming integrated HIV and GBV content into the school curriculum, an unintended effect was the dilution of LARA's originally mandated SRGBV programming. PEPFAR's operational and administrative approach diverted project attention away from an overall system support approach to achieve real-time, quarterly targets as dictated by PEPFAR. As all PEPFAR projects are required to reach 25% of the targeted beneficiaries each quarter, failure to do so resulted in a project implementation improvement plan. In addition, the PEPFAR programming priority for coordination and layering of different services to DREAMS girls required heavy commitment by the project staff, which impacted their ability to work on SRGBV programming. Little is known about the impact of PEPFAR programming on LARA's R2 achievement, as this was not included in the PI&E assessments. Flexibility in the timing of reaching goals and better alignment with the academic year would have provided for a more integrated program.

Overall, much was accomplished under LARA. The project built the capacity of the MoES to plan and manage an EGR program. Education stakeholders at the national and district levels now have the skills to continue providing professional development to newly hired CCTs and DISs. CCTs and college tutors also have the capacity to train teachers and student teachers in EGR techniques. Moving forward, it is recommended that USAID support teacher refresher trainings, CPD events, and classroom coaching support; expand the EGR program to the 222 control schools in C2; field test the revised EGR books; and replenish books. To support R2, LARA recommends that USAID assists with the coordination of the protection and care of children; simplifies education sector interventions; and continues working with teachers to create positive, supportive, and safe classrooms and schools.

# ANNEXES

## Annex 1: Life of Project Indicator Dashboard — Year 1 (2016) to Year 5 (2020)

| Indicator Name | Target Year 1 (2016) | Achievement Year 1 (2016) | Target Year 2 (2017) | Achievement Year 2 (2017) | Target Year 3 (2018) | Achievement Year 3 (2018) | Target Year 4 (2019) | Achievement Year 4 (2019) | Target Year 5 (2020) | Achievement Year 5 (2020) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **R1: Increased capacity to deliver EGR** | | | | | | | | | | |
| Ind_0001: Percent of learners who demonstrate reading fluency and comprehension of grade-level text at the end of Grade 2 with U.S. Government (USG) assistance: Foreign Assistance Framework–Education Sector ([FAF] ES.1-1) | Establishing baseline | **Aggregated score:** 3% **Luganda overall:** 3% **Runyankore-Rukiga overall:** 5% **Runyoro-Rutooro overall:** 0% | **Luganda overall:** 13% **Runyankore-Rukiga overall:** 15% **Runyoro-Rutooro overall:** 10% | **Luganda overall:** 14% **Runyankore-Rukiga overall:** 36% **Runyoro-Rutooro overall:** 12% | **Aggregated score:** 16% **Luganda overall:** 15% **Runyankore-Rukiga overall:** 37% **Runyoro-Rutooro overall:** 13% | **Aggregated score:** 19% **Luganda overall:** 22% **Runyankore-Rukiga overall:** 44% **Runyoro-Rutooro overall:** 6% | **Aggregated score**: 23% **Luganda overall:** 26% **Runyankore-Rukiga overall:** 47% **Runyoro-Rutooro overall:** 10% | **Aggregated score:** 24% **Luganda overall:** 26% **Runyankore-Rukiga overall:** 47% **Runyoro-Rutooro overall:** 12% | **Aggregated score:** 25% **Luganda overall:** 28% **Runyankore-Rukiga overall:** 49% **Runyoro-Rutooro overall:** 13% | **Aggregated score:** 21% **Luganda overall:** 25% **Runyankore-Rukiga overall**: 36% **Runyoro-Rutooro overall:** 9% |
| Ind_0002: Percent of learners who demonstrate reading fluency and comprehension of grade-level text at the end of P4 (Project custom) | — | — | — | — | — | — | **Luganda:** Establishing baseline **Runyankore-Rukiga:** Establishing baseline **Runyoro-Rutooro:** Establishing baseline | **Aggregated score:** 38% **Luganda overall:** 42% **Runyankore-Rukiga overall:** 74% **Runyoro-Rutooro overall:** 18% | **Aggregated score**: 43% **Luganda overall**: 47% **Runyankore-Rukiga overall:** 79% **Runyoro-Rutooro overall:** 23% | **Aggregated score**: 49% **Luganda overall:** 56% **Runyankore-Rukiga overall:** 85% **Runyoro-Rutooro overall**: 28% |

| Indicator Name | Target Year 1 (2016) | Achieve-ment Year 1 (2016) | Target Year 2 (2017) | Achieve-ment Year 2 (2017) | Target Year 3 (2018) | Achieve-ment Year 3 (2018) | Target Year 4 (2019) | Achieve-ment Year 4 (2019) | Target Year 5 (2020) | Achieve-ment Year 5 (2020) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ind_0003: Number of learners reached in reading programs at the primary level (FAF ES 1-5) | **Overall**: 290,522 | **Overall**: 241,389 **Boys**: 118,956 **Girls:** 122,433 | **Overall**: 577,952 | **Overall**: 558,588 **Boys**: 285,067 **Girls:** 273,521 | **Overall**: 764,930 **Boys**: 383,493 **Girls:** 381,437 | **Overall**: 737,797 **Boys**: 375,468 **Girls:** 362,329 | **Overall**: 924,076 **Boys**: 472,731 **Girls:** 451,345 | **Overall**: 876,158 **Boys**: 443,754 **Girls:** 432,404 | — | — |
| Ind_0004: Number of learners in primary schools or equivalent non-school based settings reached with USG education assistance (ES.1-3) | **Overall:** 507,508 | **Overall:** 641,930 **Boys:** 315,478 **Girls:** 326,452 | **Overall:** 1,270,782 | **Overall:** 558,588 **Boys:** 285,067 **Girls:** 273,521 | **Overall:** 1,283,489 **Boys:** 629,483 **Girls:** 654,006 | **Overall**: 1,122,202 **Girls:** 564,904 **Boys**: 557,298 | **Overall**: 1,307,907 **Boys**: 656,904 **Girls:** 651,003 | **Overall**: 1,202,422 **Boys**: 597,768 **Girls:** 604,654 | **Overall**: 1,340,467 **Boys**: 622,547 **Girls:** 717,920 | **Overall**: 1,131,844 **Boys**: 558,281 **Girls:** 573,563 |
| Ind_1001: Proportion (%) of observed teachers who demonstrate adequate uptake of instructional methods on which they were trained (Project custom indicator) | **Cluster (C)1:** 57% | **C1:** 57% | **C1:** 67% **C2:** Establishing baseline | **C1:** P1 & P2: 69% | **C1:** P1: 77% P2: 78% P3: 52% P4: Establishing baseline **C2:** P1: 44% P2: 46% P3: Establishing baseline | **C1:** P4: 40% **C1C:** P1: 39%, P2: 23% **C2**: P3: 44% | **C1:** P1: 40% P2: 24% **C1C:** P3: Establishing baseline P4: Establishing baseline **C2:** P4: Establishing baseline | **C1:** P1: 24% P2: 21% **C1C:** P3: 32% **C2 & C1C:** P4: 25% | — | — |
| Ind_1002: Number of primary school classrooms that receive a complete set of essential reading instructional materials with USG assistance (FAF ES. 1-11) | — | — | 6,558 | 4,796 | 6,718 | 8,248 | 2,144 | 1,569 | — | — |
| Ind_1003: Proportion (%) of teachers receiving at least one coaching/support visit from instructional support agents or “coaches” per term during school year (Project custom | 75% | 17% | 84% | 45% | 32% | 53% | 55% | 28% | 77% (1,318/1,712) | 65% (1,113 1,712) |

| Indicator Name | Target Year 1 (2016) | Achieve-ment Year 1 (2016) | Target Year 2 (2017) | Achieve-ment Year 2 (2017) | Target Year 3 (2018) | Achieve-ment Year 3 (2018) | Target Year 4 (2019) | Achieve-ment Year 4 (2019) | Target Year 5 (2020) | Achieve-ment Year 5 (2020) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| indicator) | | | | | | | | | | |
| **IR 1.1: Improved planning and management of EGR** | | | | | | | | | | |
| Ind_1101: Number of laws, policies, regulations, or guidelines developed or modified to improve primary grade reading programs or increase equitable access (Project Custom indicator) CDCS links–DO3: IR 3.4: Sub-IR 3.4.2: | 2 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | — | — |
| **IR 1.2: Improved reading instruction in P1 to P4 classrooms** | | | | | | | | | | |
| Ind_1201: Number of primary school educators who complete professional development activities on implementing evidence-based reading instruction with USG assistance (FAF indicator ES. 1-7) | **Overall**: 6,924 **Men**: 3,652 **Women**: 3,272 | **Overall**: 5,378 **Men**: 1,553 **Women**: 3,825 | **Overall**: 3,845 **Men**: 730 **Women:** 3,115 | **Overall**: 6,311 **Men**: 1,205 **Women**: 5,106 | 0 | **Overall**: 4,287 **Men**: 1,577 **Women**: 2,710 | **Overall**: 8,742 **Men**: 3,235 **Women**: 5,507 | **Overall**: 8,770 **Men**: 2,637 **Women**: 6,133 | — | — |
| Ind_1202: Number of primary or secondary textbooks and other teaching and learning materials (TLM) provided with USG assistance FAF ES. 1-10 | **Overall**: 572,694 **Pupil materials:** 555,282: **Teacher guides:** 17,412 | **Overall**: 514,687 **Pupil materials:** 499,980 **Teacher guides:** 14,707 | **Overall**: 753,465 **Pupil books:** 728,332: **Teacher guides:** 21, 341: **ABC charts:** 3,792 | **Overall**: 802,131 **Pupil books:** 758,481 **Teacher guides:** 22,860 **ECD materials charts:** 7,977 **Story cards:** 12,813 | **Overall**: 450,482 **Pupil books**: 450,482 | **Overall**: 1,178,569 **Pupil books:** 417,299 **Teacher guides:** 8,991 **UKU pupil handbooks:**5, 144 **Journeys for Communities handbooks**: 3, 910; **Story cards:** 681,345 **Supplementar** | **Overall**: 527,448 **Pupil books**: 265,216 **Teacher guides**: 4,270 **UKU pupil handbooks**:2, 862 UKU **Teacher Guides**: 5,100 **Supplementar y readers:** 250,000 | **Overall**: 393,056 **Pupil books**: 266,737 **Teacher guides**: 5,773 **UKU pupil handbooks**: 266 **Journeys for School Staff Handbook:** 40 **Journeys for Communities handbooks:** 40 | — | — |

| Indicator Name | Target Year 1 (2016) | Achieve-ment Year 1 (2016) | Target Year 2 (2017) | Achieve-ment Year 2 (2017) | Target Year 3 (2018) | Achieve-ment Year 3 (2018) | Target Year 4 (2019) | Achieve-ment Year 4 (2019) | Target Year 5 (2020) | Achieve-ment Year 5 (2020) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | **y readers**: 61,880 | | **Supplementar y readers:** 120,200 | | |
| Ind_1203: Number of CCT and other teacher educators/instructional support coaches who have attended at least 75% of planned training for the period (Project custom indicator) CDCS links–DO3: IR 3.1 Sub-IR 3.1.2 | **Overall**: 71 **Women**: 13 **Men**: 58 | **Overall**: 541 **Women**: 232 **Men**: 309 | **Overall**: 176 **Women**: 76 **Men**:100 | **Overall**: 184 **Women**: 58 **Men**: 126 | **Overall**: 176 **Women**: 76 **Men**: 100 | **Overall**: 14 **Women**: 6 **Men**: 8 | — | — | — | — |
| Ind_1204: Number of education administrators and officials who complete professional development activities with USG assistance (ES.1-12) | **Overall**: 71 **Women**:13 **Men**: 58 | **Overall**: 541 **Women**: 232 **Men**: 309 | **Overall**: 830 **Women**: 340 **Men**: 490 | **Overall**: 2,194 **Women**: 1,169 **Men**: 1,025 | **Overall**: 2,877 **Women**: 1,295 **Men**: 1,582 | **Overall**: 330 **Women**: 150 **Men**: 180 | **Overall**: 45 **Women**: 20 **Men**: 25 | **Overall**: 46 **Men**: 29 **Women**: 17 | **Overall**: 2,401 **Men**: 1,440 **Women**: 961 | **Overall**: 1,217 **Men**: 788 **Women**: 429 |
| Ind_1205: Number of educators who complete professional development activities with USG assistance (ES.1-6) | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | **Overall**: 11,115 **Men**: 4,446 **Women**: 6,669 | **Overall**: 10,594 **Men**: 4,609 **Women**: 5,985 |
| Ind_1206: Percent of primary grade learners targeted for USG assistance who have the appropriate variety of decodable, leveled, AND supplementary readers in the language of instruction with inclusive representation of diverse populations | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | **Learners enrolled in each grade:** 95% | **Learners enrolled in each grade:** 81% |
| Ind_1207: Number of primary or secondary textbooks | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | **Overall TLMs:** 374,857 | **Overall TLMs 294,604Pupil** |

| Indicator Name | Target Year 1 (2016) | Achievement Year 1 (2016) | Target Year 2 (2017) | Achievement Year 2 (2017) | Target Year 3 (2018) | Achievement Year 3 (2018) | Target Year 4 (2019) | Achievement Year 4 (2019) | Target Year 5 (2020) | Achievement Year 5 (2020) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| and other TLMs that are inclusively representative provided with USG assistance (FAF indicator) (ES. 1-49) | | | | | | | | | **Pupil books:** 284,437 **Teacher guides:** 7,970 **Journeys for Staff:** 100 **Journeys for Pupils:** 6,676 **Story cards:** 37,276 **Supplementary readers:** 38,398 | **books:** 208,793 **Teacher guides:** 8,101 **Journeys Plus handbooks:** 408 **Story cards:** 39,370 **Supplementary readers:** 37,932 |
| Ind_1208: Number of public and private schools receiving USG assistance (ES.1-50) | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | **Schools:** 3,723 | **Schools:** 3,723 |
| **IR 1.3: Increased community and household-level involvement in promoting literacy attainment** | | | | | | | | | | |
| Ind_1301: Number of parent-teacher associations or community governance structures engaged in primary or secondary education supported with USG assistance (FAF ES. 1-13) | 157 | 1,249 | 1,593 | 1,586 | 3,186 | 124 | 154 | 120 | 174 | 174 |
| Ind_1302: Proportion (%) of children who report that a parent or other caregiver at home reads to or with them | **Aggregated score:** 55% **Runyankore-Rukiga:** 57% **Runyoro-Rutooro:** 53% **Luganda:** 52% | **Aggregated score:** 55% **Runyankore-Rukiga:** 57% **Runyoro-Rutooro:** 53% **Luganda:** 52% | **Aggregated score**: 56% **Runyankore-Rukiga:** 59%: **Runyoro-Rutooro:** 55% **Luganda:** 54% | **Aggregated score:** 59% **Runyankore-Rukiga:** 63% **Runyoro-Rutooro:** 55% **Luganda:** 59% | **Aggregated score:** 58% **Runyankore-Rukiga:** 63%: **Runyoro-Rutooro:** 54% **Luganda:** 60% | **Aggregated score**: 61% **Runyankore-Rukiga**: 53% **Runyoro-Rutooro**: 50% **Luganda:** 69% | **Aggregated score**: 63% **Runyankore-Rukiga**: 56% **Runyoro-Rutooro**: 53% **Luganda:** 70% | **Aggregated score**: 57% **Luganda**: 59% **Runyankore-Rukiga**: 54% **Runyoro-Rutooro**: 55% | **Aggregated score:** 59% **Luganda**: 61% **Runyankore-Rukiga**: 56% **Runyoro-Rutooro:** 57% | **Aggregated score**: 65% **Luganda**: 69% **Runyankore-Rukiga**: 63% **Runyoro-Rutooro**: 61% |

| Indicator Name | Target Year 1 (2016) | Achieve-ment Year 1 (2016) | Target Year 2 (2017) | Achieve-ment Year 2 (2017) | Target Year 3 (2018) | Achieve-ment Year 3 (2018) | Target Year 4 (2019) | Achieve-ment Year 4 (2019) | Target Year 5 (2020) | Achieve-ment Year 5 (2020) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **R2: Improved retention in primary grades** | | | | | | | | | | |
| Ind_2002: Proportion of children who regularly attend school (Project custom indicator) | — | — | — | — | Establishing baseline | **Overall**: 75% | **Overall**: 80% | **Overall**: 67%<br>**Boys**: 66%;<br>**Girls:** 67% | **Overall**: 70% | **—** |
| **IR 2.1: Improved capacity of education system to implement SRGBV-related policies** | | | | | | | | | | |
| Ind_2101: Number of national and district officials trained in principles of SRGBV prevention<br>DO2 IR 2.2 Sub-IR 2.2.3 | **Overall**: 332<br>**Women**: 173<br>**Men**: 159 | **Overall**: 308<br>**Women**: 160<br>**Men**:148 | **Overall**: 188<br>**Women**: 90<br>**Men**: 98 | **Overall**: 228<br>**Women**: 89<br>**Men**: 139 | 0 | **Overall**: 226<br>**Women**: 79<br>**Men**: 147 | - | - | - | - |
| Ind_2102: Proportion of schools observed to have written feedback on SRGBV response and prevention from monitoring & support supervision actors | 0 | 0 | 20% of T2 schools | 17% of T2 schools | 25% of T2 schools | 36% of T2 schools | 40% of T2 schools | 35% of T2 schools | 70% of T2 schools | |
| Ind_2103: Number of SRGBV cases reported to the authorities | 0 | 0 | **Overall**: 286<br>**Bullying:** 172<br>**Corporal punishment:** 57<br>**Sexual violence:** 57 | **Overall**: 218 | **Overall**: 856<br>**Bullying:** 514<br>**Corporal punishment**:172<br>**Sexual violence**: 170 | **Overall**: 7,181<br>**Bullying:** 4,312<br>**Corporal punishment**:1,439<br>**Sexual violence:** 1,430 | **Overall**: 7,155<br>**Bullying:** 2,862<br>**Corporal punishment**:2,862<br>**Sexual violence:** 1,431 | **Overall**: 12,693<br>**Bullying:** 8,529<br>**Corporal punishment**: 2,675<br>**Sexual violence**: 1,489 | **Overall**: 8,890<br>**Bullying**: 3,556<br>**Corporal punishment**:3,556<br>**Sexual violence**: 1,778 | **Overall**: 3,308<br>**Bullying:** 2,361<br>**Corporal punishment**: 562<br>**Sexual violence**: 385 |
| Ind_2106: Prevalence of bullying in the current school term<br>CDCS links–DO2: IR 2.3: Sub-IR 2.3.1 | — | — | — | — | Establishing baseline | **Overall**: Boys: 97%<br>Girls: 98%<br>**Verbal bullying:**<br>Boys: 93%<br>Girls: 93% | **Overall**: Boys: 94%<br>Girls: 93%<br>**Verbal bullying:**<br>Boys: 90%<br>Girls: 90% | **Overall**: 97%<br>**Boys:** 97%<br>**Girls:** 96% | — | — |

| Indicator Name | Target Year 1 (2016) | Achieve-ment Year 1 (2016) | Target Year 2 (2017) | Achieve-ment Year 2 (2017) | Target Year 3 (2018) | Achieve-ment Year 3 (2018) | Target Year 4 (2019) | Achieve-ment Year 4 (2019) | Target Year 5 (2020) | Achieve-ment Year 5 (2020) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | **Relational bullying** Boys: 62% Girls: 61% **Bullying by stealing or damaging property:** Boys: 83% Girls: 87% **Physical bullying**: Boys: 81% Girls: 78% | **Relational bullying:** Boys: 58% Girls: 57% **Bullying by stealing or damaging property**: Boys: 78% Girls: 82% **Physical bullying:** Boys: 76% Girls: 73% | | | |
| Ind_2107: Prevalence of corporal punishment in the current school term CDCS links–DO2: IR 2.3: Sub-IR 2.3.1 | — | — | — | — | Establishing baseline | **Overall:** Boys: 92% Girls**:** 88% **Verbal corporal punishment**: Boys: 53%. Girls: 39% **Physical corporal punishment**: Boys: 88% Girls: 86% **Corporal punishment by labor:** Boys: 44% Girls: 36% | **Overall:** Boys: 87% Girls: 83% **Verbal corporal punishment**: Boys: 48%. Girls: 34% **Physical corporal punishment**: Boys: 83% Girls 81% **Corporal punishment by labor:** Boys: 39% Girls: 31% | **Overall**: 87% **Boys**: 88% **Girls**: 86% | — | — |
| Ind_2108: Prevalence of sexual violence and harassment in the current school term CDCS links–DO2: IR 2.3: Sub-IR 2.3.1 | — | — | — | — | Establish baseline | **Overall**: Boys: 56% Girls: 52% **Body exposure:** Boys: 39% Girls: 37% **Physical** | **Overall**: 49% **Body exposure:** 32% **Physical sexual violence**: | **Overall**: 46% **Boys**: 52% **Girls:** 39% | — | — |

| Indicator Name | Target Year 1 (2016) | Achieve-ment Year 1 (2016) | Target Year 2 (2017) | Achieve-ment Year 2 (2017) | Target Year 3 (2018) | Achieve-ment Year 3 (2018) | Target Year 4 (2019) | Achieve-ment Year 4 (2019) | Target Year 5 (2020) | Achieve-ment Year 5 (2020) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | **sexual violence:** Boys: 42% Girls: 43% | 34% | | | |
| Ind_2109: Number of legal instruments drafted, proposed, or adopted with USG assistance designed to improve prevention of, or response to sexual and GBV at the national or subnational level–GNDR-5<br>CDCS links–DO3: IR 3.4: Sub-IR 3.4.2 | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | 0 | 2 | 1 |
| **IR 2.2: Schools strengthened to provide a positive and supportive school climate for learning** | | | | | | | | | | |
| Ind_2202: Number of teachers trained in SRGBV<br>CDCS links–DO2: IR 2.3: Sub-IR 2.3.1 | **Overall**: 4,284 **Women**: 1,842 **Men**: 2,442 | **Overall**: 3,812 **Women**: 1,649 **Men**: 2,163 | **Overall**: 3,795 **Women**: 1,644 **Men**: 2,151 | **Overall**: 2,772 **Women**: 1,352 **Men**: 1,420 | 0 | **Overall**: 10,369 **Women**: 5,734 **Men**: 4,635 | **Overall**: 9,650 **Women**: 5,308 **Men**: 4,342 | **Overall**: 12,573 **Women**: 6,267 **Men**: 6,306 | **Overall**: 5,300 **Women**: 3,180 **Men**: 2,120 | **Overall**: 5,026 **Women**: 2,316 **Men**: 2,710 |
| Ind_2203: Number of schools implementing actions to reduce SRGBV<br>CDCS links–DO2: IR 2.3: | 0 | 0 | 1027 | 0 | 1,771 | 1055 | 1,238 | 428 | 1,067 (60% of 1,778 schools) | 0 |
| Ind_2209: Proportion of pupils who perceive their school climate to be positive.<br>CDCS links–DO2: IR 2.3: Sub-IR 2.3.1 | — | — | — | — | Establishing baseline | **Overall**: 26% **Boys**: 25% **Girls:** 27% | **Overall**: 36% **Boys**: 35% **Girls:** 37% | **Overall**: 29% **Boys**: 30% **Girls:** 28% | — | — |

| Indicator Name | Target Year 1 (2016) | Achieve-ment Year 1 (2016) | Target Year 2 (2017) | Achieve-ment Year 2 (2017) | Target Year 3 (2018) | Achieve-ment Year 3 (2018) | Target Year 4 (2019) | Achieve-ment Year 4 (2019) | Target Year 5 (2020) | Achieve-ment Year 5 (2020) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ind_2210: Proportion of pupils with a positive gender attitude. CDCS links–DO2: IR 2.3: Sub-IR 2.3.1 | — | — | — | — | Establishing baseline | **Overall**: 7% **Boys**: 5% **Girls:** 10% | **Overall**: 17% **Boys**: 15% **Girls:** 20% | **Overall**: 10% **Boys**: 11% **Girls:** 9% | — | — |
| Ind_2211: Proportion of pupils with positive SEL skills. CDCS links–DO2: IR 2.3: Sub-IR 2.3.1 | — | — | — | — | Establishing baseline | **Overall**: 18% **Boys**: 20% **Girls:**17% | **Overall**: 28% **Boys**: 30% **Girls:** 27% | **Overall**: 25% **Boys**: 25% **Girls:** 24% | — | — |
| Ind_2212: Number of people reached by a USG funded intervention providing GBV services (e.g., health, legal, psychosocial counseling, shelters, hotlines, other) (standard indicator GNDR-6) CDCS links–DO1: IR 1.2 | — | — | — | — | — | — | **Overall**: 554,112 **Girls:** 288,138 **Boys**: 265,974 | **Overall**: 325,957 **Boys**: 158,975 **Girls:** 166,982 | **Overall**: 318,863 **Boys**: 116,619 **Girls:** 202,244 | **Overall**: 7,435 **Boys**: 3,718 **Girls:** 3,717 |
| Ind_2213: Number of priority populations reached with the standardized evidence-based intervention(s) required that are designed to promote the adoption of HIV prevention | — | — | — | — | — | — | **Overall**: 128,010 **Girls:** 65,916 **Boys**: 62,094 | **Overall**: 2,639 girls[26] | **Overall**: 235,612 **Girls:** 159,948 **Boys**: 75,664 | **Overall**: 7,435 **Boys**: 3,718 **Girls:** 3,717 |

[26] The number reported (2,639) only represents DREAMS girls who attended bootcamps in May and June 2019. The rollout of Journey Plus in the schools was delayed due to the delayed finalization of the HIV package. The project was, therefore, not able to reach out to boys and girls in schools as planned. USAID requested that implementing partners focus on DREAMS girls within the priority populations prevention (PP_Prev) targets, ensuring 75% of DREAMS girls received the "minimum package" by the end of June 2019 (COP18). This led to implementing partners, including LARA, conceptualizing a rapid response to the crisis, i.e., bootcamps for DREAMS girls. These bootcamps were also used to field test Journeys Plus.

| Indicator Name | Target Year 1 (2016) | Achieve-ment Year 1 (2016) | Target Year 2 (2017) | Achieve-ment Year 2 (2017) | Target Year 3 (2018) | Achieve-ment Year 3 (2018) | Target Year 4 (2019) | Achieve-ment Year 4 (2019) | Target Year 5 (2020) | Achieve-ment Year 5 (2020) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| behaviors and service uptake (PP-PREV) | | | | | | | | | | |
| Ind_2214: Percentage of participants reporting increased agreement with the concept that males and females should have equal access to social, economic, and political resources and opportunities (GNDR-4) | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 24.4% | 0 |
| Ind_2215: Number of persons trained with USG assistance to advance outcomes consistent with gender equality or female empowerment through their roles in public or private sector institutions or organizations (GNDR-8) | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | **Overall**: 11,114 **Men**: 870 **Women**: 6,244 | **Overall**: 9,930 **Men**: 4,704 **Women**: 5,226 |
| Ind_2219: Number of youths trained in soft skills/life skills through USG assisted programs YOUTH-1 This indicator tracks the count of youth aged 10–29 years of age who have been trained in soft skills/life skills (YOUTH 1) | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | **Overall**: 318,863 **Boys**: 116,619 **Girls:** 202,244 | **Overall**: 7,435 **Boys**: 3,718 **Girls:** 3,717 |
| **IR 2.3 Strengthened community commitment and capacity to support SRGBV prevention and response programs** | | | | | | | | | | |
| Ind_2301: Number of community members trained in the nature, basis for, and prevention of SRGBV | 0 | 0 | **Overall**: 1,070 **Women**: 460 **Men**: 610 | **Overall**: 31,117 **Men**: 14,142 **Women**: 16,975 | **Overall**: 22,770 **Men**: 10,246 **Women**: 12,524 | **Overall**: 2,528 **Men**: 1,380 **Women**: 1,148 | — | — | — | — |
| Ind_2303: Number of school communities | 0 | 0 | 147 | 163 | 2,696 | 464 | 338 | 669 | — | — |

| Indicator Name | Target Year 1 (2016) | Achieve-ment Year 1 (2016) | Target Year 2 (2017) | Achieve-ment Year 2 (2017) | Target Year 3 (2018) | Achieve-ment Year 3 (2018) | Target Year 4 (2019) | Achieve-ment Year 4 (2019) | Target Year 5 (2020) | Achieve-ment Year 5 (2020) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| implementing actions to prevent SRGBV (Outcome)<br>CDCS links–DO2: IR 2.2: Sub-IR 2.2.3 | | | | | | | | | | |
| Ind_2304: Number of communities that have established a community-based case management plan.<br>CDCS links–DO2: IR 2.2: Sub-IR 2.2.3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | **C1 T2 schools:** 1,431 | 931 C1 T2 schools | 902 C2 T2 schools and the nine DREAMS districts | 1,075 C2 T2 schools and the nine DREAMS districts | — | — |
| **Guiding principles** | | | | | | | | | | |
| **Guiding Principle 1: Apply a holistic approach to Collaboration, Learning, and Adaptation** | | | | | | | | | | |
| Number of meetings held to share learning products within and across sectors | — | — | — | — | — | — | 38 | 58 | 54 | 32 |
| Number of evidence-based program decisions made annually | — | — | — | — | — | — | 10 | 10 | 32 | 0 |
| **Guiding Principle 2: Ensure broad and inclusive stakeholder engagement throughout the program cycle** | | | | | | | | | | |
| Number of community stakeholder platforms used in planning, executing, and learning | — | — | — | — | — | — | 10 | 21 | 10 | 9 |

# Annex 2: Impact Stories

LEGACY BRIEF I (2021)

# Supporting children to read better in safe schools and at home

The US Agency for International Development/Uganda Literacy Achievement and Retention Activity was a 6-year (2015–2021) initiative that supported Uganda's Ministry of Education and Sports to improve early grade reading in a positive and supportive school climate.

## BACKGROUND

The right of children to access quality education in a safe environment has gained momentum globally and stimulated national interest in Uganda to create positive and supportive schools.

A 2012 research study by the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) showed that children in Uganda face different forms of violence in, around, and at school. The study found that children experience high levels of bullying, corporal punishment, and sexual violence: at least 77% of pupils in primary schools in Uganda reported experiencing sexual abuse or assault. A 2016 study of early literacy skills also showed that pupils struggle with basic literacy skills in both their local languages and English; most pupils could identify fewer than 10 letters in either language.

In response to these widespread problems, the USAID/Uganda Literacy Achievement and Retention Activity (LARA; also referred to as "the Activity") partnered with the MoES to create safe and effective learning environments so that pupils stay in school and learn better. In addition, the MoES and Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, supported by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), developed the National Strategic Plan for the Elimination of Violence Against Children in Schools 2015–2020.[1]

## APPROACH

LARA directly helped the MoES to address both problems—unsafe schools and inadequate learning—through a holistic approach. At the center of this approach, LARA helped to strengthen the MoES's innovative early grade reading (EGR) program that is designed to build literacy in local languages and English. LARA also promoted positive and supportive school climates where pupils enjoy school and learn to read by reducing school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) and training teachers on the importance of building social and emotional learning skills, for themselves and their pupils.

### Improving Literacy Through Delivery of a Comprehensive EGR Program

LARA used a multifaceted strategy to support the MoES's EGR program in order to strengthen pupils' reading acquisition:

**Enhancing teacher EGR instructional practice.** To support literacy development in school, teachers were given teachers' guides that supported a systematic application of EGR methodologies. Teachers were trained on the EGR methodology, including the basics of phonics and letter sounds. District teams provided teachers with regular mentorship and support supervision on the use of the EGR methodology and tools, which also improved teachers' capacity to assess learners' reading skill.

[1] National Strategic Plan on Violence Against Children in Schools 2015-2020. https://eprcug.org/children/publications/health/protection-and-participation/violence-against-children/national-strategic-plan-on-violence-against-children-in-schools-2015-2020.

### Prevalence of Violence in Uganda

**41.2%**

41.2% of Primary 3 students said they had experienced **sexual harassment** in the past term.

**95.6%**

In the LARA baseline study, 95.6% of students reported **being bullied** in the past term.

**88.3%**

88.3% of students said they were subjected to **corporal punishment**.

Pupils reading during Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) day. The Activity focused on improving the foundational reading skills of early grade learners. —*Photo: RTI International*

**Putting books in the hands of pupils.** The Activity gave reading materials in English and three local languages (Luganda, Runyankore-Rukiga, and Runyoro- Rutooro) to 1.5 million pupils in Primary 1 to Primary 4. Pupils' reading proficiency improved as they began to learn to read in their mother tongue and then transitioned to reading in English.

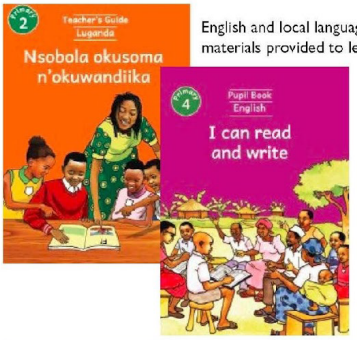
**Promoting out-of-school reading activities with parents and caregivers.** Families play an important role in helping pupils build their literacy. Therefore, the Activity bolstered its support to teachers by carrying out a national literacy campaign and introduced simple reading tools to parents and caregivers, including illustrated story cards. These story cards were designed to engage parents, including those who have low literacy levels, and to help them build a reading culture at home. These story cards focus on the life of a Ugandan child and include plot lines that sensitize readers about ending SRGBV, fighting, and bullying.

This national literacy campaign also simultaneously used multiple communication methods, including radio, dramas, and posters, to highlight the importance of parents and caregivers reading with their children at home. In school, teachers promoted regular letter writing, while district reading competitions were held to motivate pupils to read more.

## Improving School Climate to Enable Learning using the Journeys Program

Pupils can learn best when they feel encouraged and supported and when they are safe from abuse and discrimination. Therefore, it is not surprising that school dropout is directly related to harsh teachers who punish and humiliate pupils in class, often using corporal punishment.

LARA directly targeted school climates that promote and tolerate abuse, discrimination, and other forms of negative classroom management behaviors. It did so through partnering with the MoES to develop and implement the Journeys Program, which aims to combat and prevent violence in schools by engaging all key actors—pupils, teachers and school staff, and communities—in reflection, participatory games, activities, scenarios, and dramas.




English and local language reading materials provided to learners.

**LARA's research question.** What impact can a social and behavior change communication campaign have on parental engagement in their children's reading practice at home?

**Result.** After eight weeks of exposure, the proportion of parents who said they read to their child more than tripled from baseline (9%) to endline (30%).

## Journeys for Pupils

The Journeys Activity Handbook for Pupils engages pupils in activities to help them develop social and emotional skills, build their agency, and promote self-reliance.

"Rose helps her son, Trevor, practice reading at her shop after watching one of LARA's TV programs." —*Photo: RTI International*

### "I got ideas on how to help my children read."

Rose, a farmer and shopkeeper in Sheema district, Western Uganda, is amazed at how her 9-year-old son, Trevor, in Primary 4, is growing into a passionate reader. It all started when she watched several reading campaign programs on TV encouraging parents to read with their children.

*"Reading with my children at home had never crossed my mind. My husband and I were often busy earning a living. Also, being a Primary 7 dropout, I had no idea how to assist them at home. I thought it is something that can only be done by parents who attained higher education and know English," shared the mother of five. "But that changed when I got ideas on how to help my children read after I watched a drama that was staged in front of my shop."*

*Now, every day after supper, Rose turns her dining table into a reading table and asks her children to read a story from a story card that her children have brought home from school. "If my son asks for any help in reading, I give him all the attention he needs because it is my responsibility to ensure that my child reads and understands what he learns at school. I look forward to the day when my son will read Bible verses in church."*

Rose hopes that teachers will continue lending learners reading materials so that families who cannot afford to buy reading materials can continue reading together at home.

"The pupils got interested in the [Uganda Kids Unite] UKU program, they love it and they can demand for UKU activities because it's full of games and taught in their local language." — *Deputy Head Teacher*

"Ever since the case register was introduce[d], bullying, fighting and abusive language has reduced." — *Pupil*

"Before, UKU learners were very stingy and would even eat [inside] the toilet so that they wouldn't have to share their food but now they help each other and share." — *Pupil*

"Before UKU, learners did not support each other because if you were a smart learner you didn't want others to be as smart as you but now they help others." — *Pupil*

Why does agency matter? When pupils have strong social and emotional skills, they are more aware of actions that are wrong, and they feel empowered to make good decisions and seek assistance from trusted adults. This power further enables pupils to help change around norms and behavior that perpetuate violence against them.

Through Journeys, pupils are taught five essential life skills: self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision making.

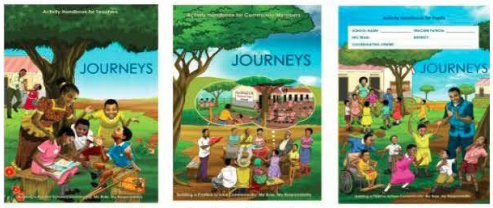
LARA found that schools using the Journeys program found positive changes in these types of skills, and in the types of engagement in learning that result from an improved school climate:

- Social and emotional skills
- Loving oneself and others
- Helping other pupils with schoolwork
- Showing kindness to other girls and boys
- Increased class participation
- Eagerness to ask for help
- Willingness to talk with teachers on sensitive topics

## Journeys for Teachers and School Staff

The Journeys for Teachers and School Staff handbook helps teachers work together, through a series of discussions and collective actions, to create a school climate that is positive and supportive to working and learning. The handbook does so by helping teachers gain insights and build skills in the following and by reframing the role of the teacher as a change agent who promotes inclusiveness and positive child support.

- Recognize forms of violence
- Recognize gender stereotypes and norms and how they limit children




**Journeys for Teachers and School Staff, Journeys for Community Members, and Journeys for Pupils Handbooks**

- Understand power differences and how those differences lead to violence against children
- Identify warning signs of pupils experiencing or at risk of violence
- Understand the importance of reporting cases of violence

In a positive and supportive type of climate, teachers and school staff are empowered to act with kindness and empathy. LARA found that the program was successful in building teacher SEL competencies. In addition, teachers administered less harsh punishment while demonstrating more empathetic listening skills and improved relationships with both fellow teachers and pupils.

### Choosing a safe school over a scholarship

**When Mugaiga Dickens, a Primary 4 pupil at Bugorogo Primary school, began to perform well in his LARA-supported school, the proprietor of a local private school persuaded Mugaiga's parents to enroll him at his private school. He even promised that Mugaiga would receive a scholarship. However, at the new school, which was not trained in Journeys, the teachers were violent: they beat in the new school and with his parents, and the pupils and used threatening language with them. Relying on the Journeys lessons he had been taught at Bugorogo, Mugaiga discussed the hostile environment he convinced them to take him back to his former school where the teachers were friendly.**

## Journeys for Community Members

The objective of the Journeys Activity Handbook for Community Members is to mobilize community members to take deliberate steps to promote a safe and caring school community that is free from violence. The handbook guides community members through activities to help them achieve this goal by deepening their understanding about the nature and extent of violence against children and helping them establish a school and community where inclusiveness, a sense of belonging, and positive child support are normal.

**Journey for Community Members does so in the following ways:**

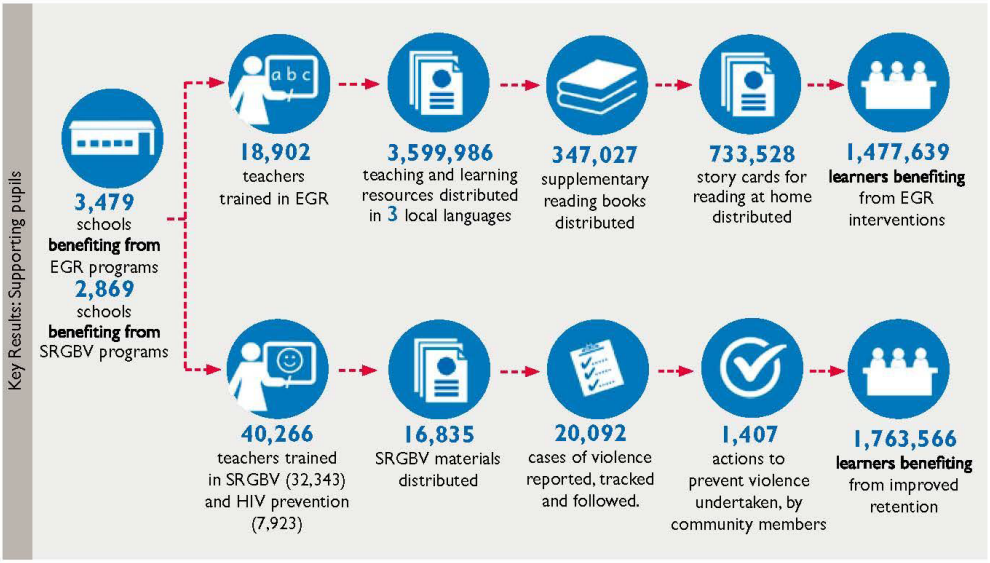
- Giving them a voice in creating safe and caring communities and schools
- Understanding children's challenges
- Recognizing different forms of violence and gender stereotypes that children face
- Understand how differences in power can lead to violence against children
- Understand the importance of reporting cases of violence

Under LARA, more than 174,000 households and community members were trained to reduce violence within their communities through, for example through community case conferences. Informational materials on violence prevention and child protection were also distributed in communities. As a result, communities gained insights and skills that helped them take concrete actions to help their children attend and thrive in school. In one case, this meant building a separate latrine for girls to help keep them in school. In another case, it meant building a canteen to prevent pupils from having to leave school grounds and, thus, keep them safer.

"Since Journeys began, it has helped me make good decisions." — *Pupil, Blessed Sacrament School, Kimaanya*

## ACHIEVEMENTS

The graphic below summarizes the qualitative accomplishments achieved by LARA, both in EGR development and the creation of positive and supportive school environments.

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**LEGACY BRIEF 2 (2021)**

# Building teachers' skills to improve pupils' learning in safe, positive schools

The US Agency for International Development (USAID)/Uganda Literacy Achievement and Retention Activity (LARA, also referred to as the Activity) was a 6-year (2015–2021) initiative that supported Uganda's Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) to improve early grade reading (EGR) in a positive and supportive school climate.

Photo Credit: Katie G Nelson for RTI International

## BACKGROUND

Pupils learn better in a school climate that offers high quality instruction and that is positive, supportive, and caring. Relevant and robust teaching methods and materials are essential for promoting learning. However, a 2016 study by Schindler let al.[1] revealed that the school and classroom culture, or climate, may be the most predictive factor of a school's capacity to promote learning achievement.

Prior to LARA, teachers struggled to effectively teach their early primary grade pupils. Reading instruction was in English—a language most pupils did not speak—and that disconnect posed an immediate barrier to learning. In addition, many teachers had been exposed to corporal punishment when they were in school, and they used those strategies to discipline their own pupils. As a result, pupils were exposed to unsafe and unsupportive learning environments that fostered verbal, psychological, and physical bullying. These environments impeded learning and caused many pupils to not attend school regularly. According to a 2012 study by the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES),[2] 70% of primary students dropped out of school before completing the primary level.

The USAID/Uganda Literacy Achievement and Retention Activity supported Uganda's MoES to implement an innovative early grade reading (EGR) program and violence prevention and response program in 3,475 schools in 31 districts. The Activity focused on building teachers' skills to effectively teach reading and to foster positive, supportive, and caring classrooms and schools, a holistic approach that led to improved reading scores and pupils' well-being.

**Teacher with Journeys for Pupils Activity Handbook.** *—Photo credit: Katie G Nelson for RTI International*

*"The program has changed me and my life. Before the [Journeys] program, I used to punish the learners whenever they were late or absent but after the program, I discovered the many challenges learners have."*
—Deputy Head Teacher

*"Not all of us were able to talk to our children and consider that they also have problems. But today, any child can go to any teacher they feel comfortable with. I myself am a case in point because I was a harsh person, for every issue I would be tough but am now a convert."*
—Deputy Head Teacher

[1] National Strategic Plan on Violence Against Children in Schools 2015–2020. https://eprcug.org/children/publications/health/protection-and-participation/violence-against-children/national-strategic-plan-on-violence-against-children-in-schools-2015-2020

[2] Shindler, J., Jones, A., Williams, A.D., Taylor, C., & Cardenas, H. (2016, Summer). The school climate–student achievement connection: If we want achievement gains, we need to begin by improving the climate. Journal of School Administration Research and Development, 1(1), 9–16.

## APPROACH

Over its six years, LARA employed a comprehensive approach to improve reading skills for 1.3 million Primary 1 to Primary 4 pupils.

### Improving teachers' early grade reading teaching methods

LARA refined and provided quality instructional materials to teachers and pupils, ensuring that everyone had the tools needed to teach and to learn. It then provided formal trainings at the beginning of each school term to help teachers use these materials to systematically teach reading, beginning in pupils' mother tongue and then transitioning to English.

The Activity complemented these formal trainings with continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities made available during each term to further support teachers in mastering specific components of the EGR materials and methodology. The content of these CPD sessions was developed in consultation with other education organizations, and these sessions were scaled up and used nationally. As a result of the sessions, teachers now use more effective teaching practices and methodologies to teach reading in the early grades.

To further support teachers, LARA trained in-service coaches—for example, head teachers and their deputies, coordinating center tutors, inspectors of schools, and tutors—to provide constructive pedagogical support to teachers, with district teams also providing support supervision and monitoring to schools to ensure that the EGR methodology and tools were used consistently and effectively by teachers to improve learner outcomes. Fifth, head teachers and their deputies, as well as school management committee members, were also trained in school leadership and strategies to care for books and manage school libraries that were supplemented by LARA.

Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) Day at St. John Bosco Primary Mpigi district.
—Photo Credit: RTI International

### Empowering Teachers to Adopt New Teaching Methodologies During CPD

*"The CPDs training sessions are fun and offer teachers new ideas on how to teach the pupils, like the games of seeking letters and sounds; teachers are able to implement these new skills."*

*"The Chairman of the School Management Committee came during the sessions and found that children were reading from their primers. He was very surprised and excited."*

*"During the observation session, teachers' weaknesses are identified and are addressed during CPD trainings."*

*"Good working relationships have been created between teachers and CPD trainers; this motivates teachers."*

—Education stakeholders, Kyegegwa district

### Shifting teachers' attitudes toward positive discipline

Corporal punishment is still used as a form of discipline in many Ugandan schools. To put a stop to its use, LARA contributed to shifting teachers' attitudes, norms, and behavior regarding corporal punishment and positive discipline.

It did so by, in partnership with the MoES, developing and implementing the Journeys Program, a program designed to combat and prevent violence in schools,

**Bugorogo Primary School in Sembabule district** is an example of a model school when it comes practicing "no violence." Teachers Daniel Ssekago and Christine Twinomugisha were trained on the Journeys program. They then took their teaching and non-teaching staff colleagues of Bugorogo Primary School through the Journeys for Teachers dialogues to discuss issues of bullying, corporal punishment, and sexual harassment and abuse. Using the Journeys program, the staff discussed ways that they could take action to improve their school.

As a result of engaging in the Journeys program, the teachers no longer use verbal or physical punishment against their pupils. Instead, Bugorogo's teachers encourage pupils and use verbal reinforcements to encourage pupils to engage in their learning, even if they may answer questions incorrectly. Because learners are encouraged with positive reinforcement, they are now eager to raise their hands.

The teacher-pupil relationship at Bugorogo has improved and now revolves around mutual respect between teacher and pupils. Pupils are not afraid to ask for help, and instead of being fearful of teachers, they greet their teachers at the beginning of the school day with smiles. The positive classroom engagement has led to active learner participation and teachers enjoying teaching more.

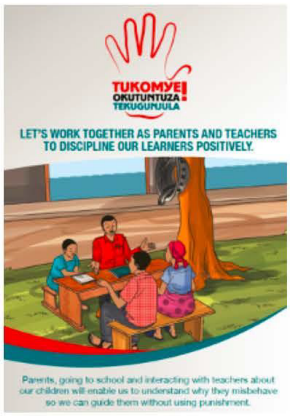
thereby contributing to creating a positive, supportive, and caring school climate. Journeys engages all key actors in reflection, participatory games, activities, scenarios, and dramas. Through this program, LARA trained teachers to use positive methods to discipline learners and to create a classroom that is free of fear, abuse, and corporal punishment and that is conducive for learning.

It also enabled its teachers to establish multi-age and-grade clubs and used discussions, dramas, art projects, and other fun activities to build learners' social and emotional skills. These clubs and activities improved pupil-pupil relationships and created a school climate that was caring and supportive of all.

Schools that implemented the Journeys program were able to positively transform their learning environments. As a result of the Journeys program, teachers not only reported that their school was now a positive and support place to work, but that their relationships with fellow teachers had also improved. In addition, pupils have indicated a greater sense of safety and support in their schools, that they are able to share concerns with their teachers, and that they are more likely to attend and achieve in school

## Engaging families and communities

The Activity engaged in an ambitious social behavior change campaign (SBCC) to encourage parents and other community members to support their children in their learning, support their schools and teachers, and hold those schools and teachers accountable for providing safe and effective learning environments. As one example of SBCC activities, teams performed drama skits at schools that modeled the desired behaviors of teachers, learners, and the community. Similarly, the team screened short videos portraying the impact of corporal punishment versus positive discipline. Facilitators discussed the key messages within the dramas and videos with head teachers, teachers, and parents and encouraged them to make commitments to change.




As a result of these SBCC activities, the number of teachers in the intervention area who supported the abolition of corporal punishment in their school increased by 14%—from 76% to 90%. In addition, the increase in the proportion of teachers in the intervention area who agreed that corporal punishment is unnecessary for parents to properly raise their children was three times higher than in the control area.

**The reflection activities** that were part of the Journeys program enabled teachers like Teopista, from St. Aloysius Primary School in Mbarara district, to support her pupils to learn through positive reinforcement. She decided that for any change to take place in her school's climate, she needed to begin with transforming herself by no longer using corporal punishment.

Teopista decided to focus on being a supportive teacher who listens to children and helps them thrive in school. Together with the two other teacher change agents trained in her school, Teopista passionately conducts sessions to help all teaching and non-teaching staff create a positive and supportive school climate that is free from violence.

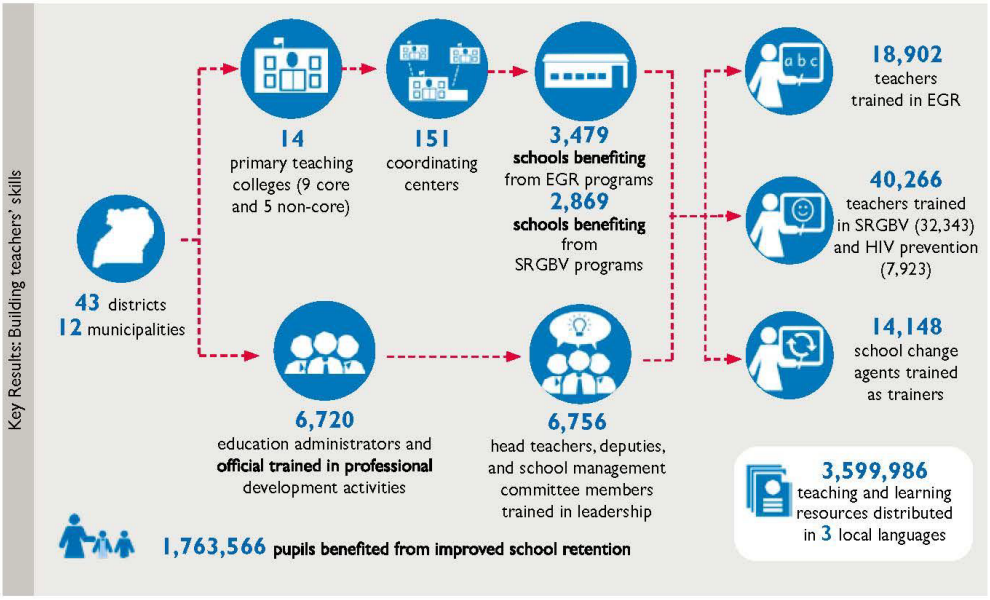
A CPD session for teachers to prepare them for use EGR tools in schools.
—Photo credit RTI International

Teachers are motivated as they have new, more effective skills for classroom teaching.
–Photo credit RTI International

Teachers were trained to create a supportive and friendly classroom climate to foster learning in schools.
Photo credit: RTI/LARA

## ACHIEVEMENTS

The The following graphic summarizes the qualitative accomplishments achieved by LARA, both in EGR development and the creation of positive and supportive school environments.

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***Engaging school-communities to foster positive parenting and create safe learning environments***

**LEGACY BRIEF 3 (2021)**

# Engaging school-communities to foster positive parenting and create safe learning environments

The US Agency for International Development (USAID) Uganda/Literacy Achievement and Retention Activity (LARA, also referred to as the Activity) was a 6-year (2015–2021) initiative that supported the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) to improve early grade reading in a positive and supportive school climate.

## BACKGROUND

Parents and caregivers in Uganda are often unsure how best to help their children thrive and succeed in school, especially if their children are struggling to learn and need additional support.

## APPROACH

To address this challenge, LARA engaged communities, parents, and caregivers, equipping them with strategies to take a more active and productive role in their children's safety, welfare, and learning. It did so through a social behavior change campaign (SBCC) and the use of the Journeys program for community members.

### Using SBCC to promote parental involvement in children's reading practice at home

LARA worked with the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) to develop a social behavior change campaign, Tusomere Wamu ("Let's Read Together") to promote parental involvement in children's reading at home. The campaign's themes included the value of education and the important role parents have in creating time for their children's reading practice at home.

The campaign used TV, radio, and home visits to show parents how, even with their busy schedules, they could create time for children's reading practice at home. The campaign also articulated the value of enhancing their children's learning in order to prepare them for successful futures. Mothers, fathers, and other caregivers were encouraged to find a place to read at home with their children-- for example, under a tree or in the kitchen or living room-- and then to use simple story cards provided by their teachers to practice reading. These story cards were designed specifically to help parents who are unable to read: they included engaging pictures that any parent could point to and then ask the child to describe what is happening in the story and to relate the pictures and story to objects or activities in the home.

During home visits, SBCC campaign team members also demonstrated to parents, especially parents who were illiterate, how to read with their children at home using flash cards. In this way, all parents were encouraged to cultivate a positive environment at home that supports language development and reading activities. Through this campaign, LARA also staged community theater dramas at trading centers and markets to demonstrate the importance of reading with children.

Campaign staff went to households and engaged parents to read with their children at home using story cards. — Photo Credit: RTI International

**303,501** number of community members participating in Journeys community dialogue meetings.

**20,092** cases of violence reported, tracked, and followed by **2,505** new Village Case Management Committees.

An evaluation of the campaign revealed that 85% of parents agreed that they enjoyed doing literacy-related activities with their child, and that the child also enjoyed the activities. The most highly practiced activity by parents was encouraging the children to read to them. In addition, after eight weeks of exposure, the proportion of parents who said they read to their child more than tripled from baseline (9%) to endline (30%).

## JOURNEYS

### Journeys helped Community Members improve children's safety and wellbeing

LARA developed and introduced the Journeys Activity for Community Members Handbook to build communities' capacity to protect and respond to violence against children. At the same time, the Activity partnered with community-based organizations to reach community members and to encourage them to become change agents. The Journeys program built the capacity of these community change agents to inspire parental engagement and collective actions to improve their children's well-being and shifted social norms related to child protection and response.

These change agents work within their communities to establish systems and procedures to handle cases of school-related gender-based violence in their local schools or communities. Community change agents also facilitate Journeys activities to deepen community members' understanding of the nature and extent of violence against children in school and communities. They support community members in working together to create a school and community environment in which inclusiveness, a sense of belonging, and positive child support are the norm. Together, the change agents and the community tackle violence through mini community case conferences, in which cases of violence against children are discussed, monitored, and acted upon for resolution. Community members then undertake collective actions that improve children's well-being.

**Community change agents facilitate a Journeys community-based activity.** —Photo: RTI International.

As a result of these efforts, parents and school representatives across communities established village case management committees to monitor and respond to reports of violence against children in their communities and schools. The committee members documented cases of violence and responded by working with parents and district officials to refer children to the needed social services. They also followed up to ensure that the appropriate actions were taken. In addition, committee members encouraged parents to re-enroll their children in school.

*"The village child case management committee members also work with local networks and know people who are valuable in matters concerning child protection in the community. They are getting more people involved in matters like the Community Development Office and hold police responsible for following cases up."*

*—MUCOBADI (local non-governmental organization), Monitoring Officer*

**SUCCESS STORY**

### Journeys Spurs School Infrastructure Improvements

When Denis Oloka of Nakaseke district was appointed by the community as a change agent representing Lukabala Primary School, he was discouraged at first by the lack of community engagement at scheduled events. *"I … mobilized community members to attend the next activity and [only] 28 people came. I was discouraged. After implementing a number of activities from the Journeys [Activity for] Community Handbook, community members realized there were some problems that needed to be addressed to help their children realize their hopes and dreams. The school had only two classrooms for all the students. We all agreed to fundraise for a new classroom and we each contributed UGX 2,000 ($0.50) to buy roof sheets, timber, nails, and other materials. A new classroom, though yet to be fully roofed, is now being used by Primary 6 and [Primary] 7 pupils. This has had a great impact on my work as a community change agent in this community."*

**SUCCESS STORY**

### Journeys Improves Learners' Welfare at School

Emmanuel Kafeero, Chairman of Katale Kamese Primary School's Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), is one of the Journeys program's community change agents in Nakaseke district. At the beginning of the program, people in his

village resisted the program, saying it was a waste of resources. However, Emmanuel, a firm believer in the importance of the program in his community, persisted.

*"After carrying out a number of Journeys activities, especially those regarding the students' well-being, the community members started calling me to express their appreciation and others wanted to join the training,"* said Emmanuel.

Emmanuel noted that the reflection sessions have had the biggest impact. Following one of the reflection meetings, parents and school management committee members agreed that lunch should be provided to children while in school. To facilitate this, each family was required to contribute $1 (UGX4,000) for the school to buy maize flour to make porridge for the children.

*"Feeding at school has started because of the Journeys program. Because of that I am the most successful PTA Chairman thanks to the [Activity]."*

**SUCCESS STORY**

### Positive Learning Environments: Keeping Girls in Schools through Journeys

At Bishops Kasheshe School, dialogue meetings held during Journeys' reflection sessions identified the biggest issue contributing to girls' school absenteeism: poor hygiene and sanitation facilities.

The school had only one pit latrine available for both boys and girls to use. Further, the doors to the latrine did not close or lock properly, and the latrine was often dirty. These issues were a source of anxiety for the girls, who already faced cultural stigma associated with menstruation in addition to concerns about safety and privacy. Without a sanitary, secure latrine, especially during their monthly menses, girls avoided school.

The school-community committee resolved to make contributions towards the construction of a separate latrine for girls. Parents dug the latrine, and both the school and parents donated money to buy materials. The separate pit latrine provided a safe space for girls, allowing them to focus on studying rather than worrying about hygiene.

*"Parents had never before come together for the cause of prioritizing children. The Journeys activities made the school and community members understand [the] challenges children face in schools."*

**SUCCESS STORY**

### Village Child Case Management Committees

In an effort to strengthen the reporting and referral of violence against children cases in Uganda, USAID/Uganda's Literacy Achievement and Retention Activity (LARA) project worked with a local community organization, MUCOBADI, in Luwero District to establish Village Child Case Management Committees (VCCMCs).

Since October 2018, 89 VCCMCs have been identified, formed and equipped with knowledge as to how to respond to violence against children and the reporting and tracking of cases in communities. Community change agents with the Journeys Program under LARA have raised community awareness about the existence of VCCMCs and their roles in case management. The VCCMCs have a minimum of 7 people which can include PTA members, para social workers, community and school change agents/ teachers and any community members who have a passion for child protection.

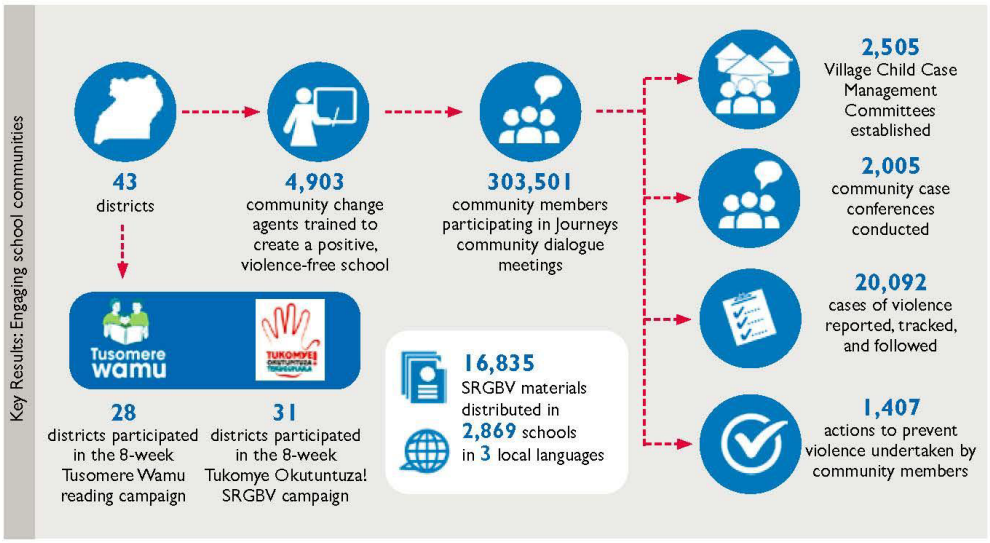
After the orientation of VCCMC members, there was an acute increase in the reporting of cases of violence against children in schools. The VCCMCs have contributed to an increase in the reporting of cases of violence (and the resolution of these cases) as they have provided an outlet through which child abuse can be reported in a confidential and effective manner. Any responsible adult in the community can report violence/abuse to any member of the VCCMC group. Cases are often reported anonymously, sometimes going through 3 community members before reaching the VCCMC. The concept of the VCCMC works because, as one community member shared, "*you find someone you trust and they tell someone in the group.*" The VCCMC also work with local networks and know people who are valuable in matters concerning child protection in the community. The committees have also been successful in holding Community Development Officers and the policy accountable for following up on cases. They identify someone within the VCCMC who can personally follow up a case regularly – maybe someone who lives close to the victim or is already an accepted member of their family.

One principle of the group that has also contributed to the increase in reporting is to ensure confidentially not only of the child, but also the person who is reporting the abuse. A case in point is Kaddu Madinah, a VCCMC chairperson/para social worker of Kiiso school community, who shared that *"Before this committee was established, we would pursue cases on [an] individual basis, which in turn was so challenging as the community would see me as a problem to them and perpetuators would intimidate me*

*for reporting cases to authorities, but with the establishment of the VCCMC, it has been [a] collective effort in handling cases against children because the committee consist of community members who jointly handle and manage cases as a team."* The collective response to child abuse and violence established by the VCCMCs has helped to restore hope in individuals and the community and ensured a safer community for the children of Uganda.

## ACHIEVEMENTS

The following graphic summarizes the qualitative accomplishments achieved by LARA, both in early grade reading development and the creation of positive and supportive school environments.

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**LEGACY BRIEF 4 (2021)**

# Systems strengthening and coordination for government accountability and ownership

The US Agency for International Development (USAID)/Uganda Literacy Achievement and Retention Activity (LARA, or the Activity) was a 6-year (2015–2021) initiative that supported Uganda's Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) to improve early grade reading in a positive and supportive school climate.

Participants at an EGR stakeholder engagement meeting in July 2018. —*Photo credit. RTI International*

## BACKGROUND

A strong education system requires good governance structures, efficient management, strategic financing, and performance incentive mechanisms that work cohesively to ensure all children have access to quality education.

In 2015, Uganda's Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) identified literacy as an education priority. With government commitment and USAID support, LARA expanded the MoES's early grade reading (EGR) program, which was already implemented in 43 districts under the USAID/Uganda School Health and Reading Program (SHRP; 2012–2019). LARA expanded the EGR program to 3,479 government schools in an additional 31 districts, directly benefiting 1.3 million learners. USAID and LARA also supported the MoES's dedication to creating positive and supportive schools for learning by reducing school-related gender-based violence.

With USAID's support, LARA accomplished these important goals working through existing MoES structures to increase the capacity of education officials to sustain the national rollout of the improved EGR model. LARA also introduced a new violence reduction program to improve learner's retention rates.

## APPROACH

LARA focused on the core functions of an education system required to improve teaching and learning:

- Set and communicate system expectations;
- Monitor learning outcomes, instructional practices, and district and school operations; and
- Ensure that the essential basic inputs required for the system to function effectively are in place.

### Setting and communicating expectations for the EGR program

LARA worked with MoES working groups to build consensus on education system policy direction. Doing so ensured government ownership of the organizational goals and the capacity requirements that were needed to expand and sustain EGR and learner retention investments.

#### Education System Capacities that Improve Teaching and Learning

Additionally, LARA formed several working groups to support systems strengthening, bringing together key stakeholders to coordinate and implement EGR activities.

- EGR and Retention Advisory Committee
- EGR Budget Working Group
- MoES EGR Communication Working Group

The Activity used its programmatic experience and research results to contribute to the evidence base of what works well and what can be expanded to accelerate pupils' learning outcomes. Key to the success of this approach was establishing a broad base of stakeholder engagement with strong collaboration and communication linkages.

During its implementation, SHRP supported the MoES to develop a National Literacy Framework. The Framework laid out the MoES' expectations for local language and English instruction; specifically, the local language as the language of instruction from Primary 1 to Primary 3 with English as a subject, then a transition to English as the language of instruction in Primary 4. The Framework also outlined expectations for teaching practice in the early grades. SHRP and LARA worked with the MoES to communicate these expectations in all project-targeted districts and schools.

To communicate expectations, SHRP and LARA held a series of consultations at all levels of the education system.

In 2018, LARA convened a **National EGR Stakeholders Meeting**, with attendees including district and MoES officials, district and municipal inspectors of schools, primary teacher's college principals, and chief administrative officers. The intention of this meeting was to identify ways of securing and allocating the resources needed to implement the EGR program across the 31 LARA districts.

Also, in 2018, LARA convened a **National EGR Symposium** of MoES departments and institutions, national education partners, and civil society organizations to discuss how to sustain good practices in EGR programming.

During the symposium, EGR experts emphasized the importance of setting teacher performance and pupil learning expectations and communicating these expectations to parents, teachers, and school administrators at all levels. They also explained the importance of supporting teachers to achieve large-scale EGR gains, including monitoring their progress and holding teachers accountable to the predetermined expectations.

Participants discussed how Uganda can incorporate these practices and examined education delivery constraints. At the end of the symposium, leaders voted on key priorities to provide the MoES with a clear action plan, including strengthening monitoring and accountability systems for teacher practice and mobilizing resources to sustain the existing EGR program—all with the aim of accelerating reading outcomes in the early grades.

Following the recommendations provided by national education stakeholders, top management officials from the MoES met in December 2018 during an **EGR seminar for top management and education development partners** to prioritize recommendations for sustaining the EGR program. This meeting was attended by key budget holders and policy and decision makers, including the Minister of State for Primary Education and the Permanent Secretary, who raised the profile and urgency of EGR implementation. Over several months, the priority areas were synthesized and rationalized before sending the recommendations to the Minister of Education for final endorsement in July 2019.

Education systems produce poor learning outcomes, because they are not "coherent for learning" —*Pritchett, 2016*

**Setting and communicating expectations** related to learning and the actions that support learning is one way to begin addressing this incoherence. —*Glewwe et al., 2012*

**Stakeholders at all levels need to know what is expected of them. This includes teachers, schools, MOES departments, and development partners.**

"Since the introduction of the early grade reading methodology, surprisingly, even where the program is not implemented, major emphasis towards literacy has been seen. No wonder [that] amongst Primary 3 learners the literacy rates have moved from 30% to 60.2% in three years."

*—Dr. Tony Mukasa Lusambu, Assistant Commissioner of Primary Education*

"Through training and exposure, we realized we can learn and empower each other rather than just inspect schools. We have become friends and want to grow together. That is teamwork."

*—Daniel Ndagga, District inspector of Schools in Entebbe Municipality*

"The components that helped EGR success in the district were the positive attitude every stakeholder had, including [the] government, and the integrated budget, which supported a successful implementation."

*—District official, Hoima district*

To support the implementation of the top management priorities, LARA worked with the MoES to form the National Literacy and Numeracy Advisory Committee (February 2020) to help strengthen the policy implementation environment. The committee included members from all key education departments; leaders from all Kyambogo University and critical MoES units, including the Directorate of Education Standards, Basic Education, Instructional Materials Unit, the National Curriculum Development Center, and Teacher Instruction, Education, and Training; District Education Officers; and the Gender Unit. All committee members were tasked to monitor policy implementation of their units and report progress on the MoES' EGR priorities to the committee at-large. The key tasks involved setting and communicating expectations, monitoring and holding system actors accountable, and ensuring that the needed resources were available.

## Monitoring and accountability for EGR results

The collaboration that LARA fostered with other USAID- funded education programs in Uganda was critical in helping the education system monitor learning outcomes, instructional practice, and school- and district-level operations. However, because schools and teachers vary in how well they are able to use inputs to achieve improved teaching and learning, once the expectations for learning outcomes, teacher practice, and system supports were established, the education system worked to set up monitoring and accountability systems to measure progress. By monitoring the system, leaders were able to hold education system actors accountable for the functional, logistical, and technical requirements of the nationwide EGR rollout. The Activity worked with districts and various departments to build the technical capacity to monitor learning outcomes and ensure that teacher practice requirements were meeting the expectations.

LARA also partnered with SHRP to strengthen the Uganda National Education Bureau to undertake national Early Grade Reading Assessments (EGRAs). LARA completed annual EGRAs and shared the findings, by language, with each of its districts. District and school officials participated in learner checks during the EGR monitoring and support supervision exercise, which strengthened districts' understanding of reading outcomes. LARA also introduced a teacher support monitoring and accountability framework that enabled the MoES to track if teachers met teaching practice expectations and if they received the expected professional development and coaching support provided by head teachers and coordinating center tutors. To help with this monitoring, the Activity introduced termly data-driven planning meetings, which allowed districts to plan their support actions where most needed. The Activity also trained district officials to use action research to investigate district-specific challenges that hindered learning outcomes. As a result of using monitoring data, districts were able to identify where they needed to strengthen their systems and better hold themselves accountable.

## Supporting basic inputs

LARA and its predecessor, SHRP, provided inputs the MoES needed to expand its EGR program and helped the Ministry plan input costs to sustain the program. In addition, the monitoring systems it helped to establish were used to indicate progress so that inputs could be targeted to the areas where they were most needed.

Initially, the Activity focused on providing books and learning materials, teacher training, support supervision, and assessment for government schools in the 31 LARA-targeted districts. Inspection indicators were revised to focus on learning outcomes, and community and local government used monitoring to ensure that teachers were at school and government officials were ably executing their roles.

## Equipping Teachers to Use EGR in Schools

LARA worked to improve teacher and instructor competencies in pedagogy in addition to providing teaching and learning materials for pupils and teachers.

The Activity trained and established a cohort of EGR trainers and trained in-service Primary 1 to 4 teachers and their head or deputy head teachers in the EGR reading methodology. The Activity worked with districts and primary teacher colleges to strengthen teacher classroom and instructional support supervision. These capacity building activities enabled coordinating center tutors, teachers, and district inspectors to work together.

The Activity also worked with other EGR projects based in Uganda, Kyambogo University (one of the top three universities in Uganda), and other implementing partners to create a pre-service teacher training curriculum addendum that incorporated the EGR methodology into the national primary teacher education curriculum. The addendum was approved by Kyambogo University in July 2017. Since then,

**Inputs to support the EGR program**

| | |
|---|---|
| Books and teaching and learning materials | • Revising, printing, and replenishing books and materials<br>• Making books available to schools and learners<br>• Clarifying materials development process |
| Teacher training and continuous professional development (CPD) | • Administering school-/cluster-based teacher trainings & CPDs<br>• Ensuring pre-service students are trained in the EGR model<br>• Systemitizing teaching practice with scripted teacher guides, training faciliator guides, and CPD content |
| Support supervision | • Re-defining coordinating center tutor's roles<br>• Increasing the number of support supervision actors located closer to schools<br>• Incorporating the CPD framework and modules into district structures |
| Monitoring and assessment | • Revising inspection indicators to focus on learning outcomes<br>• Utilizing community and local government in monitoring<br>• Ensuring that teachers are at school and government officials are ably executing their roles<br>• Determining best ways of measuring and monitoring for accountability |

all pre-service tutors and principals are trained on EGR. At the national level, the EGR methodology has been mainstreamed into the national pre- service curriculum at Kyambogo University and the primary teacher training colleges. This integration ensures that the country has a teacher workforce that is prepared for EGR integration into primary education and to complement the government's expansion of the EGR program to remaining districts.

The Activity supported the development of a strong policy environment, complemented by technical and logistic skills to ensure that needed inputs (i.e., teacher training, books in the hands of children, and strong school- and classroom-level coaching systems that, combined with the EGRA, build national, district, and school-level capacity to monitor learning outcomes) exist at all levels.

## Building financial skills for EGR budgetary planning

LARA engaged the MoES to analyze and understand the financial requirements of building a robust, national EGR program. Starting in 2018, the MoES held a series of national consultative meetings to reflect on accomplishments and lessons learned under its EGR programming activities. LARA worked with Ministry and district leaders through each annual budget cycle over the years to identify key priority areas to build upon and sustain progress in schools throughout the nation, as well as to ensure the needed resources were included

in departmental and district budget. For example, SHRP, LARA, and the Global Partnership for Education provided a summary of the number of pupil books that were distributed to schools in 95 districts, by grade, over several years. Because the books were distributed over several years and had an estimated lifespan of four years, the MoES was able to plan book replenishment in accordance with the existing distribution schedule and annual budgets. As a result of this effort, the MoES secured funding for book replenishments.

In addition, LARA worked with district education offices to lobby and secure funding for essential teacher professional development and support supervision activities. Some education offices accessed the district development grant's 10% allocation for capacity building to finance EGR activities, such as CPD for teachers.

Because of LARA's influence, the education system has increased its budgetary allocations for and strengthened its ability to sustain the EGR program. The Activity's interventions, including its support of government-led, systematic approaches, laid a strong foundation for the government to prioritize the gradual nationwide rollout of EGR.

**Action research for building the evidence base**

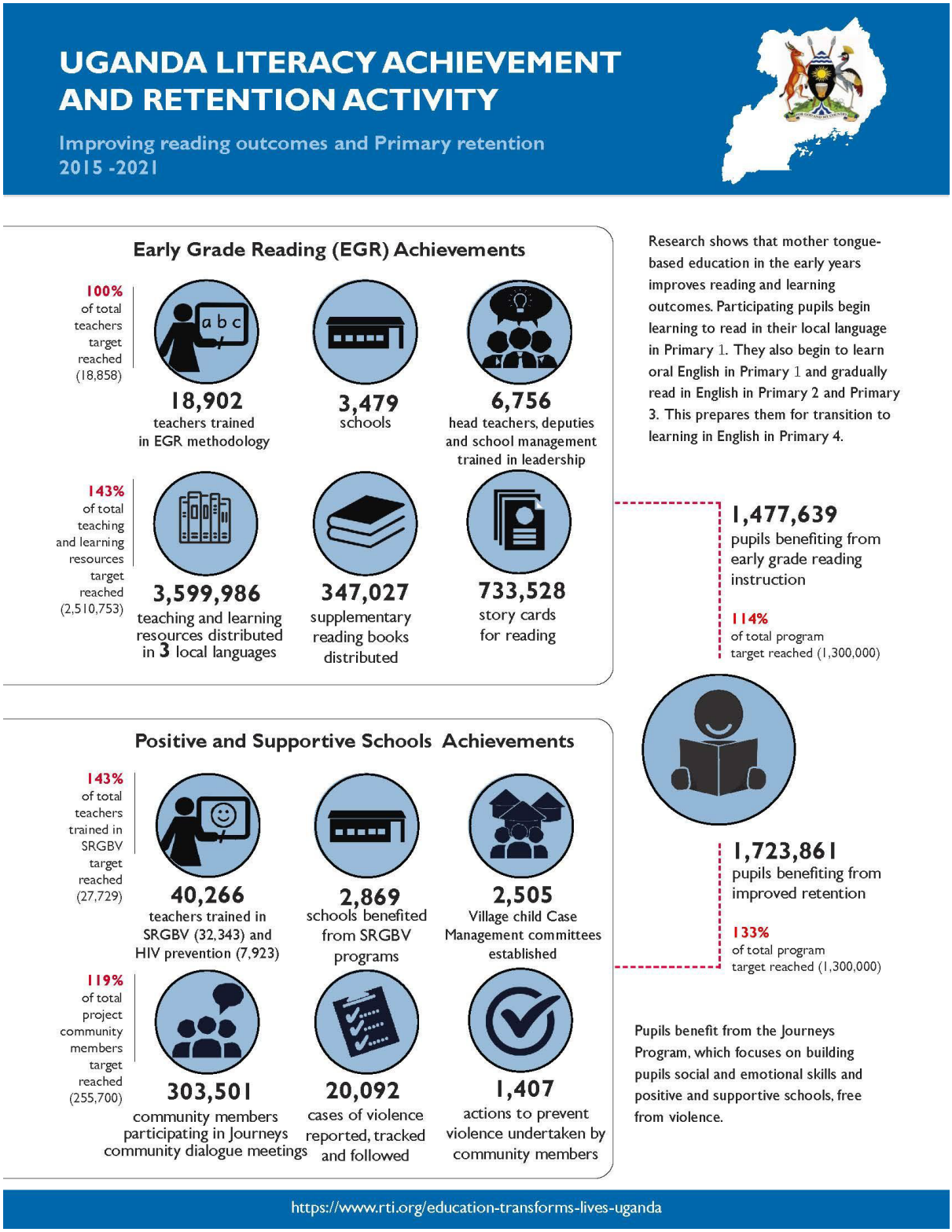
As part of systems strengthening, LARA supported the MoES to conduct action research and micro-experiments on teacher and pupil absenteeism in selected districts. As part of this work, LARA and district officials documented the relationship between children's learning outcomes and school inspection and support.

This research highlighted key challenges to the implementation of the EGR methodology, including lack of head teachers' support for teachers, teacher and pupil absenteeism, and access to EGR materials.

**For more information:** USAID/Uganda Literacy Achievement and Retention Activity

2 Kafu Road, P.O. Box 23582, Kampala, Uganda • Tel: +256 (0) 204 250 100 • Email: info@lara.rti.org • Chief of Party: Geri Burkholder

## *Improving reading outcomes and Primary retention (2015–2021)*



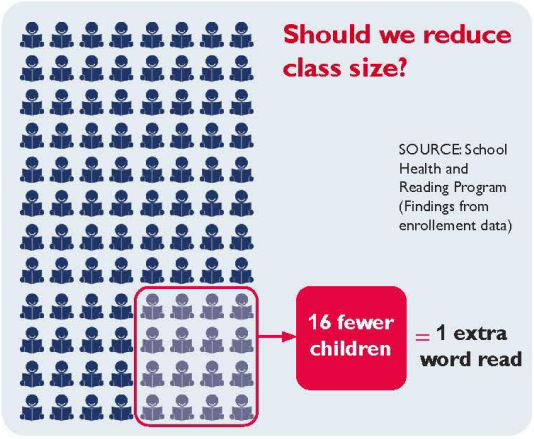
## Analytic Research into Contextual Factors that Impact Reading Outcomes

The literacy Achievement and Retention Activity (LARA) contextual factors research addressed the following questions:

1. What student-, teacher-, and school-level factors are associated with higher local language and English reading performance in Uganda?
2. What are the student-, teacher-, and school-level characteristics associated with gains in learning outcomes?
3. What are the implications of the findings for implementing reading programs in Uganda?

The research involved a review of the existing literature on the contextual factors affecting reading outcomes and analysis of existing LARA and School Health and Reading Program (SHRP) datasets. The analyses included demographic factors, such as socioeconomic status, but the focus was mainly on predictors of learning outcomes that could be potentially incorporated into future education programming. The key findings of the study are summarized in this briefer:

Figure 1. Class size reduction and gains in reading




Class enrollment was also associated with reading achievement: sixteen less students in a classroom led to a gain of one additional words (**Figure 1**). However, this is certainly a more modest gain compared to other factors and may not be a cost- effective focus.

*Table 1. Contextual Factors Associated with Reading Achievement and Gain: Schools, Classroom, and System*

| Factor | Local Language | English |
|---|---|---|
| Head teacher training | 4.4✓✓○○○ | 3.2✓○ |
| Teacher training | 8.0✓✓✓○○○ | 6.8✓✓○○ |
| School administrator observes teacher | 1.9✓○ | |
| Evidence of regular lesson planning | 2.5✓✓○○ | 3.6✓✓○ |
| Lesson plans reviewed every week | | 9.1✓✓○ |
| Up-to-date attendance records | 1.3✓○○ | |
| Coordinating center tutor (CCT) observes class | 2.4✓✓○ | |
| At least half the learners have books | 4.3✓✓✓○ | |
| SMC supports activities | 2.4✓✓○ | |
| SMC supports activities that promote reading | | 2.3✓✓○ |

## Schools, Classrooms and System Factors Associated with Reading Achievement

Factors found to be significantly associated with reading achievement include teacher training and support, head teacher training, regular preparation and review of lesson plans, learners access to pupil books, community support (as evidenced by SMC support to school activities in general and reading-promoting activities) and class size. Table 1 shows the additional words read associated with each of the factors. The additional words read associated with these factors ranged from 1.3 to 8.0 in the local language and 2.3 to 9.1 in English.

Circles represent statistical significance: ○○○ P<0.001, ○○ P<0.01, ○ P<0.05: Check marks represent effect size: ✓✓✓=0.50 or more, ✓✓=0.20-0.49, ✓ = less than 0.20: Shading represent percent practicing a behavior; dark blue=few (<30%), medium blue=some (30%-59%), light blue=many (=/>60%): Boxes with blue border are gains.

## Teacher Characteristics and Instructional Practices Associated with Reading Achievement

Teachers characteristics associated with significant reading achievement (or gain) include teachers' sex, years of experience, and language of instruction (LOI) as shown in Table 2.

*Table 2. Contextual Factors Associated with Increased Reading Achievement and Gain: Teacher Characteristics.*

| Factor | Local Language | English |
|---|---|---|
| Teacher is female | | 2.4✓○ |
| Teacher's mother tongue is same as the LOI | 2.4✓✓✓○ | |
| Teacher experience (additional years) | 0.4✓○○○ | |

Circles represent statistical significance: ○○○P<0.001, ○○P<0.01, ○P<0.05: Check marks represent effect size: ✓✓✓=0.50 or more, ✓✓=0.20-0.49, ✓ = less than 0.20: Shading represent percent practicing a behavior; dark blue=few (<30%), medium blue=some (30%-59%), light blue=many (=/>60%): Boxes with blue border are gains.

*Figure 2. Teacher instructional practices significantly associated with reading achievement and gains.*

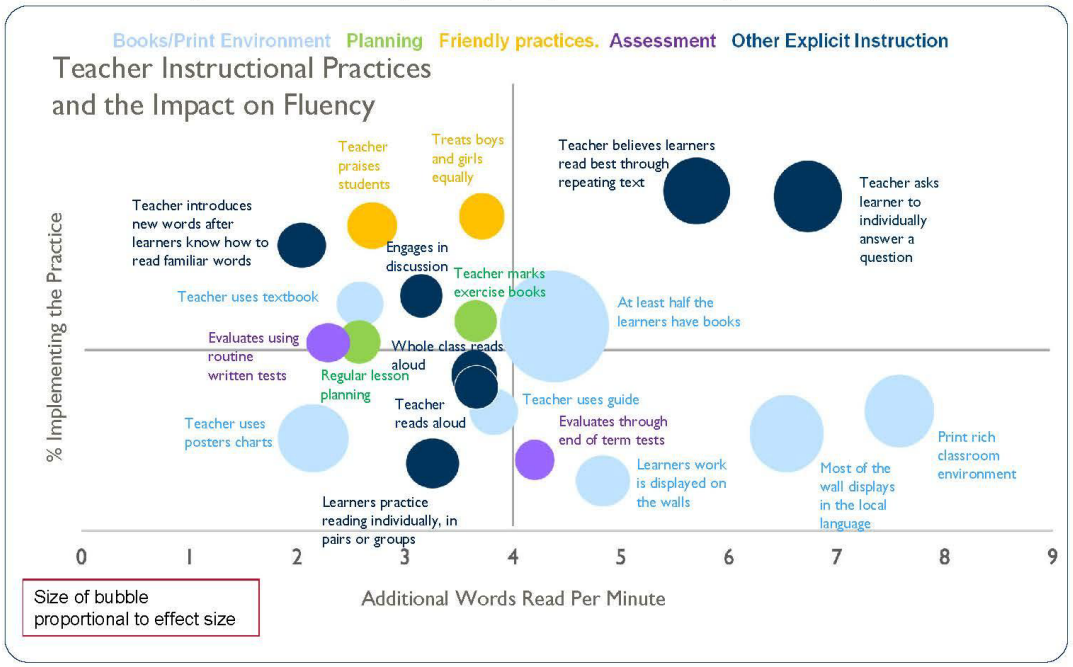



Figure 2 shows the instructional practices found to be significantly associated with reading achievement and gains. The x-axis is the number of additional words read, while the y-axis is the percent of teachers who implemented the practice. The size of each bubble relates to the effect size, while the bubble's color corresponds to the area of practice: books/print environment (light blue), planning (bright blue), friendly practices (light gray), assessment (dark gray), and other explicit instruction (dark blue). It is worthwhile to emphasize the practices that are associated with a greater number of words read, but one should also focus on the practices that fewer teachers undertake, as found in the lower right quadrant (high impact, few teachers doing). The practices in the circle all have to do with the promotion of a print rich environment, including learners work displayed on the walls and the displays being in the local language. The light blue bubbles – denoting all practices related to books, including teachers' guides, and the print environment – are prevalent.

The dark blue circles represent other explicit instructional practices, including the high impact of teachers asking learners to individually answer a question, which is associated with an additional 6.7 words read. This reflects a questioning classroom and dialogic pedagogy, as does a teacher engaging learners in discussion. Learners practicing reading (individually, in pairs, or in groups) during the reading lesson is very important to their acquiring fundamental reading skills, but it is surprising how little it is done during a reading lesson—it was observed in fewer than 20% of reading lessons. Although most teachers were observed praising students (87%) and treating boys and girls the same (89%), just over half carried out the planning activities (53% regularly planned lessons and 60% regularly marked exercise books). Assessment activities were carried out even less frequently.

Photo Credit LARA/RTI

## Learner and home characteristics associated with reading outcomes

***Table 3*** shows the learner and home contextual factors found to be significantly associated with reading achievement in Uganda. Learners repeating a grade or being overage are both negatively associated with reading achievement. Like teachers, a student's sex also impacts their achievements. A learner wearing shoes (proxy for social economic status) is associated with higher reading achievement and gains. Finally, a learner's exposure to someone reading in their home is significantly associated with a modest increase in the words read.

*Table 3. Contextual Factors Associated with Increased Reading Achievement and Gain: Learner and Home.*

| Factor | Local Language | English |
|---|---|---|
| Learner is repeating grade | -0.8✓○○ | -1.4✓○○ |
| Learner is overage for grade | -1.9✓○○○ | -3.7✓✓○○○ |
| Learner is wearing shoes | 1.5✓○○○ | 3.3✓✓○○○ |
| Learner is female | 6.6✓✓○○○ | |
| Learner is exposed to someone reading in their home | 3.7✓✓○○○ | |
| Learner is exposed to someone reading in their home | 0.7✓○○ | 1.1✓○○○ |

Circles represent statistical significance: ○○○P<0.001, ○○P<0.01, ○P<0.05: Check marks represent effect size: ✓✓✓=0.50 or more, ✓✓=0.20-0.49, ✓ = less than 0.20: Shading represent percent practicing a behavior; dark blue=few (<30%), medium blue=some (30%-59%), light blue=many (=/>60%): Boxes with blue border are gains.

Photo Credit LARA/RTI

## Recommendations

Below are key recommendations for future EGR programming in Uganda.

- Use MoES-GPE/SHRP/LARA like programs daily (pupil book ratio of 1 to 1, teacher training and support, assessment)
- Invest in teacher training that works (focus on key instructional practices such as questioning and dialogic teaching, student practice and assessing student skills)
- Provide ongoing teacher support through coaching (focus on observable behaviors)
- Increase learning materials in the hands of learners and in the classroom
- Promote positive school behaviors (teacher support, SMC support, links to home, accountability)
- Promote active classroom environments
- Provide modest support to reading at home efforts
- Class size matters, but may not be the most cost-effective investment, especially without changing the availability of materials, instructional practices and school and classroom dynamics

USAID FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

The Republic of Uganda
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SPORTS

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## *SUCCESS STORIES*

# SUCCESS STORY

## Advancing Government Commitment to Grade Reading Program

Photo credit: RTI International

*Primary 2 children reading LARA produced early grade reading book.*

Evidence shows that supporting children to read early in life lays a strong foundation for their success in school. In Uganda, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)/Uganda-funded Literacy Achievement and Retention Activity (LARA; also referred to as "the Activity") supported the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) to expand its early grade reading (EGR) program.

Building on the legacy of the USAID/Uganda School Health and Reading Program (SHRP; 2012–2019), the Activity worked through the existing MoES structures to support education officials' skills to sustain the national rollout of the improved EGR model, both centrally and at the district level.

LARA determined that four processes were essential for the EGR expansion plan: (1) consensus building, (2) technical and logistical capacity strengthening, (3) system application, and (4) institutionalization

### CONSENSUS BUILDING

To help build consensus for the EGR program, LARA participated in MoES working groups to encourage government ownership of EGR, agree on strategies to support its implementation, and identify organizational capacity for expanding and sustaining EGR and retention investments. Following strong advocacy by LARA, a national Literacy and Numeracy Advisory Committee was formed to accelerate stakeholder engagement for policy around implementing and monitoring the EGR program. At district-level, the Activity used its research results and experience to

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**LARA (2015-2021) NUMBERS**

- 3,479 schools implementing EGR
- 18,902 teachers trained in EGR
- 3,599,986 EGR materials distributed
- 151 coordinating centers supported
- 31 district education offices supported
- 1.4 million learners benefited

**SHRP (2012-2019) NUMBERS**

- 4,097 schools implementing EGR
- 35,984 teachers trained in EGR
- 4,000,000 EGR materials distributed
- 178 coordinating centers supported
- 43 district education offices supported
- 3.3 million learners benefited

*Early grade reading stakeholder engagement meeting in July 2018. Photo credit: RTI International*

support district planning and manage. At the end of each academic term, LARA reviewed the learning outcomes and education input data (i.e., teachers trained and supported in the schools) with education officers to build consensus on the expectations for the EGR program, the resource requirements, and to measure progress toward those expectations.

## TECHNICAL AND LOGISTICAL CAPACITY STRENGTHENING

LARA strengthened the technical and logistic capacity of the MoES to expand the EGR program. The Activity trained in- and pre-service tutors from primary teacher training colleges and district education officers to train or provide pedagogical support to teachers in 3,479 government schools. The Activity also trained head teachers, deputy teachers, and school management committee chairpersons in educational leadership and about the essential elements of a quality EGR program, including the early grade methodology, classroom observation, learner checks, and coaching and mentoring of teachers. Overall, LARA trained more than 18,400 Primary 1 to Primary 4 teachers in EGR methods and provided with a scripted teacher's guide to ensure a systematic teaching approach. Pupils also received books in English and the local language to support their learning. At the national level, the EGR methodology has been mainstreamed into the national primary teacher education curriculum at Kyambogo University—one of Uganda's top three universities—ensuring that the country has a teacher workforce that is prepared to integrate EGR into primary education. The Activity also trained pre-service tutors in EGR methods so that all new teachers receive classes in the EGR methodology before graduating.

## SYSTEM APPLICATION

To measure learning gains, the Activity introduced an annual Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) and worked with the Uganda National Examinations Board to conduct EGRAs. LARA then trained district officials to monitor and

*"Since the introduction of the Early Grade Reading methodology, surprisingly even where the program is not implemented, major emphasis towards literacy has been seen. No wonder, amongst Primary 3 learners, the literacy rates have moved from 30% to 60.2% in three years."*

*Dr. Tony Mukasa Lusambu, Assistant Commissioner Primary Education*

*"With the onset of USAID funded projects (SHRP and LARA) that collaborated with TIET, BE and Local Government, government aided primary schools gained a lot in a number of areas:*

*i. Teaching of literacy lessons improved as well as teachers reading skills in both local language and English*

*ii. Leaners' reading improved as well as their learning outcomes in early grade levels*

*iii. Budget for replenishment of EGR materials was included in the education sector*

*These benefits have given the MoES impetus to continue equipping teachers with skills and positive attitude towards the teaching of reading. An addendum to incorporate EGR in the primary teacher education curriculum has also been put in place. We believe that through Literacy and Numeracy Advisory Committee, stakeholders will find strategies to roll out EGR throughout the country."*

*Dr. Cleophus Mugenyi Commissioner Basic education*

support teachers in schools, through random sampling, by observing teacher fidelity to the trained EGR approach and use of learner assessments. LARA integrated early grade reading into existing monitoring and support supervision processes to strengthen district-level monitoring of the early grade reading program. LARA also used a tablet-based accountability system to understand the extent to which the system's teacher support actors, the coordinating center tutors, reached out to teachers each term. At the end of the Activity, all LARA-supported districts had the technical and logistical capacity to sustain an EGR program.

## INSTITUTIONALIZATION

Because LARA was only a 6-year program, it was important for it to support government agencies to apply the systemic approaches and institutionalize the key elements of the EGR program. In addition, the Activity supported district and national education stakeholders to analyze and understand the financial and budgetary requirements of building a robust, national EGR program. Through this process, the MoES allocated 1 billion Ugandan shillings ($274,196) for EGR implementation in 2019/2020 and 5.4 billion shillings ($1,480,663) for book replenishment in 2020/2021. In addition, district-led monitoring and support exercises were adopted using district resources in the majority of LARA-targeted districts.

With the rollout of the EGR program, MoES officials and district leaders conducted action research to document the relationship between children's learning outcomes, teacher motivation, and the school environment, thereby enhancing the education system's accountability for results. To this end, LARA worked with several EGR projects implemented in Uganda and the Minister of State for Primary Education to showcase the EGR program's achievements with a focus on learning outcomes. This led to the MoES's EGR program sustainability measures, which were endorsed by the Minister of

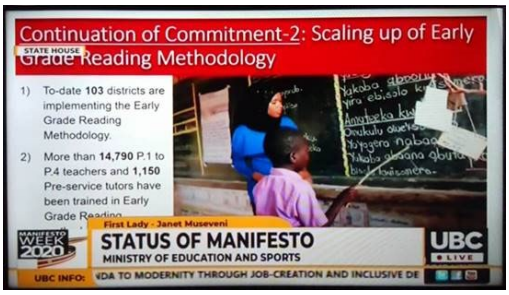


Photo credit: RTI International

*Uganda Broadcasting Corporation (UBC) nightly news show aired on 14th August 2020. It shows state house commitment to early grade reading. Photo credit RTI International.*

Education and Sports in late 2019 and began implementation by the MoES in 2020.

## KEY RESULTS

Strong collaboration between LARA and the MoES through consistent, regular meetings fostered learning and improved learning outcomes over time. This collaboration established the functional, logistical, and technical requirements of a nationwide EGR program rollout, championed by the Government of Uganda. This led to increased budgetary allocations for EGR for the replenishment of EGR books in local languages, district-funded school visits to monitor teachers' use of EGR tools and methodology, learner reading checks, and teacher support systems. Coordinating center tutors were also empowered to continue supporting and mentoring teachers in EGR methodologies.

Finally, school, college, and district personnel were trained to deliver and monitor the EGR program, while the EGR method was integrated into college pre- and in-service teacher training.

The Activity's interventions to foster a government-led, systematic approach, built a strong foundation for the government's prioritization of a gradual nationwide EGR rollout. The MoES announced this commitment to scaling up the EGR methodology as a key achievement in May 2020.

<<End>>

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# SUCCESS STORY

## District-Led Accountability for Early Grade Reading Results

Photo credit: RTI International

*Consilous Rwanyonga, Senior Education Specialist, watches a student read from a SHRP-produced early grade reading book.*

Uganda, like many countries, is committed to improving the quality of its education. The country's Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) has worked to strengthen Uganda's education quality using various tactics with a key goal of ensuring that all teachers are well trained and motivated. To support Uganda in these efforts, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has worked with the MoES since 2012. The USAID/Uganda Literacy Achievement and Retention Activity (LARA; 2015–2021) took on and progressed what the USAID-funded School Health and Reading Program (SHRP; 2012–2019) started: an investment to improve early grade reading instruction. These two USAID initiatives supported 7,664 government schools in 74 districts and 54,000 Primary 1 to Primary 4 teachers. LARA, following SHRP's lead, worked with Uganda's education system, to improve the monitoring and support supervision of teachers through their district and college education coaches and mentors

### COLLABORATION FOR TEACHER TRAINING AND SUPPORT

District education offices play a critical role in ensuring that the investments made to enhance the early grade reading program are planned, managed, and sustained. The key components of an early grade reading program include improved classrooms with high-quality instruction and learning materials. To this end, SHRP developed teachers guides and pupil

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Photo credit: RTI International

*Early grade teachers in training plan lessons using LARA produced early grade reading book.*

books in 12 local languages and English for Primary 1 to Primary 4 so that each learner received quality learning materials. The USAID/Uganda-supported SHRP and LARA projects worked with district offices to distributed teacher guides, pupil books, and supplementary reading books and materials to schools. District offices also ensure that books are being used by learners and monitor the materials to determine when replenishment is needed.

To strengthen reading instruction, teachers were trained in early grade reading methodologies and on how to support learners to fully use the books. District offices provided the lists of teachers to be trained and ensured system efficiency by guaranteeing that trained teachers were not transferred to another school or class-level. District and college education officers were also trained in the early grade methodology to ensure that the districts had the capacity to provide a large cohort of teacher trainers and coaches that could support teachers in the classroom. Teachers were trained using a cascade approach, with shorter and more frequent training and continuous professional development (CPD) sessions. This approach allowed teachers to practice and master new techniques, complemented by CPD sessions during the academic term, before building on their skills with each successive training

LARA also ensured district and teacher support and ownership of the early grade reading program by assisting with district-organized CPDs for teachers. The project, together with district and college personnel, developed a series of standardized CPD sessions and identified champion teachers to serve as trainers who could support the roll out of CPD sessions to the teachers. During these trainings, champion teachers demonstrated to fellow teachers the early grade reading methodology skills they previously learned and currently practice in their classrooms. This strengthened collaboration between the districts and colleges as coordinating center tutors (CCTs), zonal leaders, and champion teachers lead the CPDs

Photo credit: RTI International

*Early grade reading learner check.*

## COACHING AND MENTORING TEACHERS IN THE CLASSROOM

SHRP and LARA also employed another key to successful teacher professional development practice: having coaches and mentors observe teachers while they teach and provide feedback on their application of new techniques. Initially, teachers were supported by CCTs and district/area inspectors of schools. This monitoring and support supervision (MSS) exercise included reviewing lesson plans, work plans, and general school operations. LARA, following on SHRP's support supervision work, introduced various innovations to strengthen the pedagogical support teachers receive.

These innovations included observing teachers in the classroom using a pre-observation, observation, and post-observation approach. LARA and SHRP introduced simple tools to guide the observation toward the instructional practices, such as, using the "I do, we do, you do" technique; teaching according to the steps in the teacher's guide; and teaching for the entire class time. In addition, the new approach introduced constructive coaching and mentoring to help teachers (1) build their application and adherence to the steps of the early grade methodology, (2) conduct simple learner checks, and (3) carry out continuous assessments to measure learners' understanding and progress. Through this process, the system coaches provided feedback to teachers on their teaching practice. In addition, CCTs were able to monitor the progress of teachers' understanding and application of the early grade reading approach and learners' progress in learning to read.

SHRP and LARA also piloted a teacher support accountability system. District officials and CCTs were trained to use tablets loaded with the classroom observation tools, the early grade reading books, videos and other coaching tools that highlighted good teaching practices. The projects also developed a dashboard so that college and district personal could

*"The key aspect of the success of EGR methodology is assessment. Headteachers in Kakindo CC appreciated EGR program but had no exams for it. I showed them the end of term assessment in teachers' guides. I then worked with EGR teachers to come up with assessment guidelines putting emphasis on the five components of literacy."*

*Bikorwomuhangi Narsi, Kakindo CC, Sheema District*

monitor how many schools and teachers were reached by the CCTs. The system is housed in the Directorate of Standards and accessible to national-level education officers to monitor CCT and district support to teachers.

LARA also trained head teachers to fulfil their role as first-level pedagogical support to teachers and, in 15 districts, how to mentor teachers on the early grade reading program. One of the key tasks during the head teacher training was coaching head teachers how to provide consistent, regular, and efficient support to teachers.

## DISTRICT MONITORING AND SUPPORT SUPERVISION

To strengthen district monitoring of the implementation status of the early grade reading program and the progress on learning outcomes, SHRP and LARA built on existing MSS functions. The structure of the MSS activity included a 1-day planning session, three days of school visits, and a 1-day debriefing to analyze the data and plan remediation actions. The MSS exercise takes place over a 1-week period each term. An MSS district team comprises education personnel, college personnel, and district leadership. The MSS team selects the sample of schools to visit, develops tools, collects data, and debriefs on their findings.

To support the planning phase, LARA provided technical support to district officials on how to randomly select a sample of schools. The team was guided to, ideally, select 19 schools— a number that provides general findings for the district. LARA also taught district officials to use the Focused Actionable Simple (FAS) tool. The tool is populated with questions phased to have binary answers of "yes" or "no". Examples of questions include

- Have teachers been trained on the EGR method?
- Do teachers have the teacher's guide?

- Do teachers follow the teacher's guide?

Are pupils using the pupil book?

It is equally important to ensure progression on pupils' learning outcomes. Therefore, teams undertake simple learner checks using the FAS to answer the following questions

- Are learners able to identify letter sounds?
- Are learners able to read words?
- Are learners reading simple sentences?

The FAS also allows district officials to develop their own lists of questions to ask during school visits, generate evidence at school visits to support findings about the questions, and implement practical action plans to mitigate issues found. In addition to helping district officials identify issues at the schools, the FAS tool allows them to rank issues in order of priority. This way, the schools and districts can work together to first tackle the most urgent problems.

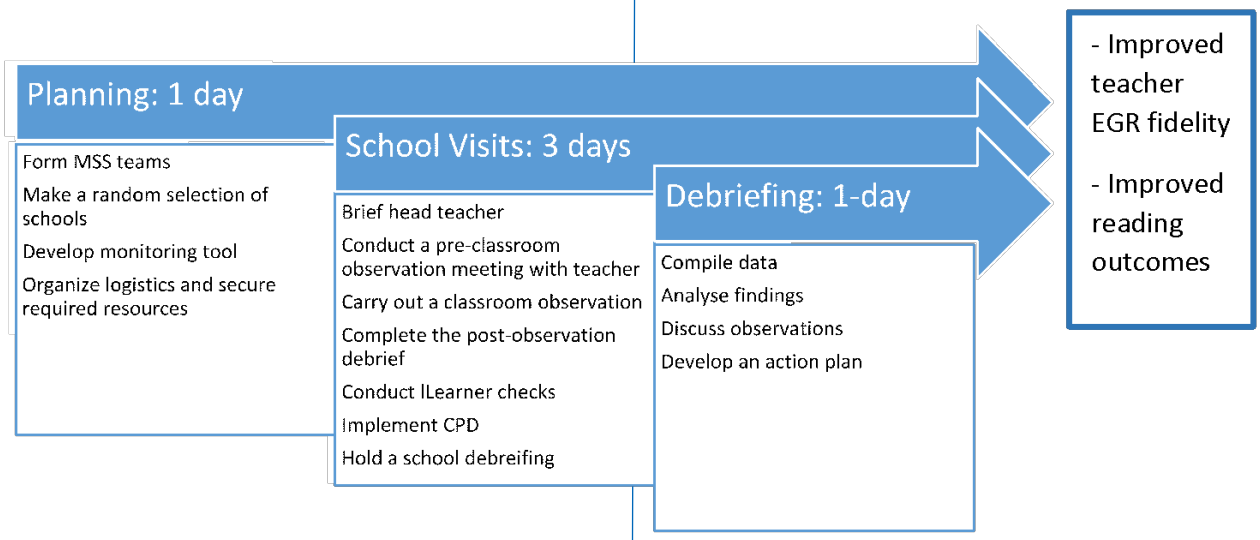
The MSS teams split into groups, with each group visiting three to four schools. At the school, the team meets with the head teacher, holds a pre-observation conference, observes the primary 1 to primary 4 teachers during a lesson, holds a post-observation session with the teacher, and conducts learner checks with a random sample of five learners. The team also conducts a CPD and an overall debriefing with the head teacher and teachers to summarize observations and discuss school actions. In many districts, champion teachers and CCTs were added to the MSS teams to support CPD delivery.

After the school visits are complete, all the MSS teams come together to tabulate their findings from the FAS data and discuss the implications for the district and colleges based on their analysis of the findings. They agree on an action plan to be undertaken during the term and, in high performing districts, the leadership

monitored the implementation of the action plan at the end of the next term.

In June 2018, Butebo district conducted a monitoring and support supervision exercise using the FAS tool. During the planning meeting, stakeholders identified 14 concerns and then ranked them from highest to lowest priority.

At a debrief meeting after the monitoring and support supervision activity, stakeholders synthesized their findings and determined three issues Butebo district needed to focus on: (1) supporting teachers to regularly prepare and follow their work schemes and lesson plans, including the EGR teacher guide steps, (2) supporting teachers to increase use of




instructional materials during the lesson, and (3) supporting head teachers to establish a school feeding program. Stakeholders brought the three items above to the attention of the district inspector of schools and their Coordinating Center Tutors. After review, the district inspector of schools and tutors promised to work with the district education office and follow-up on the identified issues. The district education leadership monitored their progress at the end of the term which informed the proceeding MSS exercise.

Initially, LARA supported the MSS activity; over time, various modifications were implemented to transition the SHRP- and LARA-introduced process to a district-led process where LARA staff observed the

districts as they organized and conducted the MSS exercise and shared good practices between districts. This allowed the districts to fulfill their pledge to provide district funding and constructive feedback to teachers. Further, this approach ensured that district education stakeholders strengthened their understanding of the early grade program efforts, teacher support, and the link between instructional practice and how learners in their district are progressing. Significantly, this approach allowed districts to analyze the issues and then focus on their chosen key priorities, thereby ensuring district buy-in and ownership of the early grade reading program.

By the start of the 2019 academic year, the majority the 74 of SHRP- and LARA-targeted districts were conducting district-led monitoring and support supervision visits in schools as part of the early grade reading program. This district-led monitoring, support, and supervision is part of SHRP and LARA's systems strengthening contribution to the Government of Uganda to build district-led accountability and ownership of early grade reading results.

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# SUCCESS STORY

## Empowering Early Grade Reading Teachers to Achieve Excellence

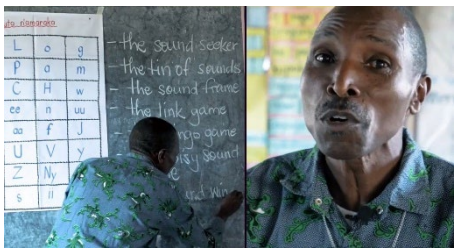


Photo credit: RTI International

*Isimbwa George William of Kakabara Coordinating Centre, Kygegwa District inspires teachers in his continuous professional development sessions to engage learners in sound games.*

Uganda, like many countries, is committed to improving the quality of its education. The country's Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) has worked to strengthen Uganda's education quality using various tactics with a key goal of ensuring that all teachers are well trained and motivated. To support Uganda in these efforts, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has worked with the MoES since 2012. The USAID/Uganda Literacy Achievement and Retention Activity (LARA; 2015–2021) took on and progressed what the USAID-funded School Health and Reading Program (SHRP; 2012–2019) started: an investment to improve early grade reading instruction. These two USAID initiatives supported 7,664 schools in 74 district, 54,000 Primary 1 to Primary 4 teachers and 4.7 million learners. LARA, following SHRP's lead, worked with Uganda's education system, including primary teacher training colleges' in-service coordinating center tutors (CCT) who are mandated to train and mentor teachers.

However, change does not come without some challenges. One main challenge was teacher workforce development, including strengthening the provision of high quality, continuous professional development (CPD). To be effective, CPD—especially as it relates to teachers' reading instruction—must start by building a solid foundation on early grade reading during teachers' college training and include classroom-level observation and coaching throughout their teaching career. To this end, LARA worked with the MoES to mitigate challenges for the advancement of teachers' development

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*Irene Wayenze (far right) a Coordinating Centre Tutor at Bugunzi CC, Sironko district conducting her engaging CPD session with teachers.*

## IMPROVE IN-SERVICE TEACHER TRAINING AND SUPPORT

The first challenge was to strengthen Uganda's in-service teacher training and support system, as well as improve teachers' fidelity to use early grade reading teaching methodologies in the local language and English. The one-off in-service training and support supervision visits used by the tutors did not adequately address the teachers' challenges. Therefore, the program worked with the teacher training colleges to provide teachers with professional development opportunities throughout the academic year. The one-time training at the beginning of the academic year was replaced with shorter, more frequent training at the beginning of each term (i.e., three trainings per academic year). Further, training was moved from residential training (i.e., training that took place in one locale in each college to coordinating centers, which were located closer to the schools. This enabled teachers to commute daily to the training site and the cost savings allowed the education system to add CPD sessions during each term so that teachers could more frequently review their application of the new techniques with other teachers and trainers.

### Improve CPD Sessions

The second challenge was to improve the quality of the CPD sessions' content. The CPD sessions lacked a standardized session format, which created inconsistencies across geographic areas, gaps in teacher knowledge, and differences in teacher uptake of the early grade reading methodology. To mitigate this, SHRP and LARA, worked with the MoES' Teacher, Instruction, Education and Training Department of the Ministry of Education, to partner with primary teacher training colleges and other reading stakeholders, such as Red Earth and Mango Tree, to develop a more systematic approach to teacher training and content delivery. Eventually, a

Photo credit: RTI International

*Teacher Brenda from Nansana Primary School was inspired to make her classroom visually engaging from lessons learnt at CPD sessions.*

*"Good working relationships have been created between teachers and CPD trainers; this motivates teachers, who now feel empowered."*

*Isimbwa George William, CCT, Kyegegwa district*

standardized, structured, CPD curriculum starter kit was developed with nine sample sessions that support the CPD content. The nine foundational CPD starter training kit includes the following sessions:

- Assessing phonemic awareness in early grade reading
- Developing a literacy rich environment
- Developing pre-reading skills
- Developing pupil talk and oral literature
- "I do, we do, you do" teaching methodology
- Making and using instructional materials to teach letter sounds
- Teaching letter sounds in the local language
- Use of words banks and word families
- The writing process for Primary 3 and 4

In addition, college staff are able to use the CPD templates to develop and add new modules based on teacher's needs. These sessions were uploaded to college servers, along with instructional videos, so that both in-service and pre-service tutors could access the content.

## Deliver CDP Sessions

The third challenge was determining the best way to deliver CPD sessions at scale. SHRP and LARA supported the training of champion teachers, CCTs, pre-service tutors, deputy principals, and other education stakeholders using a starter training kit. After being trained on the starter kit, tutors collaborated with head teachers to invite teachers to their coordinating center to take part in a CPD session and used trained champion teachers to train the Primary 1 to Primary 4 teachers in their geographic areas. CPD sessions were scaled up to include teachers in the 74 districts.

Finding the training useful, the pre-service teachers used the starter kit CPD modules to train student teachers. For example, CCTs from Kabulasoke Core Teachers' College requested the pre-service deputy principal organize another CPD session for tutors before the start of school practice.

Photo credit: RTI International

*CPD participants group words in families during a tutor training session at Butiiti Primary Teacher College.*

## PROMISING CPD RESULTS

The combination of professional development events, including regular and frequent short trainings and classroom monitoring, improved teaching in schools because they expanded teachers' skills. Teacher training fidelity improved through the training of trainers and the use of the CPD scripts. It's noteworthy that CPD content across different districts and colleges was consistent in content to ensure cohesion.

The training sessions were also important in identifying additional CPD sessions. For example, using feedback from teachers, LARA developed additional sample sessions that supported the continued standardization of the early grade reading curriculum.

Even district officials have seen the improvements in teachers' motivation and performance and are happy with the CPD sessions

Teachers were particularly interested in the CPD sessions because they taught them new skills and ideas on how to improve teaching, including the use of games for letters and sounds, word banks, and word families. Teachers were also able to review early grade reading content and identify their weaknesses, which allowed them to improve their skills all around. Through the CPD sessions, teachers reviewed and practiced the early grade reading methodology, clarified challenging steps in the process, and explored new techniques to improve their teaching practice.

Ultimately, CPD improved teachers' instruction, led to the application of child-centered classroom activities that increased learners' reading practice, and promoted the adoption of best practices that improve general learning outcomes for learners. The CPD development process is important for its role in building life-long learning for teachers and to promoting early grade reading and literacy in schools, which is critical to children's successful learning.

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# SUCCESS STORY

## Adolescents Remain Safe, Healthy, and Educated

Photo credit: RTI International

*US Ambassador talks with USAID/LARA staff on HIV programs and communications.*

Uganda has one of the highest HIV prevalence rates in the world.[27] This is true not only for adults, but also for children and adolescents. Uganda's Education Management and Information System (2016) estimates that 28,674 primary students, 5,154 secondary students and 2,816 teachers live with HIV.[28] Adolescent girls and young women (15-24 years) are at least twice as likely as their male counterparts to be living with HIV and young women under 25 years account for 90% of new HIV infection.[29] There are varying reasons for why children and youth are at such a high risk. For some, it is a result of economic, social, or cultural factors that increases their vulnerability and limit their choices. For example, adolescent girls, young women, and children experiencing poverty may be forced into transactional sex or unprotected sex for economic reasons. Other adolescents may be victims of abuse or violence that puts them at risk of contracting HIV. In fact, a 2012 Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) report revealed that 77.7% of primary students had experienced sexual violence.

To this end, the United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) support programs aimed at primary and secondary students in Uganda to combat violence and HIV prevalence. Programs like the USAID/Uganda Literacy

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[27] See https://www.avert.org/professionals/hiv-around-world/sub-saharan-africa/uganda

[28] Final Report: Summative Evaluation of GPE's Country-level Support to Education, Batch 5. Country 19: Uganda (GPE. February 2020) referencing the Education Sector Strategic Analysis (2019), page 171.

[29] Ministry of Health (MoH) Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (PMTCT) report (2019)

Photo credit: RTI International

*US Ambassador talks with USAID/LARA staff on HIV programs and communications*

*Uganda's Ministry of Education and Sports, under the Presidential Initiative on AIDS Strategy to Youth (PIASCY), partnered with USAID between 2012 and 2021 to implement innovative approaches that improve health-seeking behaviors of students in primary and secondary schools.*

*"Good working relationships have been created between teachers and CPD trainers; this motivates teachers, who now feel empowered."*

*Isimbwa George William, CCT, Kyegegwa district*

Achievement and Retention Activity (LARA; 2015–2021) and its predecessor, the School Health and Reading Program (SHRP; 2012–2019), have helped adolescents navigate daily challenges, in a non-judgmental way and help adolescent youth get the HIV prevention information they need to make informed and responsible decisions. This has led to youth and their families accepting and seeking information and services they need to stay healthy and safe. Families and communities are beginning to accept that seeking services, such as HIV testing and maintaining antiretroviral treatments, are morally positive.

As the initial USAID- and PEPFAR-supported program, SHRP helped the MoES establish sustainable mechanisms for a meaningful HIV and AIDS response within the education system and to implement effective HIV- and AIDS-prevention education in primary and post-primary schools and institutions. This included supporting the MoES to enhance the curriculum. In doing so, SHRP established a minimum package of HIV education interventions for schools through the School Family Initiative (SFI).

The SFI used an HIV awareness and information sharing approach, which addressed HIV prevention and provided peer support in a small-group setting to have guided discussions with a teacher "parent" in a safe space. Research has found that learners in mixed-aged groups develop stronger support bonds than same-age learners[30]. Thus, SFI created a support system that improved the relationship between teachers and learners by replicating a caring and supportive "family" at school. The SFI actively engaged districts in HIV education initiatives and trained teachers how to teach about and become champions for HIV prevention and the promotion of positive health-seeking behaviors.

[30] Gray, P. (2011). The special value of children's age-mixed play. American Journal American Journal of Play. 3(4), pp. 500-522. See https://cdn2.psychologytoday.com/assets/attachments/1195/ajp-age-mixing-published.pdfS

**USAID|Uganda School Health and Reading Program (2012 – 2019)**

65,524 girls received Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-free, Mentored, and Safe (DREAMS) HIV SRGBV interventions

603,647 adolescents received HIV and AIDS education

13,407 teachers and head teachers trained in HIV and AIDS prevention and school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) prevention

39,069 PIASCY manuals distributed to teachers

**Uganda|USAID Literacy Achievement and Retention Activity (2015 – 2021)**

194,307 girls (including 4,426 DREAMS girls) received HIV and GBV education

373,509 adolescents received HIV and GBV education

7,923 teachers and head teachers trained in HIV and AIDS and GBV prevention and response

408 Journeys Plus manuals distributed to teachers

265,700 mini-Journeys Plus booklets distributed to adolescents

In 2018, USAID/Uganda LARA joined SHRP's efforts, expanding to include more Ugandan youths. In addition, the program incorporated the HIV content from the SFI into its innovative Journeys Program and developed Journeys Plus and group reflection on attitudes and behaviors by using activities that teach about HIV awareness and prevention, seeking services when needed, finding support from trusted adults, and speaking out about issues that affect learners' life and future. The Journeys Plus curriculum focuses on creating and maintaining healthy relationships, preventing HIV transmission, and supporting people living with HIV to seek health services needed to stay healthy.

Journeys Plus supports adolescents to build their social and emotional skills, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, healthy relationships, and responsible decision making. These skills build adolescents' resiliency and agency to protect themselves and others and to seek the assistance when they feel unsafe or need advice and support.

Learners receive their own booklets with contact information for local counselors, health professionals, and community development officers

Within Journeys, children, teachers, and community members are taught the link between violence prevention and response. LARA trained teacher patrons to facilitate Journeys dialogues and collective actions with mixed-age groups once a week as an extra-curricular activity.

This program has encouraged children to open up to their teachers about their problems so that they can make better, more informed choices without fear of judgement. Schools that participate in Journeys have the foundation necessary to build learner agency and create a safe environment. Teachers and pupils who participated in Journeys activities found it easy to understand and put into practice

*Michael is an HIV-positive orphan from Kanungu district. He was constantly beaten by his teachers for missing school and mistreated and verbally abused at home by his grandmother who felt that he was a burden. Michael eventually decided to drop out of school and began to spend his days with cattle keepers. A LARA trained teacher who knew about Michael's HIV status alerted the school administration about Michael's situation. The school administration visited Michael's home and had a discussion with his grandmother about how he could enroll in their school and safely return to school. Michael expressed the emotional distress he suffered because of the violence he experienced both at home and in his school and agreed to join the LARA-supported school. His grandmother and teachers agreed to support him when he needed to pick his medication and give him the emotional support he needed to stay in school. Michael's new school implements the Journeys Plus program and is working hard to create a positive and supportive school for all learners.*

*Mary, a primary 6 student from an impoverished family, had taken up employment as a dancer at the local community night clubs. Because of the awareness created by Journeys, Mary's classmates talked to teachers at their school who then discreetly looked into the situation, without placing blame on Mary. The teacher and the head teacher visited Mary's home and convinced her family to allow her to become a boarding student. This way, Mary would receive regular meals, supervision, and care. Mary was happy with the decision and is working hard to finish school in a safe and positive school environment.*

prevention and response activities and support each other. Journeys Plus prepared teachers to identify and support children affected by HIV. The programs also showed teachers how to be empathetic, supportive, and caring.

Teachers and learners have benefited from the USAID-funded interventions provided through the programs, especially as each program involved the MoES to advance the content and ensure that it responded to the needs of Ugandan children and youth—especially in protecting and responding to them. SFI and Journeys Plus each strengthen learners' knowledge about social and emotional skills to reduce violence, decrease their risk of HIV infection, and seek help when needed. Together, these approaches have enabled children, teachers, families, and communities to build partnerships and create meaningful examples of how positive, supportive, and safe school environments can be successfully achieved in Uganda

<<End>>

Photo credit: RTI International

*Lwemiyaga Sembabule students take part in LARA Journeys activity on teenage pregnancy*

*St Kizito Nalinnya Primary School, Kanungy District. [Top left and Bottom] pupils undertaking Journeys activities to increase their agency for decision making. [Top Right] Teachers and school staff convene to undertake reflection activities with the aim of reducing violence in schools. Photo credit: RTI International.*


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# Learning is fundamentally emotional and, therefore, social

Learning is fundamentally emotional.[1] Because learning is emotional, the social characteristics of schools and classrooms can catalyze or seriously impede learning. In fact, some scholars, such as John Schindler and his colleagues from California State University, suggest that the characteristics of school life—the school and classroom culture and climate—may be the single most predictive factor in any school's capacity to promote student achievement.[2]

> "… school climate may be the single most predictive factor in any school's capacity to promote student achievement…"
>
> — *Schindler et al., 2016*

**School culture has to do with the underpinning values and norms—either spoken or unspoken—that drive the way school personnel, managers, and students approach their responsibilities and the way in which they interact with each other.**

**School climate is how the behaviors and relationships of individuals in the school translate into the "feel" of being in the school or the characterization of life at school.** —*Kane, et al., 2016*

Where there is a positive school and classroom climate learners feel cared about and encouraged and have a sense of connection to their school. They are happy to come to school every day without fear of bullying or humiliation in the classroom. Teachers may not have all the materials and resources they need, but they are committed to teaching and feel responsible for their students' learning and wellbeing. When the culture of a school focuses on wellbeing and social and emotional learning (SEL), as well as academic learning, school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) is not likely to survive or thrive.

Research has shown that in Uganda, the learning environment is not always positive, and children of all ages experience violence. Findings from USAID/Uganda Literacy Achievement and Retention Activity (LARA or "the project") in 2016 and 2018 indicated that from one-third to one-half of Primary 2, Primary 3, and Primary 5 pupils feel that not all pupils in their schools are treated equally by their fellow pupils or teachers and that some children, such as those with disabilities or in minority groups, are treated unkindly. Pupils, they say, worry and miss school because they might be bullied by fellow classmates or beaten by teachers.

Furthermore, findings from 2016 showed that children with disabilities had significantly lower perceptions of the school climate than students who did not have a disability.

**Children with disabilities were more likely to agree with the following than children without disabilities (item comparisons, $p<0.005$):**

- **Boys and girls are not very nice to each other**
- **Pupils treat pupils with disabilities unkindly**
- **Teachers are unkind to children who have a disability**
- **Pupils are punished too much for little things**
- **Pupils are sometimes afraid to go to school for fear of punishment**
- **Violence is a problem**
- **Pupils often worry that other pupils might be mean to them**
- **Pupils often threaten and call other pupils names**
- **School officials do not do anything when pupils hurt other pupils**

[1] Immordino-Yang, M.H. (2018). *Emotions, learning, and the brain: Exploring the educational implications of affective neuroscience.* W.W. Norton & Company.

[2] Schindler, J., Jones, A., Williams, A.D., Taylor, C., & Cardenas, H. (2016, Summer). The school climate--Achievement connection: If we want achievement gains, we need to begin by improving the climate. *Journal of School Administration Research and Development, 1*(1), 9-16.

Findings from LARA's 2016 and 2018 baselines indicated that over 95% of pupils in Primary 2, 3, and 5 experienced bullying one or more times in a school term, 88% experienced some form of harsh punishment, and 45% or more of boys and girls experienced sexual violence. Most children have reported experiencing these adverse events multiple times in a school term, not just once. Orphans and children with disabilities are at higher risk of experiencing some forms of SRGBV. Children with disabilities reported significantly higher levels of sexual violence than children who do not have a disability ($p<0.05$). Orphans experienced higher levels of bullying and corporal punishment than non-orphans ($p<0.01$). Violence in schools negatively impacts a students' social and emotional development and impedes learning. Therefore, it is likely that many of Uganda's learners are not reaching their potential because of the violence they experience in or around their schools, especially vulnerable children such as those who are orphaned or who have a disability.

### Response

If life at school is characterized by a positive and supportive school climate, a violence free environment, and effective instruction, then students enjoy learning and participate in class without fear of humiliation or punishment, remain in school throughout the primary cycle, and succeed in their schoolwork..

LARA's Theory of Change places school climate in a central role for improved reading and retention.

With aims to promote, a positive learning environment, eliminate violence in schools, and increase retention, the Journeys intervention is based on an awareness-based system change model. It engages teaching and non-teaching school staff, community members, and pupils in a variety of activities that promote reflection and discussion about the intersection between a caring and supportive learning environment, positive social and emotional growth and development, and learning outcomes.

In 2018, the project embarked on a mixed methods study to evaluate the tenability of this hypothesis and the impact of Journeys in establishing positive and violence-free schools and improving retention and early grade reading (EGR) outcomes. In this study, project schools participated in both Journeys (see above) and also LARA's EGR intervention.

**Journeys Impact**

## STUDY DESIGN

The study sought to develop an understanding of improvements in reading, retention, and violence experience (i.e., bullying, corporal punishment, and sexual violence) in relation to school climate, attitudes about gender norms, and social and emotional learning. Our original design—a first of its kind—involved tracking these measures across three years of a learner's primary school cycle, from Primary 2 to Primary 5; however, the study was cut short due to the COVID-19 school closings. The findings presented in this brief are, therefore, based on repeated measures collected from the same learners in Primary 2 (P2) and, again, in Primary 3 (P3).

**First of its kind**

Never before in a low to middle income country has there been longitudinal data that allows the investigation of age-related growth of violence experience and reading outcomes in primary schools and the influence of known mediating factors of these outcomes – school climate, gender discriminating attitudes and student social and emotional.

## FINDINGS

### Early Grade Reading and Retention

The gains in oral reading fluency (ORF) from P2 to P3 were significantly higher for pupils in project versus the control schools, 10.6 words per minute vs. 6.39 [WPM], $p>.001$, reflecting a medium effect size for the difference in gains (0.385). The greatest advantage for pupils in the project over control schools were those who were low readers by the end of P2. A significantly higher percentage of pupils in the project schools versus control schools demonstrated shifts from low reading proficiency at the end of P2 to emergent or fluent reading proficiency at the end of P3 (63% versus 48%). Pupils in both project and control schools who could not read one word at the end of P2 were less likely to progress to higher levels of reading proficiency than if they could at read at least 1–10 words.

**Longitudinal Design**

- Schools **47** project **40** control (random assignment)
- Random Selection: **15** pupils/school
- Planned **P2–P5** (2018–2021)
- Actual **P2–P3** (2018, 2019)

**Variables**

- Perceptions of school climate
- Attitudes about gender norms
- SRGBV experience in term
  - Bullying
  - Corporal punishment
  - Sexual violence
- SEL
- Reading fluency, comprehension

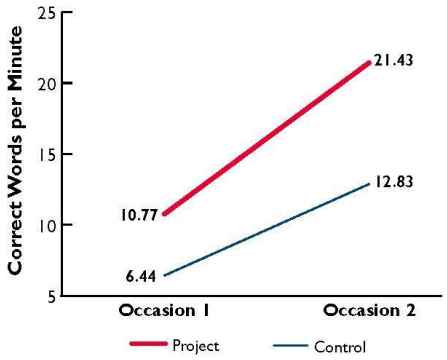
**Focus Group Discussions**

- 9 treatment schools
- 36 teachers
- 9 head teachers
- 18 Journeys facilitators
- 54 P5–P6 pupils

**Open-Ended Survey Questions**

- 47 project schools
- 94 teacher interviews

**Oral Reading Fluency**



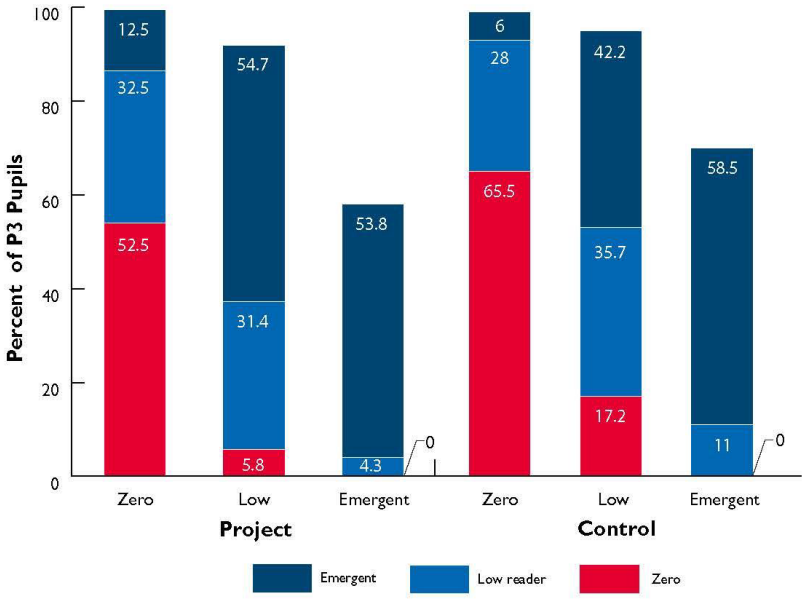

This underscores the critical importance of helping children achieve, minimally, the ability to read some words by the end of P2.

## School Climate

Based on a school climate survey, children exposed to one year of Journeys showed, on average, a slightly larger positive shift in their perceptions of certain general attributes of school climate, such as friendliness, equal and fair treatment of pupils, and safety, than the controls. The effect size was very small (0.137), however, and the difference in differences test was not statistically significant.

Qualitative data from focus group discussions (FGD) with pupils and teachers suggested that there had been improvements in certain attributes of the school climate since Journeys was initiated. Pupils had become kinder to each other and teachers friendlier, pupils said. Teachers reported that they listened more to pupils and that their increased understanding of pupils led to less frequent use of corporal punishment.

**Pupil Shifts in Reading Proficiency Levels from P2 to P3**

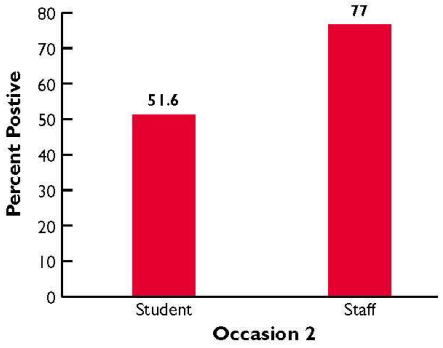


Even though pupils and teachers alike reported that schools were friendlier and safer as a result of Journeys, pupils still viewed their schools as places to be feared due to bullying and corporal punishment. On average, about half of pupil responses on the School Climate Survey suggested that children were afraid of being bullied by their peers, that caning was common in their school, and that children stayed home for fear of harsh punishment. Staff were less inclined to agree that fear of bullying and harsh punishment were a problem. On average, only about 25% of teacher responses reflected beliefs that students were fearful of violence and caning, compared to 48% of pupil responses. These fears or direct experience of violence impede student's sense of belonging, safety, and ability to focus on school tasks. When children do not feel safe at school, their achievement is negatively impacted.[1,2]

## Experience of SRGBV

As mentioned earlier in this brief, all forms of SRGBV are experienced at disturbingly high rates by children in Uganda's primary schools. Almost all pupils in the study (over 90%) reported experiencing bullying and corporal punishment at least once in a term and the majority (over 50%) experience these forms of violence multiple times. Both boys and girls as young as P2 experience a variety of acts of sexual violence, including being spied on; clothing pulled to display nudity; being forced to look at nude pictures; being touched on the breast, buttocks, or genitals or forced to touch others' sensitive areas;, or a forced unwanted kiss. From 45%–55% of pupils in P2, P3, and P5 report experiencing at least one act of sexual violence in a school term and from 16%–29% report multiple incidents of sexual violence in a term. Even with this information, a recent study using alternative methods of data collection suggested that sexual violence experience among these young children is often under reported. Maitri Punjabi and her colleagues at RTI International (2021)[3] showed that when the full anonymity of respondents was guaranteed using audio-computer assisted self-interviews (ACASI), levels of reporting different acts of sexual violence double, if not triple, which suggests that alarming levels of sexual violence occur among boys and girls in the early primary grades in Uganda.

**Pupil and Staff Perception of Fearfulness of Violence and Punishment**

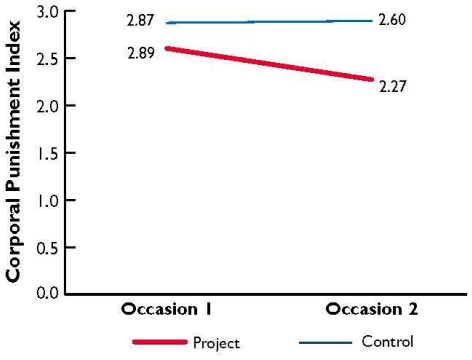



Findings from this study and the LARA 2016 SRGBV baseline study indicated that reported experience of corporal punishment, bullying, and sexual violence decreases from P2 to P5. For P5 only, the extent of sexual violence that was higher was in P5, but not P2 or P3.

### Did the Journeys intervention serve to reduce the prevalence of SRGBV in Uganda's primary schools?

**Corporal punishment**. SRGBV index scores measure the extent to which pupils experience different forms of SRGBV. A difference-in-differences analysis showed a slightly larger drop in corporal punishment for pupils in project versus controls schools, but the effect size was very small at 0.16 and statistical significance was achieved only at the .10 level (p=0.059). School-level prevalence data, however, suggests that Journeys is serving to reduce corporal punishment, with more project than control schools showing a drop in corporal punishment prevalence (48% versus 26%; p>0.012).

**Schools with Decreased Corporal Punishment**




[1] Kibriya, S., Tkach, B., Ahn, J., Valdez Gonzalez, N., Xu, Z., & Zhang, Y. (2016). *The effects of school-related gender-based violence on academic performance. Evidence from Botswana, Ghana, and South Africa.* USAID.

[2] Kabriya, S., Zhou, S., Zhang, Y., & Fatema, N. (2018). *The effects of school safety on academic achievement: Evidence from Rwanda, Tanzania, and Zambia.* USAID

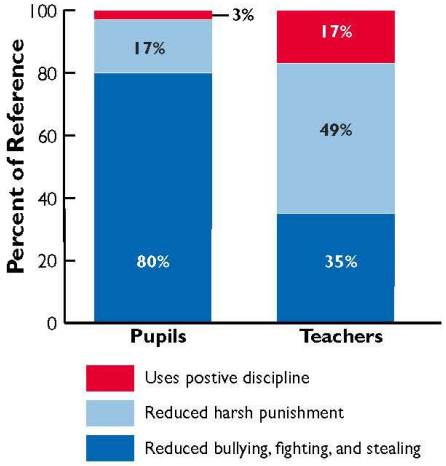
[3] Punjabi, M., Norman, J., Edwards, L., & Muyingo, P. (In press). Audio Computer-Assisted Self-Interview (ACASI): *Surveys of a sensitive nature require a sensitive method of data collection: A study from Uganda.* RTI Press.

When teachers and pupils discussed changes in violence since Journeys was introduced during FGDs, 66% of the teachers' comments and 20% of the pupils comments noted reduced use of caning and other forms of harsh punishment. Students reported that they were no longer afraid of teachers and teachers discussed how they take pride in listening to their pupils and talking through issues together. Overall, the quantitative findings, combined with the qualitative, suggest that the Journeys intervention reduces the degree to which corporal punishment is used in the classroom.

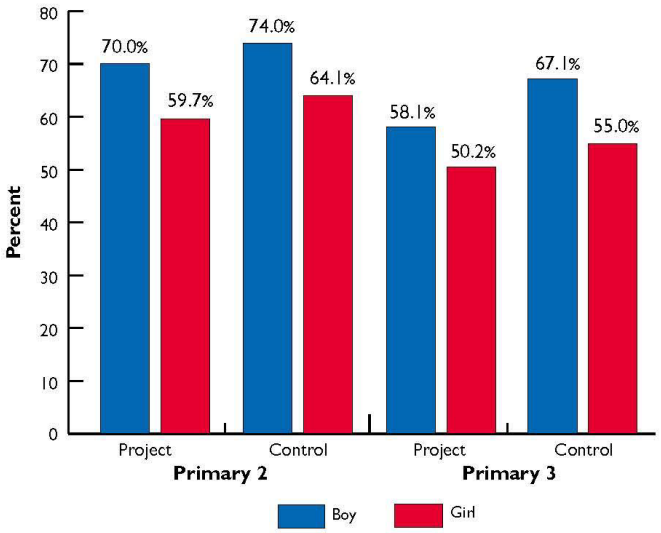
**How is corporal punishment experienced differently for boys and girls and does the Journeys intervention have a differential impact on girls and boys?**

More boys than girls experienced repetitive incidents of corporal punishment. This was true for pupils in P2 and P3 and in project and control schools. However, only in the project schools was there a statistically significant decrease in the proportion of boys and girls who experienced corporal punishment multiple times: from P2 to P3. These findings reinforce the findings above that Journeys does influence a reduction in the use of corporal punishment in school.

**Findings on Changes in SRGBV Attributed to Journeys: FGD references made to different forms.**




**Percent of Pupils who Experienced Corporal Punishment Multiple Times in a Term**




**Harsh Punishment**

*"I always used to walk with a cane, bark [at], and threaten children which was causing a lot of fear among the learners. But now with Journeys, I counsel and guide them and now am looked at [like a] father and they are now open to tell me their problems, which we solve together."*

—Teacher

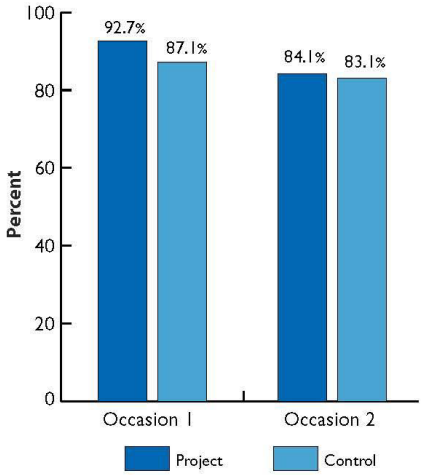
### Bullying

Bullying experience dropped from P2 to P3 as an effect of age, but the difference-in-difference analysis results failed to show a significant advantage for project schools. During the FGDs, teachers and pupils all mentioned that in the past year since Journeys began, incidents of bullying, fighting, and stealing had declined. Out of comments about school changes in violence, 80% of the pupils' and 35% of the teachers' comments referenced a reduction in bullying. Pupils fought less and were kinder to their fellow classmates, they said, and refrained from name-calling and using abusive language with each other. Pupils pointed out that these changes were especially noticeable among older and younger pupils.

### How is bullying experienced differently for boys and girls and does the Journeys intervention have a differential impact on boys and girls?

In the project schools only, the proportion of boys (not girls) who experienced bullying multiple times in a term significantly dropped after one year of Journeys (93% in Grade 2 to 84% in Grade 3, $p < 0.008$). This decrease in prevalence was more than twice as much as that observed among boys in the control schools.

**Percent of Boys who Report Experiencing Bullying Multiple Times in a Term: Project and Control Schools**




### Sexual violence

Consistent with other forms of violence, pupils in both project and control schools demonstrated a drop in reported experience of sexual violence from P2 to P3. The difference-in-differences analysis did not show any significant differences in the changes from P2 to P3 between the project and control schools, suggesting an age effect for sexual violence experience.

### Bullying

*"Before the introduction of Journeys program learners at this school used to fight regularly, in a term the school would receive more than 20 cases of children fighting amongst themselves but after the implementation of journeys these cases of children fighting have greatly decreased. In this term alone they have received about only 3 cases of children fighting."*

—Teacher

*"A boy was disturbing me, and I didn't want to come to school. He was bullying me, kick [kicked] my bag when UKU started. Now this boy stopped bothering me because the people were talking about their fears and I think this is because of the UKU."* —Grade 5 Pupil

### The challenge in measuring impact of violence-prevention programs

One of the goals of any violence-prevention intervention is to increase reporting. Violence can only be prevented if individuals are able talk about and feel safe in reporting. Increased reporting–though desirable–makes it difficult to gauge and compare shifts in actual violence experience. Assuming that all children would be more likely to report their violence experience truthfully using the ACASI method because of anonymity, adopting this method may be one way to mitigate this challenge in violence prevention efficacy studies.

RTI International investigated the validity of using an alternative method of data collection, the ACASI method. Findings showed that this approach yielded substantially higher reporting of sexual harassment and assault experience among Grade 3 with 34% more pupils reporting sexual violence under the condition of autonomy given by the ACASI method. *Punjabi, M., et al., 2021*

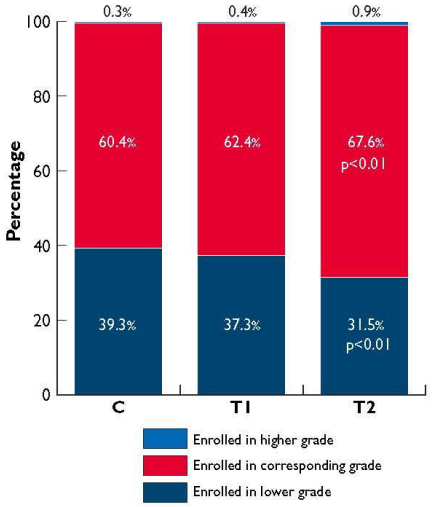
### Attitudes about Gender Norms

On average, pupils' responses at P3 were more favorable toward gender equality than at P2. This was considered an age affect rather than attributable to the Journeys program because both pupils in project and control schools demonstrated this trend. Improvement is needed to build a better understanding about gender discriminating norms and the implications these have on the lives of children. The majority of children still uphold many of the gender stereotypes that present a barrier to education.

## Retention

According to mid-term evaluation findings from NORC, pupils who had participated in both Journeys and the EGR support (see T2 in graph below) were significantly ($p<0.01$) more likely to be promoted to the next grade rather than repeating a grade when compared to pupils who participated in only the EGR support (see T1 in graph below) or were in control schools.

**Promotion and Repetion: Group Comparison**




## Recommendations

### Reading

Ensure all learners achieve at least a minimum level of reading proficiency by the end of P2 to be able to read some words independently—even if it involves investing in remedial reading programs for non-readers during P2

### School and Classroom Climate

The characteristics of school climate matter. Use pupil data about fears of violence and harsh punishment to enlighten teachers about the way these fears impede learning. Focus on building positive inter-personal relationships between and among teachers and students to build a sense of belonging and confidence, trust, and more open expression.

### Pupil Relationships

*"....teachers at school started to notice that learners of the early grade class started to make friends with learners in the higher classes which was rather very rare until journeys was introduced."* —Teacher

*"Before UKU, learners did not support each other because if you were a smart learner you didn't want others to be as smart as you, but now they help others."* —Pupil

### Trust and Freedom to Speak Openly

*"Before Journeys pupils in the school used to fear their teachers. If they had an issue, they would keep it to themselves. Even in class few children participated actively but after Journeys children gained confidence and are more free with their teachers. Participation in class has increased."* —Teacher

### Gender Attitudes

Provide safe places for sharing ideas and build on the Journeys activities to provide more opportunities for staff, pupils, and community members to reflect and discuss gender discriminating norms and how these can lead to violence and unequal opportunities for boys and girls.

### Social and Emotional Learning

SEL and school climate are interdependent. Integrating SEL into all aspects of teaching and learning supports pupils positive social and emotional growth and development and also reinforces a positive school climate.

### Preventing SRGBV

SRGBV cannot survive or thrive in a school that is positive, caring, and supportive. Thus, the collective will and agency of all individuals in the school to build a positive, supportive, and violence-free learning environment is the first step toward eliminating SRGBV. Reflection and dialogue about SRGBV, school projects to improve the school climate and prevent SRGBV, and school and community partnering to identify and respond to children who experience violence should be built into a school culture that places wellbeing front and center.

**For more information:** USAID/Uganda Literacy Achievement and Retention Activity
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## Annex 3: Resource Pack

The resource pack is the result of six years of collaboration between the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and RTI International, which implemented the USAID/Uganda Literacy Achievement and Retention Activity (LARA).

The resource pack is a compilation of key documents produced under the USAID/Uganda Literacy Achievement and Retention Activity (LARA). The pack provides a list of selected knowledge products, an abstract for each product, and an electronic link to the document.

Users can easily access and use documents, such the early grade reading (EGR) teaching and learning materials (Primary 1–4 Teacher's Guide and Pupil Books), the four Journeys activity handbooks, training materials and facilitator guides, EGR and school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) assessment instruments, support supervision tools, and key technical briefs. Some documents, such as teaching and learning materials and training guides, will be useful as stand-alone resources. Others, such as assessment instruments and support supervision tools, will be useful as templates for future work.

The resource pack can be found at the following link on the DEC:

https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/b495cc26daa64c69aa8ce41edf0a6ee1.pdf