



Technical Brief

THE ROLE OF WORLD VISION ZAMBIA'S READING CAMPS IN ENHANCING LITERACY LEARNING AMONG CHILDREN IN ZAMBIAN RURAL COMMUNITIES

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Background

The Ministry of Education (MoE) has made respectable gains in education in recent years, especially in providing equal access to schooling. In 2018, the gender parity index¹ for boys and girls in grades 1 to 7 was 1.02 compared to 0.97 in 2011. Zambia has also achieved near-universal primary school completion with a grade 7 completion rate of 97.3% (Education Statistical Bulletin, 2018). As a signatory to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Zambia ascribes to goal number 4, addressing quality education². However, the provision of quality education continues to be a challenge. For



Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

example, as of 2014, the government had not reached its target of an average score of 40% in

language and math in either Grade 5 or Grade 9³. Further, the 2018 World Development report indicated that 58% of assessed grade 2 learners in Zambia could not read a single word when given short texts⁴.

On the other hand, the USAID Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) baseline report of 2019 revealed that only 10.2% of grade 2 learners read with comprehension compared to the national benchmark of 40%. World Vision Zambia supports the Ministry of Education's Primary Literacy Programme by implementing the Zambia Reading for Education and Development Technical Programme (ZREAD TP) in 32 districts in 7 provinces of Zambia, namely Central, Eastern, Lusaka, Muchinga, North-Western, Southern, and Western. The programme aims to "Improve literacy for 140,000 girls and boys in grades 1-4 by 2025".

Technical Approaches

The World Vision Zambia Reading for Education and Development Technical Programme implements an innovative, evidence-based model called Unlock Literacy (UL) used for literacy enhancement. Nations currently implementing the UL model in Africa include Malawi, South Africa, Rwanda, Mozambique, Ethiopia and Zimbabwe. The UL model consists of three components, namely; (i) Learner Assessments which focus on using assessments to identify

gaps and measure students' literacy levels in the five core reading skills (ii) Teacher Training – which provides an action-reflection experience for teachers to learn more about pedagogical practices in teaching the five core reading skills in line with the Zambian National Education Curriculum and the Primary Literacy Program (PLP), (iii) Community Action – mobilizing communities to support children's reading, and material creation – to better engage children in their learning.

¹Gender Parity Index is the ratio of female to male pupils. A GPI lower than one (1) means that there are more males than females attending school.

²Zambia Sustainable Development Goals Voluntary National Review.

³Zambia's Grade 5 National Assessment Survey Report for 2014.

⁴The World Development Report.

The focus of this Technical brief is the Community Action component for the period 2016 to 2021. The Community Action comprises two main parts, i.e. the Reading camps and the Reading Awareness workshops provided for parents and Reading camp facilitators. Reading camps are informal literacy sessions held over the weekend in the communities that provide a safe and fun environment for children to explore reading and writing in Grades 1-4, usually from 7-11 years old. In some cases, out-of-school children have also joined the Reading camps. Reading camp sessions are facilitated by volunteers called Reading Camp Facilitators (RCFs) trained by MoE Trainer of Trainers (ToTs) from the Directorate of Open Distance Learning to offer essential literacy support to children in the communities. Reading camps are designed to be fun learning sessions to complement what children learn in school and to help them develop a love for reading. A Reading camp comprises two (2) facilitators and, on average, 45 children. The RCFs follow a simple 90 minutes Reading camp agenda through which the five core literacy skills are taught to the children. A generic agenda for the Reading camp consists of; (i) Song time, (ii) Story-time, (iii) Activity time, (iv) Make and Take and (v) Journaling. Journal writing encourages reflection, comprehension and writing skills, while Make & Take further strengthens children's literacy skills by producing learning materials they can take home to their Reading corners⁵. By September 2021, World Vision Zambia had established 1,026 Reading camps.

Further, World Vision Zambia, in collaboration with MoE District Education Board Office (DEBO), has supported producing 65,200 Work cards with associated marking keys (the content of work cards has been drawn from the learners' curriculum). The development of work cards was necessitated to support continued literacy and learners' access to various reading materials in the Reading camps.

World Vision Zambia further supports the production of simple storybooks for children, developed from stories written by teachers, community members and children. For example, Nyimba and Chongwe districts produced 9,000+ one-pager stories, and WVZ worked with the District Education Boards to develop 13 titles of storybooks, which were approved by the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) and are currently used in Reading camps and schools.

To enhance the commitment of Reading camp facilitators who work as volunteers, the ZREAD Technical Program integrates with the Livelihood Technical Program to link the facilitators to livelihood activities and train them in financial literacy skills and Savings. This provides Reading camp facilitators with an opportunity to earn income.

To make Reading camps more effective and solicit parental involvement, World Vision Zambia has conducted Reading Awareness Workshops (RAWs) for community members. As a result, by 2021, World Vision Zambia had trained 7,856 parents/guardians supporting literacy learning for their children.

Outcomes of the Interventions

The creation of Reading camps has accorded children in rural communities an opportunity to acquire reading skills through fun and enjoyable activities. The children enjoy using their familiar language as they learn and actualize various literacy concepts. Teachers and Reading camp facilitators have lent out Work cards to 31,923 children. This approach has proved effective as it allows learners to read age-appropriate material.

Further, children's interest in reading the locally-produced stories has increased as they read about familiar places, animals and names from the one-pager stories developed locally.

There is increased interest among children to borrow books for reading from Reading camps. In addition, when a child returns a book, the RCFs ask comprehension questions to assess comprehension levels before a child borrows another book. The book borrowing exercise has helped retain

children's interest in reading. It has also enhanced home learning as parents, through the Reading Awareness Workshops (RAWs), have been trained to mentor their children in reading.

As a result of the RAWs, parents and guardians created Reading corners in their homes where children displayed what they learned at the Reading camps. In addition, parents and guardians who have gone through RAW have produced 16,254 local stories in five local languages as part of the reading materials for children in districts supported by World Vision Zambia.

“Having a reading corner in the house helps me to continue teaching my children at home. Even when schools go on recess, my children continue to learn from the house. I am now both a mother and a teacher in my house and our house is also a classroom”
(Masuka Zuze)

⁵A Reading corner is a dedicated place in the home where parents display reading materials for their children to read.



Regarding Reading camps that meet implementation standards, the World Vision Zambia evaluation of 2021 showed that 51% met both physical and quality standards. Physical standards entail having handwashing facilities, safe drinking water, accessible toilets, minimal distractions, session schedule and Safe Ground. Reading camps that met quality standards had facilities such as sufficient attendance of at least 20 children, a print-rich environment and story-time done with quality (World Vision evaluation report, 2021).

Further, results showed that 54% only met the quality standards, while 53.3% only met the physical criteria. In 2021, Reading Camps were also accessed by 680 out-of-school children. Of that number, 268 were mainstreamed back into regular schools.

Local leaders have embraced the Reading Camp programmes and have taken an active role in advocating for the creation of Reading camps without the involvement of World Vision Zambia. World Vision Zambia's position remains with

Limitations and Challenges

Despite the positive gains achieved in having Reading Camps, several challenges and gaps were identified. The notable ones are detailed below:

- High illiteracy levels among parents/caregivers in the communities hinder full support to their children's literacy learning at home.
- Most Reading camps have more than the required number of 45 children hence compromising the sessions of Reading camps.
- The lack of community support to provide mats for children to sit on at a Reading camp continues to be a challenge.

Opportunities

There are a lot of opportunities that can be derived from Reading camps. The following are areas to be considered in collaboration with partners:

- As Reading Camps have positive literacy gains among children, especially in rural areas, the Ministry of Education can adopt the programme as part of the Ministry's literacy programme to be implemented beyond World Vision Zambia's existence in communities. This will ensure that children benefit from literacy programmes long after World Vision Zambia exit the communities.

supporting communities that have created Reading camps on their own to meet physical and quality standards.

Furthermore, the indicator below shows a five-year upward involvement of parents in their children's literacy activities in the communities of intervention.

Indicator measured	Baseline (2017)	End line (2021)	Change
Proportion of parents and caregivers who promote learning and Reading	17.6	24.8	7.2

From a programmatic perspective of the ZREAD interventions supporting the MoE Primary Literacy Programme (PLP), there have been some gains regarding grade 3 learners' reading with comprehension. For example, while the baseline conducted in 2017 found that 12.5% of grade 3 children could read with comprehension, the evaluation of 2021 showed a marked increase of grade 3 children reading with comprehension at 25.2%. The case of Nyimba district of Eastern province was even more impressive, showing 41.7% of grade 3 children who could read with comprehension.

The positive results in World Vision Zambia supported intervention areas indicate that Reading camps and parental involvement in literacy programmes created a rich home literacy environment, contributing to children's ability to read with comprehension. Nonetheless, World Vision Zambia intends to strengthen the collaboration with MoE regarding community interventions by ensuring that schools support Reading camps. World Vision Zambia further wants to work with other organizations to support the creation of Reading camps in non World Vision Zambia intervention areas.

- With concerted efforts from all stakeholders, i.e. community and MoE, Reading camps have the potential to contribute to improved literacy levels for children.
- Reading camps can also serve as platforms to strengthen emergent literacy for children in Early Childhood Education (ECE).

Our Call to Action

- MoE should revamp adult literacy classes. This will help address the challenge of high illiteracy among rural parents to support their children's literacy learning effectively.
- The community and local leadership should ensure that all Reading camps meet prescribed minimal standards such as having hand wash facilities, safe drinking water, accessible toilets, minimal distractions, session schedule, safe ground, sufficient attendance by children, a print-rich environment and story-time done with quality.
- For the continuity of Reading camps, the community and local leadership should continue supporting Reading camp facilitators with a stipend or gift to continue working as volunteers.
- NGOs and other implementing partners in the education sector should adopt the Reading camp concept and expand to areas of their operation where World Vision Zambia is absent.

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