Multi-Country Review of World Vision's Unlock Literacy Programme

A new analysis of Unlock Literacy's pilot programming data from twelve countries explores programme impact, operational lessons, and discusses the way forward for effective and impactful early grade reading programming.

The report was authored by Lisa Zook, Cameron Ryall, and Billi Shaner of InformEd International.

World Vision

Introduction

From 2012-2016, World Vision piloted the Unlock Literacy project model, which aims to improve reading outcomes for early grade learners in developing countries. Through implementation in twelve countries (see Figure 1), World Vision gathered rigorous monitoring and evaluation data which is reflected upon and analysed at a cross-country level in this report to answer the question:

**What have we learned about implementing
early grade reading programmes for the most vulnerable children?**

This summary document presents the conclusions of that analysis and how the findings should be used to inform programming moving forward.

**Countries that undertook
Unlock Literacy pilot
programming include:**

- **Bangladesh**
- **Burundi**
- **DRC**
- **Eswatini**
- **Ethiopia**
- **Ghana**
- **India**
- **Kenya**
- **Malawi**
- **Nepal**
- **Rwanda**
- **Senegal**

Key Findings

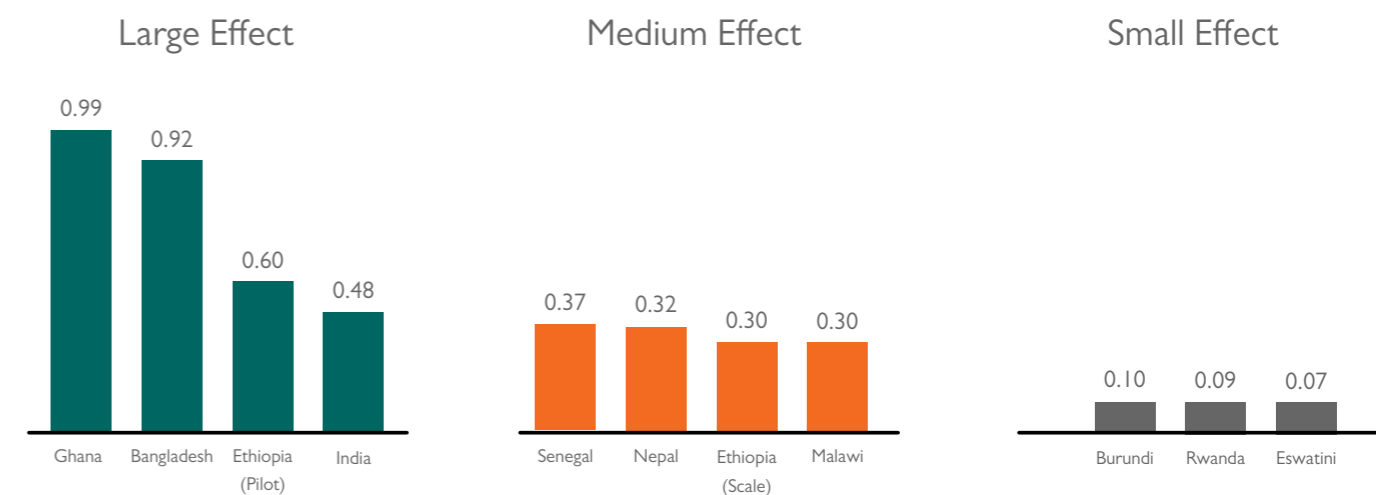## Unlock Literacy has had substantial impact on reading outcomes.

Unlock Literacy programming defines success as positively impacting reading outcomes. The cross-country analysis examined early grade reading assessment data from ten of the twelve pilot countries and compared observed impact against a World Bank benchmark of 0.25 standard deviations, which are substantively important. This is equal to nearly 4 months of learning in Grade 2, slightly more than 6 months in Grade 3, and nearly 6 months in Grade 4. Seven of the ten pilot programmes had substantive impact, beyond the 0.25 SD benchmark. These findings were generally consistent across reading sub-tests, showing that within a country, impact was observed across reading tasks of varying difficulty level.

As measured by effect size, countries fell into three categories of effect: large (average effect size of 0.48 to 0.99 SDs), medium (average effect size of 0.30 to 0.37 SDs), and small (average effect size of 0.07 to 0.10 SDs). To guide the suggestions outlined in this report, programme design and implementation are viewed considering these categories.

In countries with particularly strong effect sizes, students received at least the equivalent of an additional year of learning.

AVERAGE EFFECT SIZE ACROSS READING OUTCOMES

Large Effect				Medium Effect				Small Effect		
0.99	0.92	0.60	0.48	0.37	0.32	0.30	0.30	0.10	0.09	0.07
Ghana	Bangladesh	Ethiopia (Pilot)	India	Senegal	Nepal	Ethiopia (Scale)	Malawi	Burundi	Rwanda	Eswatini

The impact of Unlock Literacy programming on reading outcomes was examined alongside equity dimensions of sex, socio-economic status, home literacy environment, ethnicity/caste, home language, early childhood education, and chore/workload. Nepal is highlighted in the cross-country analysis as one programme that successfully identified and addressed baseline inequities of caste through local language adaptions in their programming. In other countries, the analysis found that many of the disparities identified at baseline lessened within both the intervention and comparison sites; suggesting that general schooling acted as an equalizer within many of these communities.

The pilot programmes had mixed results in terms of addressing educational inequities.

A child's home literacy environment was examined by two measures: a child's access to reading materials in the home and his/her engagement in reading activities in the home with a sibling, caregiver, community members, and/or by him/herself. A child's home literacy environment was a strong predictor of baseline reading performance, meaning that children that enter the Unlock Literacy programme from a stronger home literacy environment (as measured by either access to materials or engagement), is likely to be outperforming his/her peers from weaker home literacy environments. While Unlock Literacy had an impact on students from various home literacy environments, the programme has not shown evidence of improving a child's home literacy environment.

Home literacy environment predicts baseline reading performance but Unlock Literacy has struggled to strengthen it.

Programme impact was examined in relation to a child's participation in community reading activities initiated by Unlock Literacy. In Ethiopia, Malawi, Rwanda, Ghana, and Senegal participation in community reading activities was strongly correlated with improved reading outcomes. Burundi and eSwatini struggled with participation in community reading activities. Both of these countries had lower impact than other pilot countries. At the other end of the spectrum, Bangladesh had high levels of participation and therefore variation in participation was not available for the analysis. The analysis therefore determines that participation in out-of-school literacy activities offered by the Unlock Literacy programme was associated with gains in reading outcomes.

Participation in out-of-school literacy activities offered by the UL programme was associated with gains in reading outcomes.

Case studies illustrate **innovative** approaches to contextualizing Unlock Literacy programming.

The report highlights four Field Offices that identified innovative approaches to strengthen standard Unlock Literacy programming.

In **India**, the programme team struggled to reach parents and caregivers due to seasonal work and traditional roles of males and females. The team shifted to carrying out household visits.
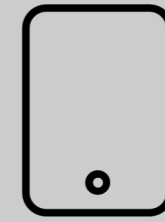
In **Ghana**, the Field Office partnered with All Children Reading programs to deliver high-quality supplementary reading materials through e-readers.

In **Ethiopia**, the Unlock Literacy programme implemented a recognition and incentive scheme to address high rates of volunteer turnover, motivating and sustaining their ongoing support.
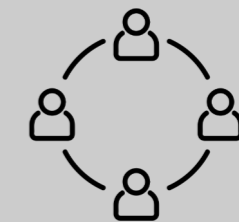
In **Nepal**, the team used a whole community approach to improving children's literacy. The investments in community and household interventions enabled the project to address inequities.

Pilot programmes varied greatly in timeline, scope, and size but a costing analysis found trends among those programmes with strong impact.

Project duration varied from 12 – 24 months, number of schools varied from 14 – 40 and the number of grade 1-3 children participating in the projects varied from 1,516 to 11,500. Across the ten countries, costs per child ranged from $22.39 in Ethiopia to $199.37 in India. At the school level, costs ranged from a low of $6,538 in Ghana to $20,700 in Rwanda.

As a benchmark, the median outputs and costs per country were calculated and are outlined below:

$217,126 Total Programme Cost

$67.10 Per Child Cost

$10,856 Per School Cost

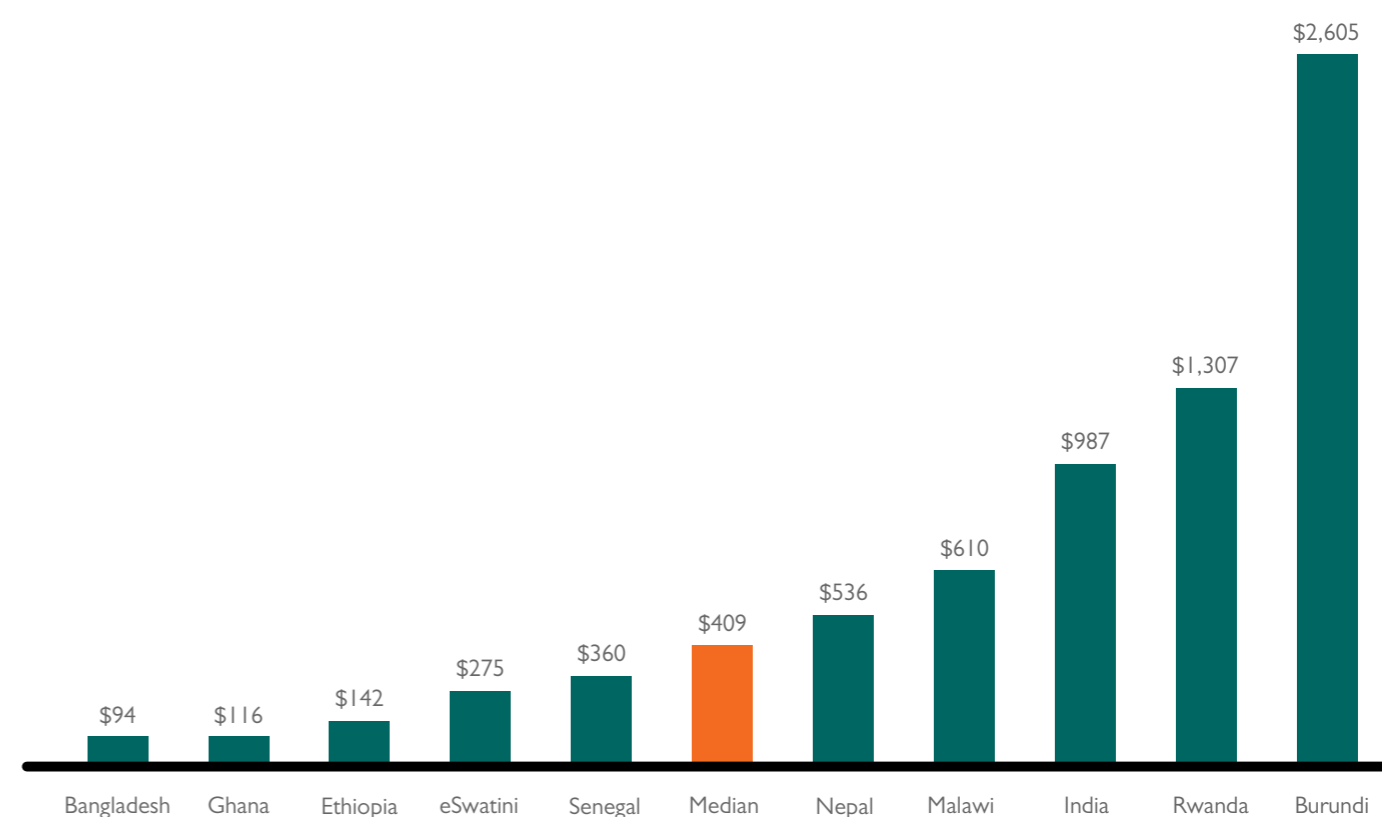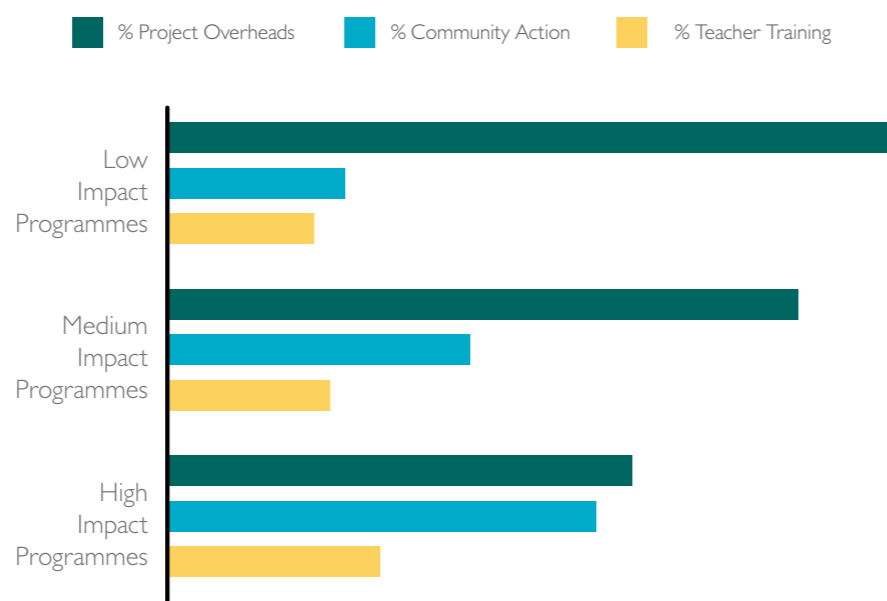| 18 Duration (Months)	3,236 Children	20 Schools	112 Teachers Trained	60 Reading Camps	108 Volunteers Trained	1,219 Parents Trained	80 Book Titles

A cost-to-impact ratio quantified how much it costs to add a new reader with comprehension.

… how much does it cost for a programme to add a reader with comprehension that would not be reading with comprehension without Unlock Literacy?
$409 *for the median programme.*

Based on the effect size categorizations of high, medium, and low impact, there were clear trends in expenditure. Firstly, high impact countries spent more per child and less per school than medium and low impact countries. Secondly, high impact countries allocated a higher proportion of funding to core interventions of teacher training and community action than did medium and low impact countries. Thirdly, high impact countries more efficiently managed the projects, enabling much lower project management costs than low impact countries.

Higher impact countries more efficiently managed financial resources, directing a higher percentage of funding to core project activities.

Legend:
- % Project Overheads
- % Community Action
- % Teacher Training

Low Impact Programmes

Medium Impact Programmes

High Impact Programmes

Country	Cost
Bangladesh	$94
Ghana	$116
Ethiopia	$142
eSwatini	$275
Senegal	$360
Median	$409
Nepal	$536
Malawi	$610
India	$987
Rwanda	$1,307
Burundi	$2,605

Implications for Global Programming

The following are recommendations for global programming of Unlock Literacy based on the findings of the meta-analysis:

Develop minimum standards for programme implementation.
Develop minimum standards for programme implementation that are shared with Field Offices. This should be done by pairing Measuring Evidence of Quality Achieve (MEQA) monitoring data with reading outcomes/results to better identify strong and weak programming approaches.

Strengthen home literacy environment programming.
Findings suggest that Unlock Literacy has no impact on home literacy environment (access to reading materials nor engagement with reading activities).. Given the challenges faced in this area it is recommended that programming be re-evaluated with an eye to strengthening home literacy environment. One potential approach to try is to incorporate social norms design. Additional communication for development and social behavior change programming might also be worth piloting to ensure parental engagement.

Develop a new strategy for getting books in homes.
Data suggest that reading materials are not getting into the homes of students. Right now, programming does so by book borrowing, make-and-takes, and parent generated reading materials. Assess why these components are not being taken up and develop strengthened or redesigned approaches to better meet the needs of the community.

Carry out research examining sustainability of Unlock Literacy programming.
There is an opportunity to assess the sustainability of Unlock Literacy programming by assessing the extent to which UL programming is continuing and/or the extent to which UL has led to sustainable system strengthening in these initial pilot sites by revisiting them now. That information could be paired with the effect size analysis as well as the costing analysis to identify characteristics of programming that enable sustainable systems change.

Carry out prospective costing analyses.
The weaknesses of the current costing analysis could be overcome if costing analysis is built into M&E / program design from the beginning, thus enabling WV to carry out prospective costing analyses.

Carry out research examining Unlock Literacy programming and teacher practice.
Pair classroom observation/teacher interviews (through MEQA) with reading assessment data in order to gather more information on teacher training, particularly the uptake of teacher training in the classroom and the impact of teacher training on learning outcomes.

Facilitate programme contextualization through a community entry assessment.
Guide Field Offices in contextualization of Unlock Literacy programming through a guided community entry assessment, identifying potential strategic partnerships as well as unique challenges that children within their context face.

Implications for Programme Design & Implementation

Findings from the cross-country analysis suggest the following recommendations for a Field Office that is designing a new Unlock Literacy programme:

Planning and Budgeting

- Target a minimum of 2,600 children and 20 schools.
- Identify schools that are nearby geographical sites, when possible, to cluster schools for the purposes of teacher training, coaching, monitoring, and project operations.
- Understand the dynamics of marginalization across grades 1-3 and develop a plan for how the program will address inequities.
- Field Office develops overall programme budget strategy that keeps project overhead to less than 30%. Additionally, costing benchmarks for programming is developed and shared with Field Offices for planning.

Teacher Training

- Train all Grade 1-3 Teachers as well as all Head Teachers or Support Staff to prevent loss to turnover.
- While monitoring data was not available for this meta-analysis, the literature review found that ongoing teacher support, coaching, and mentoring is essential for improving teacher practice.

Community Action

- Budget and plan for systematic and incremental trainings for community action volunteers to address challenges, encourage motivation, and address turnover.
- Motivate volunteers through capacity building and recognition (monetary recognition has been the most impactful for long term sustainability).
- Monitor participation in community action activities ensuring regular and active participation among all target students (considering dimensions of equity).

Teaching and Learning Materials

- First ensure that existing materials in the necessary languages are utilized and reaching the programming communities through the market assessment.
- Explore adding to existing materials through national level partnerships with publishers or other implementing organizations.

Implications for
Monitoring, Evaluation & Research

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While the cross-country analysis articulates key recommendations for programming, additional data are needed to further inform programme improvement and scale up. These monitoring, evaluation, and research opportunity are outline below.

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Monitoring

- The cross-country analysis was carried out on early grade reading assessments. Details regarding program implementation and roll-out were gathered through review of annual reports, retrospective interviews, and/or program participant recall. Monitoring program outputs and outcomes would add beneficial insights into programming strengths and challenges.
- Of particular note, the WV UL meta-analysis incorporated no data from classroom observation/teacher interviews. A strongly recommended first step is to pair classroom observation data from MEQA with reading outcomes in order to have a better understanding of the uptake/application of UL teacher training.
- As participation in community action activities was shown to be significantly associate with gains in reading outcomes, it is recommended that programme monitoring assess participation across stakeholder groups to ensure that all children are attending. If not, the programme should adapt to better meet the needs of those children (language barriers, timing, setting, etc.)

Evaluation & Research Questions to Explore

Programme Support and Timeline:
1. How should Unlock Literacy define success?
2. Does the boost last and for whom?
3. How long does Unlock Literacy programming need to be in place for impact to be achieved?
4. How long does Unlock Literacy programming need to be in place for the programme to be sufficiently embedded in local structures?

Parental Awareness Raising and Home Literacy Environment:
1. In countries where reading engagement increased over the length of the project, what were the drivers?
2. What barriers do parents face in applying the lessons of Unlock Literacy's parental awareness raising activities?
3. In what ways can parental awareness raising activities be strengthened?

Teaching and Learning Materials:
1. What interactions exist between the numbers and types of reading materials and engagement with those materials?
2. What motivates children to engage in reading outside of school? Which activities? What materials?

Sustainability:
1. To what extent are initiatives of community action and teacher training sustained within a community after World Vision exits? This can be assessed by re-visiting these pilot countries to assess sustainability (of reading performance, teacher practice, community action activities).
2. Are there drivers or barriers to that sustainability?
3. To what extent has World Vision strengthened the systems that support a child's learning and education?
4. Does Unlock Literacy scale with similar impact or is an altered approach required?

Inclusive Education:
1. To what extent does Unlock Literacy lead to inclusive education outcomes considering the most vulnerable populations?