

# Inspiring foundational learning for all children: A call for action

## What is the challenge?



Too many children... do not become confident readers and writers; indeed they are denied the creativity that in turn denies the world the boldness of their ideas...

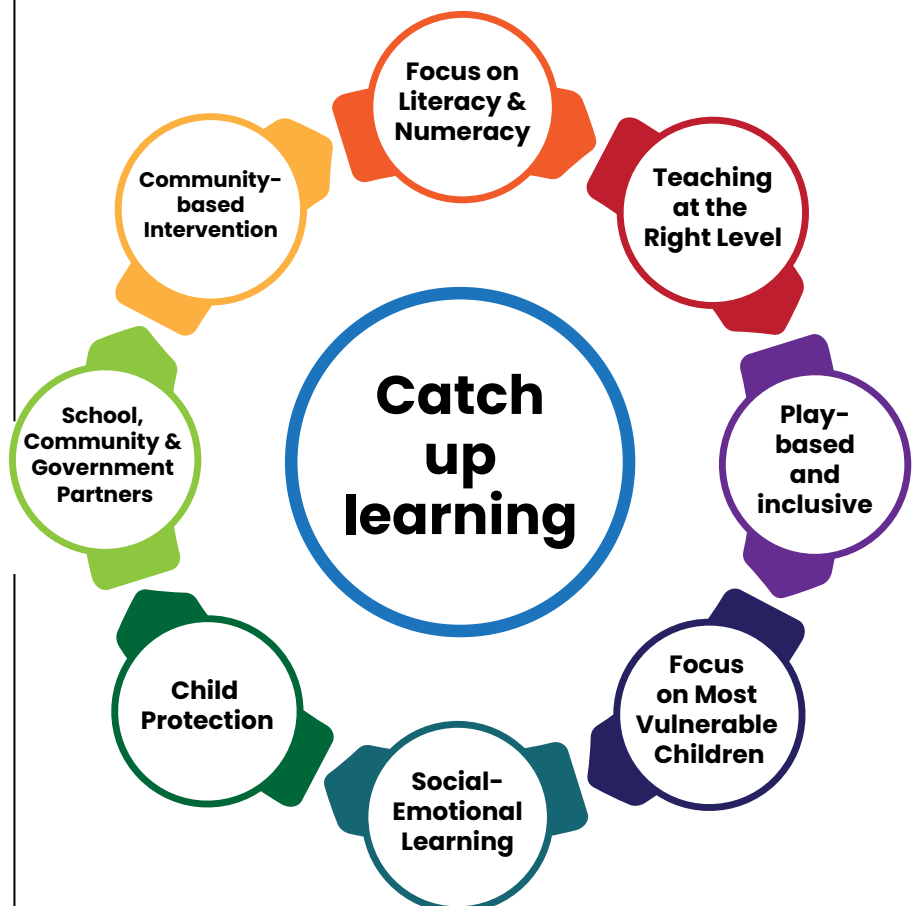
Nelson Mandela  
*The founding statement of the Nelson Mandela Institute, 2006*

- Ministries of Education around the world are striving to ensure that all children acquire foundational skills in **literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional learning**—the essential building blocks for lifelong learning and productive citizenship.
- Yet this goal remains out of reach for millions, especially in rural and vulnerable communities. An estimated 70% of 10-year-olds in low- and middle-income countries are unable to understand a simple written text (World Bank et al, 2022).
- Innovative practices are emerging in many contexts, but education systems must find ways to nurture, embed, and scale these efforts—grounding them in the real experiences of learners and teachers, and elevating the role of communities as partners in driving foundational learning.
- This policy brief seeks to signal a practical roadmap to move from commitment to action!

**This learning crisis is not only an education challenge but a threat to national development.**

## What is the World Vision (WV) Catch Up Programme?

- The Catch Up Programme (CUP) is a crisis-responsive collaborative initiative designed to address the learning needs of children who are most affected by educational disruptions across the globe. It supports the acquisition of foundational skills in literacy, numeracy, and social emotional learning, providing a pathway for children to (re)engage with their education.
- Community-based clubs deliver interactive, play-based and inclusive learning sessions drawing on carefully sequenced and structured session plans, adapting and evolving them to suit their contexts and children's needs. Curriculum is aligned with UNESCO's Global Proficiency Framework for literacy and numeracy adapted to local language and context embedding social emotional learning.



World Vision

The Open University

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# What is the evidence that it works?



## Evidence Spotlight 1: Ethiopia

A **community-based** 'try and learn' implementation reached vulnerable children in and out of school in conflict affected areas.



### Reach and learning time



**166**

girls



**173**

boys



**39%**

out of school



**10**

CUP clubs



**20**

facilitators

**32**

sessions of 2 hours between January and June 2024



### Literacy

#### Learning progress



**33%** improved by 1 point<sup>1</sup>



**27%** by 2 points



**9%** by 3 points



**4%** by 4 points



**27%** no improvement yet

#### Graduation



**27%** met the exit criteria (graduation) which broadly relates to attaining simple comprehension skills as measured by the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA)



### Numeracy

#### Learning progress



**33%** improved by 1 point<sup>2</sup>



**32%** by 2 points



**11%** by 3 points



**4%** by 4 points



**1%** by 5 points



**19%** no improvement yet

#### Graduation



**29%** met the exit criteria (graduation) of ability to add and subtract within 20 and work with number through 100.

### Social emotional learning

Most participating children had a sense of belonging and increased confidence in themselves. Families and teachers observed more positive behaviours at home and in the community.

### Stakeholder feedback

*"My target for grade 1 enrolment for this year is 180, but I enrolled 250 students within short days. This is the result of CUP clubs which ignited children's interest in education."*

School Principal

### Policy alignment

Ethiopia Education Transformation Programme,  
Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Ministry of Education, 2023

*"Our role is to ensure the programme aligns with the community's priorities."*

Centre Management Committee member

1 E.g., moving from not reading to reading letters, from reading letters to reading words.

2 E.g., moving from not reading to reading 1 – 10, from reading to adding and subtracting within 10.

# What is the evidence that it works?



## Evidence Spotlight 2: Zimbabwe


An at-scale **school-based** implementation reached children in communities affected by poverty, climate crises and food insecurity.



### Reach and learning time

  
**8,116**  
girls

  
**8,632**  
boys

  
**100%**  
in school

  
**123**  
schools with clubs

**836** community facilitators

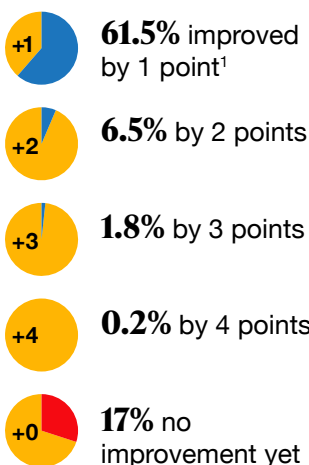
**376** teacher facilitators

Weekly or twice-weekly sessions of 30 – 60 minutes each

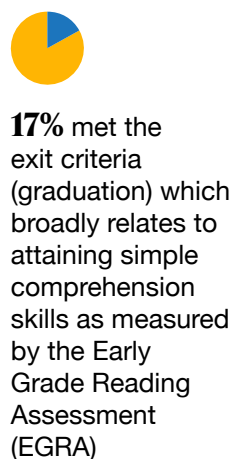


### Literacy

#### Learning progress

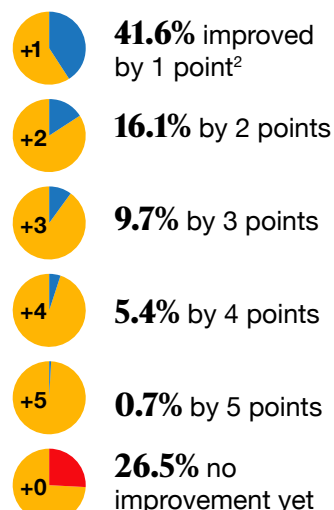


#### Graduation

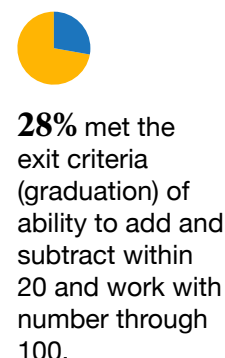


### Numeracy

#### Learning progress



#### Graduation



### Social emotional learning

Most participating children showed a strong sense of belonging, more positive attitudes toward learning and overcoming challenges, high levels of engagement in activities, and developing independent learning skills.

### Policy alignment

Launch of Implementation Framework for Blended and Catch Up Learning, Government of Zimbabwe Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2022.

### Stakeholder feedback

*"... Improving standards of our children."*

*"... Children taught to write and spell home language."*

*"Both parents and teachers support catch up."*

School Development Committee Chair

*"CUP gives time for learners, we can focus on literacy and numeracy, the children are selected and we can move together."*

Teacher

# What works in multiple settings?

## Alignment with national priorities

Empowering all children with strong foundation learning skills (e.g., ‘learn to read’ to ‘read to learn’), addressing learning equity for the most vulnerable children are at the heart of CUP.

## Low-cost entry

After low-cost initial investment, CUP makes effective use of local capacity, mobilising families and communities to extend the reach and capacities of formal school systems to vulnerable children.

## Flexible, targeted, structured intervention

Whether it is remediation within schools, accelerated learning for out-of-school children, catch-up learning for migrant children, the principles of CUP can be applied and adapted to multiple contexts.

## Community ownership

CUP is built on collaboration, communities’ lived experiences and a shared sense of ownership between educators and communities.

## Evidenced learning gains in rapid cycles

Diagnostic and Proficiency Assessments (DAPA) enable teachers and volunteers to identify children in need of support and their progress. These can be used to generate evidence of learning across multiple settings and promote accountability.

## Integrated social emotional learning

CUP enables children to express their views on engagement, confidence and belonging as part of their learning development.

## Moving These Pathways into Action

- Frame CUP not as a standalone innovation, but as a catalyst for **foundational learning, system reform and resilience**.
- Start by identifying **entry points in current sector plans or crisis recovery strategies**.
- Emphasize **cost-effectiveness, flexibility and equity gains**.
- Prioritize **locally-led adaptation**, peer learning, and early action to build momentum across similar contexts.

# Implications – Pathways to Scale for National Action

To support national governments in responding to foundational learning poverty and education disruptions, this framework proposes system-aligned, equity-driven, crisis-responsive pathways to policy and programmatic scale. The approach draws on CUP’s implementation lessons and pedagogical insights grounded in children’s lived realities and frontline delivery experiences of teachers, families and communities.

## 1. Align and Integrate with Existing Policies and Programmes

Identify where CUP’s practical insights and tools align with national education sector plans, catch-up or remedial learning frameworks, and broader inclusion policies.

## 2. Prioritize the Most Marginalized Children at Greatest Risk of Being Left Behind

Ensure that every policy, programme adaptation, and investment strategy explicitly targets children who are out of school, living in poverty, affected by conflict or displacement, have disabilities, or are from rural, indigenous, or minority communities.

## 3. Convene Evidence Cafés and Policy Dialogues

Facilitate structured, inclusive dialogues between policymakers, teachers, community leaders, NGOs, and researchers to reflect on diverse forms of evidence, identify scalable practices, and foster joint ownership of adaptive responses for foundational learning.

## 4. Support Collaborative, Test-and-Learn Approaches

Encourage short, district-led learning sprints—especially in fragile settings—to adapt CUP models using local insights, existing budgets, personnel, and emergency education platforms for rapid, context-driven innovation.

## 5. Invest in Local Capacity and Implementation Leadership

Build a network of trained, community-based facilitators and education officers who can deliver context-responsive, child-centred foundational learning sessions. Promote peer exchange and learning across districts. Recognize performance and learning, not just compliance.

## 6. Monitor What Matters – Simply and Consistently

Use diagnostic and progress-tracking tools like DAPA to support tailored instruction and to inform ongoing learning loops at school, district, and national levels, and incorporate into teacher training and local planning cycles to enable data-informed decision-making. Prioritize interpretation and action over data collection alone.

## 7. Build a Shared Evidence Base for Scale

Document and synthesize learnings from multiple contexts—especially those involving vulnerable learners—to shape a growing evidence base on what works for catch up learning to support broader systems change.

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For further information, please contact [education@wvi.org](mailto:education@wvi.org) or [csgd@open.ac.uk](mailto:csgd@open.ac.uk)