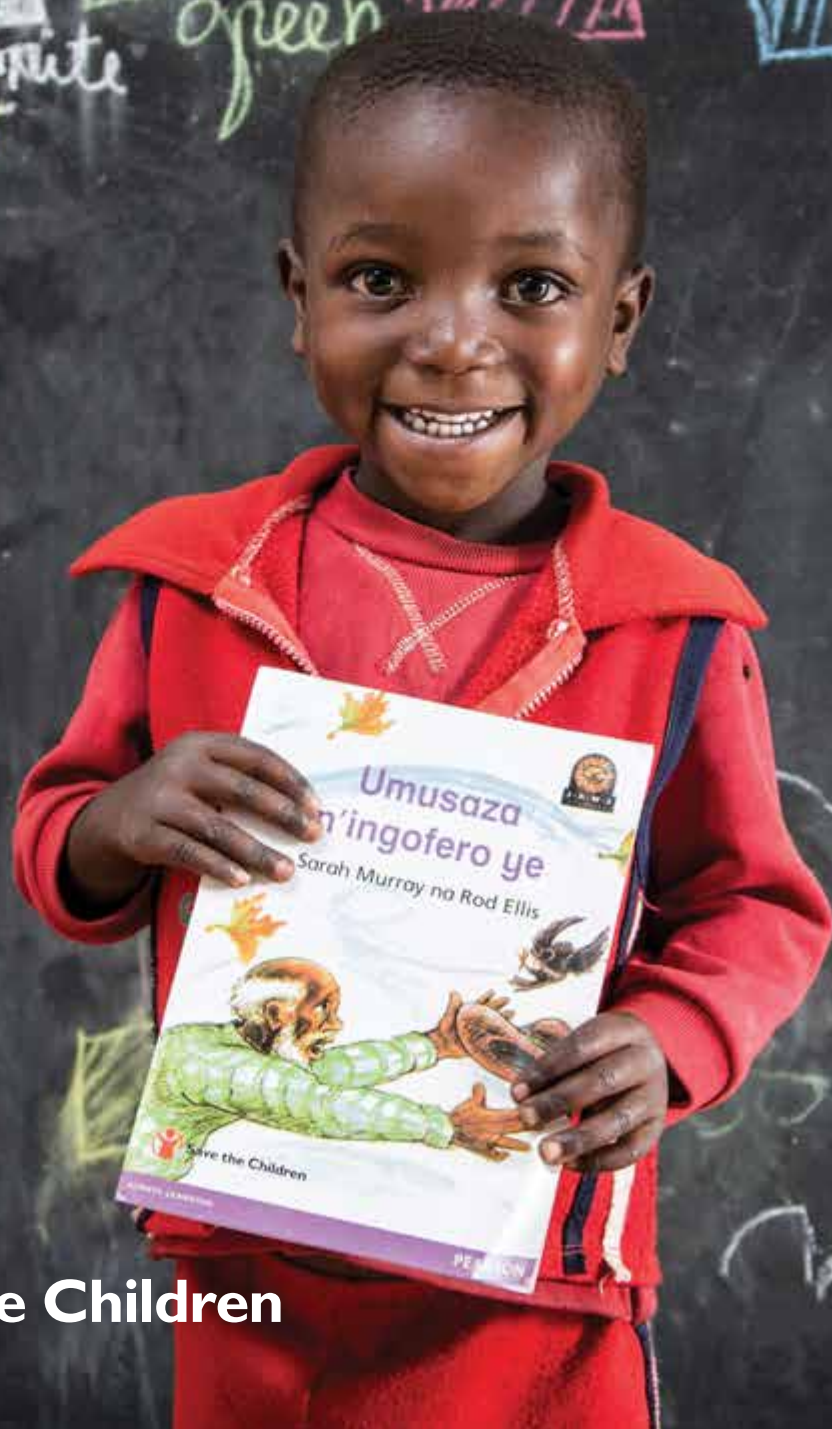


# ADVANCING THE **RIGHT TO READ** IN RWANDA

Programme baselines and studies

Summary report



**Save the Children**

Save the Children works in more than 120 countries.  
We save children's lives. We fight for their rights.  
We help them fulfil their potential.

**Front cover: Four-year-old Hervé, holds up a book published by Save the Children at the Kiboga Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) centre in Burera, Rwanda. Funding and promoting the publishing of children's books in the local language is one of the many innovative aspects of Save the Children's Signature Education Programme in Rwanda. This literacy programme combines teacher training, assessments, community action, innovating classroom designs and support for the publishing of children's books in order to increase literacy in Rwanda. (Photo: Colin Crowley/Save the Children)**

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A student at Groupe Scolair Ruhanga primary school enjoying a book. In 2013, Save the Children launched its Advancing the Right to Read (ARR) education signature programme to ensure all children in Rwanda leave school able to read.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## BACKGROUND

In 2013, Save the Children launched an education signature programme, Advancing the Right to Read (ARR), which is now operational in five districts in Rwanda. The programme aims to contribute to addressing the global crisis in learning by providing a continuum of services for children aged nought to nine years, focused on supporting emergent and early-grade literacy to ensure all children leave school able to read.

## THE PROGRAMME'S FOUR PILLARS

Using the latest evidence of what works best when trying to help children to learn to read and write, together with innovative approaches to community action and the literate environment, Save the Children is working towards:

1. **Closing the gap in early childhood care and development services** by supporting family learning for parents and children aged nought to three years and increasing the quality and coverage of both centre-based services and parental support for children aged three to six.
2. **Improving the teaching of reading** in early grades of primary schools (Primary 1–3) by providing teachers with training in effective reading instruction, through our Literacy Boost approach and methodology.
3. **Developing a culture of literacy and learning out of school** in which families and communities understand the value of literacy, and create and sustain opportunities to practise and enjoy reading together.
4. **Creating a rich, literate environment**, which guarantees that children have access to high-quality, local-language reading materials.

## PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

Signature programmes are Save the Children's flagship initiatives, striving for replicability and positive results at scale for children. Therefore, the ARR programme endeavours to generate evidence, which proves that our approach delivers the intended results, is possible at scale, represents good value for money, and can be implemented by government and communities. To build this evidence base, between April 2013 and April 2014, Save the Children in Rwanda, in partnership with Stanford University, Save the Children member organisations, the Rwanda Education Board (REB), local NGO Umuhuza and external consultants, carried out nine baselines and studies supporting different aspects of the programme.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the main findings from these baselines and studies, and document the status quo, before implementation of programme activities. The findings are presented according to ARR's programmatic framework and four pillars, making associations across the different baselines and study findings, when relevant.

## KEY FINDINGS

The findings provide clear evidence of the urgent need for the ARR programme. As anticipated, students at the end of Primary 1 are struggling, both with the high order skills of fluency, accuracy and comprehension, but also with the more basic skills of simple letter identification. It is also evident that students with lower socio-economic status and with a weak home literacy environment struggle more, which holds true across the measured core reading skills.

The findings illustrate several key challenges specific to the districts where the programme is being

implemented that need to be addressed. They have also identified strengths, which can be drawn on to strengthen programme activities. These findings include:

#### PILLAR 1: CLOSING THE EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES GAP

- School readiness skills of preschool-age children are low, particularly among children who are not accessing formal Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) services.
- Access to ECCD services appears to positively correlate to improved school readiness skills.
- A variety of background factors appear to influence children's school readiness skills, including access to a supportive home literacy environment, parents' education, age of child and socio-economic background.

#### PILLAR 2: IMPROVING THE TEACHING OF READING

- Teachers need to be trained and supported in effective ways to teach reading.
- Recreational reading in classrooms is infrequent.
- Classroom environments provide little exposure to printed material for children.
- Few teachers assign any literacy homework.

#### PILLAR 3: DEVELOPING A CULTURE OF LITERACY AND LEARNING OUT OF SCHOOL

- Literacy activities seem to be associated only with school. Few children report reading for pleasure.
- Parents' reading at home is positively correlated to the likelihood of children reading at home and in school.
- There is a dearth of appropriate reading materials and reading opportunities for children at home and in the community.
- There is a general understanding of the importance of education and literacy among parents and community members.

#### PILLAR 4: CREATING A RICH, LITERATE ENVIRONMENT

- There is a lack of Kinyarwanda children's storybooks on the market and in schools, with a particularly large gap in materials for pre-primary-aged children.
- Local publishers lack a solid understanding of the quality criteria and attributes required for high-quality storybooks for children at all levels.
- Schools tend to dedicate a greater portion of available funds to storybooks for the upper primary and secondary levels rather than for P1–P3.
- Schools tend to give preference to buying many copies of a few titles for 'read alone' purposes rather than increasing the diversity of books to read for pleasure as part of independent reading or read aloud activities.

#### WHAT'S NEXT?

The ARR programme is ambitious and holistic, endeavouring to provide a continuum of services and opportunities for literacy and learning for children aged nought to nine, in order to ensure that all children leave school able to read. With all the gaps identified as part of our research addressed by the programme, we expect to see significant returns in the next three years. In particular, we expect to see the benefits of out-of-school reading promotion and the increased availability and accessibility of high-quality, Kinyarwanda children's books, both in and outside of school. This evidence will be used to generate a policy consensus, mobilise supportive actors and undertake direct policy influencing in Rwanda and internationally, with the overall aim of achieving systemic change in how reading is taught and supported nationally and locally, and to ensure that children in Rwanda have the reading materials needed to acquire and then use their literacy skills.

# I INTRODUCTION

## BACKGROUND

Save the Children believes that being able to read is the foundation for all future learning. Ensuring that children master this skill early is essential as it will pave the way for their ongoing learning, decrease the number of children dropping out of school early and reduce inefficiencies in the education system.

However, in Rwanda, children are struggling to learn how to read. This 'learning crisis', with children failing to master key literacy skills, was clearly illustrated in the national Early Grades Reading Assessment (EGRA), conducted in 2011, which showed that:

- Primary 4 (P4) and P6 grade students had difficulties in reading and comprehending P2–P3 level texts in Kinyarwanda and English.
- Even after three years in primary school, 13% of P4 students could not read a single word of a Kinyarwanda P2–P3 level text, while another 13% could read less than 15 words correctly in one minute.

- Of those children who were able to read, almost 40% of P4 students could not answer even half of the comprehension questions relating to the passage they had just read.<sup>2</sup>

Based on the needs identified in the EGRA, Save the Children designed a five-year education signature programme in Rwanda, Advancing the Right to Read (ARR), which has been implemented since the beginning of 2013. Signature programmes are Save the Children's flagship initiatives, striving

for replicability and positive results at scale for children. Our ambition is to demonstrate how Save the Children, in partnership with others, tackles issues that threaten children's ability to survive, thrive and achieve their rights.

Our programme in Rwanda aims to help address the learning crisis by providing a continuum of services for children aged eight to nine years. Children need to start developing their reading skills early and they need to learn how to read well in order

Teachers reading aloud regularly is an important way of motivating and helping students to read.

A teacher at Groupe Scolaire Ruhanga primary school in Burera district using newly acquired techniques following training by the ARR programme.



PHOTO: J. WILLIAM HIRTL/SAVE THE CHILDREN

to be taught effectively in early primary school. By strengthening emergent and early grade literacy, the programme aims to ensure that all children leave school able to read.

## PROGRAMME OUTCOMES: THE FOUR PILLARS

The ARR programme sets out to achieve four main outcomes, which form the four core pillars of the programme:

1. **Closing the gap in early childhood care and development services** by supporting family learning for parents and children aged nought to three years and increasing the quality and coverage of both centre-based services and parental support for children aged three to six.
2. **Improving the teaching of reading** in early grades of primary schools (Primary 1–3) by providing teachers with training in effective reading instruction, through our Literacy Boost approach and methodology (see below).
3. **Developing a culture of literacy and learning out of school** in which families and communities understand the value of literacy, and create and sustain opportunities to practise and enjoy reading together.
4. **Creating a rich, literate environment** which guarantees that children have access to high-quality, local language reading materials.

By the end of 2017, the ARR programme will have demonstrated the impact of our work around these pillars in five districts (Rubavu, Ruhango, Ngororero, Burera and Gicumbi), in approximately 200 primary schools and 21 ECCD centres. We will have reached at least 2,000 teachers and 70,000 parents, for the benefit of more than 200,000 children.

## OUR APPROACHES

In order to achieve our programmatic goals, we are implementing four innovative approaches: First Read, Early Literacy and Maths Initiative, Literacy Boost and Rwandan Children's Book Initiative.

### FIRST READ

First Read aims to increase the emergent literacy of children aged nought to three years and the school readiness skills of children aged three to six years through four components: the development of age-appropriate books; the gifting of books to children and their families; family learning; and community action. This approach provides parents and carers with the skills, confidence and materials to support the development of their children's vital pre-reading skills.

First Read is being implemented in Ngororero district.

### EARLY LITERACY AND MATHS INITIATIVE

The Early Literacy and Maths initiative aims to improve the readiness of young learners (aged three to six) for school by the developing and implementing a Rwanda-specific, pedagogically sound early literacy and maths curriculum, as well as training parents and caregivers for both centre-based care and care at home.

The Early Literacy and Maths Initiative is being implemented in Burera, Gicumbi, Rubavu and Ruhango districts.

### LITERACY BOOST

Literacy Boost is our evidence-based approach to strengthen the five core skills of reading (alphabetic knowledge; phonological/phonemic (sound) awareness; vocabulary; fluency; and comprehension) of children aged six to nine, both inside and outside school. It uses three components – rigorous assessment; in-service teacher training; and community action – to identify reading gaps and improve children's reading skills.

Literacy Boost is being implemented in Gicumbi district.

### RWANDAN CHILDREN'S BOOK INITIATIVE

The Rwandan Children's Book Initiative is a unique, whole-system approach that addresses the unavailability of books by intervening at every stage of the local book chain to develop a self-sustainable market and industry for high-quality children's storybooks. The initiative is carried out in close cooperation with the Rwanda Education Board (REB). It trains and builds the capacity of authors, illustrators, publishers and teachers, and provides books, bookshelves and mats to schools.



The Rwandan Children’s Book Initiative is being implemented in Burera district and at national level with the publishing industry.

## PARTNERS

Save the Children is working with a range of partners, including local and international development organisations, government and the private sector, particularly the Rwandan publishing industry. Implementation partners include Umuhuza (a Rwandan NGO which is leading the Literacy Boost community action component and First Read) and Stanford University (which is leading on a randomised control trial or the Literacy Boost approach).

The programme is currently supported and funded by Comic Relief (Special Initiative), the UK Department for International Development (DFID) through the Innovation for Education fund, Save the Children UK Education Breakthrough Funds, Jersey Overseas Aid Commission (JOAC), the Roy A. Hunt Foundation and Save the Children US IDEA funds.

**By the end of 2017, the ARR programme will have reached more than 200,000 children.**

## BASELINES AND STUDIES

In order to ensure a rigorous evidence base for the programme’s impact, Save the Children planned and implemented a series of project baselines and programme studies throughout the first year of implementation. As well as informing programme planning, these studies also documented the current situation in target areas, against which programme impact can be demonstrated to inform future scale-up.

Nine baselines and studies were performed for the programme by Save the Children staff and external researchers (see table below).

TABLE 1: FRAMEWORK OF BASELINES AND STUDIES

Framework of baselines and studies	When and where	Purpose	Author
Rwandan Children’s Book Initiative baseline	May – June 2013, national level and Gicumbi district	To assess the current number, range and quality of the available Kinyarwanda children’s storybooks published by local, regional and international publishers.  To assess how teachers’ reading practices and the accessibility of books influence students’ reading habits	Save the Children
Early Literacy and Maths Initiative baseline	May 2013, Burera, Gicumbi, Rubavu and Ruhango districts	To assess school readiness of pre-primary school children in four groups: in ECCD centres, in ECCD centres with early literacy and maths, with no ECCD exposure, and with parents receiving early literacy and maths intervention	Save the Children in Rwanda, in collaboration with Save the Children US

*continued overleaf*

TABLE I *continued*

<b>Framework of baselines and studies</b>	<b>When and where</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Author</b>
Community Practices and Perceptions of Reading study	February – April 2014, Gicumbi district	To assess reading practices and beliefs in communities, including the availability of reading resources and opportunities, children's reading practices and perceptions of reading outside school and community members' beliefs about reading	Laterite Ltd (local research firm commissioned by Save the Children)
Literacy Boost: Home Literacy Environment Survey baseline	September – October 2013, Gicumbi district	To assess the home literacy environment of young learners, including reading practices and availability of reading materials at home	Stanford University, in collaboration with Save the Children and Umuhuza
Literacy Boost: Reading Assessment baseline	September – October 2013, Gicumbi district	To assess primary school learners' emergent reading skills and determine how these vary by student demographics, socioeconomic status, and home literacy environment	Stanford University, in collaboration with Save the Children and the Rwanda Education Board
Literacy Boost: Teacher Practices baseline	September – October 2013, Gicumbi district	To assess teacher attitudes, practices and approaches to the teaching of reading	Stanford University, in collaboration with Save the Children and the Rwanda Education Board
Literacy Boost: Home Ethnography baseline	September – October 2013, Gicumbi district	To gain a deeper understanding of the role of literacy in primary school children's homes, including literacy habits, beliefs and expectations about reading	Stanford University, in collaboration with Michael Tusiime (University of Rwanda)
Children's Book Practice and Policy baseline: Capitation Grants and Recreational Reading Materials	February – March 2014, Gicumbi district	To assess the current supply and demand processes and practices of children's storybooks in Rwanda and identify bottlenecks, challenges and opportunities	Sofia Cozzolino (independent consultant commissioned by Save the Children)
Political Economy Analysis on Early Literacy Promotion in Rwanda	February – April 2014, Burera, Gicumbi, Kigali, Ngororero, Rubavu and Ruhango districts	To assess opportunities and potential barriers to early literacy promotion at the community, school, sector, district, and national levels, while taking into account the policy and institutional context, including key stakeholders and structural issues of incentives and authority.	Ishya Consulting (local consulting firm commissioned by Save the Children)

## REPORT PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the main findings from the above baselines and studies, set according to Advancing the Right to Read's programmatic framework. The report begins by presenting the findings from a reading assessment baseline of Rwandan primary school students' reading skills at the end of the first grade of primary school (Primary I), before presenting findings relating to each of ARR's four pillars and making associations

across the different baselines and studies' findings, when relevant.

For more detailed information on findings as well as research design, methods and sample sizes for the different baselines and studies, please refer to the full studies, which can be downloaded from the Save the Children in Rwanda website (<http://rwanda.savethechildren.net/>).

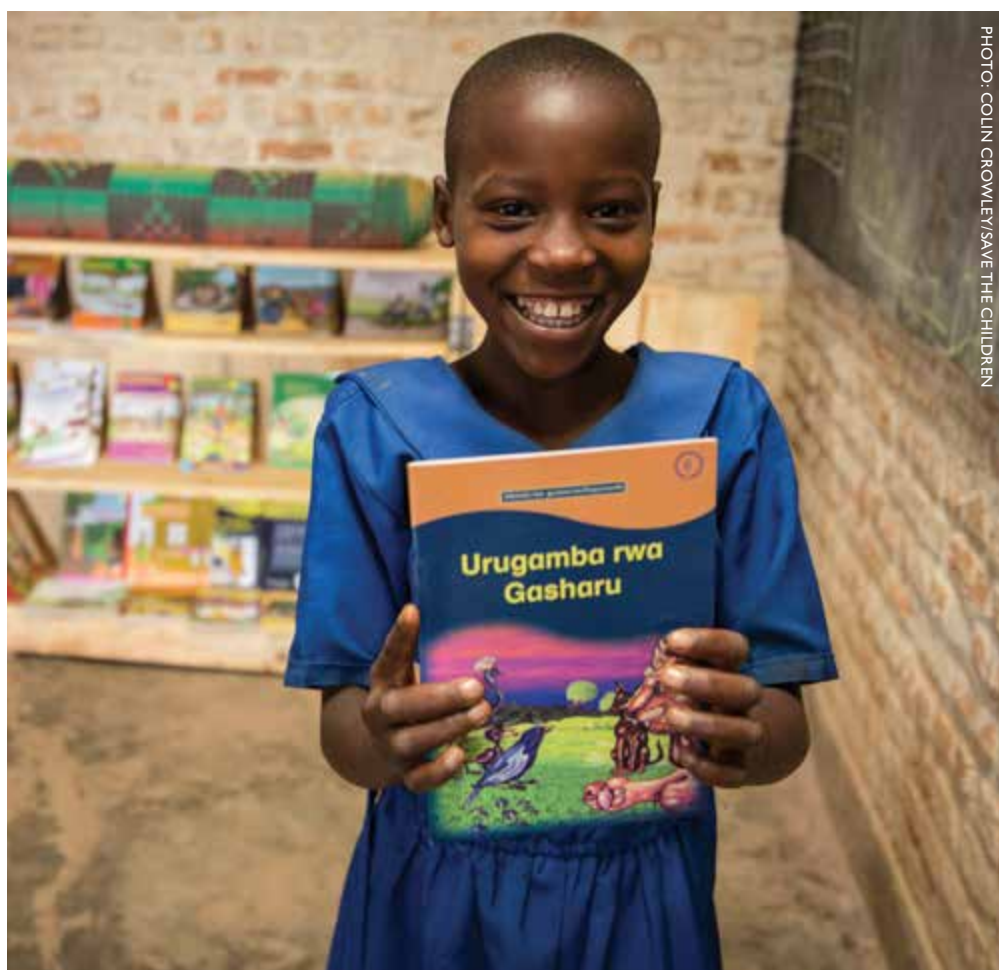


PHOTO: COLIN CROWLEY/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Students need access to a wide range of age-appropriate books in the local language.

A student at Groupe Scolair Ruhanga primary school in Burera district with a storybook provided by the ARR programme.

# 2 OVERALL GOAL: ADVANCING THE RIGHT TO READ

## SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- Students at the end of Primary I are struggling, both with the high order skills of fluency, accuracy, and comprehension, and with the more basic skills of simple letter identification.
- Students with lower socio-economic status and with a weak home literacy environment struggle more across all the measured core skills of reading.

The ability to read and write is the foundation for all future learning. Ensuring children master these skills is an essential component of addressing the learning crisis in Rwanda. Not only will it reduce the number of children dropping out of school and pave the way for their ongoing learning success, it is cost-effective as it reduces inefficiencies in the education system.

Since the ultimate objective of the ARR programme is to improve children's reading skills, this report begins with the findings from a Literacy Boost: Reading Assessment baseline study of the reading skills of Rwandan primary school students who have reached the end of Primary I (PI).

**Out of the 24 letters in the Kinyarwanda alphabet, students in the sample on average could identify only 8.8 letters.**

Literacy Boost: Reading Assessment baseline study

Research shows that the trajectory of a child's reading progress at the end of grade one can predict his or her skills at the end of primary school since reading skills are self-reinforcing (ie, strong readers acquire double the vocabulary of weak readers, which builds reading skills).<sup>3</sup> Our assessment demonstrates the clear need for the programme to reverse Rwanda's learning crisis by addressing the reading skills gap early on.

## KEY FINDINGS

The Literacy Boost: Reading Assessment baseline study measured the following key reading skills: alphabetic knowledge; phonological awareness; reading fluency and accuracy; reading comprehension; and individual word reading and writing. It identified that students at the end of PI are lagging behind on all of the measured core skills. In particular, students in the assessment showed low alphabetic knowledge (out of the 24 letters in the Kinyarwanda alphabet, students in the sample on average could identify only 8.8 letters), far less than the curriculum demands of students at the end of PI, who are expected to know the complete alphabet.

Moreover, students scored low on reading comprehension and were struggling to read fluently even text appropriate for PI learners. Students could on average read three words per minute, with 17.5% accuracy. Only 5.1% of students could read 20 words per minute or more and only 0.4% could read 40 words per minute or more.

As for individual word reading and writing, the students could read and write less than a fifth of words presented to them. On average, students could read between 12% and 19% of the words they were presented with in isolation. They could write, on average, 12% to 21% of the words dictated to them.

The data on phonological awareness reveals that students were very comfortable separating words into syllables. The concept of phonemes (individual sounds within words, eg, the three sounds comprising cat – /k/ /a/ /t/), and the division of words into phonemes, proved a much more challenging task.

**Students with low socio-economic status (SES) scored 1% on reading accuracy while those with high SES scored 12%.**

Literacy Boost: Reading Assessment baseline study

Although it is possible that phonemic awareness should be encouraged to help all children learn to read earlier and better, a causal link between phonemic awareness instruction and early literacy development in Kinyarwanda has not been established.

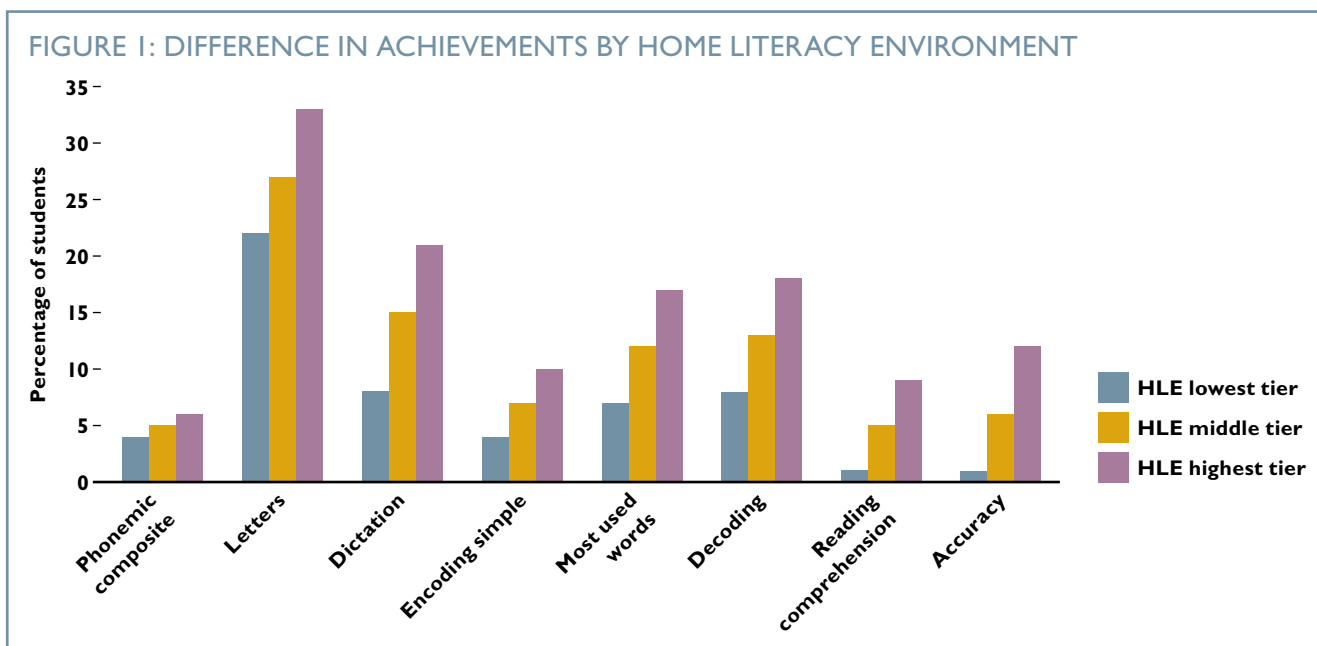
Children with lower socio-economic status and a weak home literacy environment – in terms of availability of reading materials and reading habits in the home – struggle more. This holds true across the



PHOTO: J. WILLIAM HIRTLE/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Enabling students to take part in a wide range of activities is important to help them improve their reading skills.

Students at Groupe Scolair Ruhanga primary school practice reading aloud in small groups.



Literacy Boost: Reading Assessment baseline

measured core skills. For example, students with low socio-economic status scored 1% on reading accuracy, while those with middle socio-economic status scored 6%, and those with high socio-economic status scored 12%. There were similar trends for students with different home literacy environments (see Figure 1).

The data collected for the assessment does not on its own answer why Rwandan students are

struggling, but the results indicate that a better approach to supporting children’s reading acquisition is needed. Data collection and associated analysis in subsequent years will provide much greater insight into recommended methods for helping children to accelerate development of their early reading skills, thereby laying a more solid foundation for improved learning outcomes.



PHOTO: J. WILLIAM HIRTLE/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Providing children with a range of interesting books and encouraging them to choose what they want to read, helps build their interest and motivation.

Students at Group Scolair Ruhanga primary school show their favourite books.

# 3 CLOSING THE EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES GAP – PILLAR I

## SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- School readiness skills of preschool-age children are low, particularly among children who are not accessing formal Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) services.
- Access to ECCD services appears to correlate positively to improved school readiness skills.
- A variety of background factors appear to influence children’s school readiness skills, including access to a supportive home literacy environment, parents’ education, age of child and socio-economic background.

Research on literacy development suggests that the foundations of learning to read and write are set long before a child enters primary school. If begun early, high-quality ECCD interventions can improve children’s development, better prepare them for school and ensure that more girls and boys actually enter primary school at the right age. This may also help to reduce later gender gaps that can be traced back to initial school intake. Investment in ECCD therefore typically far exceeds the return on most other social investments.

## OBJECTIVE

Through Pillar I, Save the Children aims to develop a Rwanda-specific, pedagogically sound approach to supporting the development of literacy and maths skills in relation to both centre-based care and care in the home. We also aim to provide caregivers and

parents of children aged nought to six years with the skills, knowledge and confidence to read with children. This will ensure that during the critical early years, Rwandan children benefit from inclusive, effective learning opportunities that support the development of literacy and maths skills at the pre-primary level, and improve school readiness and long-term learning outcomes for young learners. Ultimately, the expected outcomes are:

- improved environment and practices in ECCD centres and pre-primary classrooms that support children’s literacy and maths development
- improved parenting practices in supporting early literacy and maths skills
- the inclusion of targeted, play-based literacy and maths approaches in the revised Government of Rwanda’s pre-primary curriculum. In turn, this will lead to improved foundational literacy and maths skills and better performance in Grade 1.<sup>4</sup>

## KEY FINDINGS

Findings are based on the Early Literacy and Maths Initiative baseline study and the Political Economy Analysis on Early Literacy Promotion in Rwanda.

### EMERGENT LITERACY

The Early Literacy and Maths Initiative baseline study indicates that children’s school readiness skills for children aged four and five need to be improved. For emergent literacy, as presented here,<sup>5</sup> the study measured concepts about print, letter identification, phonological awareness, oral language and overall emergent literacy skills.

#### Concepts about print

Overall, children in our sample had very limited knowledge of printed materials. On average, children correctly identified two out of nine items related to knowledge of printed materials. The easiest task for

**On average, children correctly identified two out of nine items related to knowledge of printed materials.**

Early Literacy and Maths Initiative baseline study

TABLE 2: SUMMARY OF CHILDREN’S SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE RELATING TO PRINTED MATERIALS

<b>50.4%</b>	could identify the book cover
<b>72.2%</b>	knew how to open the book
<b>20.5%</b>	could identify the book title
<b>16.1%</b>	could describe the topic of the book
<b>27.2%</b>	could identify separate words
<b>9.1%</b>	could identify the first word
<b>13.2%</b>	knew which direction to read in
<b>10.8%</b>	could read lines
<b>9.4%</b>	could identify the end of the book

Early Literacy and Maths Initiative baseline study

**Children were on average able to answer only two out of eight questions relating to listening comprehension.**

Early Literacy and Maths Initiative baseline study

children was to open the book and the most difficult tasks were identifying the first word and identifying where the story ends.

#### Letter identification

Generally, children in the sample had very limited letter knowledge; on average they could identify only two letters. In fact, 92% of children could not identify a single letter.

#### Phonological awareness

On average, phonological awareness – or awareness of sound and syllables – was another relatively difficult indicator for children in our sample, with an average total score for rhyming of 15.8% correct, and for first letter word sounds, 18% correct.

#### Oral language

The expressive vocabulary task was the most difficult for children, while the multi-step direction (ie, asking children to remember a three-step instruction and execute it in order) and receptive vocabulary (identifying pictures with different actions) were the easiest. Children also struggled with the listening comprehension task and were on average able to answer only two out of eight questions.

#### Overall emergent literacy

In order to create a composite score for emergent literacy, all items were weighted equally and added together. Children had an average score of 16.5 out of 47 possible points (35% correct). Expected levels depend on children’s experience with ECCD and home support. However, by the end of age five we expect them to be close to 37.6 points (80% correct) in country contexts like Rwanda.

Although the baseline does not set out to prove the effect of ECCD interventions on children’s school readiness skills, it does indicate an impact on those children who attend established, integrated ECCD





PHOTO: COLIN CROWLEY/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Reading aloud to very young children helps strengthen their early literacy skills.

Caregiver Yvonne Umutoni uses a large format book provided by the ARR programme to read aloud to four and five -year-olds.

centres (despite this being the first year of ECCD for most of them). Likewise, the observed trends in background factors suggest that some, such as home literacy environment, parents' education, age of child and socio-economic background, positively correlate to better school readiness.

## POLICY CONTEXT

While there is political will to support Early Childhood Development and Education (ECD & ECE)<sup>6</sup> in Rwanda, there is a significant policy gap for the delivery of high-quality early years services, in terms of caregiver/teacher training in emergent literacy and maths, provision of age-appropriate materials, and systems for overseeing quality.

There are also several challenges, including lack of funding for construction of classrooms and payment of caregivers' salaries, which further hinder the provision of high-quality ECD/ECE. Additionally, government-supported ECCD interventions are currently envisioned only for children on the cusp of formal school attendance, as a single year of pre-primary education with identical facilities to those in primary school. Consequently, there is a gap in support for the cognitive development of children aged nought to three, and a gap in high-quality services for children aged four to six. There is therefore a need to improve early childhood care and development opportunities for younger children in Rwanda.

# 4 IMPROVING THE TEACHING OF READING – PILLAR 2

## SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- Teachers need to be trained and supported in effective ways to teach reading.
- Recreational reading in classrooms is infrequent.
- Classroom environments provide little exposure to printed material for children.
- Few teachers assign any literacy homework.

Research has shown that even when teachers are motivated and show up to class, they are often not adequately prepared in the most effective ways to teach children to read. According to the Centre for Universal Primary Education at the Brookings Institution,<sup>7</sup> providing training in such skills is critical to improving literacy in early primary-aged children.

Our programme of in-service teacher training introduces teachers to five core skills that have been identified as critical to acquiring literacy: alphabetic knowledge; phonological awareness; fluency; reading comprehension; and vocabulary. These core skills represent a balance between code-focused and meaning-focused skills that are critical to reading success.

## OBJECTIVE

Through Pillar 2, Save the Children aims to improve the teaching of reading in Kinyarwanda by training PI–P3 teachers on how to teach reading using active learning approaches and formative assessments, which enable teachers to modify their teaching and learning methods. Ultimately, the expected outcome is improved reading skills among students leading to higher learning outcomes, as a result of better quality of teaching.

## KEY FINDINGS

Findings are based on the Literacy Boost Teacher Practices baseline study; the Rwandan Children’s Book Initiative baseline study; the Children’s Book Practice and Policy baseline report: *Capitation Grants and Recreational Reading Materials*; and the Political Economy Analysis on Early Literacy Promotion in Rwanda.

## CORE READING SKILLS

The findings for this pillar indicate that there are gaps in teacher knowledge and application regarding the core skills of early grade reading development. A majority of teachers in the study highlighted alphabetic knowledge, reading comprehension and reading fluency as core skills, while few seemed to realise the importance of phonemic awareness or vocabulary.

### **Alphabetic knowledge**

The majority of teachers surveyed (82%) identified ‘being able to identify letters and the sounds they represent’ as one of five most important skills for children to read well. However, observers noted that teachers or students identified letters/letter sounds in only 45% of classrooms and students wrote letters in their notebooks in just 17% of classrooms observed. Teachers and students wrote letters in the air with their fingers in only 5% of the classrooms

## Students wrote letters in their notebooks in just 17% of classrooms observed.

Literacy Boost Teacher Practices baseline study

observed. The decoding and encoding activity they participated in most often (69% of classrooms) was sounding out words.

### Reading fluency

Of teachers surveyed, 72% identified 'reading accurately with proper pacing and intonation' as one of five core skills for reading well. A majority of teachers surveyed (84.5%) reported an accurate understanding of what it means to read fluently. While teacher survey data indicates that teachers do not model/exhibit fluent reading to students regularly (only about 9% reported doing so daily), 90% of those observed modelled fluent reading in the classroom. Some type of text was read out loud in 95.2% of the classrooms, 88% of teachers encouraged students to read fluently and 83% explicitly taught students about fluent reading during lessons. However, all students did not have the opportunity to read aloud independently.

### Vocabulary

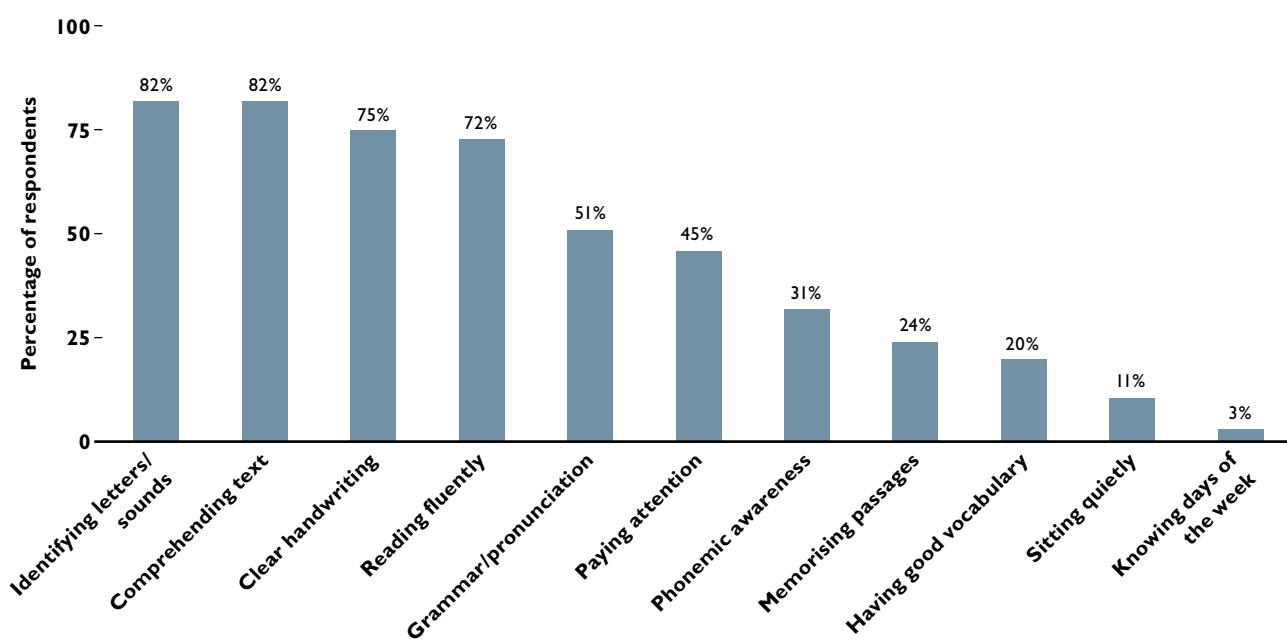
Only 20% of teachers surveyed identified 'having a good vocabulary' as one of five core reading skills and vocabulary instruction took up the least amount of observed literacy instruction time (on average, three minutes). However, teachers seemed to display a strong understanding of activities that would develop vocabulary skills among students. During classroom observations, while teachers taught the meanings of words, less than half taught words related to the text the children had read. Only half practised new vocabulary words with students and few teachers (2%) taught the meanings of words by having students generate synonyms or antonyms.

### Reading comprehension

A majority of teachers (82%) correctly identified 'understanding what you read' as one of five core reading skills.

When asked to select strategies to teach comprehension skills from a list, 86.9% of teachers appropriately selected 'being able to answer questions about the plot of the text', 74.7% identified 'being able to summarise accurately in your own words', 65.6% identified 'understanding, interpreting and using information from a text' and 40.4% identified 'being able to relate it to a similar text you have read'. However, a fairly high percentage of

FIGURE 2: FIVE MOST IMPORTANT SKILLS FOR CHILDREN TO READ WELL AS REPORTED BY TEACHERS



Literacy Boost Teacher Practices baseline study

teachers (39.3%) understood reading comprehension as ‘reading out loud without mistakes’, 35.1% understood it as ‘reading out loud with accuracy’, and 29.1% as ‘repeating a text from memory’. The strategies used to teach reading comprehension most often observed in classrooms involved asking questions about text (87%) and asking students to summarise the text (82%).

### Phonemic awareness

The concept of phonemes appears to be unfamiliar to teachers in Rwanda and is not usually taught in classrooms. This may be associated with the issues faced in translating this term on the survey forms, a fact that limits our interpretation of any findings related to phonemic awareness.

Only 31% of teachers identified ‘awareness of how words can be broken down into individual sounds’ as one of five most important skills for children to read well. Teachers seemed to have an understanding of the concept of syllables (though they hardly ever made explicit mention of breaking words up into syllables). However, they did not display a correct

understanding of phonemes. When asked how many phonemes are in the word ‘muraho’ (meaning ‘hello’ in Kinyarwanda), only 1.4% correctly responded ‘six’.<sup>8</sup>

### USE OF RECREATIONAL READING MATERIAL

As demonstrated in the Children’s Book Practice and Policy and Rwandan Children’s Book Initiative baseline reports, the use of storybooks in the classroom is limited. This is partly due to the lack of time allocated to reading in the curriculum, but also due to a crucial lack of awareness among teachers of how or why one would engage in reading instruction. This suggests that teacher training on the importance of the use of supplementary reading materials and different reading techniques (such as shared and independent reading) would be beneficial for teachers, and ultimately students, in Rwanda.

### PRINT-RICH ENVIRONMENT

As highlighted in the Rwandan Children’s Book Initiative baseline report, teachers self-reported positive practices in terms of creating a rich literate



PHOTO: BETHANY ERICSON/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Research shows that the availability of books and other print materials in school classrooms is associated with higher student performance.

Example of a typical classroom in a primary school in Burera district with few print materials on display.

environment in their classrooms. A majority stated that they produced their own materials (92.1%) and that students were asked to produce materials to be displayed on the walls (80.5%). However, only 60.8% reported that their classrooms actually had any materials on the walls.

In classroom observations for the Literary Boost: Reading Assessment study, it was noted that some type of printed material was present on the walls of 69% of classrooms, with an average of ten items per classroom. Most of the materials were teacher-made (54.8% of classrooms had items with text in Kinyarwanda, 45.2% in English, 9.5% in French and 7.1% with only images). Some were professionally printed or store bought – 7.1% of classrooms had store-bought items with text in Kinyarwanda, 21.4% with text in English and 7.1% with images only. Very few classrooms had student-made material on the walls – 4.8% had items with text in Kinyarwanda, 4.8% in English and 2.4% in French. The types of materials present on walls were most often words matched to pictures. Songs or poems were found least often on classroom walls.

#### LITERACY ASSESSMENT AND HOMEWORK

Of the teachers surveyed, 98% reported tracking students' literacy skills and progress in some way. While most of the teachers observed (98%) made informal assessments of individual students (asking students about their understanding in some way) during the lesson, only 29% provided formal assessment. While a majority of teachers (83%) kept summative assessment records of educational outcomes, only 2% kept formative assessment records of their students' progress.

Fewer than half of the teachers surveyed reported providing their students with any regular literacy homework and teachers assigned literacy homework in only 7% of classrooms observed.<sup>9</sup>

## POLICY CONTEXT

Both education quality issues in general, and specifically the acquisition of literacy skills, are priority areas for the current Education Sector Strategic Plan in the early primary years. However, the plan's monitoring matrix reduces these educational quality issues and strategies to only a few general indicators. Many of the important quality strategies – such as teacher training in literacy instruction, school time for reading instruction and independent reading, and the availability of supplementary reading materials – have not been directly converted into measurable indicators. Examination scores are treated as quality indicators, but the strategy for making valid and year-to-year comparable judgments about literacy proficiency based on the Kinyarwanda examinations is not clearly defined. There is also very little or no budget for a number of outputs directly related to improving education quality. Furthermore, planning documents at the district level – where implementation of education sector strategies is coordinated – typically do not include any education quality-related indicators.

Revision of the national curriculum commenced in 2013 and includes technical support from Save the Children. The new curriculum will be rolled out in schools from 2016, and may result in positive systemic changes regarding literacy instruction.<sup>10</sup>

# 5 DEVELOPING A CULTURE OF LITERACY AND LEARNING OUT OF SCHOOL – PILLAR 3

## SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- Literacy activities seem to be associated only with school. Few children report reading for pleasure.
- Parents' reading at home is positively correlated to the likelihood of children reading at home and in school.
- There is a dearth of appropriate reading materials and reading opportunities for children at home and in the community.
- There is a general understanding of the importance of education and literacy among parents and community members.

Available evidence points to the importance of encouraging a culture of literacy and learning both at the school and community levels. A significant body of research in developed countries finds that, in general, children who come from homes with higher amounts of literacy activities – such as reading books or playing with alphabet toys – read better than children who come from homes with fewer literacy-related activities.<sup>11</sup>

## OBJECTIVE

Through Pillar 3, Save the Children aims to cultivate a community-based understanding of the value of literacy by creating opportunities to enjoy reading together. With most ARR approaches addressing community aspects of literacy and learning, the ultimate expected outcome of the interventions is increased support and opportunities for children to develop and practise their reading outside of school. Moreover, although attention to the importance of community action in support of literacy and reading is evident in pockets of research, it has not been

analysed to the same extent as in-school activities. Thus, the ARR findings will also make a significant contribution to the evidence base of its effectiveness.

## KEY FINDINGS

Findings are based on the Literacy Boost: Home Ethnography, Home Literacy Environment and Reading Assessment baseline surveys; the Community Practices and Perceptions of Reading study; and the Early Literacy and Maths Initiative baseline survey.

## READING HABITS AND PRACTICES

As shown consistently across several studies, literacy activities seemed to be limited to, and associated with, school. Children reported that they spend most of their time outside of school doing housework and that they have little time for reading.<sup>12</sup> In answer to the questions, 'How do you help your child to learn?', the most common response by parents in the Literacy Boost: Home Literacy Environment study was that they would purchase school materials to



PHOTO: J. WILLIAM HIRTLER/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Parents and the wider family reading with their children for pleasure is key to improving literacy skills.

A mother in Gicumbi district reading to her two children.

help their child learn (59%). The next most common response (25% of respondents) was that they read to their child and 9% of respondents replied that they do not help their child to learn.

*“When I wake up, I wash my face, brush my teeth, take a bath, put on clothes, and go to school. Then I take lunch. When the sun sets, I find food for cows. When I come back, I take a bath, eat supper, and go to bed.”*

Six-year-old girl in Primary Grade 2

At the same time, more than 76% of students in the Literacy Boost: Reading Assessment study reported that someone reads to them at home and 86% of students reported having someone who reads in the family. Similarly, in over 90% of households in the Home Literacy Environment study, at least one family member reported that he/she could read, write and had discussions with the study child.

According to the Rwandan Children’s Book Initiative baseline study, the probability of children reading is highly influenced by the home environment. Parental reading habits and socio-economic status seem to predict if a child will read or not. Findings also show that if a mother reads, a child in a household with low socio-economic status has the same probability of reading as a child in a household with high socio-economic status where the mother does not read.<sup>13</sup>

#### AVAILABILITY OF READING MATERIALS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The baselines and studies illustrate that there is a crucial need for reading materials geared towards children, both at home and in local communities. According to both the Rwandan Children’s Book Initiative and the Home Literacy studies, the most common printed materials in the home are religious materials, with 60% of families reporting that they had some religious materials in the home. Following this were learners’ books (textbooks), found in 37% of households. Adult books were found in less than one out of every five homes, and children’s books were found in less than one out of every ten homes.<sup>14</sup> According to the Early Literacy and Maths Initiative baseline study, very few families with children of ECCD age have any types of books at home.

**Adult books were found in less than one out of every five homes, and children’s books were found in less than one out of every ten homes.**

Literacy Boost: Home Literacy Environment



PHOTO: J. WILLIAM HIRTLE/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Children from homes with books, literacy games and toys generally read better than children without access to these materials. Simple materials can be made locally by parents and community members.

A mother making reading materials together with her son at their home in Gicumbi district.

All sectors (subdivisions of districts) surveyed in the Community Practices and Perceptions of Reading study provided some form of reading resources and/or opportunities to community members. While reading resources were mainly supplied by public libraries, which are typically located in or near the sector offices, reading opportunities outside of school mainly target adults through literacy classes at churches or local government offices. While all the sectors had a public library, the average library contained only 225 books and fewer than half of the libraries had books, other than schoolbooks targeted at primary school children.

In most localities, it was reported that children could borrow books and bring them home. However, many community members, leaders and students were reportedly unaware of any publicly available reading resources and libraries.<sup>15</sup>

**Fewer than half of the libraries had books, other than schoolbooks targeted at primary school children.**

Community Practices and Perceptions of Reading study

## BARRIERS TO INCREASING THE AVAILABILITY OF READING OPPORTUNITIES

- The **burden of domestic and agricultural labour** makes it difficult for parents to provide opportunities for their children to read outside of school.
- The **structure of the formal education system** makes it difficult for teachers to provide students with the time and materials for independent reading.

## ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS ABOUT READING

In student focus group discussions as part of the Community Practices and Perceptions of Reading study, a total of 60 participants stated that they enjoy or like reading. Forty-five expressed an association of positive feelings with reading and 37 an association of negative feelings. In general, the positive feelings towards reading were related to how it would shape their academic success. Only in a few cases did students say that they read for pleasure. Students also expressed a preference for reading at school, rather than reading alone or at home. The students who expressed negative associations with reading



**Virtually all respondents agreed that there are many benefits to reading and that every child should learn to read.**

Community Practices and Perceptions of Reading study

stated that they did not like reading because of the risk of punishment from their teachers, or due to the noise levels and distractions from undisciplined classmates, which makes it difficult to understand and remember what they have read.<sup>16</sup>

Despite the seemingly limited scope for reading in the home, the Home Literacy Environment study documented overwhelmingly positive beliefs about reading and learning among parents and community members as well as a general understanding of the importance of education and literacy. Nearly all (96%) of the respondents (92% of whom were parents or grandparents) agreed that reading is a valued activity and 92% agreed that people who can read have higher standing in their community. Virtually all respondents (99.8%) agreed that there are many benefits to reading and that every child should learn to read.

While positive attitudes related to reading were prevalent, parental responses to different questions indicated that parents might be lacking confidence in supporting children to read. When asked whether they agree with the statement ‘It is difficult for someone like me to help my child to learn to read’, 38% of respondents agreed.

## POLICY CONTEXT

The goal of creating a culture of reading in Rwanda was first raised as a national policy issue in 2011–2012, with the establishment of the Rwanda Reads initiative. Bringing a number of government, development and private sector partners on board to emphasise reading issues within their areas of work, Rwanda Reads began a process of raising awareness regarding the importance of giving children and others access to books, and incorporating literacy-promotion language in key policy documents. However, the importance of emergent and early literacy is not sufficiently recognised – in general public discourse and in detailed district planning – as a foundation for individual and national development. Furthermore, the detailed planning and budgeting for increasing access to and the use of books – whether within schools or beyond – remains weak, indicating that this policy issue still needs to be accorded greater attention in order for significant change to be achieved.<sup>17</sup>

**Most parents understand the importance of being able to read well and are keen to develop their children’s skills. Playing literacy and maths games is one way parents can engage with their children and support their learning.**

**A mother counting with her children at their home in Gicumbi district.**



PHOTO: J. WILLIAM HIRTLE/SAVE THE CHILDREN

# 6 CREATING A RICH LITERATE ENVIRONMENT – PILLAR 4

## SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- There is a lack of Kinyarwanda children’s storybooks on the market and in schools, with a particularly large gap in materials for pre-primary children.
- Local publishers lack a solid understanding of the quality criteria and attributes required for high-quality storybooks for children at all levels.
- Schools tend to dedicate a greater portion of available funds to storybooks for the upper primary and secondary levels rather than for PI–P3.
- Schools tend to give preference to buying many copies of a few titles for ‘read alone’ purposes rather than increasing the diversity of books to read for pleasure as part of independent reading or read aloud activities.

For young children in school, access to and use of reading materials in languages they can understand is critical to acquiring basic literacy skills. Numerous international and national learning assessments have demonstrated that the availability of books and other printed materials in school classrooms and libraries is associated with higher student performance.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the publishing industry in Rwanda remains very small and relies on publishing textbooks to survive. The market beyond textbooks is limited, and publishers lack incentives to publish a wide variety of titles for children and schools.

## OBJECTIVE

Through Pillar 4, Save the Children aims to get more children reading more and better books, using a whole-system approach that will address the current book gap. Ultimately, the expected outcomes of this pillar’s interventions are improved demand for and supply of age-appropriate local language children’s books. This entails:

- improving the quality, quantity and range of books available
- establishing and sustaining demand for such books by increasing opportunities for reading in and out of school
- building teachers’ capacity to use books to support reading and learning
- equipping publishers, authors and illustrators with the knowledge, skills and confidence to produce high-quality children’s books in Kinyarwanda.

## KEY FINDINGS

Findings are based on the Rwandan Children’s Book Initiative baseline survey; Children’s Book Practice and Policy baseline report: *Capitation Grants and Recreational Reading Materials*; Community Practices and Perceptions of Reading baseline survey; and Political Economy Analysis on Early Literacy Promotion in Rwanda.

### AVAILABILITY OF STORYBOOKS

#### Nationally

In 2012, in order to increase the amount of recreational reading materials available to primary schools, the Rwanda Education Board (REB) issued an off-the-shelf tender for publishers to submit recreational reading materials for inclusion on an authorised list. Prior to 2012, there were 19 Kinyarwanda storybooks on the REB approved list, none of which were appropriate for P1 to P3, and there were 227 English language books. After the 2012 tender, the number of approved Kinyarwanda titles for primary level (P1–P6) increased to 372.<sup>19</sup>

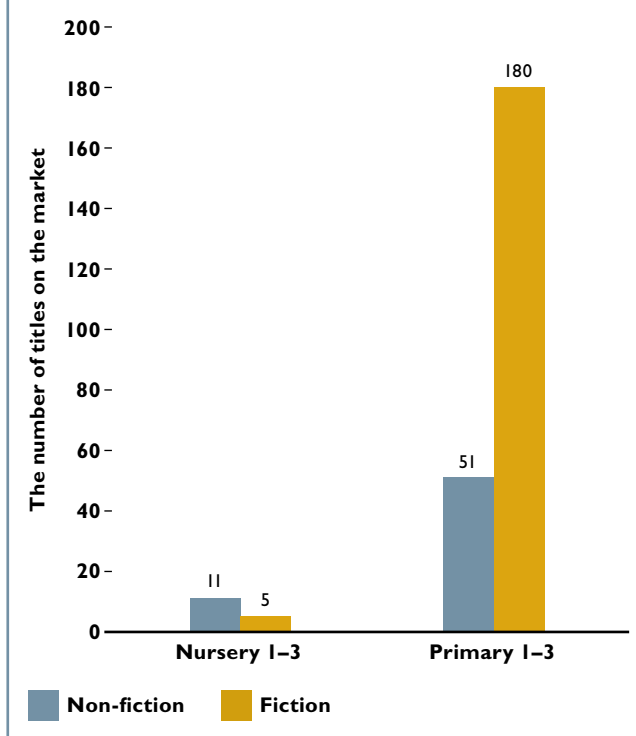
Despite noteworthy progress, the Rwandan Children’s Book Initiative baseline report highlights that there is still significant room for improvement in the number, range and quality of Kinyarwanda children’s storybooks available on the market. In particular, there was an identified lack of pre-primary level books. Only 6.5% of books for P3 or lower grades were actually suitable for this level.

Moreover, the majority of existing Kinyarwanda books for P3 and below were deemed ‘acceptable’, ‘poor’ or ‘unacceptable’ across all REB quality criteria for text content, presentation, language, editorial quality, promotion of positive values (for fiction) and factual accuracy (for non-fiction). Less than 40% of the books were identified as good for each of the criteria and less than 4% were identified as excellent.

#### In schools

According to the Children’s Book Practice and Policy baseline report, *Capitation Grants and Recreational Reading Materials*, there was an observed tendency in many of the schools surveyed to dedicate a greater portion of available funds for supplementary materials, such as storybooks, for the P4–P6 levels

FIGURE 3: RANGE OF KINYARWANDA CHILDREN’S STORYBOOKS ON THE MARKET



Rwanda Children’s Book Initiative baseline report

rather than for P1–P3. When interviewed, the staff responsible for placing orders indicated that students in lower grades (P1–P3) could not yet read, and therefore would not make ample use of the books. P1–P3 teachers noted that the Kinyarwanda spelling system prevents children from being able to read most texts until they have learned all of the complex consonant blends. According to the rate of phonics introduction specified in the current national curriculum, this competency is not achieved until P3.

There was also a noted trend of teachers preferring to purchase class sets of storybooks in order to provide all students, or every other student, with a copy of the text. One school bought 50 P1–P3 books, but with an average of 25 copies per book, there were only two distinct titles purchased.<sup>20</sup>

According to the Rwandan Children’s Book Initiative baseline report, headteachers reported that 82.6% of schools in the sample have a storybook collection. However, there were on average only three storybooks per school, with the median school having only one storybook. In 24 out of 52 schools, no storybooks were observed at all.



There is currently a lack of high quality Kinyarwanda storybooks available to schools and the wider community.

The ARR programme supports authors, illustrators and publishers to increase the number and range of storybooks.

### In communities

As outlined earlier in this report (see Chapter 5), there is also limited availability of age-appropriate Kinyarwanda storybooks in communities and homes.

### ACCESSIBILITY AND MANAGEMENT OF BOOKS IN SCHOOLS

In all of the surveyed schools for the Children's Book Practice and Policy baseline report, *Capitation Grants and Recreational Reading Materials*, the procured recreational reading materials were stockpiled in libraries or storage rooms. Interviews revealed that teachers and administrators consciously decided to store the books in a central location for easier maintenance. According to the Rwandan Children's Book Initiative baseline report, the main reason not to grant free access to books was that there were not enough books for each classroom. In order to protect the books from damage and theft, the rooms were permanently locked, with only one or two staff members in possession of the keys.

In more than one-third of schools surveyed, only teachers were allowed to borrow books.

### PUBLISHING OF STORYBOOKS

There are several obstacles to the production of high-quality reading materials in Rwanda. First, the publishing industry in general lacks knowledge

on what constitutes a good book for children and publishers lack a solid understanding of the quality criteria and attributes required for high-quality storybooks for all levels. The absence of degree programmes to train publishers means that many Rwandan publishers do not undergo any formal professional training and are often not sufficiently knowledgeable about the fundamental elements of various types of high-quality children's texts.

For off-the-shelf tenders, publishers have less time to prepare their submissions – generally between one to two months – and guidelines are not as clearly determined as they are in the regular tender process. Because of the limited time given for publishers to prepare for off-the-shelf tenders, and the poor quality of submissions, the tenders are frequently won by regional and international publishers who have comparable materials already in circulation in other countries, which can be quickly adapted and, if necessary, translated into Kinyarwanda.

Another issue voiced by publishers is that shipments of books take a long time to reach Rwanda and publishers are fined for every day their delivery is late. These long distance shipments are an inherent part of the process as local printing costs are prohibitively high, and local printers do not have the capacity to print large quantities of books that fulfil the REB's technical specifications.<sup>21</sup>

## POLICY CONTEXT

Until recently, there has been an overall absence of legal and institutional frameworks for the publishing sector and for the expansion of a network of community libraries. However, a National Policy for Library Services has recently been created, and a National Book Development Policy is also under development. With assistance from Save the Children, the National Book Development Policy is expected to support the functioning of a stronger publishing sector in Rwanda, producing a regular supply of Kinyarwanda-language supplementary reading materials. These draft policies do not yet have adequate implementation plans or funding provisions, issues that can be worked on in the coming year.

As expressed in the draft 2013–2017 Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP), the Government of

Rwanda is committed to improving the student-to-textbook ratio in primary schools, and is considering providing capitation grants for purchasing books for pre-primary classrooms to be delivered to all primary schools by 2017.<sup>22</sup> However, out of the capitation grants already designated for primary schools, 50% is allocated for school materials and only 20% of this portion goes to supplementary materials, which includes storybooks, reference books and teaching aids. Thus, the number of storybooks available in schools relies heavily on ordering practices in each school, as illustrated above. Furthermore, the detailed planning and budgeting for increasing access to and use of books – whether within schools or beyond – remains weak, indicating that this policy issue still needs to be accorded greater attention in order for significant change to be achieved.<sup>23</sup>



PHOTO: COLIN CROWLEY/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Books should be readily accessible to children in the classroom. Displaying the cover of books is one way of gaining children's interest.

A student at Groupe Scolair Ruhanga primary school chooses a book from a bookshelf provided by the ARR programme.

# 7 REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Many interesting findings have derived from the baseline surveys and studies carried out for the Rwanda Education Signature Programme, Advancing the Right to Read (ARR). Most importantly, they have further evidenced the need for the ARR programme and its approaches in Rwanda and they have provided insight into key issues and gaps, both at the local and national levels, which gives us the opportunity to better target our interventions and advocacy work during the coming years.

The ARR programme is ambitious. It endeavours to provide a continuum of services and opportunities for literacy and learning for children aged eight to nine years, in order to ensure that all children leave

school able to read. With all of the gaps identified in our research addressed by the programme, we expect to see significant returns in the next three years. In particular, we expect to see the benefits of out-of-school reading promotion and the increased availability and accessibility of high-quality, Kinyarwanda children's books, both in and outside of school.

Evidence produced by the programme will be used to generate a policy consensus, mobilise supportive actors and undertake direct policy influencing in Rwanda and internationally, with the aim of achieving systemic change in how reading is taught and supported nationally and locally, and to ensure that children in Rwanda have the reading materials needed to acquire and then use their literacy skills.



It's important that teachers regularly make time for reading with their students.

A teacher reads aloud to a group of PI students at the Groupe Scolair Ruhanga primary school.



PHOTO: COLIN CROWLEY/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Stories stimulate children's imagination and creativity.

Children at the Kiboga ECCD centre in Burera draw pictures based on a story they were told.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Improving children's reading requires a specific focus from early childhood through the early years of primary school, as well as a supporting culture, environment and literacy resources in homes, communities and schools. The baselines and studies performed for the ARR programme confirm the need for action to address the gaps.

- Early childhood development opportunities should be improved by:
  - offering a holistic approach to parenting education that addresses physical, socio-emotional, and cognitive development with a special focus on helping parents understand how they can support emergent literacy and maths in the home
  - providing caregiver/teacher training in emergent literacy and maths, promoting age-appropriate activities and materials, and advocating for quality-oversight systems.
- Good-quality education strategies – such as pre- and in-service teacher training in literacy instruction; school time for reading instruction and independent reading; print-rich classrooms conducive to learning; and the availability of supplementary reading materials in schools and communities – should be given increased attention in government of Rwanda policies and plans.
- These and other indicators of education quality should be monitored in both national and district planning documents, and the inspection and professional development systems should be expanded in order to ensure good-quality implementation.
- A greater budget should be allocated to improving access to resources for learning, including increased funding for the provision of supplementary reading materials such as storybooks in schools, and funding for a network of community libraries.
- More and better quality children's storybooks in Kinyarwanda should be made available on the market and to schools through support for the local publishing industry and through improved national level processes for book approval.
- Awareness should be increased within Rwanda's decentralised governance system and among the public of the importance of supporting emergent and early literacy at school, at home and in the community.
- Continuing data collection and analysis is needed to provide greater insight into recommended methods for helping to accelerate the development of early literacy skills among children in Rwanda.

# ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> A baseline for children aged 0–3 is being undertaken in 2014, and therefore findings for this age group are not included in this summary report.

<sup>2</sup> RTI International, *Early Grade Reading and Mathematics in Rwanda: Findings Report*. (Washington, 2012). Available at <https://www.eddataglobal.org/documents/index.cfm?fuseaction=pubDetail&ID=390>

<sup>3</sup> H S Scarborough, 'Connecting Early Language and Literacy to Later Reading (Dis) Abilities: Evidence, Theory, and Practice', in *Handbook of Early Literacy Research (Volume 1)*, edited by S B Neuman and D K Dickinson (New York: Guilford Press, 2001); A Cunningham and K Stanovich, 'Early Reading Acquisition and its Relation to Reading Experience and Ability 10 Years Later', *Developmental Psychology* 33 (1997): 934–45; F He, L Linden and M MacLeod, *A Better Way to Teach Children to Read? Evidence from a Randomized Control Trial* (Cambridge: J-Pal, 2009); and A Gove and P Cvelich, *Early Reading: Igniting education for all* (NC: Research Triangle Institute, 2011)

<sup>4</sup> Both the Early Literacy and Maths Initiative and First Read approaches fall under this pillar. However, the First Read approach was initiated after the baseline studies were carried out and, hence, it is not a part of this report.

<sup>5</sup> The school readiness tool in the assessment also measured children's motor development, emergent maths, socio-emotional intelligence, health and hygiene, and persistence. Refer to the full study for more information.

<sup>6</sup> Early Childhood Development (ECD) refers to initiatives targeting children aged nought to six years, while Early Childhood Education (ECE) refers to pre-primary education (often one year). Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) is Save the Children's preferred term for initiatives targeting children aged nought to six.

<sup>7</sup> Centre for Universal Education at Brookings, *A Global Compact on Learning: Taking Action on Education in Developing Countries* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2011)

<sup>8</sup> Literacy Boost: Teacher Practices

<sup>9</sup> Literacy Boost: Teacher Practices

<sup>10</sup> Political Economy Analysis on Early Literacy Promotion in Rwanda

<sup>11</sup> C E Snow, M S Burns and P Griffin, *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*, Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children. (Washington, DC: National Research Council, 1998)

<sup>12</sup> Community Practices and Perceptions of Reading

<sup>13</sup> Rwandan Children's Book Initiative baseline report

<sup>14</sup> Literacy Boost: Home Literacy Environment

<sup>15</sup> Community Practices and Perceptions of Reading

<sup>16</sup> Community Practices and Perceptions of Reading

<sup>17</sup> Political Economy Analysis on Early Literacy Promotion in Rwanda

<sup>18</sup> UNESCO, *Education For All Global Monitoring Report 2006: Literacy For Life*. (Paris: UNESCO, 2005)

<sup>19</sup> Children's Book Practice and Policy baseline report: *Capitation Grants and Recreational Reading Materials*

<sup>20</sup> Of the capitation grant provided to schools by the Ministry of Education, 50% is intended for school materials such as books, with 80% earmarked for textbooks and 20% for supplementary materials. Schools are allowed to purchase any supplementary materials from the approved list (including storybooks, and also teaching aides such as atlases, dictionaries, wall charts). The extent to which these purchases include storybooks varies depending on the individual school.

<sup>21</sup> Children's Book Practice and Policy baseline report: *Capitation Grants and Recreational Reading Materials*

<sup>22</sup> Children's Book Practice and Policy baseline report: *Capitation Grants and Recreational Reading Materials*

<sup>23</sup> Political Economy Analysis on Early Literacy Promotion in Rwanda



# ADVANCING THE **RIGHT TO READ** IN RWANDA

Programme baselines and studies  
Summary report

This summary report contains findings from nine different baselines and studies carried out for Save the Children Rwanda's Advancing the Right to Read programme. Launched in 2013, the programme aims to reverse the global crisis in learning by providing a continuum of services for children aged nought to nine years, focused on supporting pre-school and early primary literacy skills to ensure all children leave school able to read.

