

Read@Home: DELIVERING READING, LEARNING MATERIALS AND PARENTAL SUPPORT TO HARD-TO-REACH HOMES

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The Challenge and the Opportunity

Families living in poverty do not have access to age-appropriate learning materials with engaging content, in languages children understand. In Sub-Saharan Africa, only 3% of households have more than two children's books, and around the world, just half of all parents report regularly engaging in learning activities with young children. A recent study covering 35 countries of varying income levels found that having at least one children's book at home almost doubles the likelihood of the child being on track for literacy and numeracy.

Access to reading materials at home, along with guidance for parents and caregivers on how to engage in reading and language development activities with their children, is crucial to ending Learning Poverty. Too many children have little or no experience reading at home, limiting their language development and pre-reading skills, which makes the transition to school-based reading instruction very challenging. Encouraging quality interactions with parents and caregivers at home is essential to improve children's development and learning outcomes. Studies consistently demonstrate that the quantity and quality of talking, interacting and reading with a child during the early years are strongly associated with language and cognitive development, school readiness and academic performance. Beyond the early years, it is important that the home reading environment supports and extends the literacy instruction that occurs in school.

Concept

The objective of Read@Home is to deliver reading and learning materials to hard-to-reach homes, as quickly and efficiently as possible, along with support for parents and family members to engage with children's learning. The initiative targets families who are unlikely to be reached with the remote learning approaches being rolled out by ministries of education: parents with low literacy levels and families with no internet, no smart phones, but possibly some access to feature phones, radio, and/or TV. Tools to help parents and family members support young children's learning will be developed and distributed along with the materials for children. The effort will align with and complement governments' distance learning efforts where possible, to ensure a wrap-around approach to learning at home, but—crucially—will be designed to stand alone for families that cannot access government-managed or technology-enabled efforts.

Read@Home is not just a crisis response; rather, it is a key component of system-building that will help countries address learning poverty, develop more effective and equitable education systems AND be resilient in the face of future shocks. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of the home learning environment to complement school-based learning and address learning inequality. The pandemic has also exposed the digital divide that disproportionately impacts poor countries and poor communities within countries and exacerbates learning inequalities that were present before the pandemic. Moving forward, education systems need to ensure that all children can learn anywhere, anytime; Read@Home will be a key intervention within this effort.

While materials and approaches need to be specialized to country needs, countries face similar challenges and there are many opportunities to use global approaches to bring down costs and improve efficiency to reach families in need. Costs at country level to procure and deliver books vary greatly, in part based on the quality of the procurement process. One key contribution of Read@Home will be to improve the quality and efficiency of book supply chains across countries. Making supply chains more efficient, the smart use of technology to track deliveries and gather feedback from users are areas where Read@Home can support countries. Options include: standardizing technical specifications, providing enhanced procurement guidance, using "track and trace" systems to ensure books arrive at their intended destinations, "advance market commitments" to produce books in underserved languages, multiple round procurement with transparent pricing,

negotiated pricing, and bulk country, regional or global pooled procurement that still allows countries to customize content and language. Another key area of support will be supporting countries to identify, access, and quickly print high-quality materials in national languages, using increasingly available open source titles from global digital libraries, and versioning language and content to fit country contexts.

Value Proposition

Read@Home is offering country teams and clients three areas of support:

- I. Just-in-time technical assistance to complement country-efforts and operations to source and select quality reading and learning materials for children and accompanying materials for parents/caregivers to support children's learning;
- II. Just-in-time and longer-term technical assistance to complement country-efforts and operations to improve efficiency and reduce costs to procure and distribute learning materials; and,
- III. Funding to close gaps at country level and incentivize resource allocations (on a matching basis). For now, funding is available only to cover the costs of the technical assistance described in points I and II.

Program description

Beneficiaries: The initiative will target hard-to-reach children ages 3-12, their families and communities.

Learning package: Read@Home will distribute reading, learning and play materials on a massive scale, along with accompanying materials to support parents and other family members to engage in children's learning, where possible, in languages children speak and understand at home.

Connecting with Ministry of Education programs: Packages and approaches will be aligned to government distance learning programs in case families can connect to remote learning.

A global approach that elevates local solutions: Read@Home will pair solutions that can capitalize on economies of scale with country-specific opportunities, advanced through a demand-driven approach.

Finding innovations and operating flexibly: Innovations in procurement processes, regional/global approaches, flexibility in rules, and/or new mechanisms such as bulk purchases and reverse auctions will be explored. While Read@Home will adopt a "low-tech" approach in recognition of the digital divide and the importance of reaching last-mile families, Read@Home will also harness technological innovations where appropriate to improve efficiency, monitor uptake and get user feedback.

Leveraging finance: The approach will leverage the \$100 billion+ World Bank COVID-19 Emergency Response, Global Partnership for Education (GPE) COVID-related funds, as well as existing project funds. To increase sustainability, scale-up within countries will be financed predominantly by country-level financing.

Partnerships will be key to deliver the initiative

Partnerships will be crafted at global and local levels and will take various forms. The Read@Home team is working closely with the Global Book Alliance, USAID, civil society partners and other key partners both at a national level and within each country, to build on existing work focused on the development, distribution, and use of educational materials to address learning poverty (including books, tools for families to support children's learning, and distribution channels to reach homes). Globally and at the country level, we will identify existing high-quality open source titles in appropriate languages, and for cases when the language is not available, open source titles that can be versioned into appropriate languages using existing platforms. Within each country, we expect to work closely with the appropriate civil society partners for that country context and as well as international NGOs and UN institutions. We will build on strong relationships with governments to

explore how to leverage cross-sectoral approaches, supply chains, and workforces in each country (e.g. explore cash transfers, health, nutrition and other community-based programs) for the delivery of books and parental guidance. Corporate partnerships on distribution and other activities to leverage non-traditional channels will also be explored. Foundations, the private sector, and bilateral partners will be engaged and in-kind donations of high-quality, relevant materials or within the production and delivery process will be explored.

Progress to Date

- The Read@Home team was assembled in April and has been moving quickly.
- A list of 13 first-wave countries has been identified through regional consultations: El Salvador, Honduras, North Macedonia, Uzbekistan, Sao Tome & Principe, Senegal, Niger, Cameroon, Sudan, Mozambique, Republic of Marshall Islands, Philippines and Djibouti. Additional countries will join in the next six months.
- Funding of \$3 million has been secured thus far from GPE, but the team is seeking to raise \$7-\$25 million in the next two years to be able to expand the number of countries and depth of engagement in countries.
- Global guidance is being developed covering: i) identifying and selecting high-quality books in languages children understand; ii) developing guidance for caregivers to support children's learning; iii) piloting, monitoring, and evaluating the Read@Home Package; (iv) enhanced procurement and other support to guide countries and teams to improve efficiency and bring down costs across the book supply chain.

Examples of country-level work

North Macedonia: Working with the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, we will reach 40,000 children age 3-12, covering the country's entire population of vulnerable children. Children age 3-7 will receive a package of five picture books in their mother tongue (Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish, Roma and Bosnian), selected from existing repositories produced by Step-by-Step and UNICEF, along with questions and activities for each book. Children aged 8-12 will receive a selection of storybooks in their mother tongue, which are required school reading and often difficult for vulnerable families to afford. For both groups, families will receive guidelines on age-appropriate ways to engage children in reading and an attractive poster designed by a famous national artist with key messages. The first tranche of books will be delivered in September, using the social safety net delivery channels of the Social Services Improvement Project (P162246).

Senegal: The \$75 million Senegal Investing in the Early Years (P161332) will be leveraged to roll-out Read@Home in the seven poorest regions of the country, reaching an estimated 1-2 million families by engaging cross-sectoral community-based platforms, including nutrition programs, preschools, Koranic schools and the country's social registry and cash transfer program. Key Government agencies are working now on plans to roll-out the program using existing distribution channels and community programs.

Honduras: The Education Secretariat would like to reach children age 3-6 from vulnerable afro and indigenous groups, who are often excluded from pre-primary services, and Read@Home will build off of plans within the Honduras Early Childhood Education Project (P169161). Meetings with UNICEF, USAID and implementing partners have been held and we are gathering existing books and guidance for parents and identifying distribution channels and lessons learned from previous efforts to refine the work plan and capitalize on disparate interventions and relevant resources in the country that can be leveraged.

Republic of Marshall Islands: Read@Home will be rolled out in partnership with the Public School System, under the Ministry of Education, Sport, and Training and aligned to the RMI Multisector Early Childhood Development Project (P166800). We are conducting a Book Supply Chain Analysis to map out challenges and opportunities to improve the availability of reading materials for children, particularly in in Marshallese vs English, and in reaching the main islands vs the remote outer islands. We are exploring two primary workstreams: (i) distributing reading materials for 3-5 year olds to the remote outer islands, where travel is limited to one boat every 6 months; and, (ii) supplementing an existing home visiting program run by Women's

Union Together Marshall Islands (WUTMI), an NGO promoting women's empowerment and gender equality in the RMI, with materials and parental guidance centered on reading at home.