

CASE STUDY

Project Description

ELEP (Early Learning Enhancement Project), a micro level incremental innovation complemented by comparative data, seeks to raise learning outcomes by engaging and empowering community education stakeholders to produce context-specific strategies, training events and learning innovations which address the realities of each individual project school. This is done by an annual cycle of assessment, analysis of resultant data, stakeholder interaction, creation of a work plan, and community

action. This cycle addresses learning outcomes as well as school management and school environment.

ELEP is part of the third and final phase of a larger program sponsored by the Tullow Oil Co and executed by Link Community Development (LCD).

ELEP is rated highly in the use of best classroom practices. See the Innovations Grid annex

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Early Learning Innovations

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Project Implementation and Capacity Building

The SPR (School Performance Review) indicated a need for the training and coaching of lower primary literacy teachers, school management teams, and school committees along with their corresponding parent/teacher associations. LCD program staff originally indicated that they lack specific expertise in literacy but have since added competent staff in this area supported by the TA technical consultant. A teacher training and mentoring plan was then implemented.

Language issues and their effects on pupils' ability to learn have only recently been carefully considered by LCD. Program staff decided to comply with the national local language use policy and cooperated with the USAID/RTI/SHRP project and NCDC (National Curriculum Development Center) efforts in this area.

Though the LCD staff did develop a greater understanding of evaluation by doing a rigorous learning outcome assessment using EGRA (Early Grade Reading Assessment) procedures and trained EGRA assessors, it is unlikely that the LCD staff would be able to repeat the procedures without continued outside consultant input.

LCD has particularly benefitted from TA consultant input and further developed its capacity in the areas of teacher support, orthography, materials acquisition, and M&E

Results and analysis

LCD worked with SHRP (Uganda School Health and Reading Program) to establish an EGRA baseline and an end line for test and control schools. Results showed that the learning rate was significantly higher in test schools though lower than the desired minimum level for the grades concerned, P1 and P3, as measured by the PLE (Primary Leaving Exams). Unaffected PLE scores are likely due to the need for several years of LCD program implementation before the cumulative effect is manifested in the PLE results. The causal effect of teacher training/mentoring and appropriate language use on superior learning outcomes should be considered plausible. Tools and procedures for all reading activities and testing have been documented.

SPR results showed that school improvement in other areas was not progressing as rapidly as reported in the early phases.

Mitigating circumstances

As Phase Three is a down-scaling of Phase Two, an important decrease in LCD staff had occurred, leaving the program with little literacy expertise. Though this decrease has been sufficiently addressed, it resulted in the late implementation of some activities, such as a late baseline (March, end of first term) and late appropriation of language appropriate materials. While this may have resulted in a lower increase in learning outcomes, the increase in learning outcomes was still significantly superior to that of control schools.

Help from SHRP and SIL in the areas of orthography training and materials provision, though not fully taken advantage of to present, will be a significant boost in any future programs. LCD otherwise has little capacity to produce materials or provide training in orthography use.

Due to the airport fire in Nairobi, the community of practice meeting scheduled for last August 2013 was cancelled and rescheduled for January. The August meeting would have provided important timely analysis and input on program planning and assessment of technical needs. As a result, the project had a late start in addressing the areas of literacy methodology, appropriate language use, M&E, and materials production/procurement. Time lost has now been recuperated for the most part.

Lessons Learned

- Changes in staff can result in a loss of expertise, resulting in delayed or poor implementation. Availability of important staff should be confirmed before granting.

- Cooperating with competent partners can result in significant resource sharing and can contribute towards sustainability.

- TA is not the largest donor to the program and so has only proportional influence in programmatic decisions. For the sake of assuring long term sustainability, the grantee may decide to prioritize the goals and/or practices of the larger longer term donor.

Scaling

The SPR and learning innovations (teacher training/mentoring and appropriate language use) could be scaled quantitatively to a district, national, or regional/international level. The Tullow Oil Co is, however, not likely to expand the program beyond

its immediate interest group limited to the schools of company employees. SHRP would be a better partner to assure sustainability for and expansion of program activities throughout the Runyoro language area and beyond, yet, as concerns organizational stability, LCD should not abandon its privileged relationship with the Tullow Oil Co. The DES (Directorate of Education Standards), though appreciative of project results, has indicated that it would not have the resources to institute the SPR on a wider scale.

Because Runyoro, the language predominant in ELEM area schools, is in the second SHRP language cluster, SHRP is cooperating with LCD efforts of mutual interest, such as EGRA testing.

The NCDL is in the process of introducing a reading program in another area language, Lugungu, and so a working relationship should be considered. In partnership with LCD, LUBITLA (Lugungu Bible Translation and Literacy Association, an SIL affiliate) has offered a large amount of pedagogical materials, children stories, alphabet charts, an orthography manual and orthography training for teachers for a perspective program.

As concerns functional up scaling, the SPR model could be applied to other community action planning needs, such as for health or development issues.

The SPR innovation would be very useful to others attempting community action planning, such as MoEs, Catholic Education, SHRP and World Vision.

Recommendations

Given the effective use of best practices, the competency of the LCD staff and the quality working relationships with potential partners, the TA technical consultant recommends that this project be positively considered for scaling up.

