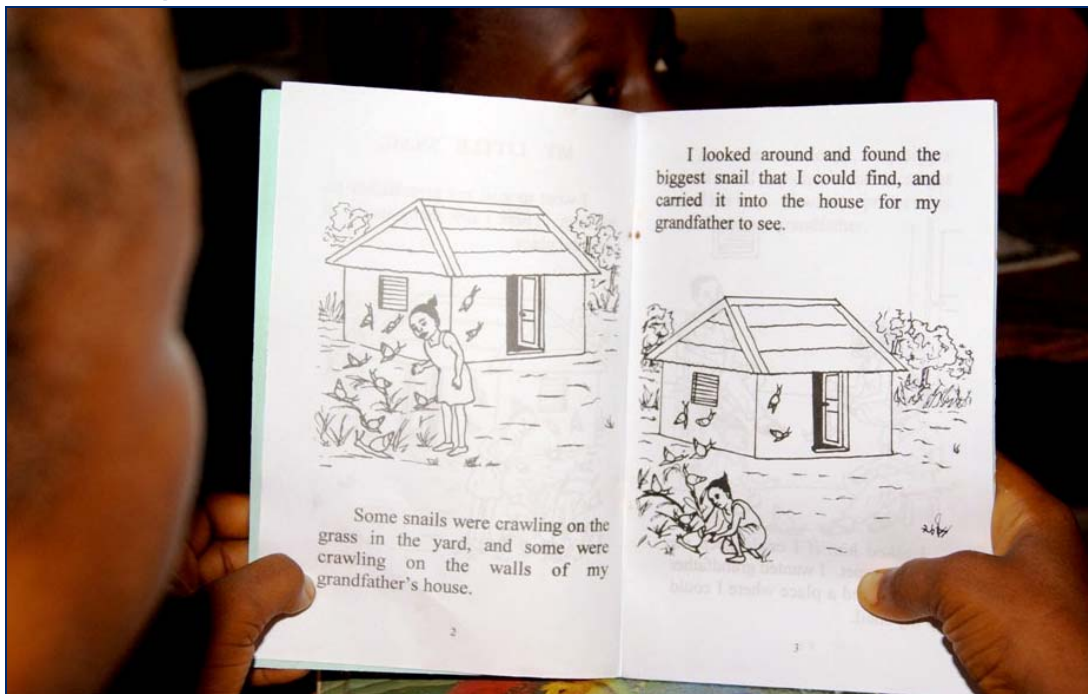




EdData II

All Children Reading by 2015: From Assessment to Action

Meeting Report



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Introduction

This report summarizes the presentations and findings of the **All Children Reading by 2015** workshop held in Washington, DC, April 12–14, 2010. The workshop was organized by RTI International with assistance from the International Reading Association (IRA), and was co-sponsored by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) via the Education Data for Decision Making (EdData II) project. The workshop also used funding from The READ Trust within the World Bank and from the Education for All (EFA) Fast-Track Initiative (FTI).

The recent formulation of EFA FTI goals has given countries the potential to sharply define quality outcomes for education that they can use to galvanize action and attention.¹ This new step forward comes at a time when the 2015 deadline of EFA and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is fast approaching.

Therefore, the All Children Reading by 2015 workshop focused on improving the quality of literacy education in eight countries interested in working with experts and donors to achieve measurable quality goals—with a “hard” goal of making sure all children in the country are reading by the end of grade 2. This three-day workshop created space for countries, donors, and experts to put their resources together to set results-based goals on improving quality and making a concerted push to reach them in a short but practical period of time: three to five years. At this working meeting, experts spoke on essential topics that countries would need to consider in taking on this challenge. After presentations by members of the expert panel, the country groups assembled separately to discuss how these topics would need to be approached in their country.

In short, the overall theme of the meeting was how to go beyond measurement and pilot projects to country-wide implementation.

The countries represented were Egypt, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Kenya, Liberia, Mali, Nicaragua, and The Gambia. These countries were chosen because they either had already concluded or were about to embark on an application of the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA)² and had also expressed serious interest in improving the quality of early grade reading on a national scale.

Besides the country representatives and the expert panel, other participants came from USAID, The READ Trust, FTI, the UK Department for International Development (DFID), the European Union, and the World Bank more generally. Also present were colleagues and collaborators from the Academy for Educational Development (AED), American Institutes for Research (AIR), and other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). A key IRA staff member facilitated several sessions.

¹ From the FTI Indicators Framework (IF): “Two indicators of reading skills are now added to the IF, one for early grades and the other for end of the primary education cycle. Evidence from sound research is the basis for these choices. a) Early grade: proportion of students who, after two years of primary schooling, demonstrate sufficient reading fluency and comprehension to ‘read to learn’. b) End of cycle: proportion of students who are able to read with comprehension, according to their countries’ curricular goals, by the end of primary school.” See http://www.eddataglobal.org/media/library/Indicative_Framework_template_FINAL_Oct-6-2009.pdf

² See <https://www.eddataglobal.org/index.cfm> > Major Activities > EGRA for more information.

Summary of Key Lessons Extracted

The expert panels addressed a number of hot topics, including teacher professional development, materials development, language of instruction, and possible solutions to linking literacy to funding mechanisms. The following were some of the key lessons that EdData II took away from the experts' presentations.

Teacher Professional Development (Sylvia Linan-Thompson)

- Research on early literacy improvement in the United States, and now in the developing world, suggests that teachers need to be able to use explicit, direct instruction in well-crafted lessons, and must teach lessons with a clear scope and sequence; but they also must have a deep understanding of why they do this.
- EGRA efforts have been focusing on classroom instruction, but they need to pay equal attention to teachers' understanding and investment.
- Teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning reflect their own experiences as students. Thus, changing teacher practices means changing teacher beliefs.
- Teacher professional development must clearly establish expectations, be provided in a focused and systematic manner, be of sufficient length to give teachers time to acquire new practices, and provide support.
- Many teachers need to learn that student outcomes are within their control.

Learning Materials (Stephanie Al Otaiba and Mary Spor)

- Learning materials are currently insufficient and of low quality, and are not based on research. The presenters provided some specifics, as well as resources, on how to improve the quality of reading textbooks. The recommendations were based on research evidence such as:
 - Schools should have a core instructional approach that explicitly and systematically supports both the mechanics of reading and reading for meaning. Materials should support the objective of a given lesson.
 - Reading materials should support grade-level objectives and should include a range of difficulties to meet learner needs.
 - Conventional wisdom around textbooks may lead to books that are not cost-effective (i.e., whose high cost is not justified by their effectiveness). For example, in many books there may not be sufficient print density, even though research shows that higher print density may lead to more learning.
 - Early-reading books often use expensive graphics and illustrations that do not reinforce the basic principles of reading, such as sound-to-print relationships.
 - Some books try to force too rapid a pace on the child and therefore are not appropriate for the grade to which they are pitched. It is possible to construct simple grade-level tools to analyze materials written for the early grades.

Alternative Funding Source (Ayah Mahgoub, Center for Global Development)

- The Center for Global Development has been advocating the use of a funding mechanism called "Cash on Delivery" that is oriented toward outcomes. Such a mechanism may fit early-grade reading efforts.

- Traditional aid does not always work well because money is typically given based on the costs of inputs, such as materials and training. One way to counter this problem is with more extrinsic incentives, such as donors giving aid based on outcomes only.
- Cash on Delivery is flexible (in that the funds can be used for any inputs or programs, as long as outcomes are produced) and allows interventions to proceed without extensive donor oversight. It uses a system of outcome measures to verify results and gives aid based on those results. That is, the more children score above a certain level on an assessment (or, more simply, the more children even just sit for the assessment), the more aid is given.

Technology Use (Dan Wagner and Mike Trucano)

- Evidence suggests that improved technology use not only is possible but also may be cost effective, even for early literacy instruction.
- Computer-assisted literacy instruction tools are available—Wagner presented some of his own work.
- The goal should be to focus on EFA and reading improvement, building on locally available hardware and human resources.
- To date, radio and (to a lesser extent) television have been used globally; but technologies such as computers and cell phones should be tested.

Social Mobilization (Colette Chabbott)

- The health sector has been more effective at social mobilization and social marketing than the education sector. Health offers useful lessons for education in these areas.
- Mass mobilization and community mobilization are clearly distinct in some ways. Mass mobilization affects individuals and requires classical mass communication such as radio spots and newspaper advertisements, and is normally aimed at individual behavior change. Community mobilization affects small communities, is aimed at collective behavior, and often requires local change agents.
- In mobilization and marketing, common mistakes are lack of clarity on the message, on what the audience is being asked to do, on who the target audiences are, and on which medium to use with which message and which audience. Others include lacking an implementable intervention to communicate, and insufficiently using partnerships (e.g., between government and civil society).

Language of Instruction (Barbara Trudell)

- Too many school systems make the fundamental mistake of attempting to simultaneously teach both reading in a language the child does not know and the new language. These two tasks need to be separated and sequenced.
- Language and cognitive abilities develop together. When schools instruct in a second language before students are proficient in their first language, they interrupt cognitive development.
- Evidence shows students learn best when they receive good instruction in their first language. Students can transfer these skills to a second language once they have learned well in their first language.

- Schools should teach curriculum content in students' first language and at the same time teach the second language orally, and only then move on to using the second language to actually impart curricular skills such as reading.
- Emphasizing mother-tongue instruction, by itself, as a goal driven by other (e.g., political) considerations, is insufficient. Mother-tongue instruction needs to be tied to solid, rigorous skills in teaching reading.
- The costs of solidly handling mother tongue instruction typically are overestimated, and the benefits are underestimated, thus leading to poor perceptions of cost-effectiveness. These mistaken perceptions need to be corrected.

General Themes Emerging from Discussion

During discussions, a few general themes kept emerging. These are summarized here.

Scaling up. Given that all of the countries represented had already applied EGRA at some level, a major question asked was how this type of assessment (and, presumably, appropriate interventions) could be scaled up. Several participants contributed their direct experiences with this issue, and noted that while pilots require only agreement with the middle levels of Ministries, scale-up requires leadership from the top.

Equity and equality. Panelists and participants acknowledged the need for more equal access to instruction in how to read, and above all equity in learning outcomes, which is harder to produce than equity in access to schooling. They noted various systemic factors contributing to inequality of learning outcomes, as well as the potential benefits of establishing fair and appropriate reading indicators, as an entry point into the issue of equity or equality of learning.

Community support for literacy learning. Participants from several countries emphasized the value of involving parents and communities in children's learning, as well as the importance of making information available to communities about what a good school is, and the role of simple reading indicators in accomplishing this.

Teacher expectations and attitudes. Teacher and parent expectations reportedly are lower than they should be, based on the demands of the curriculum and the research findings about the importance of early reading. It is difficult for parental and community involvement to lead to increases in quality if expectations are low. Several participants described their work toward changing attitudes.

Comprehension. Even countries that are making progress with basic skills in literacy are nevertheless concerned that assessed levels of comprehension are not rising at the same time. There is a need to improve vocabulary and comprehension, and to better measure those skills.

Results and Next Steps

The meeting concluded with three major results:

1. Each country put together the framework or outline for a plan that could be further developed in country toward the goal of getting all second-grade students to read by 2015.

2. A network of experts, donors, and country officials was formed to promote and support the work that started at the meeting.
3. A spontaneous consensus formed around the need for further workshops—both in the United States and regionally, around the world—that could support what was started here and extend the knowledge and ideas to other countries.

As noted above, the three-day meeting concluded with a half-day working session in which country officials worked with experts and donors to synthesize all of the information and thinking done in the previous 2½ days, while applying the lessons to their own countries. These syntheses were presented in the plenary session, in the form of draft outlines for plans that would allow each country to reach the goal of all children reading by 2015. Based on the presentations and what was known about each specific context, all countries analyzed what areas they would need to improve upon or what they would have to put in place in order to reach their goal. Common among country outlines were needs for curriculum review or development, teacher training, bilingual or mother-tongue instruction, community and parent involvement, and the use of both system-level and classroom assessments such as EGRA.

Considering the relatively brief duration of the workshop and the large amount of information that had been presented over the 2½ days, the country outlines were found to be extremely thoughtful and specific, especially in countries such as Nicaragua, which left with a fully formed plan as to how to improve the quality of early grade reading instruction that would fit in with its ongoing “Battle for the First Grade” campaign.³

Country officials went back to their respective countries with the intent of taking these outlines to their Ministry of Education to evaluate how they can be developed and implemented. (The EdData II workshop planning team received evidence that some started mobilizing immediately after the workshop.) Country officials also went home with more than an outline and a charge to improve reading: Through the meeting, a network and community of experts, donors, and country officials was formed. This network will foster the support and expertise necessary for countries to develop and implement their plans. Each country official left with a CD that included all workshop materials, including presentations and a participant list with contact information so that communication among participants can continue as needed. These materials have also been posted to the EdData website (see address above) so that these and other countries may benefit from the experience that was shared at this meeting.

A final conclusion from the meeting was the idea from all participants that besides the participating countries, *all* EFA countries could benefit from the knowledge that was shared and the work that was done at this meeting. Several participants suggested that a next step would be to begin organizing another meeting for 2011 that would allow for the participating countries to update donors on their progress as well as for new countries to work toward developing their own plans. Others suggested that the experience of this meeting could reach more countries if meetings were held regionally in Latin America, North Africa, and sub-Saharan Africa. As of the end of June 2010, discussions were taking place as to how this would be possible. The World Bank and FTI have agreed to fund direct costs for a meeting in Washington, DC, in April 2011, as well as regional meetings that would coincide with the International Reading Association’s regional conferences. In addition to ensuring that the work of the first meeting continues, the

³ The country outlines have been posted to the EdData II website: <https://www.eddataglobal.org/documents/index.cfm?fuseaction=showdir&pubtype=7&statusID=3&showtypes=0&showwall=Yes>.

follow-up meetings will help more countries reach their EFA and MDG goals by measurably improving quality of reading education.