EdData II: Education Data for Decision Making
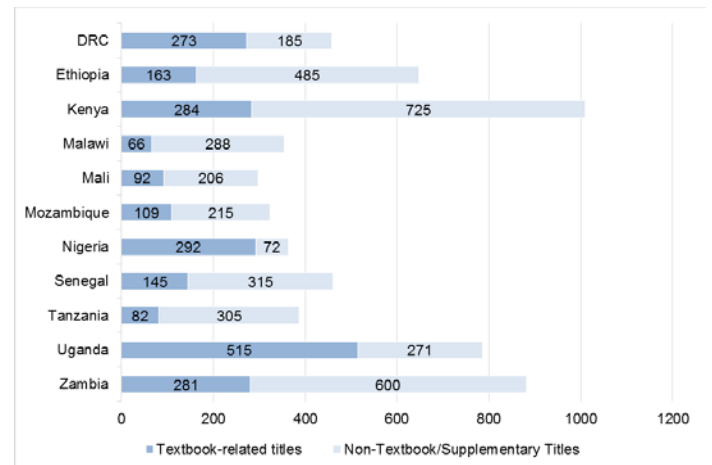## Survey of Children's Reading Materials

Access to and availability of appropriate Early Grade Reading (EGR) materials remain a challenge for students throughout the world. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and other development partners have created the Global Book Alliance, which aims to transform book development, provision, and distribution and to establish a Global Reading Repository. The repository will serve as a global catalogue of existing materials and facilitate their sharing, adaptation, and printing on large or small scales. Under Task Order 19 under the Education Data for Decision Making (EdData II) program, *Data for Educational Research and Planning (DERP) in Africa*, the Research Team developed a questionnaire and a data collection protocol to conduct a detailed inventory of EGR materials in 11 African countries: the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia. The findings from this inventory will contribute to the Global Reading Repository and are one step in helping ensure appropriate reading materials for all students.

Throughout a 1-month period in early 2015, the Research Team collected **5,919** titles in **200** different African languages. Targeted titles were those available for kindergarten through Primary Grade 3. The Research Team categorized a range of materials into textbook or supplementary reading materials. Textbooks include teacher manuals, student textbooks, and student workbooks. Supplemental reading materials included narratives, informational or nonfiction books, and reference books. The data collected are not an exhaustive inventory and are not necessarily a representative sample of children's publications in African languages; however, they do provide more

information than has previously been available on EGR materials in this region.

Overall Availability

The team identified 3,617 supplementary titles and 2,302 textbook-related titles across all 11 countries, for an overall ratio of three to two, as seen in the figure below. Students' literacy workbooks were the least commonly inventoried (seven percent of the total titles). Narrative texts were overwhelmingly and consistently the most common type of supplementary materials; informational, nonfiction texts were much rarer and almost nonexistent in Nigeria and Mali.

Usefulness of Available Materials for EGR Development

In addition to inventorying the number of available materials, the questionnaire addressed the usefulness and appropriateness of these materials in relation to helping learners progress in their reading fluency. As learners progress through the primary grades, availability of a wide range of reading materials at different levels can help nudge along an emergent reader and more deeply

challenge a fluent reader. Common pedagogical techniques found in textbook-related materials included reading passages and vocabulary development, with less than half of the titles using a phonics approach to teach letter sounds. A phonics approach can be an effective technique to helping students learn to read, and it is promising that it appeared in an average of 42 percent of all titles.

Regarding book level, the publishers labeled 80 percent of textbook materials for a specific grade, with the highest percentage intended for Primary Grades 1 (36 percent) and 2 (25 percent). The research team evaluated the supplementary materials by measuring the number of words per page (wpp). Only 14 percent were in the 1–10 wpp range, which would be appropriate for a beginning reader. This inventory shows that there is an opportunity to provide more reading materials to early stage readers who are not prepared for comprehensive, complex texts.

The inventory also assessed the equity and appropriateness of illustrations along gender, ethnic, religious, and disability lines. Overall, the illustrations portrayed boys and girls with general equity and did not discriminate in illustrations along ethnic or religious lines. However, people with disabilities appeared in only four percent of the titles.

Feasibility of Reusing, Adapting, and Reproducing Available Titles

Because data from the inventory will be used to inform the Global Reading Repository, another key concern was documenting the trends of copyrights for these materials. Only nine percent of inventoried titles had an open Creative Commons license, which limited the number of titles that are freely available and could be reproduced or adapted.

Producing Children's Reading Materials in African Languages

The inventory collected data about the producers and suppliers of early reading materials. Commercial publishers and nonprofit organizations are the leading producers of EGR materials and produced a combined 74 percent of the titles inventoried. Domestic government entities published 15 percent of registered titles, with nearly half of those titles being co-produced with bilateral or multilateral donors. Also, nonprofit organizations and international development agencies can publish EGR materials in a variety of African languages; some local publishers may be unwilling to do so because of a small language group size or perceived lower profitability.

Next Steps

This EGR materials inventory is helping to fill the gaps in knowledge about current availability and showcases what steps could be taken to increase availability of EGR materials. Although materials exist in a wide range of languages, there is still limited availability for fully supporting children's reading development. The most apparent gaps are low numbers of teacher's guides and nonfiction supplementary materials. There is an opportunity to strengthen the capacity of local authors and publishers to produce developmentally appropriate supplementary materials for early readers.

This inventory provides information to USAID, its partners in the Global Book Alliance, and interested consumers about the availability of different types of materials and to national governments or other development organizations so they can identify opportunities to develop titles that would fill the gaps in the current supply.

Detailed results of the inventory both overall and by individual country are available for additional reference at the EdData Global Web site.