

## Webinar 1: Handout 1

### Research to conduct and information to gather when designing an EGR program

During the program conception and design phase, the planning team should review and conduct research relevant to the different components of an EGR improvement initiative. The purpose of this background research is to identify needs and gaps that will inform the design of the program. This research will also help to better understand the capacity of the government and other institutions in country to implement an early grade reading initiative.

#### 1. Current learning outcomes, and the general “state of education”

It's important to understand the quality of education in the country in which the program will be implemented. Find out: What are current learning outcomes, as measured by various assessments, such as country-specific exams or large-scale assessments, such as TIMSS? What are the rates of student repetition and drop-out? Do all students have equitable access to education, or are spaces limited and/or “reserved” depending on various characteristics? Review the curriculum, learning materials and other education system products to get a sense of the overall quality of teaching and learning in the country. Find out how much time is currently allocated in the school day for teaching reading and language.

#### 2. Children's literacy and other skills

EGR program design and implementation must be informed by an understanding of children's literacy and other skills. These include pre-reading skills (such as oral language proficiency), reading skills (such as oral reading fluency) and other skills and characteristics of the population that might be relevant to the context or program (such as safety, social and emotional well-being). Results from pre-reading or reading assessments like EGRA, ASER, PIRLS or Pre-PIRLS provide information regarding children's current literacy skills and what a program may need to focus on.

Information about children's literacy and other skills and individual and environmental characteristics can help to (a) identify geographic areas that may be in particular need of intervention (if a program is not designed to be nation-wide initially), and (b) to better understand the scope and size of needs (e.g., what percentage of children are in need of improvement, and in which skills). One resource to consult is the Early Grade Reading Assessment Barometer, which provides data that can help inform EGR program planning and benchmarking <http://www.earlygradereadingbarometer.org/> It's important to disaggregate children's literacy skills by sex, language, geographic area, socio-economic status, and other characteristic relevant that would indicate any disparities.

#### 3. Teacher workforce characteristics

When planning (or expanding) an early grade reading improvement program, it's important to know as much information about the teacher workforce. This includes:

- a. Teacher recruitment and deployment policies and practice
- b. Number of teachers by grade, subject and other pertinent characteristics
- c. Student-teacher ratio
- d. Teacher attendance
- e. Teacher mobility
- f. Teacher attrition

Such data will provide helpful information in terms of understanding the size of the teacher workforce (that will need to be trained), how frequently teachers move from one school to another (which can affect training), ability of teachers to teach children based on language, how many teachers may need to be trained each year, whether teacher attendance (or absenteeism) is a significant problem that will need to be addressed within the scope of the EGR program; and how many teachers trained in EGR may move from school to school, or leave the system annually.

#### **4. Teacher knowledge, instructional practices and language skills**

Information on teachers' current pedagogical knowledge, instructional practices, and language skills is critical in shedding light on a variety of issues that EGR programs need to take into consideration during the design phase. Information gathered from teacher classroom observations and surveys about their knowledge and beliefs about early grade reading instruction can provide information on what reading or language instruction is currently taking place (or not taking place) in classrooms; teachers' current strengths and weaknesses; teacher instructional practices that an EGR program can incorporate or modify in a program to build on what teachers are already doing; teacher language skills; and teacher needs vis-à-vis teaching and learning materials.

This information may be available from program reports, and it can also be gathered by conducting surveys and classroom observations. Such surveys and observations can include a targeted sample of schools and teachers based on specific criteria relevant to the context and anticipated program. Classroom observations should also capture information about how much time is spent teaching reading—in comparison to how much time is allocated. Survey and observation instruments specific to the purpose should also be designed. Care should be taken when developing and administering assessments of teacher language skills. See the webinar in this series on **Teacher professional development** for additional ideas on background research to conduct to inform program design.

#### **5. School, enrollment and attendance information**

Data on the number and placement of schools, as well as the number of students enrolled, is essential in designing an early grade reading program. This data will be a significant determinant of the size, scale, design and cost of the program. Information on different types of schools (e.g., traditional government primary schools, accelerated learning programs, “nomad” schools, religious government schools, etc.) is useful in that it may help identify which types of schools to include in the program. Attendance data, if available, is also useful in understanding the context and needs for resources and teachers. The reliability and accuracy of school and enrollment data should be reviewed; a school verification exercise will likely be needed prior to program roll-out. (If data are several years old or were collected in an ad-hoc manner, an investment of time and resources to gather up-to-date information may be useful during the design phase.)

#### **6. Teaching and learning materials (TLMs) availability, content and quality.**

Information on the current availability and content of early grade reading TLMs is critical at the design stage, as it will be an important factor in terms of a program's scope, timeline and cost. Information about the availability of TLMs can sometimes be found in existing school and classroom surveys, from government documents or surveys, or from past or previous programs. It's important to review all the data that exist and to pay attention to how the data were gathered to know what information is the most reliable. In some cases, it may be necessary to conduct a materials availability study as part of the program design stage. Information regarding the content and quality of the materials is equally important to ascertain what materials may already be appropriate to an

early grade reading program, what materials may need to be adapted, and what materials may need to be developed “from scratch.”

The webinar in this series about **Resources for teaching and learning EGR** contains detailed information on how to review existing early grade reading TLMs, and other background research to conduct to prepare for materials development. The Survey of Children’s Reading Materials in African Languages in Eleven Countries (RTI, 2016) also provides information on materials availability in countries implementing early grade reading programs.

## 7. Language-related information and data

Information about the languages that students, teachers and school-communities speak and understand is vital. Such information can help to facilitate alignment between the language(s) children are taught to read in which regions and schools; the languages with which children speak and understand best (and which should therefore be used for EGR instruction); the languages teachers speak, read and write; and the materials that are delivered to schools. In some contexts, information on languages can be found through various sources, including in student assessment data (both the language in which children were assessed and their home language are usually gathered); census data (which may collect information on languages or ethnic background); and through a materials review study. A “language mapping” exercise will usually need to be conducted during the program design phase to obtain accurate information needed to appropriately plan a program.

In tandem with information on children’s language abilities, information on teachers’ language abilities is also critical. Such information can provide information on how well teachers can read, write and speak the languages in which they may need to provide instruction. This information will further inform the design of materials that teachers use and teacher professional development opportunities. Finally, information about the languages to be used for reading instruction needs to be gathered as well. This includes whether the language has a standardized orthography (writing system). It also includes understanding how the specific properties of the language will affect instruction. More information about language-related information to gather can be found in the webinar in this series on **Language considerations in EGR programs**.

## 8. Equity issues

Equity—or the presence of inequity—in the education system is a critical issue, as illustrated by its prominence as Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals and by the commitments of many international donors, implementing organizations and national governments. As such, it’s important that any early grade reading program be designed, implemented, monitored and evaluated with equity in mind. This includes issues related to gender equity, equity for people with disabilities, and other contextually-specific issues, such as ethnicity or religion, that may be relevant to where the program is being implemented. During the conception and design phase, the planning team should educate itself about inequities that may exist in the context and in the education sector. Then, the team should identify how a program may be designed in such a way that it does not exacerbate them, but instead addresses them. To do so, the planning team should gather information and data on equity-related issues and review existing research and information (outlined above) through an equity lens. For example, this may include identifying whether inequities exist vis-à-vis education access and learning/reading outcomes based on gender, geographic area, ethnicity or language. This can include comparing EGRA results for girls and boys, for different geographic regions, and in terms

of home language. For more information and resources related to equity issues in education, see the Resources and References section of this session.

### **9. Issues related to inclusive education and children with disabilities**

Increasingly, attention is being paid to screening and assessing students for disabilities, in particular vision and hearing impairments. Understanding the needs of children with disabilities is important to informing instructional strategies, materials development as well as policies and practices around EGR. Several resources related to developing an inclusive approach to EGR instruction are included in the Resources and References section of this webinar, as well as the webinar on Instruction and Skills.