



# ACCELERE! ACTIVITY I: IMPROVING EDUCATION ACCESS, QUALITY, AND GOVERNANCE IN THE DRC

FINAL REPORT

APPROVED BY THE COR ON MAY 21, 2021

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**Contract No.** AID-660-C-15-00001

**Cover photo:** Grade 1 students practice reading a Kiswahili student workbook in Haut Katanga province, DRC. ACCELERE!I supported the DRC Ministry of Education to create high quality teaching and learning materials in Congolese national languages and distributed those materials to students and teachers. (Credit: Chemonics International Inc.)

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# ACRONYMS

A!1	ACCELERE! Activity 1
A!2	ACCELERE! Activity 2
ACCELERE! I	Accès, Équité, Lecture, Rétention, et Redevabilité! Activity 1
ALC	Accelerated Learning Center, or Centre de Rattrapage Scolaire
ASOPROSAFD	Association de Solidarité pour la Promotion de la Santé Familiale et Développement
ASSONEPA	Association Nationale des Ecoles Privées Agréées
CBCA	Communauté Baptiste au Centre de l'Afrique
CEPACO	Collectif des Ecoles Privées Agréées du Congo
C-FOI	Classroom Fidelity of Implementation
CLA	Collaboration, Learning, and Adaptation
COGES	School Management Committee, or Comité de Gestion
COPA	Parent Committee, or Comité des Parents d'Elèves
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease, 2019
CSG	Community Savings Group
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DIPROMAD	Direction des Programmes et Matériels Didactiques
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo, the
EAGLE	USAID Empowering Adolescent Girls to Lead through Education project
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
FOI	Fidelity of Implementation
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IGA	Income-Generating Activity
IRI	Interactive Radio Instruction
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
MERL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning
MOBICOM	Community Mobilizers
MOU	Memoranda/Memorandum of Understanding
M-TEW	Mobile Training Everywhere
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization

PAQUE	<i>Projet d'Amélioration de la Qualité de l'Éducation (Global Partnership for Education)</i>
PAQUED	<i>Projet d'Amélioration de la Qualité de l'Éducation (USAID)</i>
P-FOI	Project-Level Fidelity of Implementation
QA	Quarterly Assessment
PROVED	<i>Province Educationnelle</i>
RANA	Reading and Numeracy Activity (Nigeria)
RERA	Rapid Education Risk Analysis
SERNAFOR	<i>Service National de Formation, the Ministry of Education's Training Division</i>
TIP	Trafficking in Persons
TLM	Teaching and Learning Material
U.K.	United Kingdom
UK aid	United Kingdom Agency for International Development
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UPEPAC	<i>Union des Promoteurs des Ecoles Privées Agréées du Congo</i>
U.S.	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VAS-Y Fille!	<i>Valorisation de la Scolarisation de la Fille</i>
VTC	Vocational Training Center, or <i>Centre d'Apprentissage Professionnel</i>
WHO	World Health Organization

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In May 2015, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the United Kingdom Agency for International Development (UK aid) launched the \$136 million project Accès, Équité, Lecture, Retention, et Redevabilité! Activity 1, or ACCELERE!1 (A!1) to increase early grade reading outcomes by making schools safer, reducing barriers for students, partnering with parents to improve retention, developing and distributing teaching and learning materials (TLMs), providing continuing teacher professional development, and improving school oversight and governance at the local and national levels. The project's strategy aligned with the Democratic Republic of the Congo's (DRC) National Education Sector Strategy (2016-2025) and the education law (*loi cadre sur l'enseignement national*). A!1 was one of four activities under the larger ACCELERE! education reform umbrella, with ACCELERE!2 focusing on governance; ACCELERE!3 providing coordination, monitoring, and evaluation; and ACCELERE!4 addressing out-of-school students and education in emergency contexts.

Political instability, armed conflict, limited resources, and poor infrastructure underscore the challenging context for education in the DRC. In 2013, the government estimated 3.5 of the 15 million primary school-aged children were not attending school,<sup>1</sup> and 68 percent of third and fourth graders attending school could not read a single word of simple text.<sup>2</sup> Poverty, violence, child labor, and trafficking in persons (TIP), school fees, and inequities wreak havoc on the education system, particularly for girls.

Over six years, A!1 worked in four languages of instruction - Ciluba, Kiswahili, Lingala, and French - with nearly 5,000 schools with over 3.6 million enrolled students across 50 sub-provinces in 9 provinces. A!1 increased early grade reading scores in all four instruction languages and, in some cases, closed the gender gap. A!1 supported the Ministry of Education to improve teaching and learning in targeted classrooms by conducting teacher and administrator training in early grade reading methods and developing, testing, and distributing TLMs for Grades 1 to 4, accelerated learning center (ALC or *centre de rattrapage scolaire*) Levels 1 and 2, and basic and functional literacy programs through vocational training centers (VTCs or *centres d'apprentissage professionnel*) in Kiswahili and French. Overall, A!1 distributed almost 3 million TLMs to almost 5,000 schools. A!1 also distributed over 300,000 student and teacher kits as well as supplies like desks, benches, and wash basins. When A!1 shared the validated TLMs for Grades 1 to 3 in Ciluba, Kiswahili, and Lingala with the Ministry of Education, the ministry made them available for others to continue to scale up and distribute. The Global Partnership for Education-funded *Projet d'Amélioration de la Qualité de l'Éducation* (PAQUE) project subsequently printed and distributed nearly 10 million additional teacher guides and student manuals, meeting a significant need for quality early grade reading materials.

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<sup>1</sup> Kinshasa, UNICEF, UNESCO Institute of Statistics and DFID DRC.

<sup>2</sup> Accelerating Progress to 2015: Democratic Republic of the Congo, A Report Series to the UN Special Envoy on Global Education, April 2013 Working Paper, pg. 6.

Throughout the project, A!I used an analytical and evidence-based, eight-step process for collecting and analyzing data to improve project design and implementation. Ongoing operational research and formative assessments informed decision-making and was integral to a collaboration, learning, and adaptation (CLA) process and project success. Evaluations of early grade reading skills were conducted regularly through both customized early grade reading assessments (EGRAs) and quarterly assessments (TAs) of early reading skills, with early indications of statistically significant increases in learning gains over baseline by 2019 at the end of Grade 2 in all languages, reductions in “zero” scores (the inability to meet the earliest stage of reading acquisition), and improvements in teachers’ applications of best practices. In addition, a 2019 external impact study found significant impact in reading proficiency learning gains in all three languages at the end of Grade 2.

### **PROGRAMMATIC SHIFTS**

*TIP sanctions.* A!I underwent two major shifts in its implementation. In Year 4 of the project, the United States (U.S.) government levied TIP sanctions against the DRC that prohibited USAID from funding public entities in countries that did not meet a minimum standard of curbing trafficking. This forced A!I to shift away from working directly with the DRC government, including supporting governance and education policies and implementing them in public schools. USAID and A!I responded by refocusing implementation on private schools. Using the same proven methodologies and materials, A!I discontinued direct work with the ministry and began to work exclusively in private schools and their supporting structures. This shift required changes in staffing, new research, and assumptions. While this change had opportunity costs in terms of lost momentum in improving reading levels among the public school population and gathering monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) data, it also presented new opportunities to understand and affect the larger educational context in the DRC in terms of the perceptions of educational quality, the impact of fee-based schooling on private and public schools, and the challenges to improving educational outcomes among a broad audience of learners facing most of the same overarching challenges.

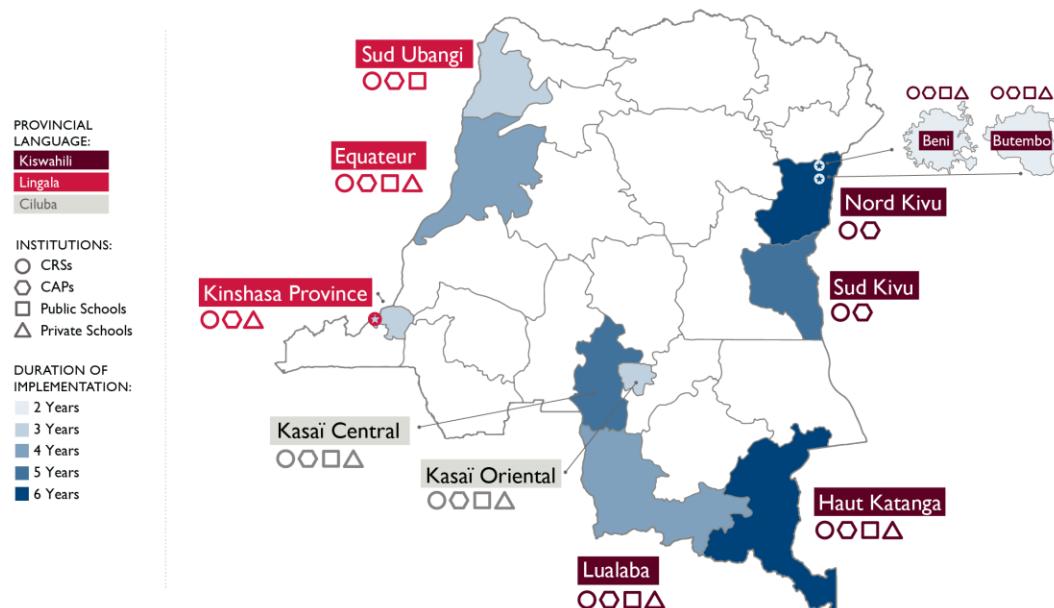
**COVID-19.** In March 2020, after the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global pandemic, the DRC government closed all schools to slow the spread of the virus and A!I entered the third phase of its implementation. To meet the demand for learners to retain what they had learned and to cope with the implications of a global pandemic, A!I froze in-person activities, including TLM distribution, follow-up, and coaching support to teachers and school directors and embarked on designing an interactive radio instruction (IRI) program that would help two levels of multigrade learners (Grades 1 to 2 and 3 to 4) maintain acquired knowledge, reinforce and build upon key literacy competencies, improve socio-emotional wellbeing, learn methods to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and prepare for their eventual return to the classroom. Because USAID had invested in IRI in the DRC years before, basic capacity existed and the project was able to launch a quick production and launch of distance learning, including 108 unique lessons that were developed and broadcast in three languages.

Listener response was inspiring, especially as it related to working in national languages, and the Ministry of Education was again able to work with the project to support the joint effort. While the IRI followed the evidence-based reading curriculum, lessons were designed to reach public and private school learners, out-of-school learners, and disabled learners. When schools reopened in October 2020, A!I began distributing TLMs again and consolidating the lessons learned from six years of intense engagement with three distinct populations of learners. These lessons contribute to the growing evidence base about what works in education in the challenging context of the DRC.

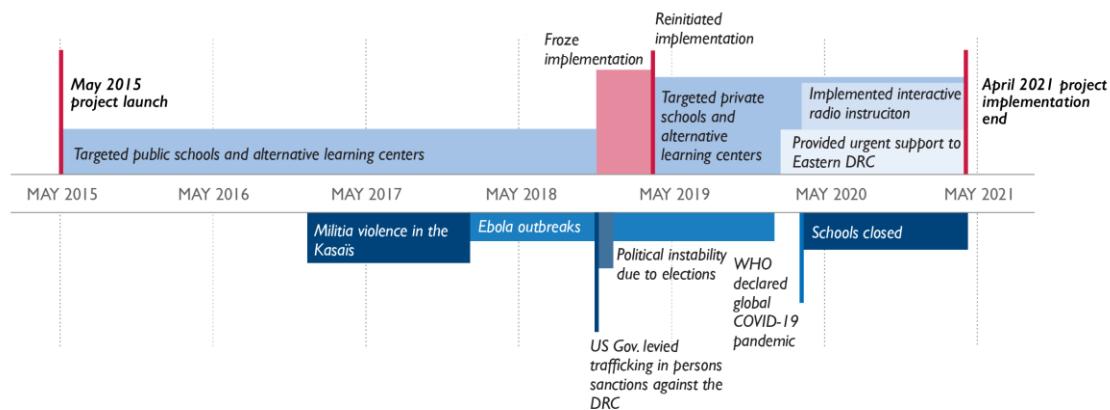
## KEY ELEMENTS OF A!I IMPLEMENTATION

A!I worked in nine provinces over six years (see Exhibit 1). Over the life of the project, A!I implemented activities in public schools for about four years, in private schools for approximately one year, and through distance learning for less than one year. See the timeline (Exhibit 2) for more details on events.

**EXHIBIT 1. TARGETED IMPLEMENTATION AREAS**



**EXHIBIT 2: TIMELINE OF MAJOR EVENTS**



To meet the challenges of introducing an expansive education program focused on quality and equity, the project spent significant time and effort to understand and address the most critical factors influencing retention and success in school. The project conducted operational research studies to uncover key aspects of the conditions within the DRC and what would produce the best outcomes. A!I refined the original logic model and produced detailed theories of change to represent and provide a framework for a project-level fidelity of implementation (P-FOI) analysis that would inform whether the project design was working and how to adapt it to improve it. The theories of change and the P-FOI were particularly important given the complexity of the DRC's educational environment and the pivots the project undertook. They highlighted the inputs that correlated with higher reading skills and enabled the project to transition to new phases, as needed, and take the evidence base with it.

In February 2019, for example, A!I collected two types of data in a sample of schools: P-FOI data to evaluate how well the program implemented activities and QA data to test students' reading abilities. The project cross-analyzed these two data sets to identify incidents where higher FOI scores correlated with higher scores and found the following:

1. Higher reading skills were most strongly correlated with factors related to community involvement activities and incentives such as school kits, and the existence of committees for increased engagement.
2. Higher reading skills were highly correlated with strong parent and the faithful implementation of reading champion programs.

A!I also incorporated formative assessments in schools to either measure population-wide changes in reading levels in Grade 2 or monitor regular progress at the classroom level (based on a sample). A!I conducted two monitoring EGRAAs in 2017 and 2018 to monitor project implementation and provide a formative measure of students' learning in public schools. A!I also conducted a third EGRA, conducted in 2019 (Year 5) during Phase 2 in private schools, with the original intention of providing a baseline. USAID canceled the endline scheduled for May 2020, therefore, the 2019 EGRA conducted in private schools served as a one-time "snapshot" measure.

## **FACTORS RELATED TO KEEPING LEARNERS IN SCHOOL**

Enrollment and retention remain complicated issues in the DRC. A!I research found that despite old and new policies supporting universal free education, the success of back-to-school campaigns and other behavior change efforts that increased enrollment were often short-lived due to the persistent inability to pay school-related fees. Based on this evidence, A!I worked closely with 22 civil society organizations (CSOs) to empower 6,554 parents through innovative income-generating activities and community savings groups (IGAs/CSGs) to earn money and cover school fees for 12,457 children. Evidence suggested that the IGA/CSG model was effective and worthy of scaling.

Gender and social inequity represent destructive obstacles, especially in conflict areas. A!I helped establish school-based gender equity and violence monitoring committees in 1,774 schools and supported 511 ALCs and 277 VTCs to equip nontraditional learners

with reading skills and distributed a *Code of Conduct Against Sexual and Gender-Based Violence* in all targeted schools.

At the beginning of the 2018-2019 school year, A!I conducted a qualitative evaluation of ongoing gender activities to gauge whether gender equity and violence monitoring committees were effective. A!I successfully narrowed the gender achievement gap (e.g., in the Ciluba speaking provinces), although the 2018 EGRA results indicated that boys were still performing better than girls on most subtasks. In response to these 2018 EGRA results, A!I implemented an internal gender assessment to better understand why girls continued to underperform boys in reading and writing. Overwhelmingly, the evaluation revealed that girls' poorer performance related directly to their heavy domestic burdens.

### **Responding to Conflict**

Stresses related to the 2017 militia-based violence broke out in the Kasai Central and Oriental provinces confirmed the importance of the project's planned socio-emotional programming. In 2018, A!I worked closely with provincial counterparts to conduct a rapid education risk analysis (RERA) and design and deliver child socio-emotional well-being modules. The RERA also found resilience in the form of community pooling of resources to address challenges. This helped confirmed that support to communities through CSGs is sustainable.

In 2020, USAID requested that A!I provide additional support to the eastern regions, so the project partnered with two local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) with strong community ties and experience to implement project activities in Beni and Butembo in North Kivu province. Based on an assessment to determine that education and other inventions could improve overall child well-being, A!I used its work in gender equality, psycho-social support, and safe learning environments to pilot a package of activities in 71 schools, 20 ALCs, and 9 VTCs in Beni and Butembo focused on early literacy for Grade I, ALC Level 1, and VTC basic literacy.

### **Professional Development and Coaching**

A!I used three strategies to help teachers understand practices embedded in the TLMs:

1. Training sessions
2. Teacher coaching by school directors
3. Peer support groups for teachers (*forum d'échange*)

During the project's first phase (supporting public education), A!I delivered face-to-face training using a cascade model. A team of national trainers (A!I staff members) trained provincial trainers (government inspectors and pedagogical advisors) who then trained school directors and teachers. A!I provided scripted training modules to each level of trainers to ensure standardized training quality. The national team of trainers conducted quality assurance visits during the subsequent training levels.

A!I also trained school directors on coaching about once a year. To facilitate school director training sessions, A!I trained government inspectors and reading mobilizers, who

then trained school directors. The reading mobilizers checked in monthly with school directors to record the number of lesson observations the school director had conducted that month. Finally, A!I used the Ministry of Education's Teacher Professional Development policy by supporting peer support groups (*forum d'échange*).

In Year 3, A!I developed facilitator handbooks with scripted sessions for each level of the *forum d'échange*. A!I used data from classroom observations and focus groups to develop sessions to further develop teachers' understanding of the strategies embedded in the TLMs.

The project provided reading kits to targeted communities. Community reading kits included storage trunks, bookshelves, dictionaries, and a book bank. The kits also included supplies such as markers, cardboard, and flipchart paper for community volunteers, parents, and students to create their own literacy materials. The book banks included 65 French and 51 national-language leveled readers. Each book bank included two to five copies of each title for students to read during reading club or to check out to read at home. The leveled readers are available and were uploaded on the [Global Digital Library](#) for public use.

Community reading activities included weekly reading clubs, monthly parent awareness-raising sessions, and reading festival activities. Community reading champions, school directors, and the school management committee presidents participated in workshops to learn how to use the reading kits. Community reading activities suffered from procurement delays and the interruption of the TIP sanctions, but these activities provided value in communities that implemented them successfully.

### **Governance**

A!I worked closely with the Ministry of Education during the first four years of the project to support effective school governance. A!I concentrated on two aspects of education policy: policies supporting reading and education methods and guidelines, and policies regulating community participation in school governance. Resulting ministerial orders continue to generate positive impacts today. Even after the Phase 2 sanctions ended A!I's partnership with the DRC government, the ministry continued to follow through on A!I's initiatives. ACCELERE! Activity 2 also worked with the Ministry of Education to strengthen education governance.

To support school management, A!I supported schools and sub-provinces to set up a school monitoring and support framework (*cadre d'appui et de suivi de l'école*) as a mechanism to assess school performance regularly based on a common set of quality standards and collectively plan for school improvement work. In the 2017-2018 academic year, A!I worked closely with targeted schools to implement school improvement planning. The schools organized self-assessments based on quality standards. More than 799 targeted schools developed school improvement plans.

A!I worked with the ministry to create a Directorate of Educational Partnership to prioritize community and parent engagement efforts and develop a regulatory framework to revitalize civil society oversight and participation in school management. A!I trained

public school committee members and community leaders on their rights and responsibilities.

Importantly, private schools have the same mandate as public schools per the education policy, but there is little oversight and support by the government. After the shift from working with public schools, A!I developed memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with the following private school associations, all of which have a strong presence in the private school sector:

- *Association Nationale des Ecoles Privées Agréées (ASSONEPA)*
- *Collectif des Ecoles Privées Agréées du Congo (CEPACO)*
- *Union des Promoteurs des Ecoles Privées Agréées du Congo (UPEPAC)*

#### **Formative Assessment, Operational Research, and Pilots**

In addition to 16 operations research studies, A!I used four formative assessment tools to regularly inform implementation:

1. QAs to evaluate student progress based on national and A!I reading program expectations and linked them to specific teacher behaviors and the use of TLMs.
2. *Classroom fidelity of implementation (C-FOI)* to monitor teacher application three times a year and coaching monthly by tracking activities such as coaching visits, lesson plan implementation, and the use of pedagogical best practices. This enabled A!I to monitor whether teachers implemented the reading program as designed and could be cross-referenced with quality assurance data.
3. *Monitoring EGRAs* to test skills related to progress in students' early grade reading and inform project adaptations.
4. *Mobile phone messaging and surveys* to gather information during the project's final phase about parents' and learners' listening habits related to the IRI lessons and content acquisition.

A!I also conducted or participated in several technology-based pilots in the DRC, including:

1. Mobile Training Everywhere (M-TEW), which was a pilot conducted in 15 public schools to communicate messages that promote a reading culture
2. The [Digital Glossary](#), which is a digital platform that defines items in the A!I teacher guides and provides a phonology section with letter-sound songs in Ciluba, Kiswahili, and Lingala
3. The [Global Digital Library](#), which is an effort through the Global Book Alliance to upload and make all TLMs and leveled readers available digitally

#### **Adapting to Pandemic School Closures: IRI to Deliver Education**

Between March and June 2020, A!I worked with Ministry of Education experts to create a series of 48 newly developed, multigrade radio broadcasts called *Lecture Pour la Vie* for Grades 1 and 2 and ALC Level 1, a complementary community mobilization system, and

a set of monitoring and assessment activities. *Lecture Pour la Vie* began broadcasting in June 2020 in Kiswahili and Lingala in the provinces of Kinshasa, Haut Katanga, and North Kivu, including the towns of Beni and Butembo. In September 2020, A!I expanded its distance learning activities by adding the multigrade series *Lire et Ecrire Ensemble!* for Grades 3 and 4 and ALC Level 2. In total, the project designed 108, 30-minute IRI lessons and broadcasted three unique lessons per week through a network of community, provincial, and national radio stations for a reduced broadcast fee.

To increase listenership, A!I provided 200 megaphones to reading mobilizers for community awareness-raising and distributed 3,500 solar radio sets to vulnerable households to help their children follow the IRI broadcasts. The project also introduced a mobile phone calling system to alert parents of upcoming broadcasts and instituted an interactive voice response system for families to call a smart code from their mobile phones and select a lesson to listen to. Callers could then put their phones on speaker, turning it into an effective audio broadcasting tool. A!I also initiated three-pronged community engagement and launched a mobile phone system of gathering feedback about effectiveness.

## A!I Achievements and Impact

**2,022,574**

learners reached in reading programs at the primary level



~~78.9%~~

**54.3%**

learners with zero scores at the end of grade two

**3,642,142**

learners reached through the project\*

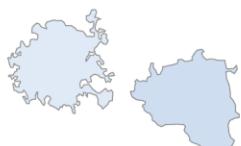
**752,415**

newly enrolled entrants



\*not including learners reached through radio

**BENI & BUTEMBO**



**9,849**

formal primary students reached

**698**

nonformal learners in ALCs

**10,745**

nonformal learners in VTCs



**39,566**

teachers

&

**13,087**

directors and officials

completed professional development activities



**2,757,118** in **33,396**

teaching and learning materials distributed to teachers, learners, and administrators

classrooms



**108**

multigrade interactive radio instruction lessons broadcast

**GRADE 2**

significant increase in reading proficiency in 3 languages



**799**

targeted school-communities

communities developed effective quality school development plans



**747**

targeted school-communities

instituted a School Report Card

# ACCELERE! I: A JOURNEY TO IMPROVE READING INSTRUCTION IN THE DRC

In May 2015, USAID and UK aid funded and launched A!I to support the DRC government's commitment to providing a free and universal basic education; increasing access, equity, and retention; and improving the quality and relevance of education as outlined in the DRC's National Education Sector Strategy (2016-2025) and education law (*loi cadre*). A!I is the largest single education intervention in the DRC to date and builds on USAID's history of assistance in improving education in the DRC through projects such as Empowering Adolescent Girls to Lead through Education (EAGLE), the *Projet D'Amélioration de la Qualité de l'Education* (PAQUED), and *Valorisation de la Scolarisation de la Fille* (VAS-Y Fille!). A!I was also designed to build upon and collaborate with other donor-supported projects, including the Global Partnership for Education-funded *Projet d'Amélioration de la Qualité de l'Education* (PAQUE).

Implemented by Chemonics International Inc. with the support of partners FHI 360, School-to-School International, and Cambridge Education, A!I aimed to increase early grade reading outcomes by making schools safer, reducing barriers for students, partnering with parents to improve retention, developing and distributing TLMs, providing continuing teacher professional development, and improving school oversight and governance at the local and national levels.

A!I's journey to accomplishing these goals was successful by most measures, but the project encountered significant challenges to implementing a single set of interventions consistently to a consistent set of targets. After four years of implementing the original project design and targeting public schools, U.S. sanctions against the DRC stopped the project from assisting the DRC government in November 2018. A!I consulted with USAID and pivoted to targeting private schools and private-school communities in 2019. Then, in March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic forced the DRC to close its schools and caused the project to stop in-person activities. Again, the project worked closely with USAID to reinvent itself by creating and launching IRI broadcasts and associated community engagement activities. Through these changes in targets and activities, A!I maintained the same application of the reading instruction curricula and evidence-based instructional processes. These challenges were out of the project's control, but the people and institutions invested in the project's goals persisted and adapted their strategies and work plans to deliver high quality reading instruction to as many learners as possible through low-cost private schools and distance learning. This document reports on project activities and includes subsections to explain the programmatic changes due to the sanctions and the pandemic.

*TIP sanctions and the pivot to targeting private schools.* In November 2018, the project faced the shift of the U.S. government's redesignation of the DRC as a Tier 3 country under the U.S. government Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2020. These sanctions temporarily restricted U.S. government funding from assisting DRC government institutions, including public schools. The TIP sanctions forced A!I to shift support from public schools to private schools in 2019. The shift to private schools increased the number of schools and teachers exposed to project training and TLMs, but also disrupted the project's continuity, M&E plans, and staffing. The overall shift away from the DRC government also required that A!I drop project governance components.

*COVID-19 and the shift to IRI.* When the WHO declared COVID-19 a global pandemic in 2020, the DRC closed all schools. The project stopped its in-person activities but quickly began to reimagine itself to continue to provide the best possible reading instruction to the most children possible. A!I initiated a monumental effort to shift to supporting distance learning to the largest population of learners possible. In this third phase of the project, roughly from March 2020 through March 2021, A!I used the research, curricula, networks, lessons learned, and its strong relationships with the Ministry of Education to create a broad-based distance learning program using radio, mobile phones, and community support to maintain and extend learning in reading instruction, socio-emotional learning, and behaviors to prevent spreading COVID-19.

In addition to these larger pivots, A!I faced a continual need to make smaller adaptations due to events such as Ebola outbreaks and conflict due to militia violence. The project also added activities in Beni and Butembo in Nord Kivu province in 2020.

To make each phase as effective as possible, A!I redesigned elements of the project and analyzed their effectiveness through a P-FOI process.

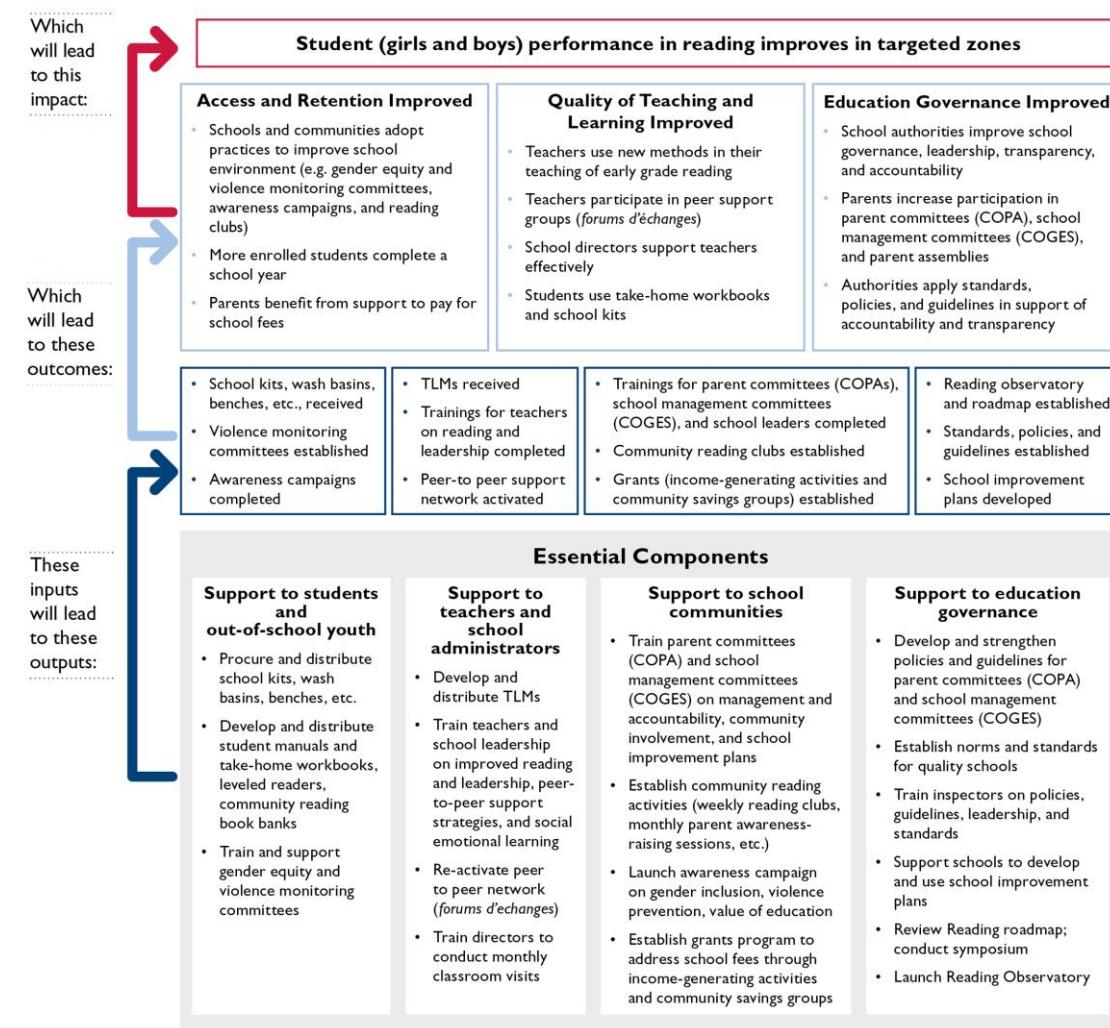


Grade 2 students in Lubumbashi, Haut Katanga, show their A!I -developed Kiswahili student workbooks and manuals

## THEORY OF CHANGE AND P-FOI

A!I originally used a causal logic model to guide project design and implementation. However, in Year 3, A!I and USAID fleshed out the model as a more detailed theory of change to explore the extent to which the project design led to improvements in reading. A!I clustered inputs and activities in the theory of change in groups called “essential components.” Essential components, according to the project’s hypothesis, are the minimum requirements to achieve the intended outcome. One output may affect more than one result area. For example, distributing school kits (one essential component) could improve access (result one outcome) as well as learning (result two outcome). See Exhibit 3 for the project’s theory of change for Years 1 to 4.

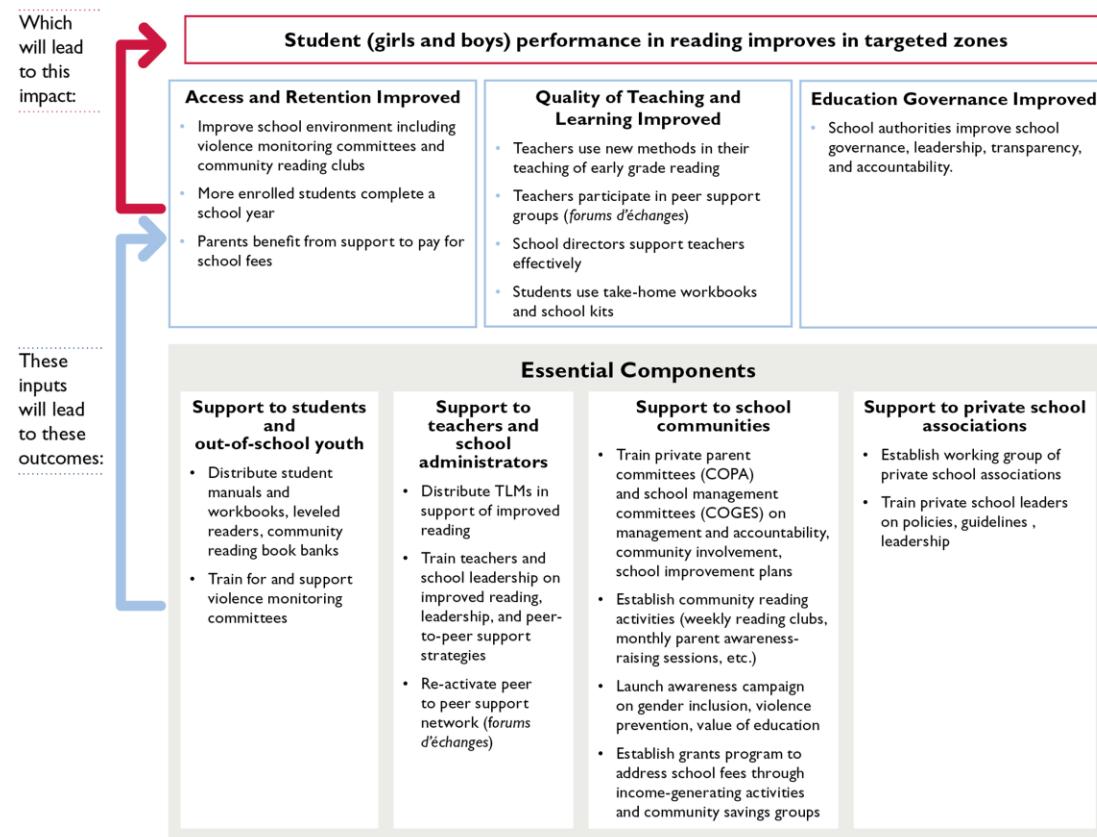
**EXHIBIT 3. A!I THEORY OF CHANGE, YEARS 1–4**



The careful attention to the theory of change and project design was instrumental in enabling A!I to make implementation adjustments, especially given the challenges of working in such a large and diverse country and the necessary project shifts that took place due to the TIP sanctions and the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the end of Year 4, the project updated the theory of change to reflect necessary design changes related to the TIP sanctions and the pivot to targeting private schools (see Exhibit 44).

#### EXHIBIT 4. A!I THEORY OF CHANGE, YEAR 5



To measure project-level progress, A!I also developed an internal P-FOI process to test the effectiveness of the project design and its activities. The theory of change served as a map of causal assumptions and helped implementation teams better understand their roles and accountability. Some staff hung it in front of their desks to keep focused. The P-FOI served as an internal tool that supplemented other MEL data and highlighted where changes were needed. Staff referred to the theory of change and P-FOI results in meetings to guide design discussions and decision-making.

A!I designed each implementation phase to reach the project's overarching goals, albeit under different circumstances. The project used the evidence-based scope and sequence for primary reading instruction tested during the first phase of the project to the second phase, where implementation took place in private schools, and then again in the third phase when the project delivered education at a distance. Each phase presented its challenges, successes, and breakthroughs, and each contributed to the long-term strengthening of reading instruction in the DRC.

# BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The DRC is the 11th largest and 16th most populous country in the world. It is rich in biodiversity, natural resources, history, and culture. The Congo River arcs through the country's lush rainforests, mountains, grasslands, and savannah, and the rainforests boast impressive biodiversity and provide a home to rare species, including the bonobo monkey and the African forest elephant. Its rich natural resources include abundant copper, diamonds, cobalt, and other minerals. The first known people in this area lived more than 90,000 years ago and left carved bone harpoons for hunting catfish. Today in the DRC, more than 250 ethnic groups speak hundreds of languages and contribute to the country's rich and diverse culture. This young country won independence in 1960 after decades of colonial rule, and it is now working to rebuild as a nation and provide social and economic opportunities to its people.

Political instability, armed conflict, limited resources, and inadequate infrastructure limit educational access, quality, and equity. In 2013, the DRC government estimated that 3.5 million of the country's 15 million primary school-aged children were not attending school,<sup>3</sup> and those who were attending school were not learning effectively; 68 percent of third and fourth grade students could not read a single word of simple text.<sup>4</sup>

## COUNTRY CONTEXT

Instability, conflict, epidemics, limited infrastructure, and low levels of educational access and outcomes contribute to the DRC being ranked at the bottom of the Human Development Index.<sup>5</sup> These factors further strain the education system and create barriers to school access and retention, particularly for girls.<sup>6</sup>

*Poverty.* While the DRC is rich in natural resources, including more than 1,100 minerals and precious metals, it remains one of the poorest countries in the world; approximately 63 percent of its population lives below the poverty line. The annual per capita income in 2014 was \$380, roughly equivalent to the annual cost of sending two children to school.

*Violent conflict.* The DRC has withstood local, provincial, and international conflicts for more than 20 years. Together, these conflicts have resulted in the deaths of more than 5.4 million people and the displacement of another 2 million, representing the deadliest

<sup>3</sup> ISSP/UO and MEPSP (2013) Rapport de l'enquête nationale sur les enfants et adolescents en dehors de l'école. Kinshasa, UNICEF, UNESCO Institute of Statistics and UK aid DRC.

<sup>4</sup> Accelerating Progress to 2015: Democratic Republic of the Congo, A Report Series to the UN Special Envoy on Global Education, April 2013 Working Paper, pg. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Inequalities in Human Development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Congo, UNDP, p. 1 [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr\\_theme/country-notes/COD.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/COD.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies. (2013). "Policy Dialogue Forum on Education and Peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo." <https://inee.org/resources/policy-dialogue-forum-education-and-peace-democratic-republic-congo>.

conflict since the World War II. In most cases, the secondary effects of the conflict, such as preventable diseases and malnutrition, cause these deaths and leave Congolese people vulnerable to hunger and starvation. Violent conflict, particularly in (but not exclusive to) eastern DRC, includes attacks against schools and the recruitment and abduction of children to become child soldiers, laborers, and slaves. These factors affect the A!I targeted provinces of Haut-Katanga, North Kivu, South Kivu, and pockets of Kasai Central. In 2015, the United Nations (UN) confirmed 22 school attacks and 12 schools used for military purposes by both the DRC's Armed Forces and armed groups, impacting the opportunities for educations of more than 31,000 children.

*Insufficient learning.* The quality of education in DRC has suffered, and despite enrollment, students still were not acquiring basic skills, such as the ability to read. Even at the end of Grade 5, most students were reading fewer than 18 correct words per minute in 2015.<sup>7</sup>

*School fees.* School fees increased 10 times over a decade, from \$2.92 in 2006 to \$30.97 in 2016.<sup>8</sup> School fees disproportionately limit access to the poorest and most vulnerable households, with the poorest households forced to spend nearly 10 percent of their per capita consumption on primary school fees per child.<sup>9</sup>

In September 2019, the DRC government implemented a new free schooling policy, but the implementation of this policy has not yet been fully realized and school fees are still a burden for parents. Children who cannot pay school fees are frequently dismissed from school and miss classes. Schools prevent these students from taking exams and advancing to the next grade level if they have not paid their school fees. Some schools use corporal punishment against children. These students also suffer disproportionately from stigma and bullying, including from teachers who resent teaching students who are not contributing to their salaries.

*Child labor.* One in four students work to pay their own school fees.<sup>10</sup> Children as young as first grade-age sell goods on the street or in markets before and after school. In addition to the physical and psychological toll of this work, child laborers are also vulnerable to sexual harassment.

*Gender inequity.* In much of the country, families prioritize educating their sons when they cannot afford to send all their children to school. Completion rates in 2014 showed that only 57.1 percent of girls who do get a chance to begin primary school can stay in school

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<sup>7</sup> RTI International. (2016). “[Education Evaluation Services in the Democratic Republic of the Congo \(DRC\)](#); the DRC 2015 Early Grade Reading Assessment and Snapshot of School Management Effectiveness – Grade 5 Report of Findings, Revised.” p 28.

<sup>8</sup> Cambridge Education. (2017). “The School Fees Landscape in the DRC ACCELERE!2,” p 38; Chemonics International, Inc. (2018). “Report on Operations Research for ACCELERE!I: Rethinking the Partnership Model – A way to alleviate the school fee burden in DRC.” p 8.

<sup>9</sup> [DR Congo Emergency Equity and System Strengthening in Education](#). The World Bank. May 8, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> “Report on Operations Research for ACCELERE!I: Rethinking the Partnership Model – A way to alleviate the school fee burden in DRC.”

to complete it. Gender-based violence also affects girls disproportionately, including at school.

## CHALLENGES AND ADAPTATIONS DURING IMPLEMENTATION

*Political instability.* Power struggles at the highest levels of government, delayed elections, and violent military responses to citizen protests strain the country's stability. Protests and political instability, such as the Kamwina Nsapu conflict, affected the project directly and indirectly. A!I paused activities during tumultuous times, and the ongoing friction negatively impacted students, families, schools, and communities.

*Violence in Kasai Central and Kasai Oriental.* Militia violence threatened and disrupted more than a million people in the Kasai provinces. The UN discovered several mass grave sites in the first half of 2017 in Kasai Oriental. Approximately 1.4 million people were displaced at the height of the conflicts, including 800,000 women. In 2017, CARE estimated that 1.2 million people in the Kasai provinces were in urgent need of humanitarian assistance because of the increased violence, and 2.8 million people did not have enough food to eat. Additionally, the population fled certain areas of the province while simultaneously receiving internally displaced persons from neighboring provinces. In cooperation with UNICEF, A!I replaced destroyed and stolen TLMs and refocused renewed efforts to activities on implement psychosocial support for students.

*Ebola.* In early 2018, Ebola broke out again in the DRC. By November, it was the biggest Ebola outbreak in the DRC's history. The outbreak lasted nearly two years until it ended in June 2020. Separate outbreaks began in northwestern DRC in June 2020 and in eastern DRC in February 2021. A!I had to close some provincial offices and delay TLM distribution to schools.

*TIP sanctions.* On November 28, 2018, the U.S. government levied the TIP sanctions against the DRC for not meeting anti-trafficking criteria. The TIP sanctions restricted aid to the DRC, thereby immobilizing A!I's activities in response. In March 2019, A!I received USAID notification indicating that the project could continue its work, but that the project should not use any funds for activities considered "assistance to the government of the Democratic Republic of Congo." To comply with USAID's guidance and the TIP sanctions, A!I froze support to the Ministry of Education and public schools and refocused its program activities toward private schools. The U.S. government later eased sanctions, and A!I could partner with the DRC government without assisting it.

*Violence and reinvestment in the east.* Ongoing violence in eastern DRC, particularly in Nord Kivu, instigated new initiatives to increase resiliency and maintain and continue learning. A!I partnered with local CSOs to distribute TLMs and train teachers and school directors in Beni and Butembo, two vulnerable cities in Nord Kivu.

*Adapting to COVID-19 with IRI.* The World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic in March 2020. The DRC closed its schools to mitigate the spread of the virus. A!I quickly launched *Lecture Pour la Vie*, a series of interactive radio broadcasts, and coordinated community liaisons to raise awareness and encourage communities to maintain and continue their children's education even during the pandemic.

The following sections include subsections that describe how the project adapted to the TIP sanctions and the COVID-19 pandemic through its adaptive management approach.

## SECTION I

# HELPING MORE STUDENTS STAY IN SCHOOL

A!I worked with nearly 5,000 schools with over 3.6 million enrolled students. Increasing student attendance and persistence while reducing equity gaps in schools in the DRC is challenging. While social campaigns increased short-term enrollment figures in 2015, students dropped out again as parents confronted the endemic issue of school fees. Noting the strong connection between children staying in school and parents' abilities to pay fees, A!I worked closely with CSOs to empower over 6,500 parents to enroll and keep their children in school by supporting IGAs and community savings plans (see box).

Students, parents, and communities learned the importance of treating and educating their girls and boys equally. School-based violence-monitoring committees created systems to keep girls and boys safe and connect students to support resources. 1,494 ALCs and 305 VTCs increased their access and quality to better equip nontraditional learners with literacy skills.

## PARTNERING WITH PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES TO IMPROVE ACCESS AND RETENTION

A!I began addressing low school enrollment by launching Back to School campaigns, but the project quickly pivoted to implementing IGAs and CSGs to address the root cause of low enrollment: school fees.

## INCREASING SCHOOL ENROLLMENT: IGAs AND CSGs

Although parents want their children to attend school, school fees can prevent parents from keeping their children in school. Together with government counterparts, A!I adapted by equipping parents to pay for school fees using

### KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Within three months of launching the IGAs:

- 98% of supported parents paid their children's first-trimester school fees on time
- 3% paid early for the second quarter
- 2% paid early for all their children's school fees for the entire year



Ms. Thérèse Maswaku is a single mother of three children from Kapalowe in Haut Katanga. A!I's IGAs helped her launch a stable tailoring business to pay her children's school fees and keep them in school. She says, "My family and I used to live off the charcoal retail business I had. Thanks to the civil society organization funded by A!I, I was trained [on] how to start and manage a business. There are so many children whose parents cannot afford to send them to school because of financial hardships."

IGAs and CSGs as an innovative approach to apply microfinance strategies to alleviate the burden of school fees.

A!I awarded grants to 22 CSOs, who, in turn, provided vulnerable households with starter kits to establish IGAs and CSGs. The kits consisted of oil, flour, sugar, legumes, smoked fish, or other local staples with steady supply and demand cycles. In exchange for the kits, parents committed to setting aside part of their incomes to pay for school fees for one whole school year through the CSG.

The CSGs received basic training and supplies to allow members to manage incoming and outgoing funds. Supplies included boxes for deposits and fines, a stamp and ink, a ledger, savings and credit account books, a ruler, pens, an education account book, a calculator, a metal cashbox, a green safe (for savings deposits), a blue safe (for school fees), and a red safe (for a “solidarity fund”, for health, or other unexpected costs) (see Exhibit 6, next page).

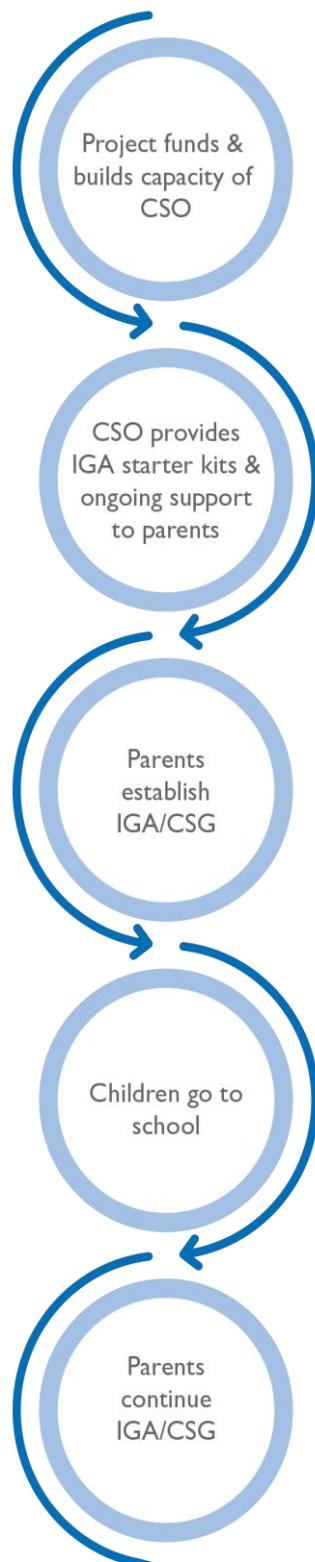
#### SUSTAINABILITY OF IGAS THROUGH CSGS

Organizing CSGs alongside the IGAs was critical for sustainability. This mutual support structure builds on existing community practices of self-help and mutual aid, grounded in strong social contracts (see Exhibit 5, right).

#### INCREASING CAPACITY OF CSOS FOR SUSTAINED IMPACT

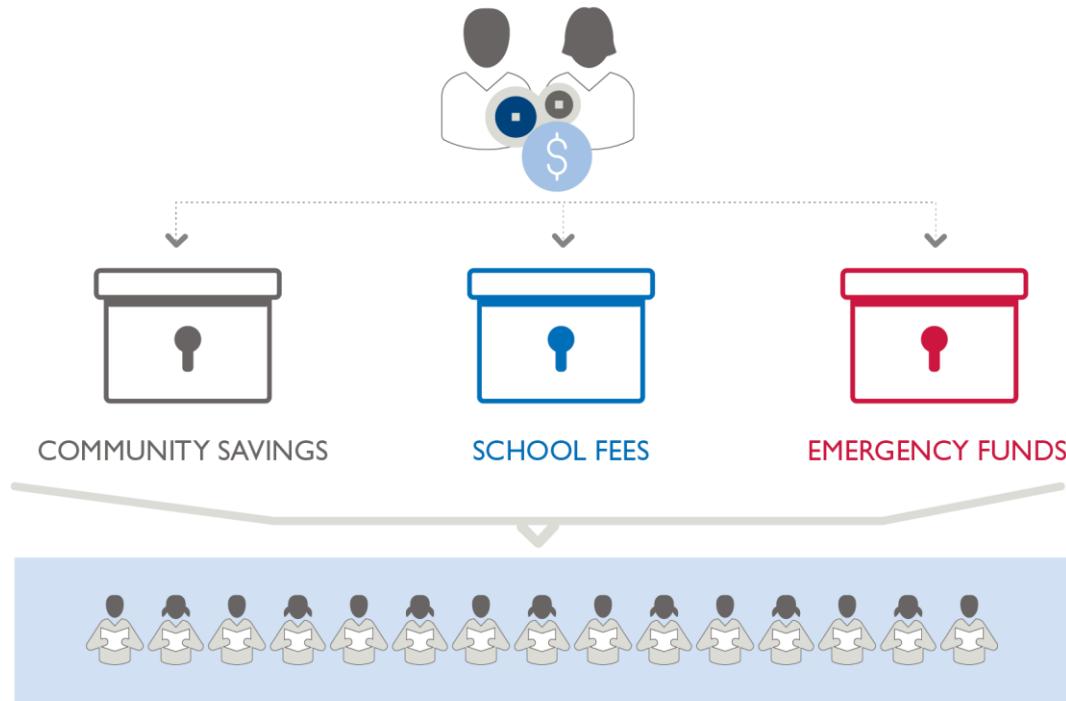
Local CSOs were essential to the success of these activities. In addition to serving as implementers and intermediaries between the project and the community, CSOs learned about sustainable money-saving practices and how to establish and support communities and savings groups effectively for potential future interventions. Through the CSO grants, A!I also hired and trained CSO staff to follow up with parents, creating a broader and more sustainable solution than simply working

**EXHIBIT 5. IGA AND CSG PROCESS**



with schools and parents directly. CSOs now have the capacity to establish CSGs without project support.

#### EXHIBIT 6. COMMUNITY SAVING GROUP MODEL



See AII's technical brief, [Keeping Vulnerable Children in School: Evidence of a Successful Community Savings Model](#), for further details, as well as Exhibit 7 (next page).

#### EVIDENCE GENERATED, LESSONS LEARNED, AND RECOMMENDATIONS MADE FOR IMPROVED ACCESS AND RETENTION

##### Evidence Generated

After implementing the first cycle of IGAs and CSGs in the 2018-2019 school year, AII conducted a formative study to determine what worked and to inform adaptations in the subsequent cycle. The qualitative study took place in July 2019 and included interviews with 35 participants across six target provinces. The study tested two approaches to implementing IGAs and CSGs: an individual approach where parents or small groups of parents of vulnerable students managed the IGAs and CSGs themselves, and a collective approach where collectives (e.g., a parent committee) or CSOs managed the IGAs and CSGs.

The study found insufficient evidence that the collective model worked better, with parents citing a lack of transparency as the main reason for not using collectively managed IGAs and CSAs. Thereafter, the project implemented only the individual approach of managing IGAs and CSGs themselves. The study also found the lessons learned below.

## Lessons Learned and Recommendations

- Decentralize IGA and CSG management to parents
- Improve standardization of operating procedures, including documentation and reporting systems
- Include clear roles and responsibilities for CSOs and parents
- Ensure a transparent community-based selection process of vulnerable children and households
- Perform rapid market studies to ensure that the IGA starter kits reflect local supply and demand factors
- Track savings groups' success rates after project intervention ends
- Document how capital from each starter kit grows, continues to be reinvested, and is used to cover school fees or other household needs
- Monitor the retention rate of targeted vulnerable children before and after project intervention
- Track and monitor IGA and CSG support for vulnerable children through at least three years of schooling
- Determine the expected return of an IGA and the extent to which CSGs cover school fees
- Work with national and local government to implement and enforce a policy that prohibits directors from expelling students whose families cannot pay school fees

## EXHIBIT 7. SUCCESS OF IGAs AND CSGs



## KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR RETENTION OF VULNERABLE CHILDREN IN SCHOOLS

- Back to School campaigns may have unintended consequences, such as large classroom sizes followed by massive dropout rates. On their own, they are not a sustainable use of development resources.
- A!I discovered that IGAs and CSGs can help keep vulnerable children in school while the DRC government establishes complementary and longer-term solutions to education funding. By supporting existing community resilience to mitigate the impacts of crisis and conflict, the CSGs can help parents and guardians afford to send their children to school.

- Even before applying the second phase of implementation with lessons learned from the first cycle, students from families participating in IGAs and CSGs were already staying in school more consistently than students from families not participating in IGAs and CSGs.

## REDUCING BARRIERS TO EDUCATION

### ENSURING SAFE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS

Physical, psychological, and gender-based violence keeps students from attending school and succeeding there. A!I worked with the Ministry of Education to adapt and deploy USAID's *Doorways* curriculum to build the capacity of school administrators, teachers, students, parents, and school management committees to promote safe schools and reduce school-based gender violence (see box).

Over the life of the project, schools and ALCs established 3,545 school-based gender equity and violence monitoring committees to educate students, teachers, and parents about identifying and preventing violence, the importance of gender equity, and promoting a non-violent environment. Each committee comprises eight elected members, including four students (two girls and two boys), two teachers (a woman and a man), and two parents (a woman and a man). Committees meet with the school director every week to discuss the school's environment, share personal experiences, document cases of violence, and plan to reduce violence in their school.

Gender equity and violence monitoring committees worked with provincial social services referral systems to support victims and report perpetrators of violence (see Exhibit 8, next page). Committees served as resources to students who could go to them to report violence. Committees could refer and connect students to community resources when necessary.

A!I distributed a *Code of Conduct Against Sexual and Gender-Based Violence* in all targeted schools. A!I trained school administrators and raised awareness within school communities about the importance of the code of conduct and applying it.

#### KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- 3,548 teachers trained in *Doorways* modules
- 3,545 school-based gender equity and violence monitoring committees established in schools and ALCs

**"Today, our teachers avoid hitting or insulting us when we are wrong. For instance, when I come to school late, I am told to do some physical exercises such as running. It is tiring but I know it is also good for my health. Sometimes I am told to write on a sheet of paper 500 times the sentence 'I will never be late again.' It is also tiring but I know it helps me improve my handwriting."**

— INNOCENT, STUDENT AND COMMITTEE MEMBER, DON BOSCO ALC, GOMA, DRC

## RERA AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT FOR CONFLICT AREAS IN THE KASAÏS

One third of A!I target schools were located in Kasaï Central and Kasaï Oriental. At the program's outset in 2015, these provinces were not experiencing significant political unrest. However, by 2017 and 2018, militia activity in these parts of the DRC was peaking. Many students were no longer able to access education, including in some A!I target schools. Community schools were destroyed or used as militia bases; materials were stolen, and children were more vulnerable to violence, including gender-based violence.

To better understand how A!I could better support impacted target schools in the Kasaï provinces after the conflict, the project conducted a rapid educational risk analysis. Following the report recommendations, A!I was determined to continue supporting school-based gender equity and violence monitoring committees and to continue planned work with ministry counterparts to build the capacity of teachers and educators to recognize and support students dealing with psychosocial issues. A!I and the government ministries designed, developed, and delivered Child Social Emotional Wellbeing modules to target schools in Kasaï Central and Kasaï Oriental.

## INCREASING GENDER EQUITY WITHIN SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

Through the gender equity and violence monitoring school committees, parents and community members increased their understanding of issues related to gender equity. Students, teachers, and parents learned about inclusive education and the importance of offering equal opportunities to girls, boys, and disabled children.

## EXHIBIT 8. TRAINING MODULE FOR THE GENDER EQUITY AND VIOLENCE MONITORING COMMITTEES

République Démocratique du Congo



Ministère de l'Enseignement Primaire,  
Secondaire et Professionnel

MODULE DE FORMATION DES ANIMATEURS (TRICES)  
DU COMITE DE SOUTIEN ET D'AIDE AUX VICTIMES  
DES VIOLENCES ET ABUS BASES SUR LE GENRE



Réalisé par la direction des programmes scolaires et Matériel Didactique

Mars 2017

**"As a gender committee member, my role is to advise others to avoid using violence. If they do not listen, I report them to the committee."** Mushagalusa has noticed an important change since the creation of the committees: **"In the past, teachers used corporal punishment. Now, teachers correct students' behavior with reading assignments, counseling, or by involving a student's parents."**

**— MUSHAGALUSA, STUDENT AND COMMITTEE MEMBER**

Local representatives and teachers also participated in community awareness-raising sessions on the importance of education and life skills for girls and boys. Each session focused on gender themes, including the importance of girls' education, setting personal goals and developing action plans, self-esteem and self-confidence, coping with stress, HIV education and prevention, physical health, health education, healthy relationships, reproductive health education, women's and girls' rights, and gender-based violence.

## PROVIDING INPUTS AND SUPPLIES TO IMPROVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS

Another barrier to education in the DRC is the persistent lack of materials, including teaching supplies, desks, chairs, and wash basins. AII provided more than 330,000 student and teacher kits to students and teachers in formal schools and ALCs in all targeted provinces.

AII also provided 160 motorcycles and information technology kits (including items such as desktop computers and internet modems) to provincial education ministries for improved support and supervision. See Section 3 for further details.

## EVIDENCE GENERATED, LESSONS LEARNED, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REDUCING BARRIERS TO EDUCATION

### Evidence Generated

Fidelity of implementation data indicated that providing school materials and implementing school-based community engagement correlated most strongly with improved reading results. Elements that contributed to a supportive learning environment and strong reading were most strongly associated with the following:

- School kits being provided to students (see picture, right)
- Functioning school-based initiatives and processes, including:
  - Gender equity and violence monitoring committees
  - Community reading activities
  - Parent participation in parent committees
  - School director training in parent committees



At the beginning of the 2018-2019 school year, AII conducted a qualitative evaluation of ongoing gender activities to gauge whether gender equity and violence monitoring committees were operational, accessible, and effective. The qualitative analysis concluded that school committees were effective in schools when student elections choose the committee members. In contrast, the committees were not effective when the head teacher appointed the committee members.

While A!I successfully narrowed the gender achievement gap (e.g., in the Ciluba speaking provinces), the 2018 EGRA results indicated that boys were still performing better than girls on most subtasks. In response to these 2018 EGRA results, A!I implemented an internal gender assessment to better understand why girls continued to underperform in relation to boys in reading and writing in targeted schools and ALCs.

Overwhelmingly, the evaluation revealed that girls' poorer performance related directly related to their heavy domestic burdens. Evidence suggests that girls do not have time to study and do homework because of their housework responsibilities. Girls wake up much earlier and go to sleep much later compared to boys. Boys, on the other hand, have time to play and study because they have fewer domestic chores. Girls continue to be at a severe disadvantage due to existing social norms. Future interventions should continue to tackle these barriers through targeted social behavior change communication strategies.

#### **Lessons Learned and Recommendations**

- School-based gender equity and violence monitoring committees are most effective when students choose the committee members through democratic and transparent elections.
- All students should be aware of the committees and know who the members are.
- Each class should have a gender point of contact to facilitate consultation.
- School principals should allow victims of violence to speak in their local languages with committee members to facilitate improved communication.
- Awareness campaigns around gender equity and violence should be conducted before establishing committees can produce better results.
- School directors should organize monthly awareness sessions about the committee after creation.
- Behavior change and communication campaigns for parents that demonstrate the connection between girls' overwhelming domestic burdens and poorer reading performance are important to show parents they need to allow all students dedicated time to study at home. Activities that include compensation from IGAs to offset parents' perceived opportunity costs may also help parents reprioritize girls' education.

#### **KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR REDUCING BARRIERS TO EDUCATION**

- Barriers to education are complicated and strategies to increase access must be multi-faceted and integrated to address material and social barriers. Donor-provided material inputs such as backpacks and school supplies may not be sustainable, however these materials do increase learning gains. Not providing materials further exacerbates the inefficiencies of the DRC's over-taxed education system.
- Gender equity and violence monitoring committees work and should be supported, but committee members need to be chosen democratically and be publicized.

## **INCREASING ACCESS AND RETENTION THROUGH THE IMPROVEMENT OF ACCELERATED AND ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION**

In addition to supporting public and, later, private schools, A!I supported accelerated learning centers (ALCs) and vocational training centers (VTCs). ALCs provide remedial education in three years instead of the traditional six years of primary school to students who did not attend formal primary school. Each level consolidates two years of primary school into one accelerated level, so that ALC Level 1 corresponds to primary Grades 1 and 2; ALC Level 2 corresponds to primary Grades 3 and 4, and ALC Level 3 corresponds to primary Grades 5 and 6. A!I created and distributed TLMs and trained teachers for ALC Levels 1 and 2.

VTCs target students who are 16 to 20 years old and equip these young adults with skills to start a career. Originally, A!I planned to support VTCs with vocational training and materials but shifted to creating basic and functional literacy curriculum for the centers to use in tandem with their vocational training. Each of the two levels, basic and functional, is a three-month consolidated curriculum to enable older learners to functionalize literacy quickly for their careers.

A!I implemented the same activities in ALCs and VTCs as in formal primary schools. Targeted ALCs and VTCs in eight provinces benefitted from the access, retention, and gender equity and violence monitoring activities described above, as well as the quality and governance activities described below.

### **PROMOTING GENDER EQUITY FOR ALC AND VTC LEARNERS**

ALCs benefited from the same gender equity awareness-raising activities that the project implemented in formal schools. A!I trained educators and reading mobilizers to deliver community awareness-raising sessions on the importance of education and life skills. Educators and reading mobilizers then conducted awareness-raising sessions for the adolescents at the ALCs. These sessions focused on gender themes such as the importance of girls' education and life skills, including setting personal goals and developing action plans, self-esteem and self-confidence, coping with stress, HIV education and prevention, physical health, health education, healthy relationships, reproductive health education, women's and girls' rights, and gender-based violence. After awareness-raising sessions, participants in Kasaï Central reported that they better understood and valued the importance of education. Before the activities, adolescents were planning to attend ALC programs passively while waiting for marriage, but the sessions encouraged them to invest more in the programs.

A!I trained VTC educators to use the gender-sensitive pedagogy and distributed the Doorways TLMs. The project also disseminated the code of conduct against gender-based

### **IMPACT**

ALCs that received in-kind handwashing stations, benches, and desks were able to increase their classroom capacity to accommodate more students and improve the educational environment. Previously, these schools were under-enrolled due to their poor condition.

violence to VTCs but did not establish gender equity and violence monitoring committees in VTCs.

## PAIRED LITERACY AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING FOR VTCs

Because of the myriad barriers keeping students from attending school, many missed their traditional entry points into formal education. A!I worked with the Ministry of Social Affairs and VTC leadership to help adolescents and young adults who never learned to read as children. A!I developed the first literacy manuals to be produced in Kiswahili, a national language in the DRC. Specifically, A!I produced two sets of vocational training center TLMs: one focused on the basics of literacy, including letters, phonological awareness, and decoding, and a second focused on functional literacy to support their vocation, such as reading and writing invoices, doing stock inventories, posting job advertisements, and more.

### EVIDENCE GENERATED, LESSONS LEARNED, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING ALCs AND VTCs

#### Evidence Generated

- For evidence generated, lessons learned, and recommendations regarding ALCs, see the EGRA findings in Section 2.
- A baseline assessment served the project to design the basic and functional literacy TLMs for VTCs.

#### Lessons Learned and Recommendations for Future Projects

- Following the Ministry of Social Affairs' guidelines and education standards, the VTC TLMs use the standard form of Kiswahili rather than regional spoken forms of Kiswahili. This created some confusion for educators and learners, especially in the east where the regional Kiswahili varies significantly from standard Kiswahili. Future interventions should negotiate with the Ministry of Social Affairs to use regional versions of Kiswahili for initial and functional literacy programs so that the language reading can be more accessible and useful for learners.

Solange Amani is a 16 years old who attended Centre Tumaini ETN in Goma. She enrolled in a VTC because her parents could not afford to send her to school. She joined the center to learn to read and write and be able to find a job. She believes finding a job will be easier with literacy skills.

One of Solange's teachers, Anna Mukene, appreciates A!I's scaffolded literacy curriculum. She received training and now teaches her students effective decoding techniques. She begins by teaching her students to recognize letters and sounds, then moves to syllables and combining syllables into words, and finally, to read full sentences.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Ministry of Education inspectors trained ALC and VTC directors and educators, which improved the quality of teaching and learning in these structures and led to better collaboration between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social Affairs.

- A!I supported VTCs by supporting initial and functional literacy rather than vocational training and materials to VTCs. Ultimately, testimonials suggest that the national language literacy TLMs for VTCs contributed to learners' vocational training and success, as well.

## IMPACT AND ADAPTATIONS DUE TO THE TIP SANCTIONS AND COVID-19

### TIP SANCTIONS

The U.S. government's TIP sanctions disrupted A!I's collaboration with public schools and strained donor and implementer relationships with the DRC government. The project froze implementation before quickly conducting rapid needs assessments and reinitiating activities with newly targeted private schools. Although working with private schools was unexpected, A!I found that private schools meet a need that the DRC's public education system could not. Low-cost private schools target low-income, vulnerable households in urban and peri-urban areas where the government does not meet the demand for education. Despite the government policy of free public schooling, most public-school students pay school fees, so the fees for private schools are only slightly more than what public school students pay.

Unfortunately, A!I could only implemented activities with public schools for about three to four years and with private schools for about one year (before COVID-19 interrupted private school activities), which resulted in missed opportunities to follow through with all activities in the same educational structures for the intended amount of time.

The TIP sanctions also significantly interrupted A!I activities and partnerships with public ALCs, provincial government counterparts, and communities. The sudden programming pause and the subsequent pivot to private schools prevented A!I from maximizing investments in public ALCs. For example, A!I could not follow up after providing extensive training to public ALCs to develop school improvement plans. The TIP sanctions forced the project to cancel the grants intended to help ALCs implement their plans. After the TIP sanctions, the project targeted private ALCs and VTCs with the same activities as previously implemented with public structures.

Finally, the TIP sanctions delayed distribution of teacher and student kits, which disappointed communities and built a negative reputation for the project. Similarly, postponing delivery of motorcycles and computer equipment to provincial governments strained relationships. Fortunately, the project ultimately delivered the in-kind grants to local government offices.



Justin Buroko is a private VTC student who benefited from the A!I-supported literacy program

## **COVID-19**

The Ministry of Education closed schools to mitigate the threat of COVID-19, and A!I suspended the activities described above.

## **KEY TAKE-WAYS FROM SHIFTS AND ADAPTATIONS**

- The shift to private schools in Year 4 was a missed opportunity to build upon the important achievements and work completed in Years 1 to 3 in targeted public schools. A!I laid a solid foundation of violence prevention, capacity building (including with IGAs and CSG), and VTC literacy for public schools.
- Maintaining a good relationship with the Ministry of Education is critical.



Grade 2 students present their Lingala student manuals

## SNAPSHOT

# BREAKING FINANCIAL BARRIERS TO EDUCATION IN THE DRC

**Income-generating activities and community savings group leveraged existing cultural practices to help parents keep their children in school**



Christine Nabarungu sells goods in Goma, Nord Kivu, as a part of the income-generating activity she started with support from ACCELERE! I. She uses the profits to contribute to her community savings group and pay her children's school fees.

PHOTO: Chemonics International Inc.

The DRC government is working to ensure fee-free schooling for all students, but this goal is yet to be realized. In the meantime, fees place a heavy burden on economically vulnerable families and can prevent them from sending their children to school. ACCELERE! I worked to remove financial barriers to education with an innovative income-generating activity (IGA) and community savings group (CSG) model. The project trained civil society organizations to administer the IGAs by distributing starter kits for parents to launch or invest in a small business. In turn, parents committed to contributing to a community savings group and paying for their children's school fees.

Christine Nabarungu, a widow and mother of four in Goma, North Kivu, could not afford classes for her family at the local accelerated learning center. Monique Balaye, a mother living in Mbandaka, Equateur, faced a similar dilemma. In 2018, she was unable to afford fees to send all of her four children to school.

Both Christine and Monique — and thousands of other parents in the DRC — broke through these financial barriers thanks to ACCELERE! I's IGAs and CSGs. Christine received a kit to strengthen her business and enable her to provide for her family. She says, “I can now keep my children in school because nowadays, in addition to potatoes, I also sell plantains, oil, and soap.” With a primary source of income, Monique now has the financial freedom to return their children to school without it diverting from other household expenses.

Parents with successful IGAs can continue contributing to community savings groups and paying for school fees in the years to come. CSOs are receiving training on sustainable saving practices to ensure that CSGs remain solidly established and sustainable.

*“Since I started my business, I can keep my kids enrolled in school, and I pay their school fees properly.”*

— Monique Balaye, mother

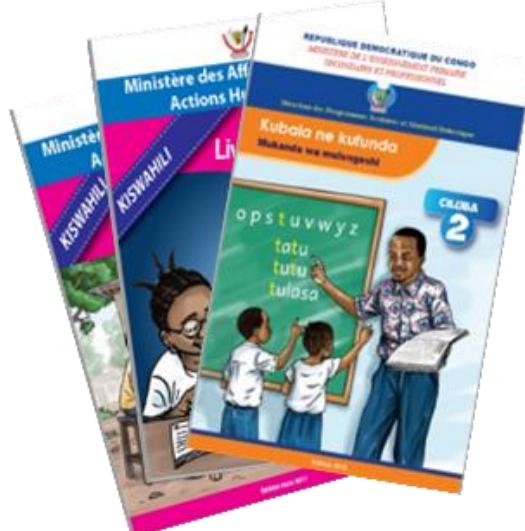
## SECTION 2

# IMPROVING EDUCATION QUALITY

A!I supported the Ministry of Education and improved teaching and learning in targeted classrooms by developing and distributing 2,757,118 TLMs to teachers and students in nearly 5,000 schools, ALCs, and VTCs in Ciluba, Kiswahili, Lingala, and French for Grades 1 to 4 and ALC Levels 1 and 2 (see Exhibit 9 for examples). The project also developed and distributed initial literacy and functional literacy programs in Kiswahili and French for VTCs. See Exhibit 10 (next page) and Annex C for details about project-developed TLMs.

The project originally designed, developed, and distributed TLMs to public schools, ALCs, and VTCs; trained public teachers and educators; and engaged public school communities. After the TIP sanctions, the project targeted private structures and implemented the same activities with private schools, ALCs, and VTCs. Then, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the project built on the evidence-based TLMs to create IRI broadcasts. Students with A!I manuals and workbooks could listen to the broadcasts and continue to use their TLMs to learn during the school closures. The project designed the radio lessons for students with and without TLMs to maximize the programming's reach. Through the shifts from public schools to private schools to radio instruction, the project applied the same research-based curricula to provide high quality educational inputs for the duration of the project to a wide audience.

**EXHIBIT 9. COVERS OF CILUBA AND KISWAHILI LANGUAGE READING AND WRITING TLMs**



A student points to a picture in their workbook.

## EXHIBIT 10. A!I-DEVELOPED TEACHING AND LEARNING MATERIALS

	CILUBA	KISWAHILI	LINGALA	FRENCH			
FORMAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	N/A N/A	N/A N/A	N/A N/A
ACCELERATED LEARNING CENTERS	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	N/A N/A	N/A N/A	N/A N/A
VOCATIONAL TRAINING CENTERS							
BASIC LITERACY							
FUNCTIONAL LITERACY							
Teacher Guide	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	N/A N/A	N/A N/A	N/A N/A
Student Manual	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	N/A N/A	N/A N/A	N/A N/A
Student Workbook	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	N/A N/A	N/A N/A	N/A N/A
Classroom Poster	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	N/A N/A	N/A N/A	N/A N/A
Teacher Guide	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	N/A N/A	N/A N/A	N/A N/A
Learner Manual	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	N/A N/A	N/A N/A	N/A N/A
Learner Workbook	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	N/A N/A	N/A N/A	N/A N/A
Classroom Poster	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	N/A N/A	N/A N/A	N/A N/A
Educator Guide*			✓ ✓				
Learner Manual			✓ ✓				

\*The teacher guide uses French to guide the teachers to teach reading and writing in Kiswahili.

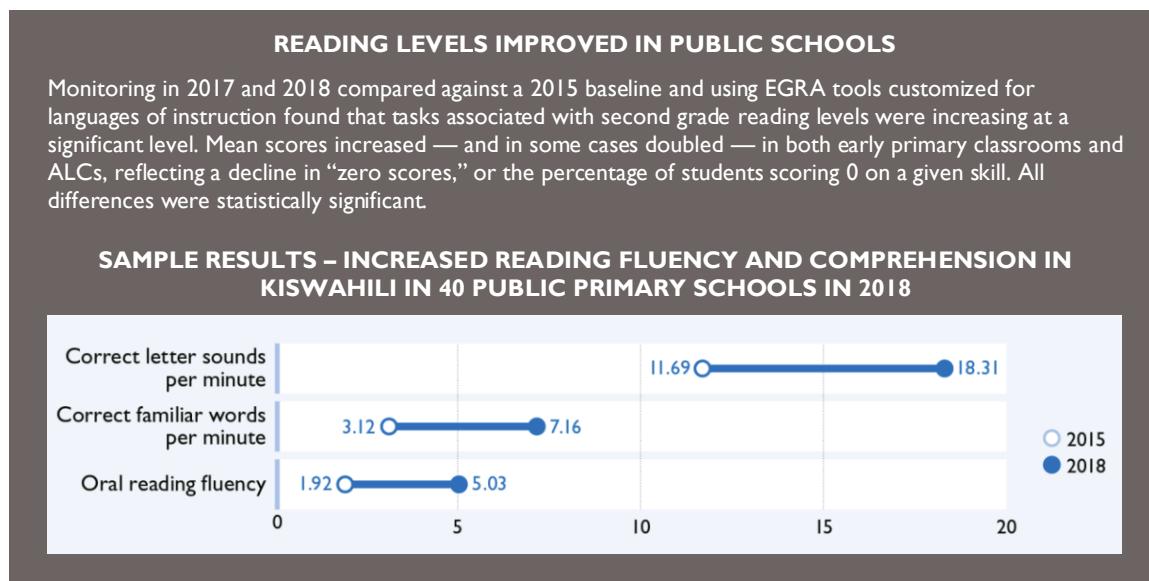
## EQUIPPING STUDENTS, TEACHERS, AND SCHOOLS WITH CRITICAL TLMs

A!I used pedagogical best practices to structure teacher guides with lessons that:

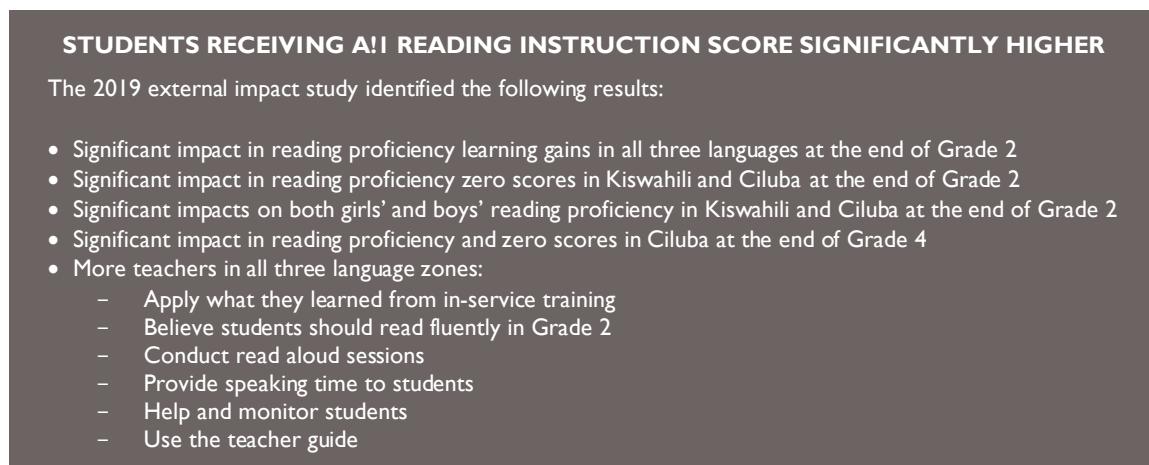
- Use the “I do; we do; you do” pedagogical method
- Provide precise instructions and specific content
- Reinforce teaching skills with cyclical, repeating lesson structures
- Follow a logical, progressive scope and sequence of content and skills that maps across grade levels
- Review skills at opportune moments as students progress through grade levels
- Assess students regularly

With the support of TLMs and training, public and private school teachers in the first and second phases of A!I were able to integrate reading and writing teaching strategies and best practices into their classrooms. While the project could not conduct a controlled

baseline-to-endline study, a comparison of EGRA scores captured during regular monitoring demonstrated that early reading skills were increasing in targeted classrooms (see box below).



Likewise, a 2019 external impact study found that students in targeted classrooms scored significantly higher than students in non-targeted classrooms (see box below for impacts).



### Ensuring Gender-Sensitive and Inclusive TLMs

A!I developed and conducted a training module for A!I curriculum specialists to help ensure that the curricula and TLMs strengthen gender equality. A!I combined gender-sensitive pedagogy, gender equity teaching strategies, and positive methods for discipline in the project TLMs to maximize inclusion.

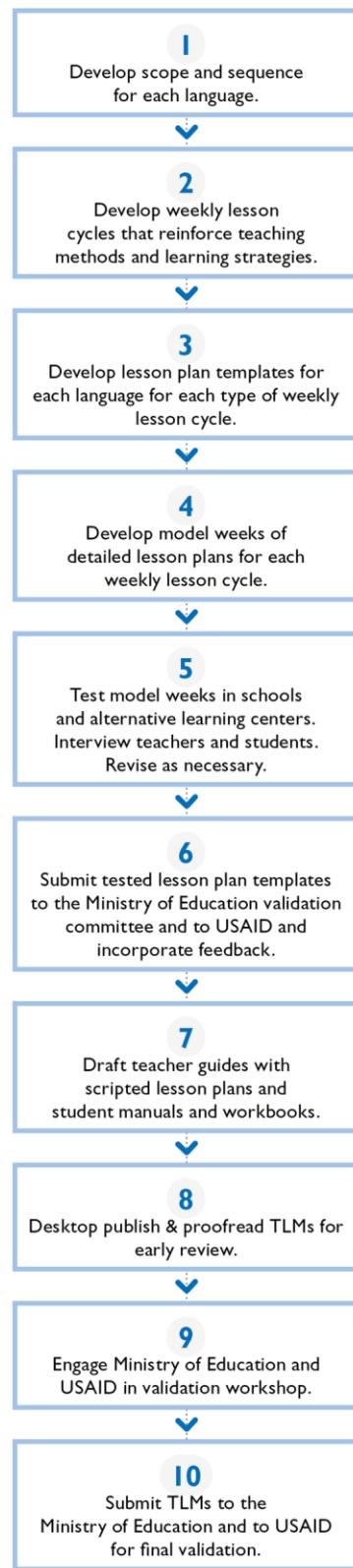
## TLM Development and Testing

A!I worked with the Ministry of Education's curriculum and training divisions, the Ministry of Social Affairs, ministry linguists, and international technical advisors to develop, test, pilot, revise, and finalize scripted teacher guides, student manuals, student workbooks, and posters. The process followed best practices and accounted for the linguistic structure of each language.

TLM development, testing, and refining took between five and nine months and followed the following steps (see Exhibit 11):

1. *Develop scope and sequence for each language.* A!I developed an overview document for curriculum developers to increase their knowledge of how different literacy skills build and mutually reinforce each other. Based on the national curriculum, A!I developed a scope and sequence to establish weekly progressions for required reading and writing skills and content (themes, vocabulary, letter sounds, comprehension strategies, and text levels). The scope and sequence covered skills and content for 24 weeks and served as a guiding document for curriculum developers.
2. *Develop weekly lesson cycles that reinforce teaching methods and learning strategies.* New teachers and teachers learning new curriculum benefit from pedagogical routines. A!I developed activities to explicitly teach the skills outlined in the scope and sequence and organized them into repetitive lesson plans to help teachers develop these skills. For example, weekly lesson activity templates that teach how to decode new letter sounds would stay structurally consistent but swap out letter sounds. Once teachers practice applying these activities for a few weeks, they become more confident in teaching decoding. Students, in turn, become familiar with the strategies to apply and can anticipate what comes next.
3. *Develop lesson plan templates for each language and for each type of weekly lesson cycle.* A!I used the scope, sequence, and weekly lesson cycles

## EXHIBIT 11. TLM DEVELOPMENT PROCESS



to organize and script 45-50-minute lesson plans that included targeted activities. Subject area time allocation determined the number of lesson plans per week.

For example, in Grade 3, there are six, 50-minute French reading and writing lessons per week and four, 50-minute national language reading and writing lessons per week.

4. *Develop model weeks for detailed lesson plans for each weekly lesson cycle.* A!I developed one week of model lessons using content from the scope and sequence for each weekly cycle. To ensure coherence across languages and grades, A!I developed the model weeks in Lingala and French as a standard for the other TLMs.
5. *Test model weeks in schools and alternative learning centers. Interview teachers and students.* A!I curriculum specialists tested all lesson plan templates in schools and ALCs. Each lesson plan was tested for:
  - Lesson plan pacing
  - Instruction clarity
  - Student engagement
  - Overall feasibility

After testing each lesson plan, A!I interviewed teachers and students to obtain their feedback and suggestions for improvement. Using data and qualitative feedback, A!I revised lesson plans and integrated the updates into future TLM development.

6. *Submit tested lesson plan templates to the Ministry of Education validation committee and to USAID.* Validation and feedback required three weeks to four months. A!I further revised TLMs to include Ministry of Education and USAID changes.
7. *Draft teacher guides with scripted lesson plans, student manuals, and workbooks.*
8. *Desktop publish TLMs for early review.* Curriculum teams shared progress weekly for reviewers to ensure quality as the teams continued developing TLMs. A!I engaged linguists to review the national language TLMs. Editors reviewed materials for quality, punctuation, and consistency across TLMs by language.
9. *Engage Ministry of Education and USAID in validation workshop.* In Year 3, the project began hosting one- to two-week long validation workshops for A!I and the ministry validation committee to review the TLMs intensely before validation.
10. Submit to the ministry and to USAID for final validation.

#### **Piloting, Testing, and Revising TLMs Based on Classroom-Based Evidence**

Once TLMs were in schools, A!I gathered evidence on the actual use of TLMs in the classroom during a full school year. With this evidence, A!I improved and updated subsequent TLMs. A!I piloted TLMs successfully for one complete school year for Grades 1 and 2 and ALC Level 1. Due to the TIP sanctions and the COVID-19 pandemic, Grades 3 and 4 and ALC Level 2 TLMs received full testing but did not benefit from a full year's cycle of piloting.

C-FOI data also informed revisions to the TLMs. For example, A!I learned that most teachers skipped writing and evaluation activities. A!I subsequently organized focus groups with teachers and school directors to gather more insight into how to best tailor future improvements.

Based on these findings, A!I collaborated with a sub-team of national materials development specialists and ministry counterparts to integrate these recommendations in the TLMs. USAID also reviewed all TLMs and proposed recommendations.

By Year 4, the Ministry of Education had A!I validated teacher guides and student manuals for Grades 1, 2, and 3 in Ciluba, Kiswahili, and Lingala languages and made them available for the government and other partners to continue to scale up and distribute. The Global Partnership for Education-funded PAQUE program scaled up, printed, and distributed nearly 10 million copies of the first versions of Grades 1, 2, and 3 TLMs nationally. For future printings, the ministry can distribute the updated, validated, and final TLMs. See Annex C for details about the different versions of TLMs. PAQUE printed and has been distributing over 9.7 million student manuals and over 250,000 teachers guides in three national languages (see box). A!I uploaded the finalized TLMs to the ministry TLM repository for future printings.

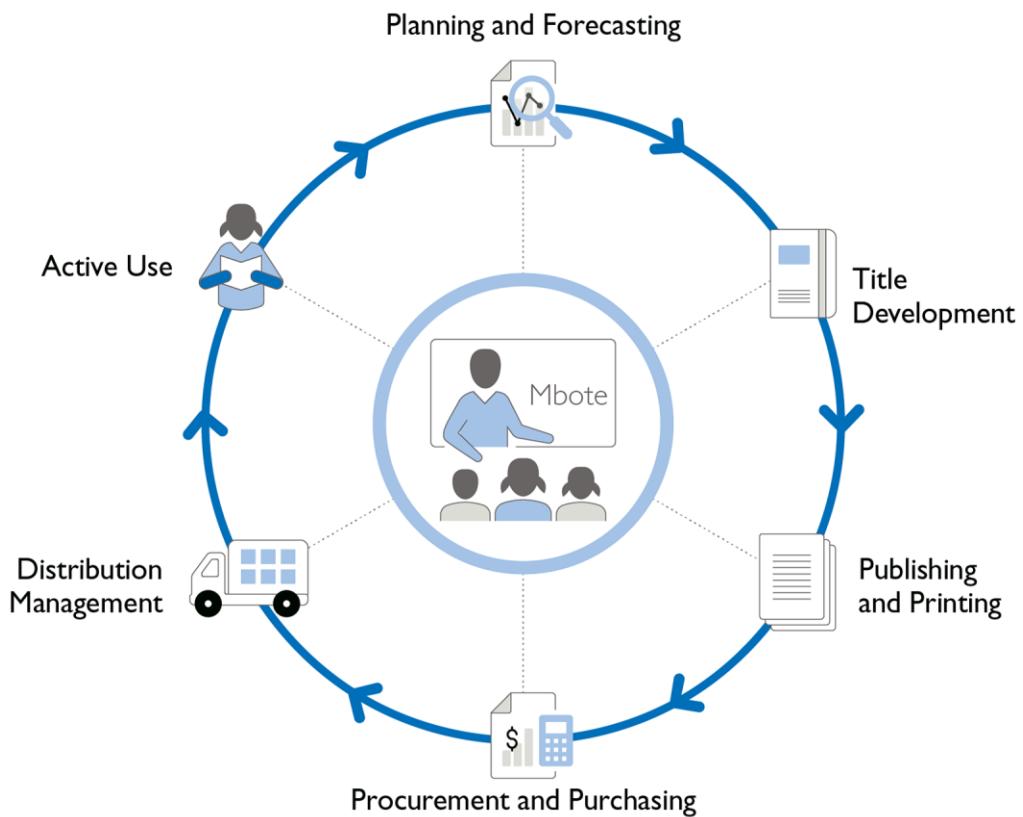
#### IMPACT

Programs like PAQUE are adopting and scaling A!I-developed TLMs. PAQUE has already printed and distributed nearly 10 million A!I-developed teacher guides and student manuals in Ciluba, Kiswahili, and Lingala for Grades 1-3.

#### Procurement and Distribution of TLMs

A!I applied supply chain principles and processes adapted for the DRC to plan, forecast, develop, publish, print, procure, and distribute TLMs (see Exhibit 12, next page). A!I borrowed from best practices in supply chain management from the health and agricultural sectors. A!I applied these supply chain principles to management, standardization, forecasting, and logistics. For further details, refer to the project's technical brief, [Book Supply Chain: The Process and Cost of Getting Teaching and Learning Materials to Kids.](#)

## EXHIBIT 12. TLM SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT



## IMPACT AND ADAPTATIONS DUE TO TIP SANCTIONS AND COVID-19

### TIP Sanctions

When the U.S. government partially lifted the TIP sanctions in 2019, A!I pivoted to supporting the private education sector. Though the TIP sanctions halted A!I TLM distribution, the project redirected TLMs to targeted private schools in 2019.

A!I conducted three needs analyses and revised programming. After the TIP sanctions, the project distributed 636,334 TLMs and trained 1,832 private school teachers and 1,938 school administrators in target schools and ALCs throughout the last two years of the project. Private schools had not previously had reading and writing TLMs available in national languages. A!I improved those materials and built the capacity of teachers to teach early grade reading and writing effectively in national languages. The project completed Grade 4 TLMs but could not pilot them in classrooms because of the interruption.

### TLM Distribution During COVID-19 Lockdown

When schools closed due to COVID-19, the project could not continue TLM distribution. A!I relaunched distribution when schools officially reopened in mid-October and completed distribution to all remaining schools and to the Ministry of Education.

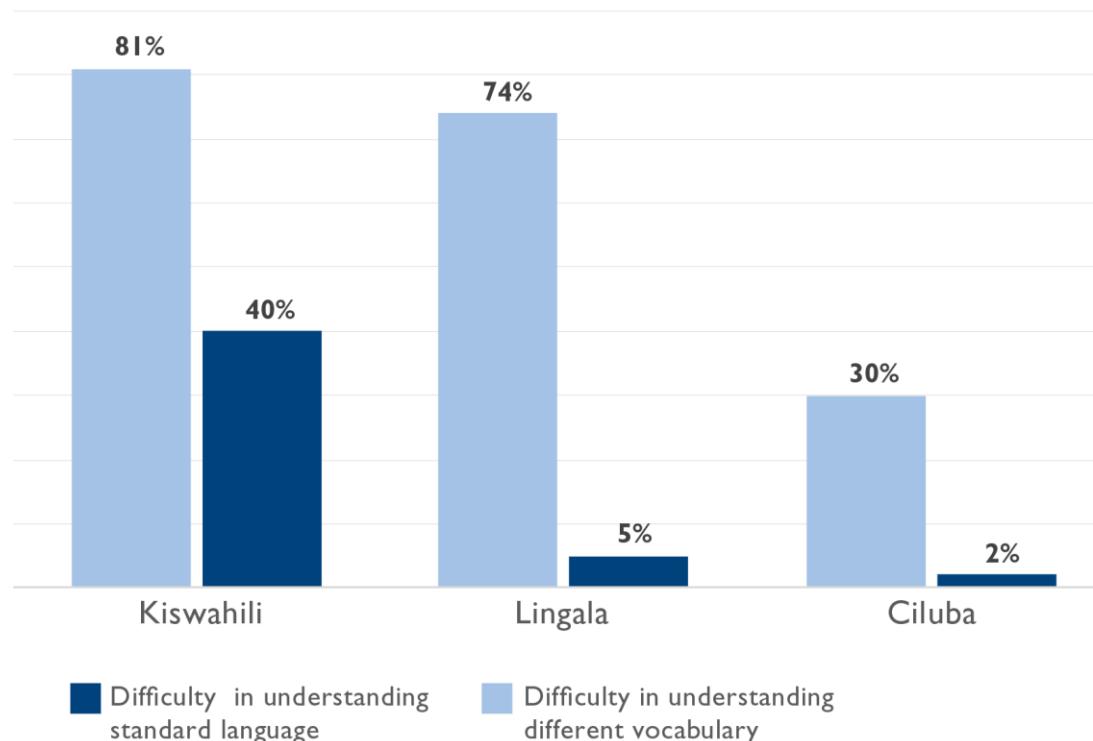
## EVIDENCE GENERATED, LESSONS LEARNED, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TLMs

### Evidence Generated

Language variations complicate standardized teaching. AII's [Sociolinguistic Mapping and Teacher Language Ability Study](#)<sup>11</sup> identified dialect and language inconsistencies throughout provinces that provide a possible explanation for a decline in scores on the vocabulary subtask in the Kiswahili- and Lingala-speaking regions from 2017 to 2018.

The study identified differences between the standard and local forms of Kiswahili. The standard form is the official language of instruction and used in the TLMs, but not all regional learners speak the standard form or use the same vocabulary (see Exhibit 13). Likewise, in Lingala-speaking areas, significant language differences exist between rural and urban areas. In fact, a substantial percentage of students and teachers in rural parts of Sud Ubangi province speak Ngbaka, a non-Bantu language with little similarity to Lingala. In Equateur province, students speak Lokondo, which shares some similarities with Lingala but is still a distinct language.

**EXHIBIT 13. TEACHERS' MASTERY OF STANDARD VERSIONS OF NATIONAL LANGUAGES**



<sup>11</sup> USAID. (2018). "Report on Operations Research for ACCELERE! I: Sociolinguistic Mapping and Teacher Language Ability."

A!I program design assumed that most children and teachers were already orally fluent in the predominant national language of their province, but the project learned that children were often learning oral and written language skills in a second language. Given the critical role language comprehension and vocabulary plays in learning to read, this indicates that other EGRA scores could be higher if children were to learn in a language they speak and understand better.<sup>12</sup>

*Quarterly assessments and fidelity of implementation inform TLM development.* In addition to the two monitoring EGRAs conducted in 2017 and 2018,<sup>13</sup> A!I conducted quarterly assessments<sup>14</sup> of student skills, monitored teachers' fidelity of implementation of the reading curriculum, and conducted additional operations research (see Section 4). Quarterly assessments measured the students' progress in learning critical reading and writing skills three times a year. The fidelity of implementation observations provided data about how teachers used teachers' guides and tracked school directors' monthly support visits to teachers. The data gathered informed subsequent TLM design and teacher trainings (see box below).

#### DATA-INFORMED CHANGES TO TLMS:

- Integrated evaluation and remediation units in teacher guides to support differentiated pedagogy and support students with reading difficulties. A!I units now include mini-tests with benchmark scores and simple remediation activities for teachers to use to support students who do not meet benchmark scores.
- Spread reading and writing competencies across a longer period in the lesson plans to allow students more time to master key competencies such as decoding.
- Simplified instructions and teacher modeling to improve student spelling and writing practice.
- Increased time dedicated to reading practice and added specific guidance to help teachers lead and support individual, independent, and simultaneous student reading exercises.
- Increased time for reading aloud, vocabulary, and reading and listening comprehension activities to learn the differences between the standard national language and the languages spoken at home.

A!I assessments and research also yielded the following noteworthy changes for national language TLMs and training:

- Inserted an explanation of new words in the teacher guides to help teachers explain words with which they are unfamiliar
- Developed a glossary of commonly used words for which the standard and locally used national languages differ
- Included activities that explain language structure of standard Kiswahili in Kiswahili-speaking province trainings

<sup>12</sup> USAID / UK aid. (2018). “2018 Early Grade Reading Monitoring Assessment in the Democratic Republic of Congo” [https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PA00WFT6.pdf](https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00WFT6.pdf), p.47.

<sup>13</sup> USAID / UK aid. (2018). “2018 Early Grade Reading Monitoring Assessment in the Democratic Republic of Congo” [https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PA00WFT6.pdf](https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00WFT6.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> A!I Quarterly Assessments (QA) provided a measure of student progress with a focus on the acquisition of critical reading knowledge and skills introduced during that school term. As such, the QAs were curriculum-based and grade-specific (in contrast to EGRAs, which are based on general reading skills across the early grades).

- Added strategies to teacher's guides to help students transfer skills from one language to another to address the significant differences between Lingala and rurally spoken Ngbaka

#### **Lessons Learned and Recommendations**

- Obtain validation of base documents (scope and sequence, weekly cycles, and tested lesson plan templates) from the ministry and USAID before moving forward with lesson development
- Integrate desktop publishing process sooner in the process to avoid later delays and bottlenecks
- Use data review workshops to improve TLMs based on evidence from the field
- Use supply chain principles from the health (medical supplies) and agricultural (farm to market) sectors to forecast, manage, and standardize logistics
- Dedicate a supply chain manager to direct end-to-end operations
- Standardize tools, terms, events, and tasks (list of book titles, delivery packages, school lists, delivery receipts)
- Forecast demand and work backwards to procure
- Use multiple ports of entry to position books closer to end users; use multiple transit methods based on best available transit routes
- Use pop-up distribution centers to reduce delivery time to schools
- Use a secondary check (consultants in the field) to ensure successful delivery of all materials

#### **KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- The DRC government is scaling up the TLMs created with A!I support.
- Collaborating with ministry experts on TLM development helped validation move forward more quickly. Future initiatives should establish a TLM team of government officials and implementors to meet monthly or quarterly to harmonize methodologies and approaches.
- Synchronize TLM delivery, teacher training, and classroom practice. Timely delivery of TLMs is essential for teachers to apply new knowledge and skills effectively in the classroom. The combination of local and international procurements can help mitigate TLM delivery delays.
- ALCs implemented activities faithfully and demonstrated more reading gains than formal schools.



The “I do; we do; you do” method ensures that the teacher is not a master but a guide. The students benefit from practicing reading and writing, and teachers benefit from assessing the students regularly.

— ELIE MIKONJO, SCHOOL DIRECTOR, ELITES 2

- Adaptive management is essential to work in fluid environments such as that in the DRC. Flexibility of client and stakeholders to readjust plans and budget is key for the project to deliver in complex context. For example, during COVID-19, the project converted the TLMs to radio format. This saved time and allowed A!I to respond adequately to the children's learning needs while they were staying at home.

## **CONTINUOUS TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: TRAINING, COACHING, AND PEER-TO-PEER SUPPORT**

A!I used three main strategies to help teachers understand and use the strategies embedded in the TLMs:

1. Training sessions
2. Teacher coaching by school directors
3. Peer support groups for teachers (*forum d'échange*)

## **DEVELOPING THE TEACHER CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY**

Research on teacher coaching effectiveness indicates that regular visits increase teacher motivation to apply new pedagogical practices. However, government school inspectors have many schools to oversee (sometimes 60 schools for one inspector), and many schools do not benefit from inspector visits for an entire school year.

Originally, A!I planned to address this shortage by hiring reading mobilizers (provincial consultants) to assist government school inspectors in visiting and assessing schools. Provincial education authorities rejected this strategy, though, because it was not sustainable, and it reduced capacity building opportunities for inspectors. Through collaboration, A!I and the provincial authorities agreed to build the capacity of school directors to support teachers using the new literacy strategies and to hire the reading mobilizers as enumerators to help track activities at the school level.

In addition to this decision, A!I collaborated with the Ministry of Education's training division (SERNAFOR or *Service National de Formation*) and provincial inspectors to develop a Teacher Continuing Professional Development strategy.

### **TRAINING SESSIONS**

The project delivered face-to-face training using a cascade model. A team of national trainers (A!I staff) trained provincial trainers (government inspectors and pedagogical advisors) who then trained school directors and teachers (see picture). A!I provided scripted training modules to each level of trainers to ensure standardized training quality. The national team of trainers also conducted quality assurance visits during the subsequent training levels.



## **TEACHER COACHING BY SCHOOL DIRECTORS**

School directors served as coaches for teachers at their schools (*accompagnateur de lecture*) because of their proximity to the school and because of the high school-to-inspector ratio. The school directors' responsibilities included observing teachers monthly using an A!I-developed form to guide their observations and their post-observation meetings with teachers. The school directors also facilitated monthly teacher professional development sessions at the school level (*cellule de base*) and ensured that their teachers met at the grade level (*unité pédagogique*) to share best practices.

A!I trained school directors on coaching approximately once a year. To facilitate school director training, A!I trained government inspectors and reading mobilizers, who then trained the school directors. The reading mobilizers supervised the school directors by checking in monthly to record the number of lesson observations the school director had conducted that month. If school directors were not conducting lesson observations, the reading mobilizer talked with the government inspector and encouraged the inspector to support the school directors in their coaching role.

## **PEER SUPPORT GROUPS FOR TEACHERS**

A!I leveraged the Ministry of Education's Teacher Professional Development policy by supporting peer support groups (*forums d'échange*), which rely on three levels of teacher professional development:

1. Two pedagogical units of Grade 1 and 2 teachers and Grades 3 and 4 teachers within a school (*unité pédagogique*)
2. A cluster of three to five neighboring schools (*reseau de proximité*)
3. The school (*cellule de base*)

SERNAFOR requires that teachers meet with their pedagogical unit every week, with their school every month, and with their school cluster every three months.

In Year 3, A!I developed facilitator handbooks with scripted sessions for each level of the peer support groups. A!I used data from classroom observations and focus groups to develop sessions to further develop teachers' understanding of the strategies embedded in the TLMs; to encourage teachers to reflect on their experiences applying these strategies; and to discuss their challenges, successes, and ideas with their peers.

## **IMPACT AND ADAPTATIONS DUE TO THE TIP SANCTIONS AND COVID-19**

### **TIP Sanctions**

A!I successfully shared project-developed handbooks and launched continuous professional development sessions in the peer support groups, but TIP sanctions prevented the project from following through with planned support and follow-up initiatives. Instead, A!I pivoted teacher continuous professional development to private school teachers and administrators. The project updated training modules and trained new trainers to replace the government inspectors with whom the project could no longer work because they were government employees. A!I conducted training sessions in reading and writing in Ciluba, Kiswahili, Lingala, and French for school directors,

teachers, and educators in schools and ALCs. A!I trained school directors, teachers, and educators of formal and non-formal private schools in all targeted provinces, including Kinshasa, Haut Katanga, Equateur, Kasaï Central, Nord Kivu, and Sud Kivu. Training content integrated coaching for directors, gender sensitive pedagogy, and the digital glossary.

### **COVID-19**

After pivoting to working with private schools and providing in-service training to school directors, teachers, and educators, A!I was prepared to launch peer support group initiatives with private schools. However, COVID-19 interrupted this work. Schools closed and the project could not work with private schools' peer support groups.

### **EVIDENCE GENERATED, LESSONS LEARNED, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

#### **Evidence Generated**

A!I conducted a *Teacher Motivation and Incentives Study* as part of its Operations Research portfolio (see Section 4) to help the Ministry of Education understand how to motivate teachers in feasible, low-cost, and scalable ways using non-monetary incentives. Key findings included the following:

- Teachers suggested the following incentives:
  - Continuous professional development
  - Promotion to a higher post
  - Decision-making responsibility
  - Praise and recognition
  - Instructional materials
  - Safety traveling to and from school, as well as at school
  - Improved student learning
  - In-service professional development opportunities
  - Certificates for training
  - Instructional materials like dictionaries and maps
  - Support materials like umbrellas and plastic folders
  - Mechanisms for recognizing strong performance
- Teachers and school directors who participated in A!I professional development activities were significantly more likely to report positive changes on six factors that affect teacher motivation:
  - Job satisfaction
  - School director leadership
  - Student performance
  - Confidence as a teacher
  - Teacher attitude toward reading
  - Teacher practices

- Teachers and school directors considered the annual in-service training sessions to be the most useful resource, followed by the pedagogical unit peer support groups
- Teachers held favorable views of the A!I materials and felt increased ability and confidence after participating in A!I activities

#### **IMPACT ON CONTINUOUS TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

A!I's quarterly assessments (which monitored students' literacy performance on a quarterly basis) indicated that improving certain teaching practices was associated with higher performance across several provinces and quarterly. Effective teaching practices included:

- Teaching the entire lesson
- Involving all students or learners in classroom activities
- Giving compliments to students and learners
- Using positive classroom management
- Demonstrating activities to students
- Giving students time to practice different activities
- Using the teacher guide

#### **Lessons Learned and Recommendations**

- Consider school cluster membership when selecting target institutions. Ideally, target all schools in a cluster.
- Align Ministry of Education government inspector pre-service training sessions with the new national reading curriculum and promote the pedagogical and teacher support strategies embedded in A!I TLMs and training.
- Use core provincial training teams, such as groups of the strongest inspectors and pedagogical advisors.
- Use refresher training to assist teachers with challenging strategies and practices. For example, A!I identified modeling letter-sound pronunciations as a challenge and developed specific sessions to help teachers implement this in decoding lessons.
- Consider prioritizing reforming teacher pre-service training and inspector training rather than investing in training school directors as coaches and trying to hold them accountable for coaching teachers. School directors do not have the knowledge, skills, time, or accountability to support teachers in this way.
- Consider alternative coaching methods such as phone calls rather than classroom visits to enable inspectors to check in more regularly with teachers and provide coaching.
- Improve in-service training by focusing on the following four elements:
  - Reduce the time gap between training and TLM distribution to schools.
  - Train all schools in a cluster to facilitate continuous professional development through peer support groups.
  - Invest in the core provincial training team to maximize the efficacy of inspector training.
  - Reduce the amount of content included in in-service training sessions and ensure follow-up and support on challenging topics such as decoding strategies.

- Provide facilitator handbooks to peer support group leaders to maximize continuous teacher professional development and increase fidelity of the reading program’s implementation.
- Include peer support group training in the in-service training content to immerse schools and program participants in the model.
- Identify strategies to support teachers to learn the standard form of national languages, especially in Lingala and Kiswahili-speaking provinces.
- Train teachers how to conduct formative assessments effectively and use results.
- Design and implement simple, quarterly formative assessment tools and strategies to help teachers monitor their students’ progress and inform their instruction.
- Continue to identify cost-effective, sustainable, and scalable modalities to train teachers. Consider in-person “refresher” workshops and school-based, peer-to-peer learning through peer support groups.

#### **KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- Existing peer support groups are essential to ensure sustainable, resilient, and self-reliant continuous professional development.
- Future interventions and the DRC government should improve pre-service training for teachers and inspectors, focus on peer support groups for teacher continuous professional development, and move away from using school directors as teachers’ coaches.
- Training content should focus on the key strategies that teachers need (rather than overload teachers with information) and establish a strong foundation for peer support groups.

#### **ENGAGING COMMUNITIES IN THE TEACHING AND READING PROCESS**

A! I conducted community reading activities to promote a culture of reading in targeted communities. A! I designed these activities in consultation with other partners that have conducted community learning activities in the DRC (e.g., Vas-y-fille, PAQUED) and elsewhere (e.g., FHI 360’s Nigeria Reading and Numeracy Activity [RANA]). A! I selected communities based on accessibility, security, community participation, and governance strength of their parent committees (COPA or *comité des parents d’élèves*) and school management committees (COGES or *comité de gestion*).

The project provided reading kits to each targeted community. Reading kits included storage trunks, bookshelves, dictionaries, and a book bank, as well as markers, cardboard, and flipchart paper for community volunteers, parents, and students to create their own literacy materials. The book banks included 65 French and 51 national language-leveled readers (simple story books). A! I created some of the leveled readers and adapted others from other projects. Each book bank included two to five copies of each title for students to read during reading club or to check out to read at home. The leveled readers are available on the [Global Digital Library](#) for public use.

Community reading activities included weekly reading clubs, monthly parent awareness-raising sessions, and reading festival activities. A!I conducted community awareness sessions in all eight A!I provinces to help parents and community leaders understand the scope of the afterschool reading activities. Community members elected community reading champions (local volunteers) in participating schools. Community reading champions, school directors, and the school management committee presidents participated in two-day workshops to learn how to use the reading kits and book banks to implement community reading activities.

## **IMPACT AND ADAPTATIONS DUE TO THE TIP SANCTIONS AND COVID-19**

### **TIP Sanctions**

Due to the TIP sanctions, the project had to cancel planned follow-up training for community reading champions. In the subsequent pivot to the private sector, A!I was able to re-train community reading champions in five provinces with private ALCs. The project also launched community reading programs and distributed book banks to 67 private schools and ALCs.

### **COVID-19**

A!I conducted follow-up activities in Goma and Bukavu before the COVID-19 pandemic forced schools to close. Reading mobilizers were able to continue following up on the activities on their own because of A!I's training before the pandemic.

## **EVIDENCE GENERATED, LESSONS LEARNED, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENGAGING COMMUNITIES**

### **Evidence Generated**

To inform the community engagement strategy for reading, A!I conducted an operations research study<sup>15</sup> to raise awareness with communities of the importance of reading. The study found the following:

- Parents and communities value reading, and students want to learn to read and write, but parents do not have the time, means, or energy to provide support
- Parents call on the government to finance schools and pay teachers; they also acknowledge the need to change their own behaviors, for example, by going to school to meet with teachers and by paying school fees
- Barriers preventing parent participation are both internal (lack of discipline or self-efficacy) and external (high cost of education)

### **KEY ACCOMPLISHMENT**

In a study that examined correlations between P-FOI data and reading assessment results, A!I found that reading scores were highest in communities with strong parent and community engagement through parent committees and school management committees and where community reading champions implemented community reading activities as intended.

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<sup>15</sup> *Etude Diagnostique de L'Engagement Communautaire sur L'Alphabétisation de L'Enfant* (Child Literacy Community Engagement Study). July 2017.

- TV and radio are possible mass communication channels, but respondents reported that interpersonal, community-based communication was more valuable

### **Lessons Learned and Recommendations**

- To overcome the internal and external barriers to parent participation, show how other families — including those with nonliterate parents — have been involved in their children’s education and in advocacy with the government.
- Parent involvement motivates the community reading champions to continue their work as reading club facilitators.
- Children seem more engaged when a family member accompanies them to the club.
- Consider using procurement teams that can process multiple large procurements at the same time.
- Community reading champion training and material distribution should be synchronized. Late distributions demotivated community reading champions and communities and required more encouragement to rebuild momentum for the community reading activities.
- Provide a small amount of assistance to community reading champions (who are volunteers).
- Communities, parents, and students met the activities with enthusiasm when the community reading activities functioned as designed. The activities helped increase parental awareness and engagement in reading and education support to children.
- Community reading activities also helped children increase their practice time in reading through fun activities.

### **KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- Community reading activities suffered from procurement delays and the interruption of the TIP sanctions, but these activities did provide value in communities that implemented them successfully.
- Future interventions should continue to encourage parent and community involvement in reading activities outside of the classroom to strengthen students’ reading habits.
- Community reading helped some children to maintain their reading skills and others to improve their reading skills.
- Further research on this aspect of literacy support could provide valuable insights.
- Providing a one-time, in-kind incentive (e.g., a bicycle) to the community reading champions could help keep them invested in the activities.
- To support continued improvement in reading outcomes, parents and communities must continue to engage.
- Community-based summer reading camps can support students during holiday breaks to prevent loss of reading gains during the school year, as well as provide remedial support to students in need.

## **MATH PILOT**

Before the A!I project, UNICEF funded and developed Lingala language math programs in the DRC and piloted the programs for Grades 1 and 2. In 2018, A!I assisted the Ministry of Education's Directorate of Teaching and Learning Materials (DIPROMAD or *Direction des Programmes et Matériels Didactiques*) by piloting the Grade 3 math program. DIPROMAD provided a list of 10 targeted schools from the Grades 1 and 2 pilot in Mbandaka, Equateur. A!I then worked with these schools for the Grade 3 pilot, as the directors, teachers, and students had already used the Grades 1 and 2 math TLMs.

Unfortunately, the TIP sanctions interrupted the Grade 3 public school math pilot program. After the project pivoted to private schools, A!I reinitiated the math pilot with Grades 1 and 2 in private schools. Both pilots (Grade 3 in 2018 in public schools and Grades 1 and 2 in 2019 in private schools) followed the same process:

1. Identified pilot schools in Mbandaka.
2. Conducted baseline evaluation of student skills (EGRA) in math. This evaluation included written and orally administered portions.
3. Adapted UNICEF-funded math program training modules.
4. Printed and distributed math TLMs (teacher guide and student book).
5. Trained directors and teachers.
6. Conducted ongoing evaluation through fidelity of implementation observations and focus groups with the pilot participants (teachers and directors).

## **EVIDENCE GENERATED, LESSONS LEARNED, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MATH PILOT**

### **Evidence Generated**

- Observations and focus groups revealed that teachers were not familiar with using mathematical reasoning to solve problems. They were more accustomed to teaching math through rote memorization and application of rules.
- Fidelity of Grades 1 and 2 program implementations was very poor. Teachers did not demonstrate adequate understanding of the situation-based instructional approach to teaching math.
- Key results for the Grade 1 math baseline assessment:
  - Most difficult tests: identifying a missing number in a sequence of numbers, operations using measurements (kilograms, liters), and subtraction
  - Easiest tests: conversion of time measurements and fraction of a quantity of objects
  - Tests with the most zero scores: operation on quantities (88 percent), subtraction (50 percent), and identifying a missing number in a number sequence (49 percent)
  - Tests with the fewest zero scores: number identification (9 percent), quantity discrimination (8 percent)
  - Overall, girls and boys performed similarly
  - Performance was not related to teacher seniority

- Key results for the Grade 2 math baseline assessment:
  - Most difficult tests: identifying a missing number in a number sequence, subtraction, and addition
  - Easiest tests: operations on quantities/capacities, composition, and decomposition of a number
  - Tests with the most zero scores: fill-in the whole additions (82 percent), operations with measures of length (69 percent), and time measurement conversion (62 percent)
  - Tests with the fewest zero scores: number identification (3 percent) and quantity discrimination (9 percent)
  - Overall, girls and boys performed similarly
  - Performance was not related to teacher seniority
- AII did not receive data from the DIPROMAD or analyze key baseline results for Grade 3 because of the TIP sanctions.

### **Lessons Learned and Recommendations**

- Support teachers to use the program effectively. The UNICEF-funded program assumes a high base level of mathematical thinking and reasoning in teachers.
- Provide complementary supports to teachers to help them develop mathematical reasoning and thinking skills in their students. These supports can include scripted model lessons and ongoing professional development through peer support groups.
- Consider using PAQUED's previous IRI math programs, which use French as the language of instruction to demonstrate how teachers can guide their students to solve problems using mathematical reasoning.
- Equip support staff to teachers (school directors, reading mobilizers, and inspectors) with math coaching training and with tips for supporting mathematical thinking and instruction.
- Prepare formative evaluations so teachers can evaluate their students' progress in math acquisition.
- Provide a French and national language glossary to help teachers understand mathematical terms in the national languages (most teachers were taught math in French).
- Provide teachers with training and the DIPROMAD handbook, *Creating Instructional Materials*.

### **KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- A national language math program does not necessarily make math easier for teachers to teach as they learned math in French, and some math concepts do not translate easily into national languages.
- Consider teaching mathematical reasoning in French and national languages but maintaining the written math problems in national languages.

- Relaunch PAQUED's summer math institutes, which boosted teachers' own mathematical reasoning. Teachers demonstrated a significant increase in understanding of Grades 1 to 6 mathematical concepts after attending these 10-day institutes.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY IN EDUCATION**

### **MOBILE TRAINING EVERYWHERE PILOT**

In 2018, A!I piloted the Mobile Training Every Where (M-TEW) mobile application in 15 schools in Kolwezi (Lualaba province) and Lubumbashi (Haut Katanga province). The goal of using M-TEW was to communicate messages to school directors, teachers, and community reading champions to help promote a reading culture in their communities. The project developed these messages based on social behavior change communication research data collected in July 2017. The purpose of the pilot was to test M-TEW as a tool to support the different actors in the project and to determine if and what to scale up. Orange (the telecommunications company) trained A!I staff to use M-TEW in April 2017, and A!I procured technology such as phones and SIM cards and trained school directors, teachers, and community reading champions.

The M-TEW pilot went well, and community members were happy to work with this technology. However, A!I determined that it was not prudent scale up the activity because of inadequate connectivity and post-project sustainability issues such as the cost of Orange's services, maintenance, and replacement of telephone sets.

### **DIGITAL GLOSSARY**

A!I developed the digital glossary as a digital platform to define all the unfamiliar or difficult words found in the A!I teacher guides. A!I made the glossary available to teachers through a web browser and an Android mobile application that does not require internet access. In addition to the words and definitions, the glossary also includes a phonology section which contains the letter-sound song in Ciluba, Kiswahili, and Lingala. A!I provided digital glossary training to teachers and school directors in the A!I target provinces.

### **ELECTRONIC DISSEMINATION OF THE FINAL TLMs**

To make TLMs accessible to the DRC's entire education community (teachers, school directors, etc.) as well as the general public, A!I worked with the Ministry of Education's information and communications technology unit to upload the TLMs to various digital platforms, including the ministry's website and the continuing education platform, VodaEduc, supported by the Vodacom foundation.

#### **Global Digital Library**

A!I also uploaded project TLMs to the [Global Digital Library](#) (GDL). The library is part of The Global Book Alliance, an international effort working to guarantee that children everywhere have the books and learning materials they need to learn to read and read to learn. A!I contributed 55 project-developed TLMs and 220 leveled readers in Ciluba, Kiswahili, Lingala, and French to the GDL's collection of high-quality, open educational reading resources. They are now available on the web, on a mobile application, and for

print for users, including ministries of education, school managers, teachers, donor agencies and their implementing partners, international and national NGOs, local publishers, digital distributors, content providers, and households in majority world countries.

## LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Launching and testing the glossary and the glossary's user guide ensured that the glossary was accessible and understandable.
- Participants preferred the glossary's digital format over a print glossary. They found it easy to use on both the website and mobile application and appreciated that the glossary was accessible offline.
- Many teachers and school directors did not have smart phones to access the glossary easily. A!I conducted a study and found that about 12 percent of teachers and school directors reported having smart phones, whereas 88 percent had feature phones. Smart phone penetration in cities was higher than in rural areas where 3G/4G connectivity is weaker.
- Although A!I made the TLMs accessible to the general public through the ministry's platform, teachers, school directors, and parents do not have an established culture of accessing resources online.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Although technology penetration is very low, COVID-19's impact on traditional education demonstrates the need for alternative educational systems facilitated by technology. Consider an analysis of how to work with an internet service provider and the government through a public-private partnership for reduced internet access costs to take advantage of technology and reach vulnerable populations in remote regions.
- For the glossary to have wider usage and effect, consider introducing a community resource smartphone or tablet at every school for teachers to use, as needed.
- Update the glossary when developing new lessons.
- Consider developing a technological adaptation to traditional education structures to help students, teachers, and communities access resources during future school shutdowns.
- As technology evolves, seek new ways of making resources available and accessible.

## ACHIEVEMENTS

- Targeted 71 schools, 20 ALCs, and 9 VTCs
- Trained 99 school directors, 22 ALC directors, and 133 VTC directors
- Trained 152 schoolteachers, three ALC educators and 166 VTC educators
- Impacted 9,849 Grade I students, 698 ALC Level I learners, and 10,745 VTC initial literacy learners

## INVESTING IN THE EAST: BENI AND BUTEMBO

Foundational literacy is essential to education resilience, especially in endemic conflict zones in eastern DRC, and USAID and the DRC government requested that A!I provide education support to Beni and Butembo in Nord Kivu. A!I's 2020 expansion to Beni and

Butembo improved beneficiary resilience by combining A!I's proven basic education interventions with additional interventions that improve child well-being and provide peace education and violence prevention in targeted school environments.

The project partnered with two local NGOs with strong community ties and experiences to implement our activities in Beni and Butembo — *Communauté Baptiste au Centre de l'Afrique* (CBCA) and *Association de Solidarité pour la Promotion de la Santé Familiale et Développement* (ASOPROSAFD).

Before launching activities, A!I conducted security and needs assessments to select 100 school structures based on security, stability, and student population and to understand the current pedagogical practices in reading instruction to inform implementation focus. The security assessment also outlined challenges and identified approaches to operating in the northeastern region's complex environment.

Based on the assessment findings, A!I piloted a package of activities in Beni and Butembo focused on early grade literacy for Grade 1 (public and private primary schools), ALC Level 1, and VTC initial literacy. A!I used its work in gender equality, psychosocial support, and safe learning environments to support a pilot package of activities, including:

- “I do; we do; you do” Kiswahili reading and writing teaching training for inspectors, directors, Grade 1 public and private school teachers, ALC Level 1 educators, and CSO members
- Training VTC teachers on teaching initial and functional literacy in Kiswahili
- Distributing TLMs to support educational activities
- Training directors and teachers on the psychosocial perspective of student well-being and learning in a school environment
- Creating gender equity and school monitoring committees in schools
- Raising parent awareness to support children’s learning

A!I facilitated these activities by training trainers in Goma, North Kivu. The trainees, which included inspectors and CSO staff, then trained directors and teachers in Beni and Butembo. A!I also trained the two partner CSOs (CBCA and ASOPROSAFD) on the pilot program overall and the CSO’s roles. These CSOs represented an important link between vulnerable communities and A!I educational programming.



A!I also created temporary networks of local schools (*réseaux de proximité*), with approval from the head of the Ministry of Education’s provincial education office. The networks helped the project train directors and teachers

while minimizing travel and maximizing the benefits of sharing experiences and practices through peer support networks (*forum d'échanges*).

### **IMPACT AND ADAPTATIONS DUE TO COVID-19**

The project paused many activities in Beni and Butembo due to COVID-19 restrictions and school closures. A!I worked with CBCA and ASOPROSAFD to conduct awareness campaigns for children and their families to tune into *Lecture Pour la Vie* (see next section). These awareness campaigns targeted more than 10,000 students. Lessons aired in Beni and Butembo starting on June 15, 2020 following the official launch. After schools reopened in mid-October, A!I distributed TLMs to schools.

### **EVIDENCE GENERATED, LESSONS LEARNED, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WORKING IN BENI AND BUTEMBO**

#### **Evidence Generated**

In December of 2020, A!I conducted a FOI review of Beni and Butembo activities. See Exhibit 14 and Exhibit 15 below for a summary of the findings.

#### **EXHIBIT 14. STRENGTHS (HIGH LEVEL OF FIDELITY BY OUTPUT AND RESULT)**

ACTIVITY	FINDINGS
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Teachers were trained in reading and writing</li><li>Teachers knew reading skills</li><li>Directors trained</li></ul>
Continuous Professional Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Private school teachers participated in grade level peer support groups (<i>unités pédagogiques</i>)</li></ul>
Classroom observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Principals observed teachers and gave feedback after each observation</li></ul>
TLMs distribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>A good level of distribution of the Kiswahili teacher guide, posters, and alphabet bands</li></ul>
TLM use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Students who brought their workbooks home used them at home. (Note: there is an average level of fidelity for the percentage of students who bring the notebook home)</li><li>Students could cite at least one element of the TLMs</li></ul>

#### **EXHIBIT 15. WEAKNESSES (NEED IMPROVEMENT BY OUTPUT AND RESULT)**

ACTIVITY	FINDINGS
Continuous Professional Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>ALC and VTC educators do not participate much in their respective peer support networks (<i>forums d'échanges</i>)</li></ul>
Classroom observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>School directors do not observe their teachers on the recommended basis (once every 10 days).</li></ul>
TLMs distribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Low level of distribution of the student workbook and manual (not every student received every material).</li></ul>
TLM use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Small percentage of classes display the oral French poster.</li></ul>

The FOI analysis also asked school directors and teachers to identify project activities that they found made a significant contribution to improving students' reading and writing skills. See Exhibit 16Exhibit (next page) for these self-reported findings.

#### **EXHIBIT 16. DIRECTORS' AND TEACHERS' PRIORITIZATION OF ACTIVITES**

ACTIVITY	DIRECTORS	TEACHERS
Distribution of TLMs to students and teachers	96%	96%
Teacher training	92%	94%
Classroom observation	88%	67%
School directors training	77%	48%
Peer support networks ( <i>forums d'échanges</i> )	27%	25%
Distance Learning	25%	8%
Other	4%	6%

#### **Lessons Learned and Recommendations**

- In an insecure environment, working with and through local organizations helped the project achieve its objectives
- Maintaining regular communication with institutions (e.g., UNICEF) on security helped to coordinate plans
- Maintaining communication with USAID helped the project align with USAID strategy in these priority areas
  - Communicating with local educational authorities in Beni and Butembo about strategy and getting their buy-in early helped facilitate implementation

#### **KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- Working with CSOs to implement activities in this insecure context is more efficient and sustainable than hiring reading mobilizers. Working with CSOs was less expensive, and CSOs understand and are invested in the local community.
- Collaboration between education authorities and CSOs helps ensure transparency in TLM distribution.
- Regular communication with CSOs on project implementation is essential to achieve successful milestones and contributes to more trust and respect of contractual commitment.

“The Ministry of Education is concerned about the educational continuity of the children who are presently retained at home following the COVID-19 pandemic. This ACCELERE! I initiative comes at the right time to respond to this concern and will allow children to benefit from remote lessons through radio broadcasts to maintain and reinforce their knowledge.”

— MR. NLANDU  
DIRECTOR OF DIPROMAD,  
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

#### **ADAPTING TO A GLOBAL PANDEMIC: IRI**

After the WHO declared COVID-19 a global pandemic in March 2020, the DRC closed schools to slow the spread of the virus. A!I had to freeze in-person activities, including TLM distribution and follow-up, as well as coaching support to teachers and school directors. The project had to rapidly decide how to use A!I's resources to design and introduce an effective distance learning approach in multiple languages to fill the educational gaps created by school closures. A!I worked closely with ministry counterparts and USAID to design an IRI activity that would help learners maintain

acquired knowledge, reinforce and build upon key literacy competencies, improve socio-emotional wellbeing, learn methods to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and prepare for their eventual return to the classroom.

MEL demonstrated that the IRI and community mobilization system proved to be an effective method of reaching learners with educational content. It also showed an ongoing monthly increase in listeners, including an upsurge of more than 31 percent in listeners in January 2021 (see box).

#### KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- 72, 30-minute radio lessons designed and broadcast for Grades 1 and 2 in three national languages (three times per week)
- 36, 30-minute radio lessons designed and broadcast for Grades 3 and 4 in three national languages (three times per week)
- 3,500 solar-powered radios and kits delivered to families
- Three-pronged community engagement strategy that engaged and supported families and learners
- Continued monthly increases in listenership

#### LAUNCHING IRI

Between March and June 2020, A!I worked with Ministry of Education experts to create a series of 48 newly developed radio broadcasts titled *Lecture Pour la Vie*, which targeted degré élémentaire (Grades 1 and 2 and ALC Level 1) as well as a complementary community mobilization system and set of monitoring and assessment activities. *Lecture Pour la Vie* began broadcasting in June 2020 in Kiswahili and Lingala in the provinces of Kinshasa, Haut Katanga, and North Kivu, including in the towns of Beni and Butembo. In September 2020, A!I expanded its distance learning activities by adding *Lire et Ecrire Ensemble!* for degré moyen students (Grades 3 and 4 and ALC Level 2). *Lire et Ecrire Ensemble!* began with 24 radio lessons in Lingala and Kiswahili. A!I also introduced broadcasts in Ciluba in Kasai Central (24 lessons for degré élémentaire and 12 lessons for degré moyen in Ciluba). *Lecture Pour la Vie* and *Lire et Ecrire Ensemble!* radio lessons helped fill some of the educational gaps left by school closures and complemented formal education once schools re-opened in mid-October (see box).

#### IMPACT

- Listenership increased by as much as 31.6% monthly (2021)
- 98.2% of respondents indicated that IRI was important for their children (2020)
- 81.4% of respondents listened to 75-100% of segments (2020)

## ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES

A!I had to make difficult and urgent decisions to launch an effective distance learning program in the middle of a pandemic. USAID, UK aid, and the DRC government wanted an inclusive approach that would make *Lecture Pour la Vie* and *Lire et Ecrire Ensemble!* accessible not only to A!I-targeted students, but also to anyone who could tune into the radio broadcasts. With these objectives in mind, A!I designed *Lecture Pour la Vie* and *Lire et Ecrire Ensemble!* with the same scaffolded reading instruction used in the project curricula but ensured that listeners without project TLMs would also be able to participate. For greater efficiency and reach, *Lecture Pour la Vie* chose a multi-grade approach with combined lessons for Grades 1 and 2 and ALC Level 1, and a second level, *Lire et Ecrire Ensemble!*, for Grades 3 and 4 and ALC Level 2.

## THE DESIGN PROCESS

A!I collaborated with the Ministry of Education (particularly the DIPROMAD) to develop and produce the interactive radio lessons. The design followed the DRC's national reading curriculum for national languages and combined socio-emotional messages and guidance on preventing the spread of COVID-19. The ministry provided their studio at no cost to the project to record and edit the lessons. After the lessons were edited, A!I negotiated with community, provincial, and national radio stations for a reduced broadcast fee. All six partnering radio stations (Radio-Télé 50 in Kinshasa, RTNC in Lubumbashi, Radio Nsanga in Kasai Central, VBR in Goma, RTNC in Butembo, and Radio Muungano in Beni) accepted the reduced fee as their contribution to the education of Congolese children during the pandemic.

The project broadcast three unique 30-minute lessons each week and rebroadcast each lesson twice. Weekly lessons featured a various activities, as depicted in Exhibit 17 on the next page.



Gédéon Ilunga, Grade I student, Lubumbashi

"As soon as it is 10:00am, I call the whole family to listen — my daughter in the 6th grade, my wife, and the neighbors in the neighborhood all gather around a radio to follow the IRI in Kiswahili. This is such a rare program that teaches the community to read and write in Kiswahili."

— MALE FAMILY FACILITATOR  
HAUT KATANGA

The IRI lessons contained opening and closing messages, including recommendations for activities that learners could practice before the subsequent lesson and messages for parents on how to best support their children. A!I chose radio characters who could serve as role models, as well as songs and activities that would be locally relevant and fun.

#### **EXHIBIT 17. ACTIVITIES INCLUDED IN IRI LESSON SEGMENTS**

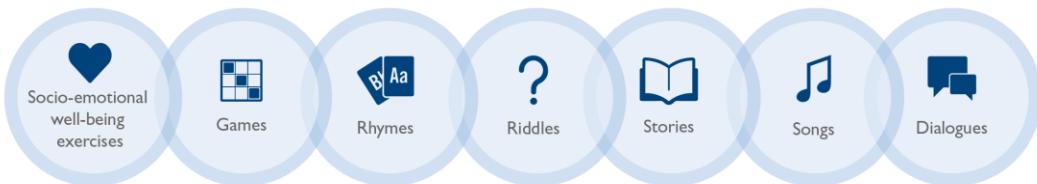


Exhibit 18 (below) and Exhibit 19 (on the next page) outline the detailed lesson templates to help make lessons predictable and effective for listeners.

#### **EXHIBIT 18. OVERVIEW OF STANDARD LECTURE POUR LA VIE LESSON SEGMENTS (GRADES 1 AND 2 AND ALC LEVEL 1)**

	<b>DAY 1: ORAL COMPREHENSION</b>	<b>DAY 2: PHONETICS</b>	<b>DAY CONSOLIDATION</b>
<b>SEGMENT A</b>	Standard opening		
<b>SEGMENT B</b>	Games/activities/songs to strengthen socio-emotional skills and well-being		
<b>SEGMENT C</b>	Story	Discover new things: sounds, story, or rhyme	Repeat Day 1 story or another story with a similar theme
<b>SEGMENT D</b>	Guided vocabulary practice	Phonological awareness activity	Pronunciation and oral skills practice
<b>SEGMENT E</b>	Health and well-being message/activity		
<b>SEGMENT F</b>	Guided comprehension practice	Phonological awareness activity	Guided writing or drawing practice
<b>SEGMENT G</b>	Consolidation games (e.g., true/false, funny sentence with a word, inventing another end to the story)	Game-song consolidation (e.g., Simon Says, give as many words with the sound as possible in 15 seconds)	Phonological awareness activity
<b>SEGMENT H</b>	Homework/activities for after the radio lessons		
<b>SEGMENT I</b>	Messages to parents and standard closing		

**EXHIBIT 19. OVERVIEW OF STANDARD LIRE ET ECRIRE ENSEMBLE! LESSON SEGMENTS  
(GRADES 3 AND 4 AND ALC LEVEL 2)**

	DAY 1: READING AND UNDERSTANDING	DAY 2: BRAINSTORMING AND DRAFTING	DAY 3: REVISING AND SHARING
<b>SEGMENT A</b>	Standard opening		
<b>SEGMENT B</b>	Games/activities/songs to strengthen socio-emotional skills and well-being		
<b>SEGMENT C</b>	Listening activity	Text refresher and guided brainstorming activity	Reading our creative writing draft
<b>SEGMENT D</b>	Guided vocabulary practice and comprehension questions	Grammar/conjugaison activity	Interactive draft correction
<b>SEGMENT E</b>	Health and well-being message/activity		
<b>SEGMENT F</b>	Guided practice; questions about text structure and form	Starting a creative writing draft	Presentation of example student projects
<b>SEGMENT G</b>	Consolidation game on the content and form of the text (e.g., true/false)		
<b>SEGMENT H</b>	Homework/activities for after the radio lessons		
<b>SEGMENT I</b>	Messages to parents and standard closing		

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

To maximize effectiveness, A!I developed a complementary, three-pronged strategy to increase community engagement.

1. The radio lesson encouraged households to identify a family facilitator (e.g., a parent, neighbor, or older sibling) who would follow instructions and facilitate interactive learning among the listening children.
2. The program identified community liaisons who would motivate family facilitators and community members to participate by sharing information on broadcast schedules and resources.
3. A!I worked with reading mobilizers who liaised between A!I staff, community radio stations, and communities to collect data and oversee operational and logistical aspects.

All three community touchpoints worked simultaneously to support the implementation

“We’re incredibly proud of the new content we were able to add with A!I to our 42502 service, including additional reading lessons and psychosocial support messages. These messages led us to create a brand new education section on the service to better organize these resources for students, parents, and teachers. We were also able to show encouraging insights with our mobile survey, including that 92% of survey respondents found the A!I radio program important for their child!”

— MEREDITH BAKER  
DRC COUNTRY DIRECTOR,  
VIAMO

of *Lecture Pour la Vie* and *Lire et Ecrire Ensemble!* and increase participation.

To increase listenership, A!I provided 200 megaphones to reading mobilizers for community awareness-raising and distributed 3,500 solar radio sets to vulnerable households to help their children follow the IRI broadcasts. The solar radios contained an integrated solar panel, a charger, and a flashlight. The project provided a memory card along with the solar radios.

A!I also worked with Viamo, a major telecommunications company that provides a mobile phone platform. Viamo's mobile phone support system helped the project sent text messages before radio broadcasts to alert families when the show was going to be broadcast. The partnership also made the IRI lessons available through a 42502 short code that families could access through their phones using Orange or AirTel. The 42502 service also included 24 messages specifically related to psychosocial support and gender-based violence.

## MONITORING

*Lecture Pour la Vie* and *Lire et Ecrire Ensemble!* activity design included ongoing monitoring to understand participation and listening habits of children and facilitators and to determine if learners were capturing basic information. Reading mobilizers helped collect some of this data through phone calls. A!I also used Viamo's 42502 platform to conduct interactive voice response surveys and gather data from the wider listening audience. These monitoring reports helped A!I adjust some aspects of subsequent lessons to make them more engaging. Finally, A!I also designed a qualitative study to analyze participation, lessons learned, and recommendations for the future. The study included focus group discussions and key informant interviews.

## EVIDENCE GENERATED, LESSONS LEARNED, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IRI

### Evidence Generated

A!I's qualitative study of the IRI activities revealed that participants identified the engaging nature of the *Lecture Pour la Vie* broadcasts as one of its core strengths. Many study participants stated that the use of national languages was invaluable. Focus group discussions and interviews found that at least a third of participants perceived the broadcasts to be clear and of good quality. Facilitators across five different focus groups also noted that the broadcast was appropriately calibrated for listeners' development and education levels. Many facilitators commented that the broadcast was of interest and enjoyable to children. The study also found that:

- Two-thirds of children sampled across provinces participated fully in *Lecture Pour la Vie* broadcasts three times a week as designed, including 73 percent of girls and 59 percent of boys.
- *Lecture Pour la Vie* broadcasts reached beyond primary stakeholders, including out-of-school children. In fact, more than 79 percent of learners surveyed indicated that individuals other than the learner and designated family facilitator participated in broadcasts.

- Many listeners interviewed remarked on the benefits of national language radio programs. Learners across provinces consistently stated that the use of national languages was a strength. They stated that they appreciated that the radio teacher was using “our language” (female learner, Haut Katanga).
- Individuals in more than three-quarters of learner focus groups (9 of 13) and a quarter of family facilitators (6 of 24) felt that the 30-minute show was too short.
- Participants in more than three-quarters of facilitator focus groups and from additional key informant interviews advocated for extending the broadcasts or adding subjects such as mathematics. To varying degrees, respondents added that IRI programs should be extended to other areas of the country and to additional national languages.

### **Lessons Learned and Recommendations**

- Outreach messaging is critical to notify and engage listeners
- Engage communities through family facilitators and community reading champions
- Consider extending lessons longer than 30 minutes in accordance with listener focus groups’ suggestion.

### **KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- The IRI programs and community mobilization system engaged many children and families successfully and received positive feedback during a national pandemic. This demonstrates the potential for distance learning in the DRC.
- A!I designed *Lecture Pour la Vie* and *Lire et Ecrire Ensemble!* to be inclusive and used in tandem with classroom-based teaching and learning once schools re-opened. A blended approach to learning using radio as one of the delivery systems could benefit learners more broadly.

#### **KEY ELEMENTS OF SUCCESS**

- A!I had established and available capacity to develop IRI programming and a close working relationship with the MOE.
- A!I maintained strong horizontal and vertical coordination strategies, including regular team meetings to foster exchange and problem solving.
- *Lecture Pour la Vie*’s community outreach efforts included intensive initial and continuous messaging to bring family facilitators on-board and increase their support for the initiative.

— Karla Giuliano Sarr  
Principal Investigator, Qualitative Study: Distance Learning degré élémentaire (2020, A!I)

## SNAPSHOT

# EFFECTIVE TEACHING STRATEGIES BENEFIT ALL

**ACCELERE! I equipped teachers and school directors to continue learning and supporting each other.**



Romain Kasongo — the school director of Saint Joseph of Cuneo, a private school in Kinshasa province — takes notes. Mr. Kasongo and the teachers at his school attended training sessions and received follow-up support from ACCELERE! I to implement new teaching strategies, provide coaching support to teachers, and engage in continuous professional development.

PHOTO: Chemonics International Inc.

With ACCELERE! I's support, targeted teachers learned how to effectively teach children to learn to read in alignment with the national curriculum using best practices such as phonics and decoding skills. Through ACCELERE! I's programming, teachers improved their instructional strategies to better teach students in national languages and use national languages as a bridge to learn to read and write in French. They also received training on gender equity and other teaching best practices.

Follow-up activities and building accountability and support networks supported teachers as they learned to implement new, effective teaching practices. Teachers continued their professional development by engaging in peer support groups at multiple levels — with grade-level teachers, with the school, and with neighboring schools.

Romain Kasongo, a school director in Kinshasa province, appreciated the thorough training he received. He says, “we got to practice and work to master the skills in the various trainings and follow-up trainings. It took a while to master the new skills, but the follow-up helped make sure we could all use the new strategies effectively.”

Mr. Kasongo noticed that teachers have adapted and that students are learning more efficiently. “Before, our teachers treated our girls and boys differently. Now, they understand that they should try to give them all the same opportunities. [...] Students are participating more with the interactive activities, and they all have a better chance to learn equally.”

As school director, Mr. Kasongo helps observe and coach the school’s teachers. He found that he has improved his own teaching considerably, and he is more invested in his teachers’ professional development.

*“Before the project trainings, there were some resources we did not utilize. We neglected things like the peer support groups — the forum d’échange and unite pédagogique. We had forgotten how important it is to use and maintain those systems both at the school level and with nearby schools in our network. The ACCELERE! I training helped reinvigorate these tools, and we found them very helpful and important when we put them into practice.”*

— Romain Kasongo, school director

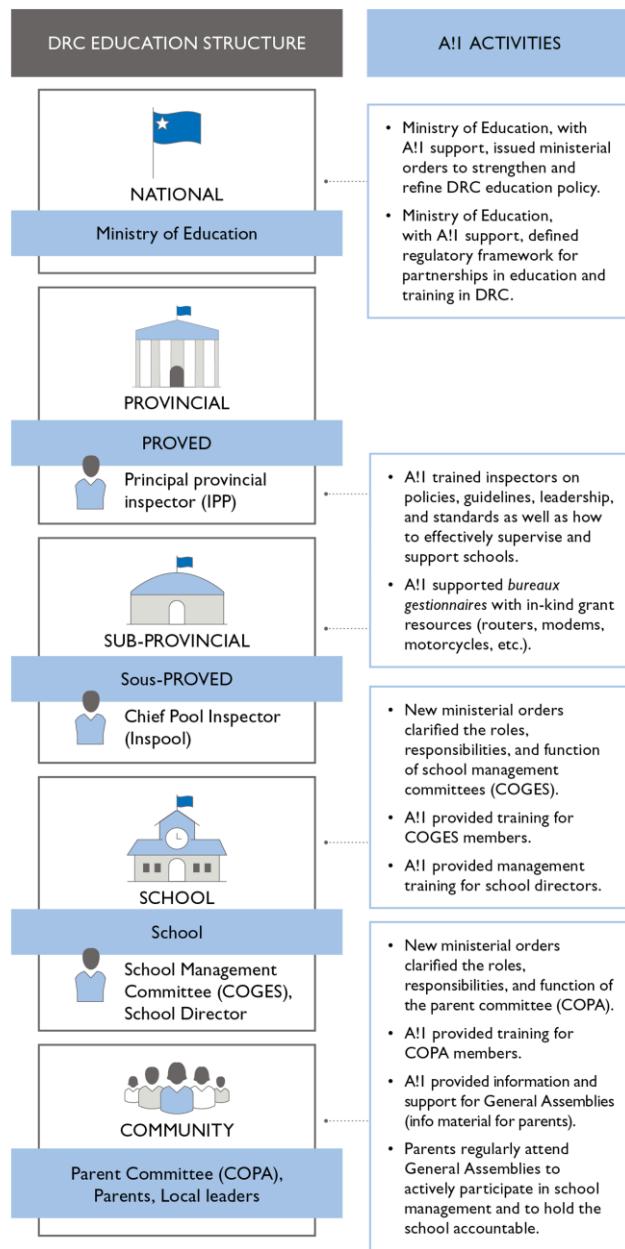
## SECTION 3

# STRENGTHENING GOVERNANCE, MANAGEMENT, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

AII used a three-part strategy to support the DRC government to develop transparent and effective school governance. See Exhibit 20 for an overview.

1. Partnered with the Ministry of Education to develop and implement policies to improve government oversight
2. Trained sub-province government officials, school owners, and directors to increase their capacities to engage in thoughtful and effective analysis, planning, and management; supported pedagogical advisors, sub-provincial officers and inspectors, school owners, and school directors by providing them with tools, training, and coaching to improve the management and leadership of schools
3. Supported parents, communities, and civil society to participate actively in school management; produced tools and built capacity at the community level to inform, raise awareness, and mobilize parents to strengthen citizen

**EXHIBIT 20. AII GOVERNANCE ACTIVITIES**



control and increase community demand for accountability in schools and the whole education system

In addition to A!1, ACCELERE!2 (A!2) worked to improve education governance. The two projects collaborated to ensure that the impacts of the two projects flowed properly through the levels of governance from school, to sub-province, to province, to national government and vice versa.

After the TIP sanctions took effect in late 2018, A!1 could no longer assist the DRC government. The project ended formal activities with the Ministry of Education at the national, provincial, and sub-provincial levels, but continued to communicate with and update government officials. With the pivot to private schools, the project communicated with and updated the DRC government at all levels as it worked with private schools and associations of private schools.

### **POLICY INNOVATIONS TO IMPROVE GOVERNMENT OVERSIGHT**

A!1 concentrated on two main aspects of education policy in the DRC. The first aspect involved policies supporting reading and education methods and guidelines. The project aligned these efforts with the DRC's National Education Sector Strategy (2016-2025), education law (*loi cadre*), and the National Reading Roadmap. The second aspect involved policies regulating community participation in school governance. Some progressive policies were already in place but not being enforced. For example, education policy already required parent and community participation in school management. A!1 helped the ministry implement those policies with guidelines, awareness raising, and structured support to the various education actors.

### **STRENGTHEN DRC EDUCATION POLICY**

The project convened major stakeholders to strategize how to implement existing policies in practice and co-create revisions to the existing ministerial orders. The ministry engaged in these deliberations and ultimately issued ministerial orders to strengthen and refine DRC education policy. The Ministry of Education produced and signed five orders as a result of A!1's collaboration and influence. These ministerial orders filled a gap in the DRC's education law by outlining specific roles and responsibilities expected from various stakeholders. See Exhibit 21 (next page) for details about the ministerial orders.

These ministerial orders continue to generate positive impacts today. Even after the TIP sanctions ended A!1's partnership with the DRC government, the ministry continued to follow through on the project's initiatives. For example, in accordance with ministerial order number MINEPSP/CABMIN/1606/2018, the ministry sent a letter to all schools mandating certain days for COGES to meet and discuss their schools' governance.

All ministerial orders are also relevant to accredited private schools, as those schools are considered an integral part of national education delivery.

## EXHIBIT 21. MINISTRY OF EDUCATION ORDERS

MINISTERIAL ORDER NUMBER	DATE SIGNED	ORIGINAL ORDER	FUNCTION	IMPACT
MINEPSP/CABMIN/1160/2017	August 8, 2017	Not applicable; new order	Established to regulate creation and function of committees leading <i>promotion scolaire</i> at each level of the education system (school, sub-province, province, and national)  Defined committee members and the process and timing of the annual performance reviews and subsequent improvement planning	Officialized <i>promotion scolaire</i> as a performance review and improvement-planning process
MINEPSP/CABMIN/1082/2018	April 10, 2018	Not applicable; new order	Established the Directorate for Partnerships in Education within the Ministry of Education	Established office to lead outreach and engagement efforts  Revitalized civil society oversight of schools
MINEPSP/CABMIN/1606/2018	May 21, 2018	Amended and supplemented Ministerial Order No. MINEPSP/CABMIN/ 0799/2011 of September 2, 2018	Further specified the roles, responsibilities, and functioning of COPA in public and private kindergarten, primary, and secondary schools	Increased independence of COPA members to be elected by parents without interference by school directors  Emphasized importance of regular general assemblies (school stakeholder meetings)  Limited terms of elected COPA members to three years with a maximum of a one-year extension
MINEPSP/CABMIN/1607/2018	May 21, 2018	Amended and supplemented Ministerial Order No. MINEPSP/CABMIN/ 0201/2004 of August 26, 2004	Updated the former ministerial order regarding the Congolese Reading Observatory of the Educational Partnership to account for the newly established Directorate for Partnerships in Education	Created a stronger operational position for the Directorate for Partnerships in Education as a full-fledged, stand-alone directorate with all the necessary features to promote educational partnerships
MINEPSP/CABMIN/1655/2018	May 31, 2018	Amended and supplemented Ministerial Order No. MINEPSP/CABMIN/ 0827/2011 of September 6, 2018	Further specified the roles, responsibilities, and functioning of the COGES in public and accredited private kindergarten, primary, and secondary schools	Strengthened the role of parents in COGES (e.g., parents need to countersign school budgets and expenses)  Established minimum number of meetings of two per quarter; created stronger protections against fraud

## EVIDENCE GENERATED, LESSONS LEARNED, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Evidence Generated

- Supervision reports and field visits to community schools demonstrated the importance of reviving and building the capacity of COPAs and COGES.

### Lessons Learned and Recommendations

- Support the government in its stewardship and oversight, particularly in implementing its existing policies.
- Consider conducting political economy analysis to determine how to best target potential policies and reforms that will advance equity within the private and public education spheres. This type of analysis will help better align political will and incentives, resources for change, and knowledge.
- Develop a broad base of government initiative champions who integrate and advance project activities collectively. A!I prioritized building working partnerships with the government and cultivating governmental buy-in. The activities with the most buy-in succeeded the most and outlasted the project's collaboration. Initiatives with one or a few champions did not often succeed. A!I helped institute the Congolese Reading Observatory, a group of pedagogy experts united to brainstorm and develop recommendations for teaching literacy. The Observatory provided a venue for government officials, donors, and implementing organizations to collaborate and unite their efforts. A prominent ministry official championed the observatory, but progress slowed after he passed away. The project reacted by forging relationships with new leaders and nurturing these vital connections but was not able to maintain the same progress as was previously achieved. When the U.S. government imposed the TIP sanctions, this activity came to a standstill without active project support.
- Continue investing in education governance. A!I was able to support important advancements, but governance work is a long-term investment in sustainability and contributes to lasting changes in access and quality of education.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

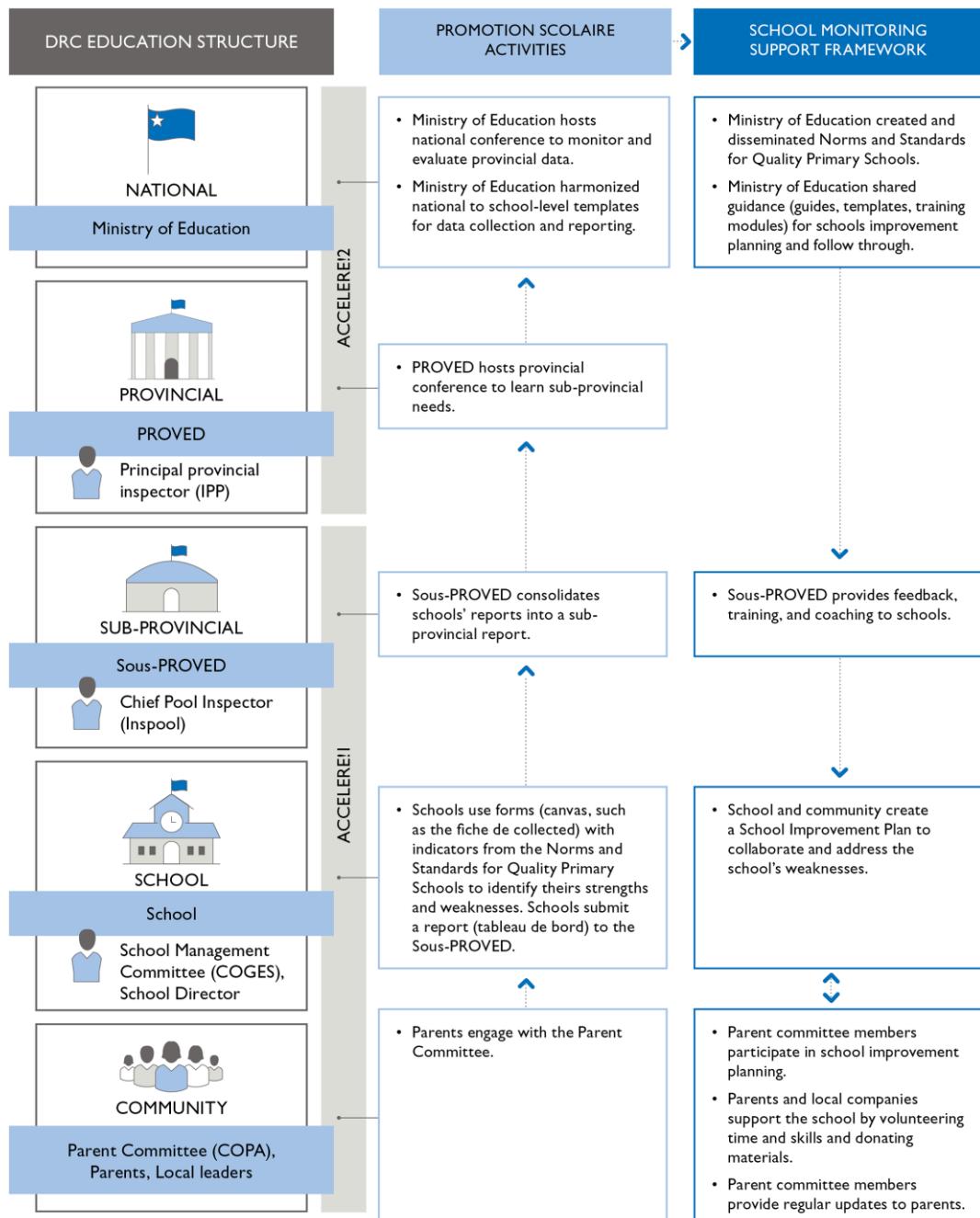
- A!I strengthened *promotion scolaire* (and participatory school management regulatory frameworks. See below for more information about *promotion scolaire*.
- The TIP sanctions interrupted A!I's ability to assist the government and therefore affected the national reading roadmap and other initiatives.
- Policy work requires early strategic planning to be effective.

### PROMOTION SCOLAIRE TO REVIEW AND IMPROVE SCHOOLS

*Promotion scolaire* is a national process to review school performance annually and plan improvements. *Promotion scolaire* existed before A!I and helped improve and develop the process into a real performance review and subsequent improvement planning process (see Exhibit 22, next page). A!I's collective work since 2017 encouraged a stronger culture of planning and evaluation and supported better communication between the different levels. For example, for the first time, the national ministry provided feedback to

the provinces on the quality of their dashboards and reports, and the sub-provinces provided support and collaborative assessments and planning to schools.

#### **EXHIBIT 22. PROMOTION SCOLAIRE AND SCHOOL MONITORING SUPPORT FRAMEWORK**



A! I worked with education partners at national, provincial, sub-division, and school levels to adapt tools and templates such as school-level templates (*canévas*) and sub-province and province dashboards that all respond to the national education sector strategy. A!

provided technical support to school and sub-provincial actors to trial the improved tools in a sample of sub-provinces and schools before sharing them nationally. A!2 did the same at the provincial and national levels.

Information flows from schools to the sub-provinces, to the provinces, to the national government. Schools gather and present information to sub-provinces, who then present to the provincial ministry an overview of the schools under their administration. The provinces hold conferences, then the national ministry invites all provinces to a national conference to review the information from the provincial conferences.

To improve information sharing, A!1 supported the national, provincial, and sub-province levels to understand their roles in providing feedback to the lower levels — especially to schools — as well as in coaching and training on tools, collecting and analyzing data, and understanding the indicators.

After the TIP sanctions, A!1 could not assist the government and ended support to schools and sub-provinces to prepare and run the annual *promotion scolaire* process. As it is an official Ministry of Education tool, A!1 helped schools improve their processes to continue using *promotion scolaire* (see boxes).

#### IMPACT

The Ministry of Education Secretary General designated the school-level template as a foundational document to monitor school performance across all of the DRC's 26 provinces.

#### IMPACT

While work remains to be done, A!1 supported the start of a shift in culture and attitude where the value of regular stock-taking through performance reviews and of evidence-based planning is better understood.

#### ACCOMPLISHMENTS

A!1 supported 26 sub-provinces to improve data on education quality and performance by developing their forms, templates, and reports for the 2017-2018 school year. All 26 sub-provinces completed their reports. Each sub-province collected data from the schools and presented it in booklets with tables, comments, and analysis. Sub-provinces used the booklets to share information with the province and to support analysis and planning.

A!1 trained 283 sub-provinces *promotion scolaire* committee members who in turn trained school directors to manage the *promotion scolaire* process, to collect data annually on school performance to fill the templates, and to create a school report using the standard indicators to evaluate school performance. This process at the school level is an integral part of the School Management Support Framework discussed further below.

#### EVIDENCE GENERATED, LESSONS LEARNED, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

##### Evidence Generated

- A!2 reports continued progress in A!1-targeted provinces and sub-provinces

##### Lessons Learned and Recommendations

- A!2 continues to support *promotion scolaire* and has found that changes in attitude and culture have been sustainable. Education actors are committed to continuing to improve the annual performance review process.

- Regular school assessments provide a strong basis for school improvement planning.

### **KEY TAKEAWAY**

- A!I's revised approach to *promotion scolaire* continues at all levels of the educational system, suggesting sustainability.
- The Ministry of Education's school administration office is now working to review and improve the *promotion scolaire* tools and link the indicators and tools to the implementation of the DRC's free schooling policy.

### **BUILDING CAPACITY TO STRENGTHEN SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP**

#### **SCHOOL MONITORING AND SUPPORT FRAMEWORK TO MANAGE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENTS**

A!I supported schools and sub-provinces to set up a school monitoring and support framework (*cadre d'appui et de suivi de l'école*) as a mechanism to assess school performance regularly based on a common set of quality standards and to plan collectively for school improvement work.

This work is linked closely to the *promotion scolaire* process mentioned above. The reform of the *promotion scolaire* process institutionalizes the annual performance review sessions at all levels of the education system, and that annual performance review is the starting point for the school management and support framework.

A!I first conducted a school rapid assessment to identify criteria for good school performance. Based on the assessments, education actors supported by A!I created a list of 20 achievable standards for quality schools,<sup>16</sup> covering teaching and learning conditions, school governance, and the school environment. The first of these standards explicitly targets improved learning outcomes in reading, while others cover enabling conditions for improving the teaching and learning of reading in schools. The school management and support framework ensures that school directors and sub-provincial offices not only better understand what “quality” looks like in terms of school performance, but also are able to plan, manage, and support schools to improve performance.

The school management and support framework provides guidance and training on how to reach those standards. A!I's work aimed to build local capacity at the sub-province level to better support schools to achieve tangible improvements by using school improvement plans.

A!I partnered with provincial and national education experts to create guides, tools, and training modules to support stakeholders (e.g., school directors, COPAs, COGES, inspectors, and sub-province staff) to evaluate school performance and create a plan to improve and achieve standards.

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<sup>16</sup> The Minister of Education approved the norms and standards for quality schools (*Normes et Standards Nationaux de l'Ecole Primaire de Qualité*) in January 2018 as a guidance document for all public and accredited private schools in the country.

## PROVIDING RESOURCES TO ENABLE OVERSIGHT

A!I provided in-kind grants to sub-province Ministry of Education offices to support their ability to supervise schools in their sub-divisions. These in-kind grants to sub-division offices included a desktop computer, an internet modem, and a motorcycle (see picture, right). These basic materials helped education officials visit the schools in their sub-division, perform regular evaluations and follow-up, and produce and submit timely quality reports.



## SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLANS

In the 2017-2018 academic year, A!I worked closely with all targeted schools to implement school improvement planning. The schools organized self-assessments based on the quality standards described above. School stakeholders analyzed the findings and decided collectively which challenges to prioritize. More than 300 targeted schools developed their school improvement plans for the full school year. The process is an annual cycle, so schools have the tools and experience to review the schools annually, update the plans, and continue improvements.

The framework successfully coordinated stakeholders so that communities could collaborate and solve their own problems. Often, someone would highlight a problem, someone else would have a creative idea of how to resolve it, and another person would be able to donate needed materials, while others would volunteer their time (see box for examples).

## IMPROVING PUBLIC SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

School directors lead the COGES and supervise teachers. Their leadership and management skills determine a school's success in creating the teaching and learning conditions that enable all students to reach their potential. In the DRC, school directors are appointed without pre-service training and receive very little in-service support.

### SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL IMPROVEMENTS

- Tujenge School in the Sakania sub-province of Haut Katanga repaired the school's blackboards, constructed toilets for the school, and built benches and desks for the classrooms.
- In Kitotwe School, also in Sakania sub-province, COGES and the community rallied to pave three classrooms, install electricity in the school, furnish the school director's office, and construct toilets.
- In Likasi, the Saint Francis School built a wall around their primary and two secondary schools. The school director also trained other schools in her community to use the framework and develop their own school improvement plans.
- Amani School repaired benches and desks, purchased additional benches and desks, and built a wall around the school. The community provided tens of thousands of bricks to build the enclosure.
- In Kambove, the Mwanakulema community restored a classroom and built an additional two classrooms so that each of the six classes at the school could have their own room.

Training and coaching school directors was therefore an important element of A!I's overall school improvement work.

In collaboration with the Ministry of Education's training office (SERNAFOR), A!I trained school directors and deputy directors on leadership and effective school administration, participative school management with COPA and COGES, and pedagogical supervision for teachers. Following the training sessions, A!I initiated a supervision and coaching strategy to further support directors. This included zonal trainer visits (inspectors and pedagogical advisers) to support school directors on leadership and management issues. In addition, A!I staff visited 10 percent of the schools.

To encourage peer learning and information exchange, A!I also established local school director networks of directors from five to 10 schools. More experienced directors were able to provide further training and peer support to low-performing directors. At the request of the sub-provincial education office, the networks also included school directors from accredited private schools. This was an opportunity for A!I to reinforce positive, indirect effects by sharing training with school directors from non-targeted schools.

## EVIDENCE GENERATED, LESSONS LEARNED, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Evidence Generated

Fidelity of implementation data indicated that the elements that contributed to a supportive learning environment and strong reading were most strongly associated with the activities below, the last two of which are governance activities.

- School kits provided to students
- Functioning school-based initiatives and processes
  - Gender equity and violence monitoring committees
  - Community reading activities
  - Parent participation in COPAs
  - School director training in COPAs

### Lessons Learned and Recommendations

- A!I's system strengthening approach is effective and efficient. Developing initiatives in close collaboration with the Ministry of Education and national, provincial, and sub-provincial staff ensures easy integration of new processes, approaches, and tools. For example, the workshop to develop quality school standards helped ministry officials and experts recognize the importance of supporting school directors.

### KEY TAKEAWAY

- The school monitoring support framework works well and aligns with the *promotion scolaire* process.
- The Ministry of Education finalized and adopted the school monitoring support framework, including all tools, templates, guidelines, and training modules.

- Schools and sub-province offices need further support and oversight. Building on the foundation A!I established with targeted schools and sub-provinces can help.

## **SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES TO ENHANCE ACCOUNTABILITY**

Community and parent engagement are critical for schools to succeed. Congolese national policy mandates participative school management, but these measures are not implemented in most schools. With project support, schools, parents, community members, and the private sector developed partnerships to strengthen local engagement, planning, accountability, and oversight of education.

A!I's policy work with the Ministry of Education to create the Directorate of Educational Partnership helped prioritize community and parent engagement efforts. With A!I's support, the ministry developed a new regulatory framework to revitalize civil society oversight of schools and active participation in school management. The ministry defined roles and responsibilities for parent and school management committees.

## **STRENGTHENING PARENT AND SCHOOL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES**

According to DRC education law, every school should have a functioning COPA and COGES, but many schools do not. Both the parent and school management committees should monitor and advise the school's operation. Active, engaged committees ensure that schools prioritize student needs and continue to improve.

A!I worked with committee members to inform them about their rights and responsibilities and empowered them to engage in school management. A!I trained committee members and community leaders from 523 public schools in the provinces of Equateur, Haut Katanga, Kasaï Oriental, Kasaï Central, Lualaba, and Sud Ubangi.

Parent and school management committees learned to understand their roles and responsibilities to engage fully in school oversight, governance, and management. The project helped committees evaluate their schools by developing school assessments for the *promotion scolaire* process. Committees also learned to create and execute school improvement plans as part of the School Monitoring and Support Framework.

## **REVITALIZING GENERAL ASSEMBLIES**

General assemblies of parents, community members, parent and management associations, and school administrators should be a key platform for information sharing, joint decision-making, and accountability. However, most schools rarely held general assemblies or used them effectively. A!I completed an operations research study to understand why. Based on the results of this research, A!I developed guidelines and conducted training sessions to improve the general assemblies. Community mobilizers (MOBICOM) addressed these guidelines to support assemblies in their work with parents to become active participants of school governance activities. The guidelines and training modules included training on advocacy techniques and community and parental mobilization.

## **EVIDENCE GENERATED, LESSONS LEARNED, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Evidence Generated**

- A!I concluded a study on the burden of school fees on parents and students and on the function of general assemblies. The study's results recommended focusing support at the school level on revitalizing general assemblies to give parents a voice in school governance and to increase transparency and accountability around school fees fixed at the school level.
- The same study helped A!I develop guidelines for parents to use to improve the general assemblies by helping parents become active participants of school governance activities. The guidelines included training modules for MOBICOMs, who support parent and school management committees, parents, and communities. A!I also prepared modules on advocacy techniques and community and parental mobilization approaches.

### **Lessons Learned and Recommendations**

- Engaging community volunteers in addition to project staff seems to be a sustainable approach to supporting parent and school management committee further.
- Provide direct support to parents as important actors in participative school management. For a sustainable change, parents need to be reached directly and empowered to make their voices heard through regular participation in general assemblies and by requesting transparency and accountability from school-level actors.

### **KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- A!I was able to make important progress in strengthening school leadership of school directors and in improving the functioning of COGES and COPAs as key structures for participative school management.
- Regulatory framework strengthened for all schools to put in place COPAs and COGES and use them as the main bodies for participatory school management.
- General assemblies started to become a productive venue for school administrators and parents to discuss and manage school performance. Continue engaging parents and empowering them to engage actively in school improvement.

### **TRANSITION TO PRIVATE SCHOOLS**

After A!I pivoted away from assisting the DRC government due to the TIP sanctions, the project reinitiated activities and continued to support parents, communities, and civil society in private schools to participate actively in school management.

A!I conducted a rapid needs assessment, surveyed private school owners and parent associations, and reached out to associations of private schools. The project learned that private schools are not accorded the same level of oversight as public schools, although regulatory frameworks require it. A!I found that private schools are insufficiently regulated; standards are not applied, and inequality may actually be exacerbated. Parent committees, which should be in place in accredited schools according to the National

Education Policy, seemed to be non-existent. Instructional and managerial oversight of schools was insufficient to support quality teaching and learning.

A!I specifically targeted the three main private school associations (ASSONEPA, CEPACO, and UPEPAC). A!I and these three associations held monthly coordination meetings to monitor the implementation of activities and the agreements set in MOUs. The meetings allowed participants to take stock of progress in implementing activities and to address issues immediately as they arose.

A!I trained private school leaders, associations, and authorities on the laws and statutes regulating low-cost private education so that they can provide the proper oversight and safeguards to ensure quality and equitable education for all.

### **ENGAGING PRIVATE SCHOOL DIRECTORS AND OWNERS**

When the TIP sanctions pushed A!I to pivot to targeting private schools, the project took four years of experience and redirected its efforts to these new schools. All schools in the DRC — public and private — should follow the same laws and regulations, however, private schools tend not to conform as well to laws.

Low-cost private schools suffer from a dearth of support. A!I was the first project in the DRC to work with low-cost private schools to increase governance capacity by working with private school directors, teachers, and COGES. A!I was also the first project to partner with the associations of private school owners and unite them to discuss private school management.

A!I developed mutually agreeable MOUs with the three main associations of private school owners. The MOUs reinforced and encouraged communities' investments in education by formalizing A!I's collaboration with schools and communities. As part of the partnership, the private schools committed to contribute, by having their teachers provide 2,000 CDF (approximately \$1 US) and by providing training site maintenance services. The private schools also made their classrooms available for training for free. A!I provided training, materials, and follow-up support.

Private school owner associations learned about the roles and responsibilities of private schools, including education delivery, the provisions in the *loi cadre*, guidelines on how to run an education association, and advocacy techniques.

### **EVIDENCE GENERATED, LESSONS LEARNED, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Evidence Generated**

A!I conducted two rapid needs assessments in preparation for working with private schools and private school associations. The assessments allowed A!I to better understand the association's functions, their relationships with schools and parents, the services they provide, and their needs regarding support and capacity strengthening. For example, A!I learned that some private schools did not have COPAs or COGES, while others have well-established committees.

These assessments produced the following recommendations:

- School owners must respect the minimum criteria to establish and accredit private schools, including having a functional COPA and school management committee.
- School directors must apply the national education program.
- Teachers and school directors must be recruited based on their specific competencies for their roles.

The association leadership also highlighted the need to clarify the roles, rights, and responsibilities of accredited private schools based on the national *loi cadre*, collaborating better with the ministry, training teachers, and procuring TLMs. A!I also found that the same associations represent parents in both public and private schools; A!I used the assessment findings to inform the project's activities in Year 5.

#### **Lessons Learned and Recommendations**

- Education access and quality in the DRC continue to be a significant challenge for the government and donors because they impede achievement of sustainable development goals. Low-cost private schools can be part of the solution by being key partners in narrowing the access gap and improving student outcomes in reading, math, and other foundational skills, but only with the right support and oversight to ensure that equity is not undermined within the broader education sector.
- The legal framework regulating the DRC's education sector is the same for public and private schools. This facilitated the project's progress, as A!I continued working to strengthen education governance.
- To formalize A!I's win-win approach for the work with private school actors, A!I signed mutually agreeable MOUs with the three main associations of accredited private school owners (ASSONEPA, UPEPAC, and CEPACO). These MOUs cover private schools' commitments to support training by covering costs, such as contributing training rooms and supplies and cleaning and maintaining training rooms and lavatories. Teachers will contribute 2,000 CDF to schools. A!I provided training, materials, and follow-up support. A similar MOU was signed with the owners of all targeted accredited private schools. Agreeing on a common understanding of mutual responsibilities proved a key step toward A!I's success in working to improve teaching and learning in private schools.
- In addition to the MOU, another key feature of strong collaboration between A!I and the associations included regular coordination meetings once a month to monitor the implementation of activities and the agreements set in the MOU. The meetings allow participants to take stock of progress in implementing A!I activities and to address issues immediately as they arise.
- A!I managed to strengthen exchange and collaboration between the associations of private school owners and the ministry directorate in charge of private schools. Both parties welcomed A!I's role as the facilitator of much needed discussions between both parties around better support by the ministry for private schools and stronger respect of rules and regulations by owners of accredited private schools.
- Continue to increase capacity of school management associations. For example, A!I found that many associations lacked knowledge and access to the updated national

curriculum. Associations and proprietors were unaware of the requirements to facilitate the establishment of school-parent committees. Capacity building and support in the form of establishing a joint steering committee under A!I also contributed to improved relations between the associations and the DRC government. This type of support will help establish durable transparency and accountability between the school and parents, associations, and the DRC government.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- A!I provided much needed support to low-cost private schools with the same mandate as public schools per the national education policy.
- Continue to support both private and public education in the DRC. In the past, funders have been hesitant to support private education systems because the government should provide free public education for all. However, private schools continue to emerge in the lowest income areas of large urban areas where public schools are almost absent, and these private schools can help increase school access. Donors should support low-cost private schools and invest in strengthening oversight and control by the directorate for the administration of private education, by school owners, and by parents to ensure that these schools meet the minimum requirements and standards of quality education.

## SNAPSHOT

# PARTNERING WITH PRIVATE SCHOOLS TO IMPROVE GOVERNANCE

**Low-cost private schools provided an opportunity for ACCELERE! I to impact more schools.**



Roger Kabamba, provincial president of CEPACO for Kinshasa province, talks with a school director. CEPACO partnered with ACCELERE! I to implement project activities in private schools.

PHOTO: Chemonics International Inc.

ACCELERE! I partnered with low-cost private schools after the U.S. government's trafficking in persons sanctions forced the project to stop assisting the DRC government and its public schools and shift attention to private schools. Low-cost private schools, which play an important role in the DRC by filling gaps in education access, also have to conform to the same standards as public schools.

The project partnered with private school associations, including the *Collectif des Ecoles Privées Agréées du Congo* (CEPACO). These associations signed a memorandum of understanding to invest and engage in ACCELERE! I activities. For example, private schools provided training venues and covered the costs of cleaning and maintenance for training sessions.

Roger Kabamba, the provincial president of CEPACO for Kinshasa province, has appreciated partnering with ACCELERE! I. He benefited from the training he received on association administration best practices and planning, and he updated his methods for managing important documents. He says that the project left a mark on him personally and that students made a lot of progress after the schools began using project teaching and management strategies.

Mr. Kabamba also saw improvements in parent engagement and parent committee work. The parent committee communicates more with parents to share updates and explain what is happening in the school. Parents are more empowered to speak up when they see something that concerns them. Mr. Kabamba says he appreciates this course monitoring and parents partnering to help children succeed.

*"I want to congratulate the ACCELERE! I project. I hope projects like this will continue, and they will partner with CEPACO again in the future. As education professionals, we want to contribute to improving schools, and we want to work as partners together. We will all benefit from working together and sharing new strategies to improve education."*

— Roger Kabamba, provincial president of CEPACO

## SECTION 4

# MONITORING, EVALUATION, RESEARCH, AND LEARNING

A!I's monitoring, evaluation, research, and learning (MERL) served the following three basic functions:

1. Provide a reporting framework for USAID, the UKaid, the DRC government, and other counterparts that details progress towards goals
2. Conduct data and information collection and analysis with robust formative assessment and operations research to inform decisions
3. Pause, reflect, and adapt programing using USAID's CLA methodology, thereby enabling the project to adjust to large changes (e.g., pivots in target learners and delivery systems) and the more subtle changes that improve project implementation

A!I used an analytical and evidence-based, eight-step process for collecting and analyzing data and using it to improve project design and implementation (see Exhibit 23). During the A!I project's three phases (i.e., targeting public schools, targeting private schools, and IRI), the project worked closely with USAID to revisit project design, research how to adapt, and adjust methods. For example, during the final phase of the distance learning project, the project shifted to monitoring measures that could also capture data at a distance, including mobile phone surveys and a qualitative study to understand behaviors and basic content acquisition.

### EXHIBIT 23. ACCELERE! I'S PROCESS FOR COLLECTING AND ANALYZING DATA TO INFORM PROJECT ADAPTATIONS



Every year, the project held a retreat to analyze progress, address challenges, adapt the project with lessons learned, and coordinate activities across provinces. The project also developed an annual work plan with monthly and weekly plans with specific objectives. MERL evidence and data helped inform this planning. The project used a formative assessment to update TLMs and codify distribution tools.

*Internal review on data quality and archiving.* A!I conducted data quality assessments to triangulate planned data, data collected in the provinces, entered data into the project databases (i.e., ACCESS, Survey CTO). These internal reviews enabled A!I to prepare for USAID's data quality assessments throughout the project's life. A!I shared data with our partners and archived data both physically and electronically.

This section will not repeat data or findings reported earlier in this document.

## **THEORIES OF CHANGE AND FIDELITY OF IMPLEMENTATION AS ANALYTICAL TOOLS TO GUIDE CHANGE**

The project's development and fine-tuning of its theory of change and the detailed P-FOI served as overarching tools to guide project implementation and manage teams focusing on different elements of the project. The project also compared results from the P-FOI process with other data on learning gains from the same timeframe. While these tools were designed to analyze progress, they became highly effective instruments to understand what was working.

## **EVIDENCE GENERATED, LESSONS LEARNED, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Evidence Generated**

Conducted three times a year, P-FOI helped improve project implementation and target resources and efforts. For example, early results showed that although A!I was achieving outputs, the project found poor outcomes in behavior change. Consequently, A!I realized the project needed to provide more targeted follow up and support. P-FOI findings also uncovered lags in delivering materials and implementing activities and revealed disparities in implementation practices across provinces. As a result, A!I provided more support to provincial teams, improved delivery and implementation timing, and improved targeted support.

### **Lessons Learned and Recommendations**

- Fine-tuning the theory of change and implementing the P-FOI process provided focus and cohesion among implementation teams.
- Linking sample sets and other data enables a deeper understanding of success factors. A!I linked the P-FOI and QA data sets with other data. Using the same sample helped the project identify correlations between fidelity of implementation and reading performance, thus making it possible to test the theory of change.
- Establish a MEL culture where learning happens on an ongoing basis. Review results with a learning lens. When P-FOI results were first shared internally, many staff felt defensive or embarrassed. Carefully consider P-FOI results and messaging to ensure teams can process the results meaningfully.

- Ensure that P-FOI and impact evaluation data are collected in tandem to identify patterns. Due to the TIP sanctions and the pivot to private schools, P-FOI and QA data were available together only on a few occasions. This limited the project's ability to identify patterns. Analyses were limited to snapshots rather than trends.

### **KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- A!I performance improved significantly because the theory of change and P-FOI established a common vision.
- P-FOI provided evidence that allowed the team to focus on how to improve project outcomes. Linking P-FOI to other progress measurements helped, too.

### **COLLABORATION, LEARNING, AND ADAPTING**

Throughout the project's life, A!I committed to integrating CLA into all aspects of its work. Every year in Years 1 to 4, A!I came together internally at the national and provincial levels for work planning pause-and-reflect workshops. These workshops provided an opportunity to collaborate across teams (technical and operations), share research findings and experiences from implementation, consolidate learning from the last quarter, and determine necessary programmatic adaptations in light of the evidence base.

A!I included workshops dedicated to CLA during Year 5 work planning to make CLA intentional during the pivot to private schools. A!I subsequently included a series of additional workshops dedicated to pausing and reflecting internally and with private school association counterparts to assimilate recommendations fully based on operations research and FOI results at the national and regional levels. A!I also conducted CLA workshops in the provinces in Year 5 to share 2017-2018 EGRA and P-FOI results to regional counterparts. The COVID-19 outbreak, unfortunately, interrupted additional CLA workshops as the project transitioned to distance learning.

### **Data Deep Dive**

In addition to the CLA activities, A!I conducted a data deep-dive learning workshop to inform the improvement of Grades 1 and 2 and ALC level 1 TLMs and training. A!I organized a week-long workshop in October 2018 with project staff and the ministry multidisciplinary team to review A!I data and consolidate learning, which included:

- Project-wide data: FOI data linked to the theory of change
- Student data: EGRA and QAs for Grades 1 and 1 and ALC Level 1 from the 2017-2018 school year
- Teacher data:
  - P-FOI of the Grades 1 and 1 and ALC Level 1 reading program TLMs in the classroom
  - Qualitative teacher interview data and data collected from field testing and training
- Operations research data: socio-linguistic mapping and teacher non-monetary motivation studies

This review helped the project learn from data and identify adaptations for TLMs and training design and content provided to teachers and coaches. See Section 2 for more details about how MEL data informed TLM development and training design.

### LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CLA

- Incorporate CLA workshops early and regularly to build stronger relationships between education stakeholders and school communities and to ensure improved coordination among implementing partners.
- The data deep dive enabled A!I to learn and understand how program participants received and used project-developed material and training. This type of data review should occur annually on future projects to enable adaptive management and improved delivery of activities.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- CLA sessions were an excellent opportunity for stakeholders to understand the activities, challenges, and what can be done together to address them.

## FORMATIVE ASSESSMENTS TO MONITOR LEARNING AND INFORM TLMs AND TRAINING

In addition to operations research, A!I used four formative assessments tools:

1. **QAs**, which evaluated students' overall progress based on national and A!I reading program expectations; could be linked to specific teacher behaviors and the use of TLMs
2. **C-FOI**, which monitored how teachers implemented the reading program per project training
3. **EGRA**, which tested skills related to students' early grade reading and were generalizable to school type and language to gauge progress and inform project adaptations
4. **Mobile phone surveys**, which gathered information during the project's final phase about parents' and learners' listening habits related to the IRI lessons and content acquisition

### QAs: INFORMING TRAINING AND TLM DESIGN

QAs monitored students' mastery of the curriculum at the classroom level three times a year through short and targeted measurements of reading acquisition conducted by the reading mobilizers. The results helped inform whether learners had mastered each section's essential content and inform overall TLM development and training content for teachers and reading mobilizers.

## EVIDENCE GENERATED, LESSONS LEARNED, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Evidence Generated

The QAs provided valuable feedback and informed project activities related to teacher training and TLM design and development as the results could be analyzed comparatively across samples and be associated with specific teaching practices, levels of understanding

of the instruction language, and the appropriate use of TLMs (see Section 2). For example, the QAs demonstrated that certain teaching practices were associated with higher performance across several provinces and time periods. These teaching practices included completing the entire lesson, involving all students or learners in classroom activities, giving compliments to learners, using good classroom management, demonstrating activities to students, and giving students sufficient time to practice activities.

#### **Lessons Learned and Recommendations**

- Frequent small-scale assessments, like the QAs, enable the project to reflect on and improve assessment design and results continuously
- Use the same group of reading mobilizers/enumerators each iteration for efficiency

#### **KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- QAs provided regular and indispensable information that complemented the annual EGRAs. Comparing and analyzing teacher practice data and use of TLMs was invaluable.

#### **C-FOI: TRACKING INPUTS**

A!I developed a classroom-based FOI observation tool that tracked activities such as coaching visits, lesson plan implementation, and the use of pedagogical best practices. Reading mobilizers conducted a full C-FOI three times a year in a sample of schools and used the coaching tracking tool every month in all targeted schools. This allowed A!I to monitor whether teachers implemented the reading program as designed.

#### **EVIDENCE GENERATED, LESSONS LEARNED, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

##### **Evidence Generated**

C-FOI data informed revisions to curricula, TLMs, and training. For example, C-FOI findings discovered that teachers were skipping evaluation and writing activities because the guide did not provide sufficient instructions. A!I was able to improve instructions in revised TLMs and added them to subsequent teacher training.

A!I also had better results using the C-FOI tool to improve teacher training and support implementation when targeting private schools. It is possible this improvement occurred due to the project's and reading mobilizers' increased experience.

##### **Lessons Learned and Recommendations**

- Share C-FOI evidence with government partners and internal project staff through a dashboard. Building an understanding of how to improve performance is helpful across the board.

#### **KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- C-FOI is a valuable formative assessment tracking tool that complements other forms of monitoring.

## **MOBILE PHONE SURVEYS: GATHERING FEEDBACK FROM A DISTANCE**

During its last year, the project delivered educational content at a distance through IRI lessons. The reading mobilizers called parents among a sample of target learners to determine whether and how often learners and their parents were listening, their attitudes and knowledge of the radio lessons, and to gauge basic content acquisition. Because the COVID-19 pandemic required social distancing, there were few opportunities to gather information in any other way than by mobile phone. Fortunately, the mobile phone feedback loops proved to be an effective way to determine if the radio lessons were meeting their intended objectives.

## **EVIDENCE GENERATED, LESSONS LEARNED, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Evidence Generated**

The mobile phone surveys proved to be an important way to determine if people were listening and whether learners could answer basic questions about the time and educational content of the radio programs.

### **Lessons Learned and Recommendations**

- Parents and learners were responsive to the mobile phone surveys and provided valuable feedback on broadcast times, language use, and the likeability of the lessons. The surveys demonstrated broad usage of the radio lessons.

### **KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- The increase in mobile phone coverage in the DRC and the need to gather data from parents and end users at a distance positions mobile phones as a viable formative assessment tool, regardless of whether the primary education delivery system is distance learning.

## **CORRELATING DATA: QAS AND PROJECT FOI**

In February 2019, A!I collected two types of data in a sample of schools: P-FOI data, which evaluates how well the program implements activities and QA data, which tests a student's reading ability.<sup>17</sup> The project cross-analyzed these two data sets to identify incidents where higher FOI scores correlated with higher QA scores. This should indicate that faithful implementation of A!I activities was responsible for improved reading outcomes and affirm the program design.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> An Examination of A!I's Theory of Change: Correlations of Project Fidelity of Implementation Data with Reading Assessment Results.

<sup>18</sup> As with all research, multiple measures are better than one. In this case, the plan was to collect fidelity and assessment data at multiple points. However, due to the TIP sanctions, A!I was required to suspend its interventions midway through Year 4 of the project. As a result, the analyses of this correlation exercise are based on data collected at one timepoint only – a partial, yet still worthwhile, picture of the relationships between project activities, results, and impact.

## EVIDENCE GENERATED, LESSONS LEARNED, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Evidence Generated

- The analysis found correlations between several A!I activities and outcome-level results, providing a basis for next steps. The more faithfully project components were implemented, the higher the P-FOI scores at the result level, suggesting these project design elements were particularly important.
- Higher reading skills correlated most strongly with factors related to school materials, community engagement activities, and incentives such as school kits and the existence of committees for increased engagement.
- Higher reading skills correlated highly with stronger parent and community engagement and the faithful implementation of reading champion programs.
- Higher reading skills correlated with female teachers receiving TLMs during their training, the existence of gender committees, the training and participation of school directors in parent committees, and the length of time school directors participated in parent committee training.

### Lessons Learned and Recommendations

- Designing the P-FOI program and tools and conducting an initial round of FOI data collection and analysis greatly contributes to the ability to test the logic of the theory's "if-then" pathways.
- Consider a simpler project design. Eight subgroups were included in this analysis, requiring separate analyses that complicated the exercise. Simpler intervention designs (e.g., fewer interventions, fewer subgroups) would facilitate the measurement of fidelity. If simplifying the intervention design is not possible, an alternative would be to develop separate theories of change for each stream of activities.
- When a theory of change includes instructional support for improving learning outcomes, ensure that some measure of instructional quality success and support is included in the P-FOI analysis. Future analyses would be strengthened if they include data such as observations of classroom instruction or training, or pre- or post-testing for teachers in training.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Contrary to initial assumptions, A!I found that the most critical factors to support reading in DRC are a learning environment that is supported and understood by the community and basic incentives associated with schooling.
- Future studies should examine the elements of these components in greater depth to determine the extent to which each element contributes to reading outcomes. Similarly, future studies should examine the conditions under which schools and communities benefit most from these kinds of activities.
- Integrating P-FOI data with QA data yielded unexpected, compelling, and relevant evidence. Future interventions should implement FOI and QA consistently for continuous testing of assumptions to ensure continuous learning.

## **EGRAS: MONITORING PROGRESS**

A!I conducted three rounds of EGRAs, alongside a student questionnaire, demographics survey, and school director survey designed to add context and insight to EGRA scores.

A!I conducted two monitoring EGRAs in Year 3 (2017) and Year 4 (2018) to monitor project implementation and provide a formative measure of students' learning. Over time, rolling assessments were defined as either EGRAs and/or TAs. The initial aim for the third EGRA, conducted in Year 5 (2019), however, was to provide a baseline for private school students in Grade 2 and ALC Level I interventions for the last year of the project. USAID canceled the end line scheduled for May 2020, therefore, the 2019 EGRA conducted in private schools served as a one-time measure.

### **2017 MONITORING EGRA**

A!I conducted the 2017 assessment between October and December 2017 in 40 public schools in Kiswahili-speaking provinces and 24 ALCs in Kiswahili- and Lingala-speaking provinces. The project intended the measures in ALCs to serve as a baseline for future measures. A!I designed the 2017 EGRA to align with the 2015 baseline. It used the same tools as an original baseline, gathered through a separate USAID instrument before A!I began, and targeted Grade 3 students in formal schools.<sup>19</sup> The 2017 EGRA pulled schools from the same sample as the original baseline and repurposed some of the same tools and questions from the Snapshot of School Management Effectiveness (SSME), developed by the RTI International. In total, 396 formal students (49.7 percent girls) and 209 ALC learners (51.2 percent girls) were assessed in the following skill areas:

- Letter identification
- Familiar word reading
- Non-word reading
- Oral reading fluency
- Reading comprehension
- National language vocabulary
- French vocabulary

### **2018 MONITORING EGRA**

A!I conducted the 2018 assessment between October and December 2018. The assessment reached 1,169 Grade 3 students in 120 public schools and 662 Level 2 learners in 72 ALCs in Ciluba-, Kiswahili-, and Lingala-speaking provinces. Again, A!I aligned the EGRA to the 2015 EGRA by using the same EGRA tools, testing students and learners at the same levels, pulling from the same schools in the sample, assessing in the same skill areas, and using a modified form of each of the SSME tools.

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<sup>19</sup> The EGRA assessed Grade 3 students in EPs at the beginning of the school year as a proxy for end of Grade 2 and Level 2 learners in ALCs as a proxy for end of Level 1. 4

## **2019 EGRA (SNAPSHOT OF PRIVATE SCHOOLS)**

A!I conducted the 2019 EGRA between October and November 2019. This assessment reached 1,423 private school Grade 2 students in 124 private schools and 798 Level I learners in 64 private ALCs in the Lingala-speaking provinces of Kinshasa and Equateur; the Ciluba-speaking province of Kasaï Central; and the Kiswahili-speaking provinces of Haut-Katanga, North Kivu, and South Kivu.<sup>20</sup> The project assessed skills in the following areas:

- National languages EGRA
  - Letter identification
  - Familiar word reading
  - Non-word reading
  - Oral reading fluency
  - Reading comprehension
- French EGRA
  - Familiar word reading
  - Oral reading fluency
  - Reading comprehension

## **EVIDENCE GENERATED, LESSONS LEARNED, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Evidence Generated**

- 2017 EGRA (public schools)
  - The 2017 results showed progress over the original 2015 baseline conducted before A!I began. The 2017 EGRA results were statistically significantly higher than the baseline measures on letter identification, familiar word reading, non-word reading, oral reading fluency, and reading comprehension subtasks. Statistically, students and learners also had significantly higher mean scores on the first two parts of the French vocabulary subtask.
  - Results by sex were mixed. While boys and girls performed comparably on the letter identification and reading comprehension subtasks in 2015, girls performed better than boys in 2017 on both tasks. The differences were statistically significant.
  - Performance did not meet benchmarks in 2017. In contrast to 2015, when the proportion of students and learners met project benchmarks on one subtask, performance on the 2017 EGRA did not meet the benchmark for any assessed subtask. In both 2015 and 2017, targets related to non-performance, known as zero scores, were met on three tasks.
- 2018 EGRA (public schools):
  - Students and learners' scores declined from 2017 to 2018 on most subtasks. Scores in 2018 were still significantly higher than scores at baseline in 2015.

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<sup>20</sup> Only ALCs were assessed in North and South Kivu.

- In both public schools and ALCs, students and learners in Kiswahili-speaking provinces had the highest mean scores, while peers in Lingala-speaking provinces had the lowest mean scores.
- The proportion of students and learners meeting the project's benchmarks declined in most instances.
- While girls outperformed boys in Kiswahili-speaking provinces on most subtasks, boys outperformed girls in Ciluba- and Lingala-speaking provinces on most subtasks. However, in Ciluba-speaking provinces, girls made greater improvements than boys did on some subtasks.
- Learners at ALCs tended to perform better than students at public schools. These differences were statistically significant.
- Analysts found two factors to predict reading success across language groups and provinces: reading aloud at least once a week at home and speaking French at home. No other factors predicted reading success across language groups or provinces.
- 2019 EGRA (private schools):
  - Overall, scores were low, probably due to the comparatively young age of learners (at beginning of Grade 2 and ALC Level 1).
  - Learners performed highest on the letter identification subtask. Performance trailed on the other four subtasks.
  - Learners in North Kivu had the highest mean scores and lowest proportions of zero scores on national language and French language subtasks of all provinces assessed. Kinshasa and Equateur had the highest proportions of zero scores of all provinces.
  - In most cases, private school students and ALC learners performed comparably, as did boys and girls.
  - On the national-language portion of the EGRA, the following factors predicted stronger reading performance:
    - Attending preschool
    - Attending an ALC
    - Being older
    - Speaking the same language at home and school
    - Feeling safe at school

However, each variable was only predictive in one national language; none were universal.

- On the French-language portion of the EGRA, the following factors predicted stronger performance:
  - Speaking French at home
  - Attending an ALC
  - Having a father who knows how to read

## **Lessons Learned and Recommendations**

- Ensure that mechanisms exist to investigate variations in performance across groups over the life of the project. Pay attention to province, school type, and sex, as these could vary considerably. Include such mechanisms in a project's operations research program. Design the mechanisms using mixed methods and with smaller, more purposeful samples.
- Ensure agreement on the EGRAs' purpose so that the design meets the client's needs. For example, had it been decided sooner that the 2019 EGRA was to only provide a of results for donors and the ministry, the project might have chosen to assess learners at the beginning of Grade 3 and ALC Level 2. At that point, students would have acquired more reading skills and could have provided more information about how the private school system was performing.

## **KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- Conducting EGRAs and gathering information about the factors that predict success in different skills is an important aspect of the project. Careful management and joint decision-making related to the scope of work of local data collection firms, the purpose of testing, and scheduling will make the process work better.
- Understanding factors to success will help future programs be effective.

## **SETTING BENCHMARKS**

Performance indicators required A!I to track how many learners read with comprehension at the end of Grade 2 and ALC Level 1 in national languages and in Grade 4 in French. However, when A!I began, definitions of “reading at grade level” did not exist. USAID requested that A!I, together with ACCELERE!3, develop definitions and establish appropriate benchmarks.

In October 2017, A!I organized a three-day workshop for 50 people, including members of the ministry, inspectors, teachers, USAID officials, A!I staff, and education partners. The project sought expertise in teacher training, early grade reading, and teaching reading in Ciluba, Kiswahili, Lingala, and French. Prior to the workshop, A!I developed a concept note to ensure mutual understanding among partners, analyzed data from the 2015 EGRA to determine that 60 percent comprehension should serve as the minimum requirement, and prepared materials for the workshop.

During the workshop, facilitators presented information on reading, including what different EGRA measures mean; definitions of standards, benchmarks, cut points, and targets; frameworks for determining appropriate performance levels; and proposals for procedures for making these determinations for the DRC. Participants worked in language groups to make determinations for students in Grade 2 (national language) and Grade 4 (French) for letter identification, familiar words, oral reading fluency, and reading comprehension subtasks. By the end of the three days, participants determined benchmarks for all four subtasks, including the proportions of students expected to meet benchmarks, expected proportions of zero scores, and proportions of students expected to meet projections over the next five years.

## **LESSONS LEARNED, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Research linguistic differences in advance. Learning to read can vary in difficulty by language due to differences in aspects like word length, difficulty, whether a language is tonal, and orthography. Knowing this in advance can help determine whether to set similar or varying standards depending on the instruction language.
- Be prepared to discuss the political ramifications of setting different benchmarks by language. From a technical point of view, a single benchmark for all languages is not possible since language features vary greatly. Yet from a political point of view, establishing different benchmarks for each language can be untenable. This was hotly disputed.
- Going forward, benchmarking will more likely be done through policy linking. USAID requested that A!I use the 80 percent comprehension approach to benchmarking. Although this approach is economical and efficient, other approaches present a more reliable picture of what students should be able to do over time. For example, the fluency benchmarks for Kiswahili reading were set using results from five children given they were the only ones to have reached 80 percent comprehension.

## **KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- EGRA results suggest that benchmarks were overly ambitious. The DRC government, with the support of donors and partners, should consider revisiting benchmarks and revising them through a piloting process to develop a more realistic set of benchmarks.

## **OPERATIONS RESEARCH AND NEEDS ASSESSMENTS TO INFORM CHANGE**

A!I conducted a series of research studies to analyze the educational and societal conditions more closely and to inform project implementation and in the wider educational community in the DRC. Studies applied scientific methods, techniques, and tools. See the brief descriptions, key findings, and program applications detailed in Exhibit 24 on the following page.

**EXHIBIT 24. OPERATIONS RESEARCH THAT INFORMED PROJECT CHANGES**

STUDY	GOAL	KEY FINDINGS	APPLICATIONS
Teacher Motivation and Incentives Study (three phases) December 2016, September 2017, July 2019	Determine what and how to motivate teachers in feasible, low-cost, and scalable ways through non-monetary incentives	<p>Most cited incentives included: Professional development, promotion to a higher post, decision-making responsibility, praise and recognition, instructional materials, safety traveling to/from/at school and improved student learning.</p> <p>Certificates for training, instructional materials like dictionaries and maps, support materials like umbrellas and plastic folders, and mechanisms for recognizing strong performance.</p>	<p>Teachers and school directors who participated in the A!I professional development model were significantly more likely to report positive changes on six factors of teacher motivation: job satisfaction, school director leadership, student performance, confidence as a teacher, teacher attitude toward reading, and teacher practices.</p> <p>Among the professional development model's five components, teachers and school directors ranked the annual face-to-face training as the most useful, followed by the grade-level forums. The study also found that teachers held favorable views of the A!I materials and, in general, felt an increased ability and confidence after participating in A!I activities.</p>
Etude Diagnostique de L'engagement Communautaire sur L'alphabétisation de L'enfant (Child Literacy Community Engagement Study) July 2017	Inform community engagement strategy	<p>Parents and the community recognized the importance of reading, and students communicated their desire to learn to read and write, but parents did not have the time, means, and energy to support their children.</p> <p>Parents recognized the need to change their own behaviors, such as by going to school to meet with teachers and paying school fees.</p> <p>Barriers preventing parental participation were both internal (lack of discipline or self-efficacy) and external (high cost of education).</p> <p>Respondents cited interpersonal, community-based communication as being the most frequently used means of communication.</p>	Informed the design of community reading component.
Sociolinguistic Mapping and Teacher Language Ability Study March-June 2017	Measure children's and teachers' linguistic skills in Lingala, Swahili and Ciluba	<p><b>Teachers</b></p> <p>In every province, the national language is spoken and understood more widely than French, and as such serves better as the initial language of instruction in early grades.</p> <p>Overall, teachers spoke the national language fluently and had positive attitudes about its use in education.</p>	Informed the redesign of TLMs, training, and development of glossary.

STUDY	GOAL	KEY FINDINGS	APPLICATIONS
		<p>The main challenge that teachers faced was in Kiswahili-speaking areas (Lualaba and Haut Katanga), where the differences between the local form of the language and the standard variety used in school is vast.</p> <p><b>Students</b> Children's competence in the local variety of the national language in urban areas were practically universal, but varied widely in rural contexts, both between and within provinces.</p> <p>The biggest challenge lay in Sud Ubangi, the only province of the five where most rural children did not adequately speak or understand the national language, Lingala, because the local language is Mbaka.</p> <p>The one province with almost no linguistic challenges was Kasai Oriental.</p> <p>For all rural and urban children in Kiswahili-speaking Lualaba and Haut-Katanga, the variety of Kiswahili was difficult to understand.</p>	
Rethinking the Partnership Model: A Way to Alleviate the School Fee Burden in the DRC  January-March 2018	Determine the impact of school fees on children, communities, and households	<p>Children were routinely (and frequently) expelled from school due to their families' inability to meet school fee payment deadlines.</p> <p>Expulsion from schools led to an increased risk of teachers bullying and/or stigmatizing children if they return.</p> <p>Expulsion was a deliberate strategy for schools to address financial issues or teacher demotivation.</p> <p>Child labor was related to school fees: one in four children work to pay school fees.</p> <p>At the primary level, almost one in six children repeated a school year because of an inability to pay school fees.</p>	Combined with observed low-retention rates in spite of back-to-school campaigns and through pause-and-reflect process, this study led AII to refocus its grants program to help address the endemic issue of school fees.
Income-Generating Activities/Community Savings Groups Study  May 2019	Review what worked in the first round of implementation	Effective activities included distributing IGAs materials to help parents start businesses, training parents and school personnel, and supporting visits by NGOs.	<p>More decentralized management and finances of IGAs/CSGs to parents were needed, no matter the approach.</p> <p>Standard operating procedures needed.</p>

STUDY	GOAL	KEY FINDINGS	APPLICATIONS
		<p>Although the sample was small and not representative, data collected for this study showed higher patterns of retention of children whose school fees were paid through the program.</p> <p>The program struggled with several challenges, including insufficient or delayed funding and the late payments of school fees.</p> <p>Procedures for documenting activities by NGOs and communities and paying school fees were not standardized.</p>	<p>Clearer roles and responsibilities needed.</p> <p>Improved process needed to select vulnerable families and children.</p>
Kasaï's Rapid Education Risk Analysis (RERA) Report February-September 2018	Determine if and how A!I should adapt programming given the violence and destruction of some target schools by militia groups	<p><b>Violence</b>  The fabric of society, families, work, and schooling was threatened by the persistent conflict and the resulting rapes and pillaging. Scarcity of food resources resulted from armed combatants stealing food from the fields, raping the women working in the fields, and closing markets due to fear.</p> <p>Families were torn apart as men and children watched their wives and mothers being raped. Women were expelled from their homes after they were raped, leaving the children without a mother and the family to be considered as "divorced" thereafter.</p> <p>Violence permeated the schools, making them unsafe, including teachers beating all children as punishment, children imitating combatants on the playground, and male teachers raping female students at will. Walking to and from school in school uniforms made girls and boys easy targets.</p> <p><b>Trauma</b>  Although respondents were able to describe and point to behaviors resulting from trauma, the concept of trauma itself required explanation. Respondents expressed great concern for some of the children and their unhealthy behaviors, including expressing violence and, in one instance, threatening death.</p> <p><b>Schooling</b>  Despite the severe destruction to</p>	<p>A!I continued its psycho-social referral support activities. This included working with school-related, gender-based violence monitoring committees to identify and ensure that community members were aware of the referral services available to them for victims of violence.</p> <p>A!I continued its planned work to build the capacity of teachers and educators to recognize and support students who were dealing with psycho-social issues.</p> <p>A!I continued to train educators on and apply USAID's <i>Doorways Safe-Schools Curriculum</i>, specifically the modules dealing with violence and school-related, gender-based violence; positive discipline; and code of conduct.</p>

STUDY	GOAL	KEY FINDINGS	APPLICATIONS
		<p>the schools, most schools continued to operate.</p> <p>Schools needed improvements to the physical structure and to internal furnishings such as desks and benches. Teachers needed support through good training and establishing close relationships with parents.</p> <p><b>Leadership</b></p> <p>Traditional leadership within the Kasaï community is failing. The church allegedly collects donated funds to pay off the militia and for funerals. Community leaders struggle to maintain their positions within the rapidly changing environment. There is no single source of authority.</p> <p>“Giving circles” and other informal networks could be considered sources of community resilience.</p>	
Are Low-Cost Private Schools an Alternative to Accessing Quality Education? A Survey of Parent Perceptions in Kinshasa. 2019	To learn the reasons why parents choose (low-cost) private schools over public schools	<p>Private school parents seemed to give more importance to quality education.</p> <p>A persistent, negative view of public schools exists among private school parents.</p> <p>Parents made sacrifices to send their children to private schools and trust these schools.</p> <p>Private school parents seemed to be more engaged.</p> <p>School owners more often accommodated struggling parents and provided access to vulnerable households.</p> <p>A discrepancy between parent perceptions and actual performance existed, suggesting that vulnerable households may be paying for poorer quality.</p>	<p>Low-cost private schools are an important part of the education system, especially in highly populated urban and suburban areas. There should be continued support for both private and public education in the DRC.</p> <p>Better government oversight of accredited private schools is needed.</p> <p>Continue to increase capacity of associations of private school owners to provide better stewardship.</p> <p>Support parents to ask for more transparency and accountability.</p>
Qualitative Study Distance Learning: Degré Élémentaire February 2021	Shed light on participation in the radio initiative and the programming's effects on learners and families; identify lessons learned and make recommendations	<p>Girls were more likely to respond that they listened three times per week than boys (77 of 105 total girls, or 73.3%, compared to 53 of 90 total boys, or 58.9%). These findings were consistent across all three provinces.</p> <p>Parents and other facilitators within the sample became more supportive of national languages as languages of instruction and became more active partners in</p>	<p>IRI programs in national languages offer a mechanism to engage parents further in their children's education.</p> <p>Capacity to develop IRI programming and a close working relationship with the Ministry of Education exists and is important.</p> <p>Strong horizontal and vertical coordination strategies are</p>

STUDY	GOAL	KEY FINDINGS	APPLICATIONS
	for future programming	their children's learning as a result of the initial <i>Lecture Pour la Vie</i> program.	essential to successful implementation within a crisis. Community outreach and intensive initial and continuous messaging brings family facilitators on board and makes them more supportive of the initiative.

## SNAPSHOT

# EQUIPPING SCHOOLS TO IMPROVE

**ACCELERE! I's multi-faceted approach helped teachers, school directors, and their students.**



Eugénie Bisewo is the school director of La Promedie, a primary school in Kinshasa province. Ms. Bisewo has been a teacher for 25 years and school director for the past 18 years.

PHOTO: Chemonics International Inc.

ACCELERE! I improved education quality and governance in the DRC by working with teachers, school directors, and school management committees. Teachers learned effective teaching strategies; school directors learned about government standards and how to meet them; school management committees learned how to engage more with both parents and school administrators to fulfill their responsibilities. After training, the project provided ongoing coaching and follow-up support.

Eugénie Bisewo, a school director in Kinshasa province, reports that ACCELERE! I's engagement helped improve her own skills as an administrator and her school overall. She cites two of the most impactful lessons as learning about government guidelines for school management and gender-based pedagogy to avoid violence and discrimination.

One change that the school has made is to teach the youngest students in Lingala, the local national language. New students can transition to using French in school by learning oral French for two years before transitioning to learning to read and write in French in Grades 3 and 4. Parents appreciate their children learning in their national language because parents do not feel like they are impeding their children's education by using Lingala at home.

Because of the project's training and follow up, parents are more involved and consider the school a community asset. Parents in the small community are engaging with the school to understand its teaching methods, and the parent committee meets regularly to discuss plans to improve their children's education. Ms. Bisewo shared that parents are impressed with the changes, which has motivated other parents to send their children to school, too.

*"After the ACCELERE! I training, we did an evaluation and found that our students were reading and understanding their lessons better because of the new teaching methods. [...] On a personal level, this has changed many things for me. Thanks to the training I received, I now manage my school better than before. The teachers and I will continue to apply the methods we have learned!"*

— Eugénie Bisewo, school director

## SECTION 5

# COMMUNICATIONS

## TECHNICAL BRIEFS

A!I published the following technical briefs on USAID's [Education Links](#) website to share the project's learning with the wider global education sector:

- [Keeping Vulnerable Children in School: Evidence of A Successful Community Savings Model](#)
- [Low-Cost Private Schools in the DRC: Needs, Challenges, and Recommendations to Improve Access and Quality for All](#)
- [Book Supply Chain: Real Costs of Getting Teaching and Learning Materials into Children's Hands](#)
- [Early Grade Reading Achievement and Context in the DRC: Findings and Recommendations](#)

## VIDEOS

A!I posted the following videos on [Chemonics International Inc.'s YouTube channel](#):

- [A!I project overview](#)
- [Income-generating activities](#)
- [Income-generating activities \(full\)](#)
- [National language education](#)
- [Gender equity and violence monitoring committees](#)
- [Improving reading and writing education](#)
- [Vocational training centers in Goma \(French\)](#)
- [Vocational training centers in Goma \(English\)](#)
- [International Literacy Day](#)

## SOCIAL MEDIA

A!I used a [Facebook page](#) to share project updates and success stories and to promote and uplift USAID's presence in the DRC.

## SECTION 6

# MANAGEMENT

At the outset of the project in 2015, Ebola outbreaks were not yet affecting the country; elections were expected to take place, and Kasaï Central and Kasaï Oriental were relatively peaceful. However, by 2017, instability due to health, political, security, and humanitarian threats had become the new normal. Permanent instability became a fixture in A!I's day-to-day operations.

In spite of these challenges, A!I achieved notable results in developing TLMs for four grades in four languages, demonstrating positive gains in reading scores of Grade 2 students, increasing access to schooling to vulnerable and out-of-school children, and increasing school and community accountability. A!I's ability to collaborate, think, and work politically and to apply adaptive management helped the project achieve these successes despite the challenging operating context.

## COLLABORATION

Collaboration with ministry counterparts, donors, and other implementing partners was indispensable for A!I to achieve its goals. In the second half of the project, the multi-disciplinary team, which included a group of ministry officials and linguists and education experts, was a critical collaborative component to develop and validate TLMs.

In addition, regular meetings with Ministry of Education counterparts, particularly with the DIPROMAD, the SERNAFOR, the *Centre de Linguistique Appliquée de Kinshasa* (CELT), the *Ministère des Affaires Sociales* (MAS); other education partners, such as ACCELERE!2, 3 and 4 at the national level; and provincial education committees at the regional levels ensured smooth implementation. A!I leadership held monthly meetings with the Secretary General of the Ministry of Education to report updates and to address bottlenecks. The project also held annual meetings with the ministry, donors, and implementing partners to share achievements and challenges. Finally, the project met quarterly at the provincial levels with *provinces éducationnelle* (PROVEDs), *sous-province éducationnelle* (sous-PROVEDs) and *inspecteurs principaux provinciaux* (IPP), inspectors, and parent associations (listed below) to share quarterly work plans and troubleshoot bottlenecks.

Joint field visits provided another critical collaboration opportunity. For example, in Year 4, USAID's education director and A!I's contracting officer's representative visited A!I's Lubumbashi office and target schools, the USAID education director and the education project management assistant visited Nord Kivu, and a U.K. government delegation visited ALC Anna Michelli in Goma to learn about A!I's program achievements in the non-formal education sector. These visits successfully provided critical field-based opportunities for key actors to provide insights to help A!I continue improving project interventions.

In Year 5, in preparation for the pivot to private schools, A!I leadership established good working relationships with private school associations at the national and provincial levels.

A!I also held joint meetings with parents and religious network representatives. The following associations attended the joint meetings:

- *Association Nationale des Parents d'Elèves et Etudiants du Congo (ANAPECO)*
- *Association des Parents d'Elèves Catholiques (APEC)*
- *Association des Parents d'Elèves Protestants (APEP)*
- *Association des Parents d'Elèves des Ecoles Conventionnées Kimbaguiste (APEKI)*
- *Association des Parents d'Elèves des Ecoles Conventionnées Islamique (APCI)*

As part of ongoing work with private schools, A!I assured an effective collaboration mechanism by establishing the *cadre de concertation*, a consultative framework with the *Direction de l'Administration des Ecoles Privées Agrées (DAEP)*, the associations of school owners, and the associations of parents. The *cadre de concertation* exchanged information, lessons learned, challenges, and advice.

Working with the private education sector also afforded A!I the opportunity to establish a new and different type of collaboration and partnership where private schools also contributed resources to improve the quality and access to education for Congolese children attending private schools and ALCs. For example, private schools covered some costs, such as providing training locations and the cleaning and maintenance costs for training locations.

In Beni and Butembo, A!I selected two local CSOs, the CBCA and ASOPROSAFD, which were active in Eastern DRC and had strong local ties and experience. These local organizations led and collaborated with our activities.

In response to COVID-19, A!I collaborated with DIPROMAD, community radio stations, community organizations, and community leaders to implement, monitor, and support our distance learning program.

### **THINKING AND WORKING POLITICALLY**

Sometimes, joint meetings and visits are not enough. Local political interests and competing priorities can influence standard planning and implementation processes. For example, in Year 3, A!I adopted a “thinking and working politically” approach to address TLM review and validation bottlenecks. A!I worked politically by working with DIPROMAD and USAID to adjust printing schedules based on DIPROMAD interests related to the PAQUE project. A!I worked politically to manage associated risks of late TLM distribution while understanding that this was necessary for the long-term scalability of U.S. and U.K. government investments.

### **ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT**

Building on USAID’s definition of adaptive management,<sup>21</sup> A!I leadership, in concert with USAID and DRC government counterparts, adapted activities as contextual challenges

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<sup>21</sup> “USAID’s work takes place in environments that are often unstable and in transition. [...] circumstances evolve and may affect programming in unpredictable ways.” (USAID LearnLab).

arose. At the end of Year 2, A!I observed and learned that the back-to-school campaigns were only having short-term effects on access and none on retention (see Section 1). After several pause-and-reflect meetings and workshops with project staff, ministry counterparts, and USAID, A!I adapted programming toward a more strategic application of grants funds to support vulnerable communities to address the endemic issue of school fees — the root cause of low retention rates.

In April 2018, A!I changed course and adapted due to the Ebola outbreak in Mbandaka, Equateur. In spite of the outbreak, project staff and consultants were able to complete a defining sociolinguistic study that informed the development of TLMs and training.

In response to the TIP sanctions and the subsequent pivot to private schools, A!I adapted its entire portfolio of activities to target private schools in less than four months. This included conducting three rapid needs assessments and organizing a national planning workshop with staff and USAID in a matter of weeks.

Finally, when COVID-19 closed schools and forced A!I to pause in-person activities, the project adapted by working with the Ministry of Education and USAID to design and launch a distance learning program and implement IRI with local community engagement activities. Through successive major obstacles and changes, A!I successfully adapted to successive obstacles to improve equitable access to education and learning outcomes for girls and boys in the DRC.

## SECTION 7

# CONSOLIDATED LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Below is a comprehensive list of the lessons learned and recommendations mentioned throughout the report for consideration in future programming.

## SECTION I: INCREASING ACCESS AND RETENTION

### Improving school access and student retention

- Decentralize IGA and CSG management to parents
- Improve standardization of operating procedures, including documentation and reporting systems
- Include clear roles and responsibilities for CSOs and parents
- Ensure a transparent community-based selection process of vulnerable children and households
- Perform rapid market studies to ensure that the IGA starter kits reflect local supply and demand factors
- Track savings groups' success rates after project intervention ends
- Document how capital from each starter kit grows, continues to be reinvested, and is used to cover school fees or other household needs
- Monitor the retention rate of targeted vulnerable children before and after project intervention
- Track and monitor IGA and CSG support for vulnerable children through at least three years of schooling
- Determine the expected return of an IGA and the extent to which CSGs cover school fees
- Work with national and local government to implement and enforce a policy that prohibits directors from expelling students whose families cannot pay school fees

### Reducing barriers by improving safety and gender equity

- School-based gender equity and violence monitoring committees are most effective when students choose the committee members through democratic and transparent elections.
- All students should be aware of the committees and know who the members are.
- Each class should have a gender point of contact to facilitate consultation.
- School principals should allow victims of violence to speak in their local languages with committee members to facilitate improved communication.

- Awareness campaigns around gender equity and violence should be conducted before establishing committees can produce better results.
- School directors should organize monthly awareness sessions about the committee after creation.
- Behavior change and communication campaigns for parents that demonstrate the connection between girls' overwhelming domestic burdens and poorer reading performance are important to show parents they need to allow all students dedicated time to study at home. Activities that include compensation from IGAs to offset parents' perceived opportunity costs may also help parents reprioritize girls' education.

#### **Working with alternative learning centers to improve access**

- Following the Ministry of Social Affairs' guidelines and education standards, the VTC TLMs use the standard form of Kiswahili rather than regional spoken forms of Kiswahili. This created some confusion for educators and learners, especially in the east where the regional Kiswahili varies significantly from standard Kiswahili. Future interventions should negotiate with the Ministry of Social Affairs to use regional versions of Kiswahili for initial and functional literacy programs so that the language reading can be more accessible and useful for learners.

## **SECTION 2: IMPROVING QUALITY EDUCATION**

### **Developing and distributing TLMs**

- Obtain validation of base documents (scope and sequence, weekly cycles, and tested lesson plan templates) from the ministry and USAID before moving forward with lesson development
- Integrate desktop publishing process sooner in the process to avoid later delays and bottlenecks
- Use data review workshops to improve TLMs based on evidence from the field
- Use supply chain principles from the health (medical supplies) and agricultural (farm to market) sectors to forecast, manage, and standardize logistics
- Dedicate a supply chain manager to direct end-to-end operations
- Standardize tools, terms, events, and tasks (list of book titles, delivery packages, school lists, delivery receipts)
- Forecast demand and work backwards to procure
- Use multiple ports of entry to position books closer to end users; use multiple transit methods based on best available transit routes
- Use pop-up distribution centers to reduce delivery time to schools
- Use a secondary check (consultants in the field) to ensure successful delivery of all materials

### **Continuous professional development**

- Consider school cluster membership when selecting target institutions. Ideally, target all schools in a cluster.

- Align Ministry of Education government inspector pre-service training sessions with the new national reading curriculum and promote the pedagogical and teacher support strategies embedded in A!I TLMs and training.
- Use core provincial training teams, such as groups of the strongest inspectors and pedagogical advisors.
- Use refresher training to assist teachers with challenging strategies and practices. For example, A!I identified modeling letter-sound pronunciations as a challenge and developed specific sessions to help teachers implement this in decoding lessons.
- Consider prioritizing reforming teacher pre-service training and inspector training rather than investing in training school directors as coaches and trying to hold them accountable for coaching teachers. School directors do not have the knowledge, skills, time, or accountability to support teachers in this way.
- Consider alternative coaching methods such as phone calls rather than classroom visits to enable inspectors to check in more regularly with teachers and provide coaching.
- Improve in-service training by focusing on the following four elements:
  - Reduce the time gap between training and TLM distribution to schools.
  - Train all schools in a cluster to facilitate continuous professional development through peer support groups.
  - Invest in the core provincial training team to maximize the efficacy of inspector training.
  - Reduce the amount of content included in in-service training sessions and ensure follow-up and support on challenging topics such as decoding strategies.
- Provide facilitator handbooks to peer support group leaders to maximize continuous teacher professional development and increase fidelity of the reading program's implementation.
- Include peer support group training in the in-service training content to immerse schools and program participants in the model.
- Identify strategies to support teachers to learn the standard form of national languages, especially in Lingala and Kiswahili-speaking provinces.
- Train teachers how to conduct formative assessments effectively and use results.
- Design and implement simple, quarterly formative assessment tools and strategies to help teachers monitor their students' progress and inform their instruction.
- Continue to identify cost-effective, sustainable, and scalable modalities to train teachers. Consider in-person “refresher” workshops and school-based, peer-to-peer learning through peer support groups.

#### **Engaging communities to build a culture of reading**

- To overcome the internal and external barriers to parent participation, show how other families — including those with nonliterate parents — have been involved in their children’s education and in advocacy with the government.

- Parent involvement motivates the community reading champions to continue their work as reading club facilitators.
- Children seem more engaged when a family member accompanies them to the club.
- Consider using procurement teams that can process multiple large procurements at the same time.
- Community reading champion training and material distribution should be synchronized. Late distributions demotivated community reading champions and communities and required more encouragement to rebuild momentum for the community reading activities.
- Provide a small amount of assistance to community reading champions (who are volunteers).
- Communities, parents, and students met the activities with enthusiasm when the community reading activities functioned as designed. The activities helped increase parental awareness and engagement in reading and education support to children.
- Community reading activities also helped children increase their practice time in reading through fun activities.

### **Math pilot**

- Support teachers to use the program effectively. The UNICEF-funded program assumes a high base level of mathematical thinking and reasoning in teachers.
- Provide complementary supports to teachers to help them develop mathematical reasoning and thinking skills in their students. These supports can include scripted model lessons and ongoing professional development through peer support groups.
- Consider using PAQUED's previous IRI math programs, which use French as the language of instruction to demonstrate how teachers can guide their students to solve problems using mathematical reasoning.
- Equip support staff to teachers (school directors, reading mobilizers, and inspectors) with math coaching training and with tips for supporting mathematical thinking and instruction.
- Prepare formative evaluations so teachers can evaluate their students' progress in math acquisition.
- Provide a French and national language glossary to help teachers understand mathematical terms in the national languages (most teachers were taught math in French).
- Provide teachers with training and the DIPROMAD handbook, *Creating Instructional Materials*.

### **Information and communication technology**

- Launching and testing the glossary and the glossary's user guide ensured that the glossary was accessible and understandable.

- Participants preferred the glossary's digital format over a print glossary. They found it easy to use on both the website and mobile application and appreciated that the glossary was accessible offline.
- Many teachers and school directors did not have smart phones to access the glossary easily. A!I conducted a study and found that about 12 percent of teachers and school directors reported having smart phones, whereas 88 percent had feature phones. Smart phone penetration in cities was higher than in rural areas where 3G/4G connectivity is weaker.
- Although A!I made the TLMs accessible to the general public through the ministry's platform, teachers, school directors, and parents do not have an established culture of accessing resources online.

#### **Expanding to Beni and Butembo**

- In an insecure environment, working with and through local organizations helped the project achieve its objectives
- Maintaining regular communication with institutions (e.g., UNICEF) on security helped to coordinate plans
- Maintaining communication with USAID helped the project align with USAID strategy in these priority areas
- Communicating with local educational authorities in Beni and Butembo about strategy and getting their buy-in early helped facilitate implementation

#### **Interactive radio instruction**

- Outreach messaging is critical to notify and engage listeners
- Engage communities through family facilitators and community reading champions

### **SECTION 3: GOVERNANCE**

#### **Partnering with the Ministry of Education on policy**

- Support the government in its stewardship and oversight, particularly in implementing its existing policies.
- Consider conducting political economy analysis to determine how to best target potential policies and reforms that will advance equity within the private and public education spheres. This type of analysis will help better align political will and incentives, resources for change, and knowledge.
- Develop a broad base of government initiative champions who integrate and advance project activities collectively. A!I prioritized building working partnerships with the government and cultivating governmental buy-in. The activities with the most buy-in succeeded the most and outlasted the project's collaboration. Initiatives with one or a few champions did not often succeed. A!I helped institute the Congolese Reading Observatory, a group of pedagogy experts united to brainstorm and develop recommendations for teaching literacy. The Observatory provided a venue for government officials, donors, and implementing organizations to collaborate and unite their efforts. A prominent ministry official championed the observatory, but progress

slowed after he passed away. The project reacted by forging relationships with new leaders and nurturing these vital connections but was not able to maintain the same progress as was previously achieved. When the U.S. government imposed the TIP sanctions, this activity came to a standstill without active project support.

- Continue investing in education governance. A!I was able to support important advancements, but governance work is a long-term investment in sustainability and contributes to lasting changes in access and quality of education.

#### **Promotion scolaire**

- A!2 continues to support *promotion scolaire* and has found that changes in attitude and culture have been sustainable. Education actors are committed to continuing to improve the annual performance review process.
- Regular school assessments provide a strong basis for school improvement planning.

#### **Improving school management**

- A!I's system strengthening approach is effective and efficient. Developing initiatives in close collaboration with the Ministry of Education and national, provincial, and sub-provincial staff ensures easy integration of new processes, approaches, and tools. For example, the workshop to develop quality school standards helped ministry officials and experts recognize the importance of supporting school directors.

#### **Partnering with COPA and COGES**

- Engaging community volunteers in addition to project staff seems to be a sustainable approach to supporting parent and school management committee further.
- Provide direct support to parents as important actors in participative school management. For a sustainable change, parents need to be reached directly and empowered to make their voices heard through regular participation in general assemblies and by requesting transparency and accountability from school-level actors.

#### **Targeting private schools**

- Education access and quality in the DRC continue to be a significant challenge for the government and donors because they impede achievement of sustainable development goals. Low-cost private schools can be part of the solution by being key partners in narrowing the access gap and improving student outcomes in reading, math, and other foundational skills, but only with the right support and oversight to ensure that equity is not undermined within the broader education sector.
- The legal framework regulating the DRC's education sector is the same for public and private schools. This facilitated the project's progress, as A!I continued working to strengthen education governance.
- To formalize A!I's win-win approach for the work with private school actors, A!I signed mutually agreeable MOUs with the three main associations of accredited private school owners (ASSONEPA, UPEPAC, and CEPACO). These MOUs cover private schools' commitments to support training by covering costs, such as contributing training rooms and supplies and cleaning and maintaining training rooms

and lavatories. Teachers will contribute 2,000 CDF to schools. A!I provided training, materials, and follow-up support. A similar MOU was signed with the owners of all targeted accredited private schools. Agreeing on a common understanding of mutual responsibilities proved a key step toward A!I's success in working to improve teaching and learning in private schools.

- In addition to the MOU, another key feature of strong collaboration between A!I and the associations included regular coordination meetings once a month to monitor the implementation of activities and the agreements set in the MOU. The meetings allow participants to take stock of progress in implementing A!I activities and to address issues immediately as they arise.
- A!I managed to strengthen exchange and collaboration between the associations of private school owners and the ministry directorate in charge of private schools. Both parties welcomed A!I's role as the facilitator of much needed discussions between both parties around better support by the ministry for private schools and stronger respect of rules and regulations by owners of accredited private schools.
- Continue to increase capacity of school management associations. For example, A!I found that many associations lacked knowledge and access to the updated national curriculum. Associations and proprietors were unaware of the requirements to facilitate the establishment of school-parent committees. Capacity building and support in the form of establishing a joint steering committee under A!I also contributed to improved relations between the associations and the DRC government. This type of support will help establish durable transparency and accountability between the school and parents, associations, and the DRC government.

## SECTION 4: MERL

### Theories of change and P-FOI

- Fine-tuning the theory of change and implementing the P-FOI process provided focus and cohesion among implementation teams.
- Linking sample sets and other data enables a deeper understanding of success factors. A!I linked the P-FOI and QA data sets with other data. Using the same sample helped the project identify correlations between fidelity of implementation and reading performance, thus making it possible to test the theory of change.
- Establish a MEL culture where learning happens on an ongoing basis. Review results with a learning lens. When P-FOI results were first shared internally, many staff felt defensive or embarrassed. Carefully consider P-FOI results and messaging to ensure teams can process the results meaningfully.
- Ensure that P-FOI and impact evaluation data are collected in tandem to identify patterns. Due to the TIP sanctions and the pivot to private schools, P-FOI and QA data were available together only on a few occasions. This limited the project's ability to identify patterns. Analyses were limited to snapshots rather than trends.

## **CLA**

- Incorporate CLA workshops early and regularly to build stronger relationships between education stakeholders and school communities and to ensure improved coordination among implementing partners.
- The data deep dive enabled AII to learn and understand how program participants received and used project-developed material and training. This type of data review should occur annually on future projects to enable adaptive management and improved delivery of activities.

## **Formative assessment**

- Frequent small-scale assessments, like the QAs, enable the project to reflect on and improve assessment design and results continuously
- Use the same group of reading mobilizers/enumerators each iteration for efficiency

## **C-FOI**

- Share C-FOI evidence with government partners and internal project staff through a dashboard. Building an understanding of how to improve performance is helpful across the board.

## **Mobile phone surveys**

- Parents and learners were responsive to the mobile phone surveys and provided valuable feedback on broadcast times, language use, and the likeability of the lessons. The surveys demonstrated broad usage of the radio lessons.

## **Correlating QAs and P-FOI**

- Designing the P-FOI program and tools and conducting an initial round of FOI data collection and analysis greatly contributes to the ability to test the logic of the theory's "if-then" pathways.
- Consider a simpler project design. Eight subgroups were included in this analysis, requiring separate analyses that complicated the exercise. Simpler intervention designs (e.g., fewer interventions, fewer subgroups) would facilitate the measurement of fidelity. If simplifying the intervention design is not possible, an alternative would be to develop separate theories of change for each stream of activities.
- When a theory of change includes instructional support for improving learning outcomes, ensure that some measure of instructional quality success and support is included in the P-FOI analysis. Future analyses would be strengthened if they include data such as observations of classroom instruction or training, or pre- or post-testing for teachers in training.

## **EGRAs**

- Ensure that mechanisms exist to investigate variations in performance across groups over the life of the project. Pay attention to province, school type, and sex, as these could vary considerably. Include such mechanisms in a project's operations research

program. Design the mechanisms using mixed methods and with smaller, more purposeful samples.

- Ensure agreement on the EGRAs' purpose so that the design meets the client's needs. For example, had it been decided sooner that the 2019 EGRA was to only provide a of results for donors and the ministry, the project might have chosen to assess learners at the beginning of Grade 3 and ALC Level 2. At that point, students would have acquired more reading skills and could have provided more information about how the private school system was performing.

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**ANNEX B**

# **TARGETED PROVINCES AND SUB-PROVINCES**

Targeted provinces :

1. Equateur

2. Haut Katanga

3. Kasai Central

4. Kasai Oriental

5. Kinshasa Province

Targeted sub-provinces :

1. Bikoro

2. Mbandaka I

3. Mbandaka 2

4. Kambove

5. Kipushi

6. Likasi

7. Lubumbashi I

8. Lubumbashi 2

9. Lubumbashi 3

10. Lubumbashi 4

11. Sakania

12. Demba I

13. Dibaya 2

14. Dimbelenge I

15. Kananga I

16. Kananga 2

17. Kazumba Sud

18. Miabi

19. Katanda I

20. Mbuji Mayi I

21. Mbuji Mayi 2

22. Mbuji Mayi 3

23. Bumbo

24. Kimbanseke I

25. Kimbanseke 2

26. Kimbanseke 3

27. Kisenso

28. Makala

29. Masina I

30. Masina 2

31. Maluku

32. Mont Ngafula I

33. Mont Ngafula 2

- |               |                |
|---------------|----------------|
|               | 34. Nsele      |
|               | 35. Selembao   |
| 6. Lualaba    | 36. Kolwezi I  |
|               | 37. Kolwezi 2  |
|               | 38. Lubudi     |
| 7. Nord Kivu  | 39. Goma       |
|               | 40. Nyiragongo |
|               | 41. Beni       |
|               | 42. Butembo    |
| 8. Sud Kivu   | 43. Bukavu     |
|               | 44. Kabare I   |
|               | 45. Kabare 2   |
|               | 46. Kalehe I   |
|               | 47. Walungu I  |
| 9. Sud Ubangi | 48. Gemena I   |
|               | 49. Gemena 2   |
|               | 50. Gemena 3   |

**ANNEX C**

# **TEACHING AND LEARNING MATERIALS**

TEACHING AND LEARNING MATERIALS	VERSIONS	YEARS OF USE	PILOTED	REVISED	FINALIZED
<b>FORMAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS</b>					
<b>GRADE I</b>					
Grade I Kiswahili teacher guide	4 versions	2016-2020	X	X	X
Grade I Ciluba teacher guide	2 versions	2018-2020	X	X	X
Grade I Lingala teacher guide	2 versions	2016-2020	X	X	X
Grade I oral French teacher guide	3 versions	2016-2020	X	N/A	X
Grade I Kiswahili student manual	4 versions	2016-2020	X	X	X
Grade I Ciluba student manual	2 versions	2018-2020	X	X	X
Grade I Lingala student manual	2 versions	2018-2020	X	X	X
Grade I Kiswahili student workbook	1 version	2018-2020	N/A	N/A	N/A
Grade I Ciluba student workbook	1 version	2018-2020	N/A	N/A	N/A
Grade I Lingala student workbook	1 version	2018-2020	N/A	N/A	N/A
Grade I poster sets (Congolese languages)	4 versions	2016-2020	X	X	X
Grade I Poster sets (oral French)	3 versions	2016-2020	X	N/A	X
Facilitator training module for gender equity and violence prevention committee members to support victims of gender-based violence	2 versions	2016-2019	X	X	X
Teacher training module on gender-based violence prevention and response	2 versions	2016-2019	X	X	X
Teacher guide to student education on gender-based violence prevention	2 versions	2016-2019	X	X	X
<b>GRADE 2</b>					
Grade 2 Kiswahili teacher guide	4 versions	2016-2020	X	X	X

<b>TEACHING AND LEARNING MATERIALS</b>	<b>VERSIONS</b>	<b>YEARS OF USE</b>	<b>PILOTED</b>	<b>REVISED</b>	<b>FINALIZED</b>
Grade 2 Ciluba teacher guide	2 versions	2018-2020	X	X	X
Grade 2 Lingala teacher guide	2 versions	2016-2020	X	X	X
Grade 2 oral French teacher guide	3 versions	2016-2020	X	N/A	X
Grade 2 Kiswahili student manual	4 versions	2016-2020	X	X	X
Grade 2 Ciluba student manual	2 versions	2018-2020	X	X	X
Grade 2 Lingala student manual	2 versions	2018-2020	X	X	X
Grade 2 Kiswahili student workbook	1 version	2018-2020	*	*	*
Grade 2 Ciluba student workbook	1 version	2018-2020	*	*	*
Grade 2 Lingala student workbook	1 version	2018-2020	*	*	*
Grade 2 poster sets (national languages)	3 versions	2016-2020	X	X	X
Grade 2 poster sets (oral French)	3 versions	2016-2020	X	N/A	X
<b>GRADE 3</b>					
Grade 3 French "Les Champions" teacher guide	1 version	2018	*	*	*
Grade 3 Kiswahili teacher guide	1 version	2019-2020	*	*	*
Grade 3 Ciluba teacher guide	1 version	2019-2020	*	*	*
Grade 3 Lingala teacher guide	1 version	2019-2020	*	*	*
Grade 3 French teacher guide	1 version	2019-2020	*	*	*
Grade 3 Kiswahili student manual	1 version	2019-2020	*	*	*
Grade 3 Ciluba student manual	1 version	2019-2020	*	*	*
Grade 3 Lingala student manual	1 version	2019-2020	*	*	*
Grade 3 French student manual	1 version	2019-2020	*	*	*
Grade 3 Kiswahili student workbook	1 version	2019-2020	*	*	*

\* A!1 planned to pilot and revise these TLMs, but the TIP sanctions caused programmatic shifts and delays, so the project modified the workplan and did not pilot or revise these.

<b>TEACHING AND LEARNING MATERIALS</b>	<b>VERSIONS</b>	<b>YEARS OF USE</b>	<b>PILOTED</b>	<b>REVISED</b>	<b>FINALIZED</b>
Grade 3 Ciluba student workbook	1 version	2019-2020	*	*	*
Grade 3 Lingala student workbook	1 version	2019-2020	*	*	*
Grade 3 French student workbook	1 version	2019-2020	*	*	*
Grade 3 poster sets (national languages)	1 version	2019-2020	X	X	X
Grade 3 poster sets (French)	1 version	2019-2020	X	N/A	X
<b>GRADE 4</b>					
Grade 4 French "Les Champions" teacher guide	1 version	2018-2020	*	*	*
Grade 4 Kiswahili teacher guide	1 version	N/A	*	*	*
Grade 4 Ciluba teacher guide	1 version	N/A	*	*	*
Grade 4 Lingala teacher guide	1 version	N/A	*	*	*
Grade 4 French teacher guide	1 version	N/A	*	*	*
Grade 4 Kiswahili student manual	1 version	N/A	*	*	*
Grade 4 Ciluba student manual	1 version	N/A	*	*	*
Grade 4 Lingala student manual	1 version	N/A	*	*	*
Grade 4 French student manual	1 version	N/A	*	*	*
Grade 4 French student workbook	1 version	N/A	*	*	*
Grade 4 poster sets (national languages)	1 version	N/A	*	*	*
Grade 4 poster sets (French)	1 version	N/A	*	*	*
<b>ACCELERATED LEARNING CENTERS</b>					
<b>LEVEL I</b>					
ALC Level I Kiswahili educator guide	3 versions	2017-2020	X	X	X
ALC Level I Ciluba educator guide	2 versions	2018-2020	X	X	X
ALC Level I Lingala educator guide	2 versions	2016-2020	X	X	X

<b>TEACHING AND LEARNING MATERIALS</b>	<b>VERSIONS</b>	<b>YEARS OF USE</b>	<b>PILOTED</b>	<b>REVISED</b>	<b>FINALIZED</b>
ALC Level 1 oral French educator guide	3 versions	2016-2020	X	N/A	X
ALC Level 1 Kiswahili learner manual	3 versions	2016-2020	X	X	X
ALC Level 1 Ciluba learner manual	2 versions	2018-2020	X	X	X
ALC Level 1 Lingala learner manual	2 versions	2018-2020	X	X	X
ALC Level 1 Kiswahili learner take-home book	1 version	2018-2020	*	*	*
ALC Level 1 Ciluba learner take-home book	1 version	2018-2020	*	*	*
ALC Level 1 Lingala learner take-home book	1 version	2018-2020	*	*	*
ALC Level 1 poster sets (national languages)	3 versions	2016-2020	*	*	*
ALC Level 1 poster sets (oral French)	3 versions	2016-2020	X	N/A	X
<b>LEVEL 2</b>					
ALC Level 2 Kiswahili educator guide	1 version	2019-2020	*	*	*
ALC Level 2 Ciluba educator guide	1 version	2019-2020	*	*	*
ALC Level 2 Lingala educator guide	1 version	2019-2020	*	*	*
ALC Level 2 French educator guide	1 version	2019-2020	*	*	*
ALC Level 2 Kiswahili learner manual	1 version	2019-2020	*	*	*
ALC Level 2 Ciluba learner manual	1 version	2019-2020	*	*	*
ALC Level 2 Lingala learner manual	1 version	2019-2020	*	*	*
ALC Level 2 French learner manual	1 version	2019-2020	*	*	*
ALC Level 2 French learner workbook	1 version	2019-2020	*	*	*
ALC Level 2 Ciluba learner workbook	1 version	2019-2020	*	*	*
ALC Level 2 Kiswahili learner workbook	1 version	2019-2020	*	*	*
ALC Level 2 Lingala learner workbook	1 version	2019-2020	*	*	*
ALC Level 2 poster sets (national languages)	1 version	2019-2020	*	*	*

<b>TEACHING AND LEARNING MATERIALS</b>	<b>VERSIONS</b>	<b>YEARS OF USE</b>	<b>PILOTED</b>	<b>REVISED</b>	<b>FINALIZED</b>
ALC Level 2 poster sets (French)	1 version	2019-2020	*	*	*
<b>VOCATIONAL TRAINING CENTERS</b>					
<b>BASIC LITERACY</b>					
VTC Basic Literacy learner manual (Kiswahili)	1 version	2019-2020	*	*	*
VTC Basic Literacy educator guide (Kiswahili with French instructions)	1 version	2019-2020	*	*	*
<b>FUNCTIONAL LITERACY</b>					
VTC Functional Literacy learner manual (Kiswahili)	1 version	2019-2020	*	*	*
VTC Functional Literacy educator guide (Kiswahili with French instructions)	1 version	2019-2020	*	*	*