



**Knowledge hub**  
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**Collection of best practices**

**Summary of the best practice**

1. Title of the best practice (e.g. name of policy, programme, project, etc.) \*

Community engagement in the development and use of books and learning materials in community languages

2. Country or countries where the practice is implemented \*

Peru, Chad, Kenya, Cameroon, Mali, Papua New Guinea

3. Please select the **most relevant** Action Track(s) the best practice applies to \*

- Action Track 1. Inclusive, equitable, safe, and healthy schools
- Action Track 2. Learning and skills for life, work, and sustainable development
- Action Track 3. Teachers, teaching and the teaching profession
- Action Track 4. Digital learning and transformation
- Action Track 5. Financing of education

4. Implementation lead/partner organization(s) \*

Various local implementation partners; SIL International as facilitating partner; various funding partners.

5. Key words (5-15 words): Please add key descriptive words around aims, modalities, target groups etc. \*

Reading skills, cognitive development, language of the community, paper and digital materials, out of school children, new readers, families

6. What makes it a best practice? \*

Communities are empowered to contribute in a specific, tangible way to their children's learning; the divide between community knowledge and "school knowledge" is broken down, so that effective learning and tangible family support become possible for the child.

## Description of the best practice

### 7. Introduction (350-400 words)

This section should ideally provide the context of, and justification for, the practice and address the following issues:

- i) Which population was affected?
- ii) What was the problem that needed to be addressed?
- iii) Which approach was taken and what objectives were achieved? \*

The proliferation of local language-based, early-grade reading programmes in the global South is testimony to the glaring need for attention to ethnolinguistic minority populations, if inclusive and equitable education is to be achieved on a global scale. However, these large reading programmes are relatively limited in scope; they do not generally meet children's need for ongoing learning in their own language, both in school and at home.

Involving local community parents, teachers and even older students in the development and use of reading materials for primary-aged children (storybooks, comics, digital books, etc.), in the language that the children speak, both builds upon existing reading interventions and helps to fill the gap in ongoing learning that such interventions tend to leave. The community-led development and use of local-language reading materials for children contributes to children's cognitive development, cements their literacy skills and adds to their knowledge of their community and the wider world. In addition, the reading and writing skills of community members themselves are improved through these programmes, and their engagement with their children's learning is enhanced.

In the past 2 years, such community-based initiatives have led to the development and use of more than 1000 unique titles, in 65 local languages of Africa, Latin America and the Pacific (see below for more details).

The development, distribution and use of these materials in homes and communities is helping to combat the tremendous setbacks to education brought on by the pandemic; it also brings family and community into the child's learning process, because the language used is the community's language and the authors are community members.

## 8. Implementation (350-450 words)

Please describe the implementation modalities or processes, where possible in relation to:

- i) What are the main activities carried out?
- ii) When and where the activities were carried out (including the start date and whether it is ongoing)?
- iii) Who were the key implementation actors and collaborators? (civil society organizations, private sector, foundations, coalitions, networks etc.)?
- iv) What were the resources needed (budget and sources) for the implementation? \*

The main activities in this programme practice include:

- workshops where parents, teachers, writers and facilitators think through the themes and content that will be interesting to children and will build their knowledge and reading skills;
- writing, editing and production of the titles that have been decided on; and
- distribution and use mechanisms including reading clubs, homes and - in some cases - primary schools.

This practice has been carried out for some years, as a feature of local community-based reading support programmes; it is still ongoing in many minority language communities around the world, where financing can be provided. The advent of COVID-19 and resulting impact on children's school attendance has given even more energy to these programmes, as they can reach children in their homes as well as in school.

Current examples of this practice include:

- a) 2021: SIL Africa, World Bank, Government of Cameroon, Government of Kenya: 200 graded, easy-reading titles developed in 5 languages of Cameroon, and 231 graded, easy-reading titles developed in 7 languages of Kenya, for printing, distribution and use in at-home family learning.
- b) 2021: SIL Chad and local community language associations: 20 video books developed in the Kenga, Sumraye and Gula Iro languages of Chad, and in Chadian Arabic, for use on non-smartphones.
- c) 2021-22: SIL Papua New Guinea, Save the Children Australia, Callan Services, SIL LEAD: Development of a set of Bloom Talking Books that can be accessed on smartphones. Over 300 titles produced so far, with translations into more than 25 languages of the country and Papua New Guinea sign language.
- d) 2020-2022: SIL Mali, SIL LEAD, World Vision Mali, Worldreader, local language and culture associations: 400 e-books are being developed in the Soninke and Mamara/Minyanka languages, plus 20 books in Malian sign language.
- e) 2021: SIL Peru, local community associations: Establishment of community reading clubs, and facilitator training for the clubs, in 19 Peruvian languages.

The key actors in this practice are of course the members of the community: parents, teachers, etc. who shape and develop the content of the materials, and who support and assist their children in using the materials. Collaborators include CSOs, NGOs, funders and government education offices.

The primary financial resources needed are funds to cover the writing workshops, local editing and printing. Personnel resources needed include editors of the L1 texts, illustrators who work

with the authors to ensure culturally appropriate illustrations, and consultants who are able to lead the process. Finances have generally come from NGO partners and their own organizational resourcing partners, or from large international donor agencies.

## 9. Results – outputs and outcomes (250-350 words)

To the extent possible, please reply to the questions below:

- i) How was the practice identified as transformative? (e.g., impact on policies, impact on management processes, impact on delivery arrangements or education monitoring, impact on teachers, learners and beneficiary communities etc.);
- ii) What were the concrete results achieved with regard to outputs and outcomes?
- iii) Has an assessment of the practice been carried out? If yes, what were the results? \*

The transformative impact of this practice has been seen to be threefold: it draws the community into the child's formal learning process, and strengthens parent and community support for that learning; it demonstrates the accessibility of learning, since it takes place in a familiar language; and it strengthens the child's reading skills and ability to take meaning from the written page, a skill which will benefit the child greatly in his or her schooling experience.

The major transformative outcome is that parents actually engage in their children's formal learning, and it takes place precisely because the process and the outcomes are all mediated in a language that the parents and community members speak and understand. This is a huge inclusion issue for parents, learners and the wider community, and its positive impact cannot be overstated.

Specific outcomes have included: books being read and enjoyed by children in reading clubs and in homes; the involvement of parents and older siblings in the child's learning; a better sense in the community of the relevance and feasibility of reading, writing and other curriculum skills; and even an increase in books available in classrooms for children to read - in a language they speak and on topics they understand.

## 10. Lessons learnt (300 words)

To the extent possible, please reply to the following questions:

- i) What were the key triggers for transformation?
- ii) What worked really well – what facilitated this?
- iii) What did not work – why did it not work? \*

Key triggers for transformation in this practice are: 1) use of the local language medium in which the practice takes place; 2) the weaving together of known, local content and new learning content in the materials; and 3) the fact that local stakeholders in the child's learning are integrally involved in the practice. In "normal" formal education systems in the global South, these three things rarely feature at all. Rather, children struggle to make sense out of knowledge and school practices that are foreign to their experience in home and community.

What worked well: This practice of community involvement in developing and using local-language reading materials for children has been facilitated by:

- Prior community conversations about language and learning, in which parents' beliefs and concerns about language and formal learning - and also the community members' love for their own language - can be thought through together.
- The inclusion of local leaders and thought leaders, who can advise regarding community sponsorship and participants, and who can also be community advocates for the practice and its outcomes.
- The support and involvement of known CSOs, NGOs and local education authorities in the area, who can give the programme additional legitimacy, and can integrate the materials developed into formal and nonformal learning-assistance programming.

When this community-based materials development and use practice does not work as well as it might, it may be because the community has not been adequately involved and brought into the programme, or because writers of the local languages - or illustrators who know the cultural context - cannot be found or engaged.

## 11. Conclusions (250 words)

Please describe why may this intervention be considered a “best practice”. What recommendations can be made for those intending to adopt the documented “best practice” or how can it help people working on the same issue(s)? \*

For the most marginalized communities in the world, the practice of community-led development and use of local-language reading materials for children has a positive impact on both school learning outcomes and the involvement of family and community in the child's learning. This practice helps to cement children's literacy skills, and builds their knowledge of their community and the wider world. The practice brings the community and family into the child's formal learning experience; it demystifies books and reading for children and their family members, through the use of the local language, the choice of content, and the participation of the community in developing and using those books.

Recommendations:

- 1) It is important that the community-based writers have the dominant voice in what their children will be reading. Orientation to the new authors regarding best practices in materials development of this kind is important, so that the thematic and content choices the writers make are well founded.
- 2) Having an editor who is a fluent writer, and who is a fluent speaker of the language, is also important.
- 3) Where literate community members cannot be found, the process of materials development can still proceed through the use of "copyists" who can write the stories down as narrated to them. In this case, however, care should be taken that the "copyist" and the story-generating community members be carefully oriented as to any requirements of text length and complexity, and the thematic parameters of the materials to be produced.
- 4) Where the target language does not yet have an established, useable writing system, orthography development and review will be an important preliminary step to the programme.

## 12. Further reading

Please provide a list and URLs of key reference documents for additional information on the “best practice” for those who may be interested in knowing how the results benefited the beneficiary group/s. \*

Graham, B. 2013. Creating cycles of writing and reading in a resource-poor school community in Kenya: Could one literacy event lead to ongoing literacy practices? *International Journal of Educational Development* 33, 294–301.

Trudell, B. and J. Ndunde. 2015. Making Space for Local Knowledge: Community-based Literature and Internationalized Education. SIL Language and Culture Archives. <http://www.sil.org/resources/archives/63680>.