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**TARMIIfp Progress Quarterly Report
October to December 2013**

School Capacity and Innovation Program (SCIP)

Project Title: TARMII*fp*

Teacher Assessment Resources for Monitoring and Improving
Instruction in the Foundation Phase



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Acronym List

TARMI*fp*—Teacher Assessment Resources for Monitoring and Improving instruction for the foundation phase

1. Executive Summary

In this report we have provided details of the TARMIIfp project activities for the period October, 2013 to December, 2013. Having provided training to teachers in the use of the TARMIIfp software in the previous quarter, the activities for the reporting period focused on monitoring teachers on the use of the software. Our visit to schools indicated that while teachers know and understand the various functions of the software, most of them are not confident enough to use the software on their own. This problem was discussed in the province steering committees where HSRC and districts decided to provide more support to teachers in the 2014 academic year. In North West, the participating teachers are using the social media— *whatsapp* to provide support to peers. We also used the reporting period to prepare for the pre-intervention learner testing. The preparation includes the development and pilot of oral reading test. We hope to use the 2014 academic year to test the hypothesis that teachers' frequent use of the TARMIIfp software would have a positive impact on their learners' home language literacy development.

2. Background

As indicated in the project three year plan, the first year of the project (July, 2012 to June, 2013) focused on the first objective. The key activities in the first year included: 1) meetings with the software developer (Roche Compaan) to discuss the design and development of software modules, 2) meetings with curriculum experts to develop assessment and teaching materials (assessment items / activities) to be housed in the software, 3) advocacy meetings in the four participating districts/provinces to discuss project activities and formation of steering committees, and 4) developing capacity of participating teachers and district officials to use software. The activities have led to the development of fully functional software with the blessings and inputs from the district officials and teachers involved in the project. The planned activities for the reporting period was to support and monitor teachers' use of the software, collection of school and learner data and planning for the TARMIIfp pre-testing due to happen early 2014 (2nd and 3rd week of February, 2014).

3. Activities

In the case of the North West, Free State and Limpopo Provinces, the main activities planned for this quarter were: providing support to participating teachers on the use of the TARMIIfp software and retraining where necessary, as well as to collect data for the TARMIIfp pre-test from the 40 project schools throughout the four provinces. For Mpumalanga the plan was to complete training of teachers on the TARMII software. The reason is that the Mpumalanga training of 18 – 20 September 2013 combined training on both computer basics and the TARMII system with 75% of the training devoted to teaching teachers the computer basics and 25% on the TARMII system. This was necessitated by the observation by facilitators that teachers were taking longer to comprehend and operate the TARMII system simply because of the absence of computer basic skills.

Planning of the support and monitoring phase

Before support and monitoring began in the four provinces, plans for the monitoring and support phase as well as the new calendar year (2014) were made with the district officials. These entailed discussing how the monitoring was to be conducted and if HSRC staff and the officials would work together and or share resources. Preparations for the TARMIIfp pre-test were also discussed, and schools as well as dates for the piloting of the tests were identified. The planning took two forms; meetings with HSRC staff going to the districts or district officials coming to the HSRC offices or teleconferences. Free State and Mpumalanga opted for a teleconference while Limpopo and North West held traditional meetings with the officials. Regarding Mpumalanga, the discussions were about the need to complete TARMII training for teachers as soon as possible before the year (2013) ends.

The Limpopo planning meeting took place on the 15th October 2013. The Acting District Senior Manager (chair), the Nzhelele East and West Circuit Managers, the District Curriculum Coordinator and the District Foundation Phase Coordinator and HSRC met at the Nzhelele East offices. Besides the development of the 2 plans; monitoring and support plan and the 2014 plan, feedback on the previous year's activities was provided by the HSRC.

The North West Province's steering committee meetings was held at the HSRC offices on the 17th October 2013. In this meeting finalisation of the plans and a school monitoring instrument were developed. This is a tool that is used by the 4 provinces and the HSRC to record and capture the interactions and observations during the monitoring visits. The Free State and Mpumalanga plans were discussed via the teleconference facility and submitted by

the responsible official electronically. Late in the year (November 2013) three provinces (Free State, Limpopo and North West) held the last steering committee meetings for the calendar year. These were held in the provinces and the focus was the TARMIIfp pre-test. The Mpumalanga steering committee meeting was cancelled due to the unavailability of district officials.

Support and Monitoring visits

The monitoring and support visits were carried out during the period October and November 2013. The last steering committee meeting for the year was held during the support and monitoring visits throughout the three provinces of Free State, Limpopo and North West. This was a busy period for schools as they were preparing for examinations or were busy conducting grade 12 conduct examinations. Despite the busy schedules, in two of the provinces; Free State and the North West, district officials were heavily involved in the monitoring and support visits while in the others the involvement was less heavy. Monitoring and support in Mpumalanga were delayed as teacher training on the TARMIIfp software was yet to be completed. However, the district officials in Mpumalanga continued with further training of teachers on computer basics with the understanding that the completion of TARMIIfp training was to follow later. This has since been scheduled to take place early in 2014.

In the North West, 4 schools were visited. Of the 4 schools visited, 11 female teachers were supported in the use of the software and assessment practices. For the Madibeng circuit, the District Manager has appointed an official to be the link in the project. This appointment as well as the passion of the official has ensured to a great extent the success in Madibeng. Schools in this circuit will get individual support. They utilized the TARMIIfp software in 2013 successfully. Two teachers from Tsewe Primary School generated assessments in their home languages and administered these assessments in class. There seems to be a break in communication in the second circuit; the Lethlabhile Circuit. No monitoring and support happened in the Lethlabhile circuit in 2013. The circuit will have a common refresher training session at Lorato Primary School on the 6th February 2014. Outstanding school and learner instruments collected by the District were delivered to the HSRC.

In Limpopo four project schools were visited on the 15 and 17 October 2013; Tshirolwe, Matsa, Mudzinga and Livhuwani primary schools. In each of the schools the 3 teachers involved in the project were observed on their use of the software. Teachers from Tshirolwe

and Matsa schools reported that they were not able to use TARMIIfp software after the August training because they were busy with preparations for the Annual National Assessment and the Common Tests. At two schools, namely, Mudzinga and Livhuwani, teachers reported to have started using TARMIIfp. They have registered as users and have created class lists. Teachers at these schools reported that they meet for one hour in the afternoon to work together on the TARMIIfp software. The district officials still need support with monitoring the use of the software and HSRC researchers were requested by the Vhembe District E-learning Coordinator to provide technical support to two schools in Nzhelele East, namely, Thononda and Mandala. The two schools were visited on the 27th of November. The teachers had problems accessing the internet using the 3g cards. The HSRC staff was able to resolve the problem and provided the two schools with contact details of the HSRC, TARMIIfp technical person should they experience problems in future.

The Free State visit took place between the 4th and 8th of November 2013. Two HSRC researchers visited the Free-State province to conduct monitoring and evaluation of the use of the TARMIIfp software as well as to prepare groundwork for preparing for the TARMIIfp pre-testing. One day was spent in a steering committee meeting at the district office. The agenda was focused on planning for the piloting of the pre-test oral questions, collection of the pre-test base line instruments, and the representation of the province at the SCIP workshop. Four district officials attended the meeting in the office of the DCES (Ms. Mokhele), who could not join the meeting. During the school visits the officials accompanied HSRC personnel to the project schools. During this period, 14 schools were visited and a total of 27 female teachers were supported. One male principal came to the training claiming that he wanted to be able to support his teachers better when they use the software.

Pilot of learners' oral test

The oral test of learners is intended to help us assess the impact of TARMIIfp on learners' reading development in their home language. We intend to carry out the pre-intervention test in February, 2014 (at the beginning of the 2014 academic year). The development and pilot of this test were carried out in November, 2014. The oral test instruments were tested in 1 school per language. Pilot testing of Setswana language was done in a non-project school in Hebron. Permission was secured from the Madibeng circuit office. Free State pre-test pilot study for IsiZulu and Sesotho languages was done on the 5th November 2013 in a non-project school in Bethlehem. The Mpumalanga pre-testing for Sepedi and isiNdebele words was

done in two schools in the Siyabuswa circuit. In Limpopo, the pilot testing (for Tshivenda) was carried out in Nzhelele East district. The pilot test scripts were brought back to HSRC where they were captured by the data analyst and the team. The results were used to select words for a subtest to be included in the baseline test that will be administered in February 2014.

TARMIIfp Software

Regarding software development, the final part of the software was completed and a User Acceptance Test was conducted. Planning for Item up-loaders was finalised with an advert going out in November 2013. A total of 41 applications were received and the HSRC panel sat and identified the top 10 candidates, 4 females and 6 males to start working on the 6th January 2014.

Versioning of the assessment items into other 10 official languages

The developing the TARMII_fp database included developing 1000 English assessment items /activities for each Foundation Phase grade (Grades 1, 2 and 3) and versioning them into other 10 other South African official languages. Foundation Phase teachers, university lecturers and subject advisors were contracted for both the development of English assessment items / activities and for versioning them into the other 10 official languages. While the development of English items / activities has been concluded, the process of versioning them into the other ten languages is lagging behind.

The versioning of Grade 3 English assessment items / activities has been completed for 6 out of 10 languages (namely, Afrikaans, isiXhosa, Sesotho, Setswana, Tshivenda and Xitsonga). The remaining four languages (isiNdebele, Sepedi, isiZulu and Siswati) are at various levels towards completion. However, the process of versioning the Grades 1 and 2 English assessment items / activities into the other 10 official languages is still on-going with various languages at different levels of nearing completion.

Reasons:

- Cancellation of contracts due to non-delivery / non-commitment on the part of some persons requested to assist with versioning;
- Contracted individuals taking longer time to deliver on their assignments. This is partly due to persons working fulltime (e.g. as teachers or education officials) and contracted on part-time basis to do HSRC work;

Mitigation:

- Retaining a core of dedicated individuals to carrying the work across the different Foundation Phase grades. These are individuals who have demonstrated commitment to complete all versioning work since their involvement in or association with the project.
- The work for Terms 1 and 2 for the various grades and language components has been covered to allow teachers to use the TARMII software even in its current form;

We are working towards the conclusion of all versioning in all grades by the end of the first quarter of the 2014 school year.

4. Results/ Accomplishments

The main accomplishment of this period was the completion of the software and training of district officials and teachers on the use of the software. Regarding its use, results were varied. In the North West one circuit, Madibeng, was doing well as the schools were getting enough support and monitoring in so much that as reported earlier, one teacher had even developed her own tests. In the Free State, only 1 teacher was using the software as per the training. She was even helping her colleague. About 50% of the teachers had tried using the Tarmiifp software but stopped due to challenges and fear to 'break' the laptops. Some had completely forgotten what they were trained on and were not using the laptops. Few were using the laptops for school purposes but not anything connected to the project. Most of the teachers were struggling with the basic ICT and this made it hard for them to operate the software. Those who grasped ICT were able to use the software but the problem was that when they forgot the software steps they stopped using it. All those who were struggling in one way or another (almost 95% of the teachers) were retrained. Some district officials also did not know how to use the software and they too underwent retraining. Information collected from the schools was captured on HSRC forms designed for the support and monitoring purposes. In the North West province teachers started a teacher support group using cell phone software called *whatsapp*. The Free State and Limpopo teachers like the idea and followed suit.

5. Evaluation/Conclusions

During this quarter, the final changes to the software suggested by teachers were finalised. This included creation of a PDF function for each report generated. Our analysis of teachers' use of the software suggests the need for a refresher course that includes both the software and basic ICT training to allow teachers to see the relationship between both. The district officials who are involved with the teachers and HODs should be invited to participate in the training as they are the ones who support the teachers. Teachers must also support each other and creating a whatsapp group, can provide a platform to do this.

To a lesser or greater extent the provinces have embraced the partnership with the HSRC. For example, District officials have integrated their district plans with the HSRC plans. In the Free State, North West and Limpopo they accompany the HSRC staff during school visits and they assist with the tasks including data collection. They have integrated the TARMIfp project with their work and it seems as if they can sustain the project after the project life span comes to an end. For now one can safely say they have taken ownership of it. The HSRC presented the TARMIfp software during the SCIP launch held at the Department of Basic Education. To emphasize our drive to ensure sustainability of the project, the key presenter of the software at this forum was a district official [E-Learning] from Madibeng circuit office

There is a need to continue providing teachers with technical support as well. There were some computers with software that was not functioning as well as it should. Such computers were unable to produce reports for the teachers or class lists but these were very few.

6. Future Activities

The South Africa school year begin in January and ends in December giving us the opportunity to assess teachers' use of the TARMIfp software in the 2014 academic year and how this impact on their learners' home language literacy development. Our major future activities include; 1) preparation toward the conduct of pre-intervention learner test during the weeks of the 10th to the 14th of February 2014 and that of the 17th to the 21st of February 2014, 2) the completion of the web hosting to enable the 3G function and for remote collection of data on teachers' use of the software, 3) the installation of the latest version of the TARMIfp software on teachers' computers, 4) visit schools and provide support to teachers, and 5) conclude the versioning of assessment activities.