

PAQUED QUARTERLY REPORT
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Second-grade students in Mbandaka reading a picture book developed by PAQUED

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AFD	Agence Française de Développement
CAT	Cellule d'Appui Technique
CGES	Comité de Gestion Scolaire
COMCON	Comité de Concertation
COP	Chief of Party
COPA	Comité des Parents
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
ECESL	Community Reading Spaces
EDC	Education Development Center
EGMA	Early Grade Math Assessment
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
IFCEPS	Institut de Formation des Cadres de l'Enseignement Primaire et Secondaire
IPAF	Inspecteur Principal Adjoint Chargé de la Formation
IPP	Inspecteur Provincial Principal
IRI	Interactive Radio Instruction
MEPSP	Ministère de l'Enseignement Primaire, Secondaire et Professionnel (MoE)
MTR	Mid-Term Review
OIF	Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie
PDI	Professional Development Institute Package for Improving Educational Quality
PAQUED	Projet d'Amélioration de la Qualité de l'Éducation
PROSEB	Projet de Soutien à l'Éducation de Base
PROVED	Directeur de la Province Educationnelle
PS	Pedagogical Supervisors
SIP	School Improvement Plan
STTA	Short Term Technical Assistance
TENAFEP	Test National de Fin d' Etudes Primaires

1. INTRODUCTION

On September 15, 2009 Education Development Center received an award from USAID to implement the PAQUED (Package for Improving Education Quality) program. Later USAID allowed EDC to use the French equivalent acronym “PAQUED” (Projet d’Amélioration de la Qualité de l’Education) as the official name of the project. The project targets 3000 primary schools in Bandundu, Equateur, and Oriental provinces.

On May 10, 2013 USAID approved EDC’s proposed modification to the program description based on recommendation following a mid-term review (MTR) conducted in 2012. The new program description seeks to realign project interventions with USAID’s new strategy on reading (Goal 1). Additionally, the modification responds to the GDRC’s renewed determination to raise reading to the level of a “stand-alone school subject” rather than leaving it as a subset of French (a major school subject) in order to improve reading outcomes in the early grades.

The goal and objectives of the realigned PAQUED are as follows:

Goal:

Increase the number of students in the DRC with improved reading and math skills.

Objectives:

- 1) Establish standards for teaching and learning in reading and math
- 2) Improve the quality of teaching in reading and math, as defined by benchmarks
- 3) Improve the school learning environment

A two-tier strategy was designed to contribute to the achievement of these objectives. In that regard, the project has: (1) continued to support the targeted 3,000 schools through the provision (and the accompanying technical support) of additional self-directed teacher learning tools; and (2) focused especially on 45 schools to experiment the introduction of enhanced pedagogical strategies aimed at improving reading skills among students.

Project performance during this period (October 1 – December 31, 2013) consisted of the following accomplishments:

Under Objective 1:

- Standards updated for reading in national languages, Grades 3 to 6;
- Sequences of instruction developed for reading in national languages, Grades 3 to 6;
- Technical validation obtained for tools developed since roadmap adoption last year;
- Local sub-contractor selected for EGRA/EGMA logistics;
- Tablet computers procured for Tangerine® electronic EGRA/EGMA assessment;

- Initial end line sample drawn for EGRA/EGMA assessment; and
- Data analysis plan approved for end line EGRA/EGMA assessment.

Under Objective 2:

- Master trainers and other resource people trained to support school clusters via self-directed learning modules;
- Principals and teachers trained to use IRI effectively;
- Grades 1 and 2 teachers in experimental schools trained on reading program;
- IRI training and materials (school kits) developed and validated, including additional IRI guides; and
- Reading intervention materials (i.e., texts) for reading program developed and validated.

Under Objective 3:

- COPAs reinforced by explaining members' formal roles and responsibilities;
- With COPAs, training needs and community facilitators identified for ECL trainings;
- SIP implementation monitored; and
- Training modules on ECEL developed.

The following is a narrative technical report for the period under review (October 1 – December 31, 2013). In addition to the introduction, it covers the following major sections: (2) Operations and Management; (3) Progress towards results; (4) Monitoring and Evaluation; (5) New trends and opportunities; (6) Success story; (7) Accomplishments versus planned activities; and (8) Planned activities for Quarter 2.

2. OPERATIONS AND MANAGEMENT

2.1. STAFFING

As was extensively discussed in the last quarterly report, the project lost a number of field staff to other education projects. Two of the strongest field staff members who had left the project were based in Kikwit, a town with the highest concentration of PAQUED target schools. Laetitia Chigangu was hired to join Amina who had been brought on board the previous quarter as replacements to supervise the project's experimental schools in Kikwit. Romain Ndaka joined the team as an "Encadreur Pédagogique" to support the use of IRI in class. However, given that all these new hires were new to the project and the large number of schools to cover, the management team determined that it was necessary to reinforce the team in Kikwit with a more experienced individual. Serge Chigeregere currently based in Gemena was chosen to play that role.

The recruitment process was immediately initiated in Gemena to replace Serge. Three qualified candidates were identified; but the successful candidate will be hired during the first week of the second quarter.

At the central level in Kinshasa, the project hired Alex Kabeya, a former NGMIA staff who had been with the project since inception. In addition to supporting the Education team on the reading program, Alex has primarily taken over from Didier Niki Niki as the focal point person liaising with the Reading Commission. Nathalie Kabedi Kalonji also joined the team in Kinshasa as an Assistant in the design of the reading program in experimental schools.

2.2. PROCUREMENT

The project made its last biggest procurement in December ordering the printing of more than 25,500 teachers' guides (grades 1 to 6) worth \$120,000. The next part related to this procurement will be the distribution of the guides in the project target schools.

2.3. PROJECT CLOSEOUT

In anticipation of the impending project end date, PAQUED began the closeout process by updating its inventory. A preliminary list of non-salvageable items was developed. The list will be reviewed and updated again during the next quarter and sent to USAID for guidance on what to do with those items.

3. PROGRESS TOWARDS RESULTS



3.1. ACHIEVEMENTS UNDER OBJECTIVE 1

As has been the case in the last several months, the project has kept a leadership position in supporting the Reading Commission in its effort to develop a reading program in the DRC.

The project continued to support the Reading Commission in laying a solid foundation for the development of a reading program in the DRC. A series of workshops were organized during the quarter to:

- Update content standards (référentiels) for reading in national languages (Grades 3 to 6);
- Develop sequences of instruction for reading in national languages (Grades 3 to 6); and
- Finalize and validate all the tools that had been developed ever since the roadmap had been adopted early last year.

In addition, the Reading Commission was able to establish criteria for the development of leveled texts (i.e., readers) and to establish performance standards for reading in both DRC national languages and French language.

The section, “Monitoring & Evaluation” of the present report includes details of other work plan tasks accomplished under this objective, specifically those related to the upcoming EGRA/EGMA end line assessment.

The Ministry of Education in the DRC now possesses the following critical tools that lay the foundation for the development of a solid reading program.

Update content standards (referentials) for reading in national languages (Grades 3 to 6)

These are content (i.e., competency) standards that constitute the fundamental document upon which all the other tools are built. They specify various competencies such as phonemic awareness, reading fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension that a reader must develop to be able to read in any given language. With the support of PAQUED technical staff, the Reading Commission identified standards within the appropriate competency areas for Grades 3 to 6.

Develop sequence of instruction for reading in national languages (Grades 3 to 6)

The Reading Commission developed, with PAQUED support, a scope and sequence document for reading instruction. It provides details (with concrete examples) on when (i.e., during which quarter) students must acquire each specific competency, whether in French and/or DRC national languages, for Grades 3 to 6. The document constitutes the main framework of the reading curriculum that the Reading Commission has already begun developing, and is the most complex and involved document produced so far.

Establish criteria for developing leveled texts

Using the “*Fountas and Pinnell Text Level Gradient™*”, and other internationally accepted tools such as “*Reading A – Z*” and “*Reading Recovery*”, the Reading Commission developed (i.e., adapted) criteria that will guide the writing and assessment of texts that will be used for teaching reading in primary schools. With PAQUED technical assistance, the Commission developed eighteen reading levels, each with a clear set of criteria such as the number of high frequency words used, illustrations, and the use of fiction or non-fiction.

Using the above criteria, the Commission determined text levels that would be targeted at each grade. For example, in Grade 2 a child should be able to read texts of levels 7, 8 and 9 in local (i.e., national) languages, and texts of levels 1, 2 and 3 in French.

Establish performance standards (in French and DRC national languages)

In addition to developing content standards, text leveling criteria, and identifying levels appropriate for each grade level, PAQUED supported the Reading Commission in the establishment of performance standards. These standards will determine students’ minimum acceptable performance within each of the major reading competencies, including (especially) phonemic awareness, fluency and comprehension. For example, by the end of Grade 3, students should be able to correctly read a level 8 text in national language at a speed of 30 to 35 words per minute; in French, the fluency performance standard should be 15 to 29 words of a level 3 text.

Finalize and validate tools developed since adoption of road map

Finally, the Reading Commission provided, in collaboration with international and national partners and with PAQUED support, technical validation of all tools developed since adoption of the reading education roadmap last year. These tools including performance standards, text leveling criteria, and sequence of instruction documents in DRC national and French languages.

Next steps and conclusions

Not only does the Ministry now possess these tools, it has also put some of them immediately to use. Hence, a week after being validated the “competency standards” and the “sequence of instruction” documents for each grade were used to develop the reading curriculum. The project will continue to support the Reading Commission in that effort as well.

PAQUED believes that the work that it has helped the Reading Commission accomplish in developing standards and related instruments constitutes a critical milestone in enhancing reading skills among children in the DRC. In effect, these tools provide the basis for developing a reading curriculum; developing and assessing leveled reading materials, enhancing teachers’ skills in teaching reading, and for assessing students’ performance. For example, it will now be possible to use the targeted leveled texts for each primary school grade as the basis for collecting and providing data on USAID’s impact indicator for Grade 2, which states: *“Proportion of students who, by the end of two grades of primary schooling, demonstrate that they can read and understand the meaning of grade level text”*.

Whatever measures are used, the establishment of text leveling criteria, content, and performance standards will allow the DRC MoE to assess students’ skills in reading in any of the primary grades. Once these and the other tools developed during the quarter have been finalized PAQUED will work with the Reading Commission and the DIPROMAD of the MoE to submit the tools to the Minister for validation.

The following section provides details of PAQUED achievements under Objective 2, including development of the experimental schools reading program.

3.2. ACHIEVEMENTS UNDER OBJECTIVE 2

PAQUED identified five key activities under Result 2 (Objective 2) for the first quarter in its Year 5 work plan. These include:

- Train Master trainers and other resource people to support school clusters via self-directed learning modules;
- Train principals and teachers to use IRI effectively;
- Train teachers on reading program (experimental schools);
- Develop, validate, print, and distribute IRI training and materials (school kits), including additional IRI guides; and
- Develop, validate, print, and distribute reading intervention materials (i.e., texts).

The project team was able to substantially complete all five of the planned activities. However, backlogs at local print houses, the unusually long second semester holiday and other logistical problems have delayed distribution of some materials for ongoing IRI and reading program activities until the coming quarter. However, these delays have not prevented the technical team from completing training and professional development tasks as planned, albeit with some modifications.

PAQUED decided to introduce activities and materials for Grades 3 to 6 teachers in the experimental schools in the second quarter to allow Grade 1 and 2 teachers (and teacher facilitators) time to build their instructional skills. This move will allow project field staff to provide adequate support to Grades 1 and 2 teachers through the beginning of the second semester as they turn their attention to supporting Grade 3 to 6 teachers. The project is organizing a two-day training workshop in early February to extend the reading program to the remaining grades. However, it will be up to the MoE to use the reading program model developed for Grades 1 and 2 and the new standards and curriculum documents (see achievements under Objective 1) to fully extend the program to Grades 3 and 4 next year on an experimental basis.

This approach of introducing a new program progressively (i.e., in G1 and 2, then in G3 et 4, and so on) is accepted practice, which mirrors the gradual development and introduction of IRI programs under PAQUED in DRC schools.

Instead of distributing print materials for new, self-directed learning activities the PAQUED technical team has decided to finalize and distribute two existing, self-directed video-based learning modules on assessing learning in French language (including reading and writing) and mathematics ahead of schedule (see Year 5 work plan). The present section provides further details and justification for these decisions, below.

3.2.1. IMPROVING TEACHER CLASSROOM PRACTICE (SUB IR 2.1)

Classroom observations made by technical team staff during the quarter showed teachers gradually adopting new professional development practices, changing ineffective literacy instructional practices, and learners demonstrating the ability to decode and “encode” (i.e., write) grade level-appropriate words. These observations are particularly significant for the sustainability of PAQUED innovations in these areas beyond the life of the project. While challenges remain, teachers are using materials, organizing their own self-directed learning activities, in new, more effective ways when compared with project observations made nearly three years ago. The present section describes the project inputs for the quarter, outcomes, and remaining challenges to toward changing classroom practice in a sustainable way—beginning with self-directed teacher learning activities.

PAQUED achieved marked success this quarter toward developing and supporting sustainable, self-directed teacher professional development, as shown by the level and quality of participation in three important activities. First, the project has now organized two, well-

attended IRI trainings via its self-directed, “school cluster” approach, the second of which took place in October. Second, the rate of participation in self-directed teacher learning activities (both with and without video support) among the 3,000 targeted project schools has increased over past years. Further, these activities are increasingly organized by local Ministry officials as well as by the teachers themselves. Third, PAQUED has successfully applied self-directed teacher learning innovations developed during the life of the project to enhance the effectiveness of the experimental schools reading program—further demonstrating the effectiveness of the approach.

Teachers have responded to PAQUED innovations in self-directed teacher learning by organizing activities to meet their own needs. Teacher-initiated activities include “peer-to-peer” lesson planning and teacher-learning forums focused on issues identified by the participants. For example, teachers in Mbandaka experimental schools are organizing their own school (i.e., neighborhood) clusters to facilitate discussion and reflection among teachers in different schools about, say, how to use songs to teach students letters and letter sounds in the early primary grades. These examples of teachers’ motivation and capacity to “learn on their own” show the potential for teacher practice to improve in large numbers of schools in a sustainable way. Both the regular, targeted project schools and the experimental schools are actively participating in these activities and thus beginning to take ownership of their professional development.

Train Master Trainers and other resource people to support school clusters (via self-directed learning activities)

Teachers in PAQUED targeted schools are increasingly organizing and facilitating self-directed activities on their own. These activities involve teachers using existing video-based tools (i.e., modules and video players already distributed) as well as relying on their own initiative to identify professional development content to meet their needs. The activities serve as appropriate vehicles for further developing the capacity of local resource people (e.g., experienced teachers) to effectively support the professional development of teachers at all primary grade levels.

There were 346 facilitators and 4,436 teachers who participated in self-directed learning activities during the quarter. Over 42% of participating teachers were women. These figures represent double the project target for training of resource people, and a four-fold increase in the number of teachers participating in these activities when compared with the first quarter of last year. This includes a nearly 14% increase in the number of female teachers participating in these activities. (PAQUED’s decision in Year 4 to provide additional field support to schools in the larger towns may be having a positive effect on participation rates as well, however, much of these staff members’ time has been devoted to supporting IRI use in the classroom.)

School cluster facilitators are increasingly well organized and capable of mobilizing teachers to participate in self-directed learning activities, such as teacher learning forums to discuss IRI use or the development of classroom instructional materials. For example, teachers in Bandundu Province—where participation levels are the highest among the three provinces in which

PAQUED intervenes—have organized teacher learning forums to discuss students’ responses to IRI lessons, as well as how to apply “best” practices modeled in IRI lessons in the classroom. Effective facilitators have included school inspectors (i.e., Master Trainers), principals, and regular classroom teachers. This mix of resource people and examples of locally organized professional development activities demonstrate the adaptability, level of autonomy, and potential sustainability of the PAQUED approach to self-directed in-service teacher training.

The level of participation in these activities is especially important given the logistical problems encountered during implementation of IRI and self-directed learning modules (i.e., audio and video technology not working properly). The project has been able to surmount at least some of these problems, strengthening participation even without the support of video equipment while virtually eliminating participant costs (i.e., teacher per diem) at the cluster level.¹

Train principals and teachers to use IRI effectively

Over 3,100 teachers in Grades 1 to 6 in over 250 schools in the larger towns participated in the IRI refresher training held in October 2013. The series of training activities began with a training workshop for cluster-level facilitators, who then organized training activities for the teachers and principals in the larger towns. Although this figure represents only 10% of the teachers that the project serves, it represents approximately 70% of the teachers in the schools that were targeted for this IRI training. About 50% of the total number of PAQUED schools in the larger towns participated in the training while other schools are conducting their own IRI trainings (see above).²

One of the project’s aims in continuing to organize and support the use of audio-based (i.e., IRI), video-based and other, self-directed training tools and activities has been to demonstrate that 1) long-distance teacher learning (i.e., professional development) via audio/video tools can work effectively in the DRC (given the appropriate technical and logistical support), and 2) the self-directed learning mechanism (i.e., school cluster) and pedagogical approach is sustainable on a national scale.³ The high level of participation in these activities during the quarter is a strong sign of their potential sustainability and continued popularity with teachers and students. Further, with the launching of PROSEB in July 2013 the MoE has effectively made the decision to implement audio- and video-based tools as soon as possible on a large scale. This decision, and the high cost of reaching such large populations of teachers across a wide geographic area requires that national and international education reform partners in the DRC need to continue contributing to the development and testing of audio and/or video technologies and tools.⁴

¹ PAQUED continues to provide per diem to trainers, facilitators, and teachers for “direct” training workshops organized by the project. These activities have included workshops to train IRI facilitators and teachers in the

² Participation figures are included in the data on self-directed teacher learning activities.

³ The MoE has adopted the self-directed learning mechanism that PAQUED developed for use nationwide for in-service training activities.

⁴ According to the CAT, most partners lack the kind of audio and video tools the MoE wants to implement via PROSEB. For example, IFADEM has neither a workable audio device nor the content developed to implement. However, PAQUED has the series of IRI programs ready for use and two new video modules. The project submitted both of these modules to the CAT for consideration for possible implementation throughout Equateur Province.

Still, technology-related implementation challenges remain (e.g., providing enough power to sustain prolonged use of audio/video delivery mechanisms, such as radio and mp3 players). However, it is clear that technology can and will continue to play a role in the government's effort to deliver in-service training to DRC teachers throughout the country, effectively and at the lowest possible cost.⁵

Train teachers for reading program (experimental schools)

Teachers began using reading program activities in September when students returned to class, supported by a series of refresher training sessions. These activities were detailed in the Year 4 annual report. Since then, participating teachers have been meeting regularly in school cluster and unit/grade level groups to discuss and reflect upon their experiences applying the new literacy instructional practices. In addition, PAQUED organized a second training workshop during the semester vacation for Grades 1 and 2 teachers in the experimental schools. Over 220 Grade 1 and 2 teachers and 110 school principals and other resource people participated in the training, which took place in each of the three experimental school sites.

The overarching goal of the workshop was to 1) facilitate further reflection and deepen teachers' understanding of EDC's *ReadRightNow!* approach and 2) assess teachers' ongoing training needs. The workshop was designed to "fine tune" teachers' understanding of literacy learning processes while reinforcing their developing capacity to correctly apply instructional techniques for decoding and encoding. These techniques include teaching students to point to letters and words as they sound them out and sounding out letters to help them write new words.

Meanwhile, field staff are supporting teachers in the experimental schools and monitoring progress, with increasing success. Successes include examples of teachers applying literacy instructional techniques creatively, such as identifying words with the same initial letter sound to help develop students' decoding and encoding skills. The PAQUED technical team has developed and tested new evaluation instruments to track fidelity of implementation in the application of literacy instructional strategies. Other tools will help the team to measure the effectiveness of the reading program, as well as the impact of program activities on students' learning.

The project is completing development of a module to provide additional support to Grades 3 to 6 teachers in the experimental schools during the coming quarter (early February). PAQUED will provide this support via two, two-day training workshops for Grades 3 to 4 and Grades 5 to 6, respectively. Teachers will then organize self-directed learning activities (i.e., discussion forums) to facilitate application of new and existing literacy instructional strategies. These activities will make use of existing texts featured in "Les champions" (Grades 3 and 4) and "A nous l'école" while using instructional strategies applied during the Professional Development

⁵ EDC has developed a cell phone-based delivery mechanism, which it can now use for long-distance learning (including teacher training). EDC has identified this technology as a viable option for any future EDC education development intervention in the DRC.

Institute in French language. These strategies incorporate some of the key strategies for developing, for example, alphabetic awareness as used in the Grade 1 and 2 activities while focusing on the development of students' vocabulary and fluency (Grades 3 and 4) and comprehension and original text (i.e., writing) production sub-skills (Grades 5 and 6).

PAQUED is introducing the planned Grade 3 to 6 activities in an effort to include teachers and students in all six of the primary grades in the experimental schools in the new reading program. However, Grades 1 and 2 remain the primary focus for the development of the reading program, which address the fundamental needs for development of letter and letter-sound knowledge required to decode (read) and encode (write) into the middle and upper grades.

3.2.2. IMPROVING CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION (SUB IR 2.2)

Develop, validate, print, and distribute IRI training and materials (school kits), including additional IRI guides

The project printed an additional 18,000 IRI guides for Grade 1 to 6 teachers in PAQUED targeted schools during the quarter. However, procurement and printing delays prevented the project from distributing the materials as planned. The project is planning to distribute the guides during the coming quarter with any additional available materials (e.g., story cards). Originally ordered to facilitate the October IRI workshop and to promote adoption of “best” classroom practices, the project will instead distribute these materials to schools to help sustain the use of IRI beyond the life of the project.

Develop, validate, print, and distribute reading program materials (student and teacher texts)

PAQUED distributed approximately 19,500 texts to experimental schools participants during the quarter for use in the first trimester of school. The texts included both guided texts for classroom use and student readers (i.e., picture books) developed and tested in Year 4. Other materials distributed during the quarter include additional radios to adequately support IRI use during reading program implementation (experimental schools), notebooks for students and teachers, and chalk. PAQUED distributed these materials to over 540 teachers and approximately 21,000 students in Grade 1 to 6 in the experimental schools.⁶

The project technical team developed the texts to incorporate letters, sounds, and vocabulary to be taught each week. The texts were designed to follow the scope and sequence document the project put together to guide teachers in planning and introducing lessons. As stated in the Year 4 annual report, the texts were designed according to standard readability criteria, including the number of words and appropriate vocabulary for Grade 1 and 2 students, respectively.

⁶ PAQUED was able to distribute notebooks and chalk from existing inventory remaining from previous materials distributions.

The PAQUED texts aim to provide a backdrop for learning to read while drawing upon students' daily life experiences, in keeping with the themes and other content featured in the DRC national curriculum. For example, both Grade 1 and 2 reading program materials feature texts about students' school experiences, daily hygiene activities, and common domesticated animals children encounter in their homes and communities. In this respect, the texts (along with appropriate learning activities and lesson plan formats) provide teachers with the materials necessary to engage students in meaningful, daily authentic reading and writing activities to best develop learners' skills.

The research-based reading program targets the development of students' skills in five areas:

- alphabetic awareness
- phonological awareness
- fluency
- vocabulary
- comprehension

Texts are thus a pivotal part of the reading program, without which students would not have the context for "situated learning"⁷ in which to acquire the necessary skills in reading and writing. The texts and activities are likewise designed to foster the development of children's desire to read and a love of reading as a regular, daily activity. PAQUED has therefore developed the reading program to be accessible to students both inside and outside of the classroom while promoting the creation of a "reading culture" within the local school community (see the following section).

The PAQUED technical team developed an additional set of 26 new texts for teachers and students in Grades 1 and 2 of the experimental schools for use during the second trimester of school. The project plans to complete printing and to distribute these materials early in the coming quarter.

Next steps and conclusions

PAQUED's technical team is implementing a series of evaluation activities during the next two quarters. These activities include a measure of fidelity of implementation and an end line evaluation of the reading program, an assessment of self-directed teacher learning activities, and collection and analysis of data on fidelity of implementation of IRI and video-based training modules. The results of these evaluations will help provide context for analysis and interpretation of EGRA/EGMA results.

The results of these evaluation activities will serve to document what has worked best in terms of literacy instructional and training activities, materials, and approaches. The evaluations will help PAQUED to develop a clear set of recommendations to USAID and the MoE regarding what

⁷ Situated learning is the basis of the pedagogical and curricular framework adopted by the DRC government within the last five years.

kinds of activities may be most useful to advance ongoing education reform in the DRC during this next phase of development.

From the results under this objective to date, three conclusions emerge:

- 1) reading program activities are making progress toward improving teachers' literacy practice and students' learning to read and write, particularly how to decode and encode words at grade level (in Grades 1 and 2);
- 2) teachers are beginning to initiate cluster- and school-based self-directed learning activities, providing a potentially sustainable model of semi-autonomous in-service teacher training (and teacher professional development); and
- 3) audio and video tools should continue to play a role in PAQUED and beyond, despite logistical problems that have seriously hampered their effective implementation.

As mentioned previously, the MoE has identified audio and video tools as the primary means of delivering quality content to such large numbers of teachers for in-service training nationwide, due to the scale of the task and associated costs. PAQUED therefore has a tremendous opportunity to learn about the conditions required for effective deployment and use of these technologies, as well as to provide quality content and thus help shape DRC education reform in productive ways. One example is the development of content standards PAQUED initiated at the start of the project, which were designed to guide development of all its programs and activities, including IRI, self-directed video-learning modules for teachers, and EGRA/EGMA studies PAQUED has conducted. Had it not been for these programs PAQUED would not hold such a strong, leadership position in current efforts to develop curricula and materials in reading and writing. Yet these efforts are vital to expanding the numbers of DRC children who will one day be able to read, in keeping with Goal 1 of the USAID Education Strategy. The project has therefore continued to support teacher participation in IRI and video-learning activities while gathering useful information on the challenges and benefits of using these technologies in the DRC context.

3.3. ACHIEVEMENTS UNDER OBJECTIVE 3 (SUB IR 3.3.1)

EDC partner CRS identified a number of tasks in the work plan for Year 5 under Objective 3 (improving the school environment):

- Reinforce COPAs by explaining members' formal (i.e., official) roles and responsibilities;
- Monitor SIP implementation;
- Train COPA members in how to organize and manage a reading space (ECEL) at the community level (experimental schools);
- Identify, with COPAs, their training needs as well as community facilitators for ECL trainings;
- Support APES in organizing COPA members training;
- Support the organization of general assemblies of COPAs in all Year 5 schools;

- Organize awareness raising campaigns on the necessity of parental accompaniment in reading;
- Train COPA members and parents of experimental school children (Grades 1 and 2) in how to fabricate and use didactic materials; and
- Provide ongoing support in the management of 30 ECEs (10 per province).

CRS was able to complete five of the nine planned activities. However, planned training activities, awareness raising campaigns on reading, and other field activities were delayed, in part due to modifications to CRS's scope of work. These modifications are necessary to increase CRS's obligation under the award so that the CRS team can provide adequate field support to the reading program and activities under PAQUED's realigned focus on Goal 1 of the USAID Education Strategy. These modifications are now nearly complete and the technical team will be able to continue with implementation, including training and support activities for the reading program.

As described in the Year 4 annual report, the CRS team has worked closely with the pedagogical technical teams to develop a series of activities designed to enhance parents' roles in their children's learning to read and write. Importantly, these activities are focused primarily on selection of appropriate community resource people and monitoring of "learner-to-learner" activities. These activities will involve teachers and parents together to help provide the proper pedagogical support to learners while they are engaged in reading and writing exercises outside of the classroom (in the ECEL). To accomplish this task, CRS has developed activities to that enhance classroom-based activities, such as organizing learners in pairs or small groups to read a text introduced by their teacher. Working closely with teachers, community volunteers selected with the help of COPA members and parents can then support students' learning to read and write while provide appropriate support.

This CRS-adapted ECEL model has been effective in other contexts, for example, in which child-to-child activities help to bridge the gap between what students learn in school (e.g., letters and letter sounds) and meaningful engagement in reading and writing with peers outside of the classroom. Teachers can then work with community volunteers to ensure that ECEL activities are organized in harmony with the pedagogical approach the PAQUED technical team has adapted to the DRC classroom. For example, volunteers will be able to encourage and support child-to-child reading activities of a new storybook with guidance from the learner's classroom teacher.

Reinforce COPAs

During this reporting period, CRS and its partners held general meetings with COPAs from all targeted schools to discuss the Ministerial decree on COPA functioning, specifically the roles and responsibilities of each COPA member. Meeting topics included ways that COPAs can improve their support to schools, such as by helping to provide needed classroom resources. In Kisangani and Kikwit, PTAs were involved in and facilitated the meetings. CRS and partners distributed 400 copies of the COPA Ministerial decree to all targeted schools. In addition, each

COPA president received a copy of the decree. The work will continue in targeted school communities in Mbandaka during the second quarter of the project.

Monitor SIP implementation

CRS and its partners have continued to monitor the implementation of the 68 awarded SIPs. Monitoring has ensured rapid completion of the SIPs and follow-up on the award of grant balances to all COPAs in Bandundu Town and other PAQUED targeted school communities. For example, below are images taken prior to and following partial construction of one SIP to replace the thatched roof and build durable classrooms for the Kibala Primary School in Kikwit. The project is typical of the poor state of school infrastructure in countless school communities in the DRC, which attests to the strong commitment and support for children’s education throughout the zones where PAQUED operates.

Agents of CRS partner, Caritas make regular visits to school communities to monitor progress and ensure timely, proper management of each SIP and the funds provided by USAID. The table below gives the results of the monitoring and evaluation visits made during the quarter:

Site	# of SIPs awarded	# of SIPs completed	Comments
Kisangani	15	14	Two SIPs were cancelled in these sites because COPAs were receiving funding from another project (PARSE)
Kenge	15	14	
Kikwit	15	15	
Mbandaka	9	8	Remaining SIP in progress
Bandundu Town	14	0	All SIPs have reached 75 % completion

Train COPAs to organize / manage a reading space (ECEL)

During this quarter, CRS developed two training modules that will be used in the field by ECEL facilitators to engage children in after school reading activities in the 45 experimental school communities. The ECEL activities aim to create a playful reading space to improve students’ reading skills and instill in them a culture of reading. ECEL activities included in these modules involve learning letters and words through songs and rhymes, drawing, story telling, and supporting parents to help develop reading materials for their children.

Now that the modules are complete and the facilitators identified, CRS and its partners can move forward with plans to organize the training activities in the field for all 45 experimental school communities. One challenge will be to engage parents and other community members in effective and meaningful ways while taking into account their own lack of formal schooling. The ECEs are designed specifically to make creative use of local resources, including community volunteers and parents, within and building upon their existing capacities. CRS has developed the two training modules to achieve this overarching goal. Meanwhile, the evaluation

framework that CRS and its partners developed for this component of the PAQUED reading initiative is designed to help measure parents' developing capacity to support community-based learning activities, among other factors.

Identify training needs of COPAs and ECL facilitators

CRS' Senior Community Mobilization Technical Advisor (CMTA) undertook visits to project sites and trained all community mobilizers on the community reading strategy. The training focused on activities within the strategy and included a discussion with partner staff on anticipated challenges. The training will be rolled-out to all COPA members and ECEL facilitators in the next quarter.



EP Kibala before PAQUED grant award/Kikwit



EP Kibala after SIP implementation/Kikwit

Next steps and conclusions (i.e., lessons learned)

Action on a key recommendation from the project's annual review—to strengthen synergies between PAQUED teams—began this quarter. In October 2013, CRS Senior CMTA presented the community reading approach to the PAQUED education team. Feedback from this meeting permitted CRS to refine the strategy and ensure its complementarity to the classroom reading strategy, which is currently implemented across PAQUED supported schools with a special emphasis on the 45 experimental schools. In addition, from Mbandaka to Kisangani, the education team has been engaged in community mobilization activities, including discussions around the reading materials that are to be developed with the help of parents. CRS's community mobilization team also participated in the government's official ceremony to validate DRC's competency standards for reading for primary schools.

These joint activities and open dialogue around the project's reading strategy at both central and field levels have strengthened relationships between the education and community

mobilization team, which have led to closer collaboration and coordination in the field, and eventually will lead to better project outcomes.

4. MONITORING & EVALUATION

PAQUED was to focus on planning EGRA/EGMA data collection during the quarter, much of which was accomplished, including the following M&E activities:

- Select local sub-contractor for EGRA/EGMA logistics;
- Procure tablet computers for Tangerine® electronic EGRA/EGMA assessment;
- Draw initial end line sample for EGRA/EGMA assessment;
- Obtain approval of data analysis plan for end line EGRA/EGMA assessment; and
- Develop plan and budget for collecting fidelity of implementation data on PAQUED activities (e.g., IRI).

Select local subcontractor responsible for logistics

Following a competitive bidding process, RTI selected and EDC approved CENADEP as the recipient of a subaward to support the logistical aspects of the end line data collection. CENADEP served this same role in 2012, and their submission was judged to be both cost-competitive and the most technically robust. The subaward was prepared and issued to CENADEP with an effective date of Jan 2, 2014.

Plan trip for T. Slade (RTI) trip to Kinshasa

RTI's technical team developed, and EDC accepted, a scope of work and itinerary for a visit to Kinshasa and Kisangani by Mr. Timothy Slade, the home office technical manager. The trip will focus on work planning activities with CENADEP; training of CENADEP's core management team on the Tangerine® data-collection software and how its use will alter logistical and management planning; testing and troubleshooting various approaches to data upload, especially in the provinces; and working closely with Mr. Kabengele to revise and update training guides and manuals for the assessors. The travel was initially planned for FY14Q1, but was postponed due to scheduling issues and personnel availability.

Procurement of small number of tablets to support Tangerine®

RTI procured a half-dozen Nexus tablets and associated accessories (stylus, case), a TP-Link mobile hotspot, and a Sapido mobile hotspot, all for use during Mr. Slade's work with CENADEP during his visit to DRC.

Draw initial end line sample

Following the FY13Q4 decision to use the 2012 sample as the comparator for End line results, the sample of schools to be visited during data collection was drawn. The sample contained 60 IRI schools, 20 IRI+ schools, and 35 control schools. NB: Subsequent technical discussions early in FY14 Q2 reversed the decision to use the 2012 results as the comparison for End line data; a new sample that incorporates 2010 ("rural" or "inaccessible") schools will be drawn in early FY14Q2.

Obtain approval of Data Analysis Plan for end line assessment

RTI developed, and EDC approved, an initial Data Analysis Plan for the 2014 End line assessment. The document articulates the research questions to be explored, the analyses to be conducted, and the likely mode of presentation of the results.

Develop plan and budget for collecting fidelity of implementation data on PAQUED activities

To improve PAQUED's capacity to collect fidelity of implementation data, project M&E staff developed a plan and budget for hiring, organizing, and deploying a number of short-term consultants to help complete this important task. The project plans to execute this plan during a two to three week period during the coming quarter. The goal of the initiative is to provide reliable implementation data on the use of IRI, video-based learning modules, and other project activities. The data collected will help provide a reference point for analyzing EGRA/EGMA data on student performance in reading and mathematics to determine what factors (e.g., IRI participation) might explain the end line evaluation results.

Completing these M&E planning tasks will help the project to collect and analyze data in a timely manner while providing useful information on the effectiveness of project interventions.

5. NEW OPPORTUNITIES AND TRENDS

Supporting the Reading Commission will remain an important opportunity for the project in the coming months until project closeout in September 2014.

The project has already begun documenting lessons learned over the past four and half years, and will continue to do so in the coming months. A workshop will be organized in June to document those lessons more formally. These lessons will help establish themes and a working framework for the Lessons Learned Conference to be organized in July. The June workshop and lessons learned conference therefore both promise to help inform future efforts aimed at enhancing development of reading skills among DRC children.

6. SUCCESS STORY



USAID | DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Children at Lukula Elementary School in the town of Kikwit in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) are making great strides toward

learning to read. As one of 45 experimental schools established by the USAID-funded Package for Improving Education Quality (PIEQ) to improve literacy education, Lukula has seen its share of problems: lack of materials, little classroom space, and inadequate training for its teachers. Teachers like Ms. Masanga know only too well. Prior to joining the program, she and her students rarely read anything in the classroom. Now, thanks to the reading materials and activities provided by PIEQ, she and her students are reading and writing new words everyday.



Two students point to words as they sound them out in class



A student learns to recognize letters by the sounds they make

As a typical second grade teacher in the DRC, Ms. Masanga says she used to drill her students in rote memorization of words and phrases written on the blackboard. Today, she is changing all that. Her students now start each reading lesson by singing the alphabet and learning to identify new letters and the sounds they make in French—the country's official language. Equipped with these skills, Ms. Masanga's students now sound out words letter by letter as they read from storybooks PIEQ has developed. Known as "decoding", this ability to read words by letter sounds is a key skill required for any child to read, in any given language.

The transformation began when Ms. Masanga attended the first of two workshops PIEQ organized in three different towns in Bandundu, Equateur and Orientale Provinces in Northern DRC. Some 220 Grade 1 and 2 teachers took part in the training workshops, which were designed to help teachers learn how to use illustrated storybooks ("picture books") to teach reading. For example, after reading a story aloud with her students, Ms. Masanga asks them to say new words beginning with the same letter as a word from the story. In this way, students start with a word such as "baby" and come up with the words, "boy", "bath", "ball" and "bill". Students then read the words as Ms. Masanga writes them on the blackboard.

The results of the new PIEQ reading approach have been nothing short of amazing. After only 3 months, second grader Mputu in Ms. Lubenwe class at Yonsi Elementary School is able to read all of the words in the sentence, "I am looking for my comb" written on the blackboard. Using her developing knowledge of letter sounds, Mputu and students like her can, with time decode, and "encode" (write) most any word she sees at her grade level. For example, she can use her knowledge of

the word, “comb” to read the words, “limb” and “numb”, once she knows what sound the two letters make.

As simple as the PIEQ approach may seem, learning the specific techniques for teaching letter sounds to young learners can be quite a challenge. However, now that teachers like Ms. Masanga and Ms. Lubwene have developed the necessary skills to teach reading effectively there is no telling how DRC students can learn!

Annex

N.B.: Performance to date for Q1 of Year 5.

Performance Monitoring Output Indicators and Data Collection Plan

Project Goal: Increase the number of students in the DRC with improved reading skills.				
Indicator # (ref to PIRS)	Indicator	2014		LOP targets
		Targets	Actuals (Q1)	
IR 1: Standards established for teaching and learning in reading and math				
Sub IR 1.1: Student assessments conducted in reading and math				
1	USG 3.2.1-34: Number of standardized learning assessments supported by USG (output)	2	2	2
Sub IR 1.2: Standards for teaching and learning developed and validation supported in reading and math				
2	USG 3.2.1-38: Number of laws, policies, regulations or guidelines developed or modified to improve primary grade reading programs or increase equitable access (output)	6	6	6
IR 2: Quality of teaching improved in reading				
Sub IR 2.1: Teacher classroom practice improved through professional development activities				
3	USG 3.2.1-31: Number of teachers/educators/ teaching assistants who successfully completed in-service training or received intensive coaching or mentoring with USG support (output)	25,078	7,921	25,078
4	USG 3.2.1-14: Number of learners enrolled in primary schools and/or equivalent non-school based settings with USG support (output)	1,276,327	1,113,372	1,276,327
Sub IR 2.2: Classroom instruction improved through provision of innovative instructional materials				
5	USG 3.2.1-33: Number of textbooks and other teaching and learning materials (TLM) provided with USG assistance (output)	1,212	31,035	541,212
IR 3: School environment improved				
Sub IR 3.1: Capacity of PTAs to support schools improved through training				
6	USG 3.2.1-18: Number of PTAs or similar 'school' governance structures supported (output)	600	0	2,400