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# USAID Quality Reading Project—Tajikistan Final Report

June 2013–October 2017



December 26, 2017 *(revised February 9, 2018)*

A partnership with  
American Institutes for Research and Save the Children International

Contract No.: AID-176-C-13-00001-00

**USAID Quality Reading Project—Tajikistan**  
**Final Report**  
**June 2013–October 2017**

Submitted by:

American Institutes for Research®

December 26, 2017

*(Revised February 9, 2018)*

The authors' views expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.

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B.	USAID Project Title	USAID Quality Reading Project
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## Table of Contents

	Page
DEC Submission Requirements.....	i
Acronyms.....	iii
I. Activity Summary .....	1
II. Executive Summary.....	2
III. Description of Accomplishments and Program Objectives (June 2013–October 2017)...	5
IV. Implementation Challenges and Lessons Learned .....	34
V. Recommendations .....	40
VI. Progress against Work Plan.....	42
VII. Progress against Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Plan .....	52
VIII. Reports, Deliverables, and Presentations Produced .....	54

## Acronyms

AIR	American Institutes for Research
AKF	Aga Khan Foundation
AOE	Academy of Education
CSPro	Census and Survey Processing System
DRS	District of Republic Subordination
DED	District Education Department
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
HMU	Head of Methodological Union
IST	In-Service Training
MOES	Ministry of Education and Science
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NTC	National Testing Center
OSI	Open Society Institute
PSA	Public Service Announcement
PMEP	Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Plan
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
QRP	Quality Reading Project
RED	Regional Education Department
RMC	Republican Methodological Center
RTI	Research Triangle Institute
RTTI	Republican Teacher Training Institute
SC	Save the Children
TTI	Teacher Training Institutes
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
wpm	words per minute

## I. Activity Summary

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Description</b>
Lead Implementing Partner	American Institutes for Research (AIR)
Other Implementing Partner	Save the Children (SC)
Activity Name	USAID Quality Reading Project (Quality Reading Project)
Activity Objective	The primary objective of this contract is to improve reading levels among students in Grades 1–4 in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The contract focuses on the following results: (1) improved reading instruction in Grades 1–4; (2) increased availability of reading materials; (3) increased, out-of-school reading time; and (4) increased government support to improve reading.
Life of Activity	June 28, 2013, to October 26, 2017
Total Contract	\$ 19,706,184
Total Invoiced as of November 30, 2017	\$ 19,514,617
Remaining to be Invoiced	\$ 191,567
<b>Tajikistan</b>	
Total Contract	\$ 10,295,575
Total Invoiced as of November 30, 2017	\$ 10,239,588
Remaining to be Invoiced	\$ 55,986

## II. Executive Summary

The main goal of the USAID Quality Reading Project (QRP) was to increase reading levels of Grades 1–4 students in the Republic of Tajikistan and the Kyrgyz Republic. The 4-year project implemented by American Institutes for Research (AIR) and Save the Children (SC) from June 2013 through October 2017. The project worked to improve reading skills among primary-grade students by drawing on existing structures in Tajikistan and the Kyrgyz Republic. The project worked to build capacity at all levels, from the national government level to the classroom, in support of the common goal of improving students' reading skills. This report focuses on the activities and experiences of the USAID Quality Reading Project in Tajikistan. For information on the USAID Quality Reading Project in the Kyrgyz Republic, please see the corresponding final report.

The USAID Quality Reading Project's goal was to improve reading outcomes among Grades 1–4 students through four intermediate results:

IR 1: Improved reading instruction in Grades 1–4

IR 2: Increased availability of reading materials

IR 3: Increased out-of-school reading time

IR 4: Increased government support to improve reading

The project aimed to increase critical areas of literacy and reading development—with a particular focus on reading comprehension and critical-thinking skills—by delivering in-service training (IST) for teachers, providing low-cost materials and age- and grade-level-appropriate non-textbook supplementary reading materials, and engaging parents and the community in out-of-school reading activities through a close partnership with the Ministry of Education and Science (MOES). Importantly, the project also promoted consistent data collection, analysis, and decision making with local education authorities.

The USAID Quality Reading Project operated under a Letter of Cooperation between USAID and the MOES, which was signed in July 2013 and established the framework of cooperation between the project and the MOES.

The USAID Quality Reading Project worked in 1,807 target schools (60% of schools in the country) and reached roughly 462,890 students from Grades 1–4. Its main activity was IST for over 17,608 teachers, supplemented with ongoing mentoring in the classroom.

The USAID Quality Reading Project with MOES and the Republican Teacher Training Institute (RTTI) rolled out 72-hour IST package in a three-level cascade training for National Trainers (Level 1) who trained Master Trainers (Level 2) and Master Trainers who led school-level trainings (Level 3) for their colleagues and peers. The Master Trainers (deputy director, head of the methodological union [HMU], and an advanced teacher) were selected from each targeted school. Master Trainers returned to their respective schools and trained other primary-grade teachers through Saturday Methodological Days, an existing system put in place by the MOES. A total of 17,608 primary teachers completed the IST by completing at least 61 hours, or 18 of 23 modules.

The USAID Quality Reading Project conducted mentoring training for deputy directors, heads of the methodological unions in each school, primary-grade teachers, and primary-grade methodologists of city, district, and regional education departments. In addition, the project

worked with librarians and donated 232,790 non-textbook supplementary reading materials in Tajik and Russian to schools and libraries, organized out-of-school reading activities for children, and worked at the policy level to promote ownership and sustainability. For instance, project staff worked closely with government institutions and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE-4) to develop competency-based reading and writing standards for the Tajik language. The project also facilitated distribution of 336,587 donated books, magazines, and newspapers and worked with teachers, students, and parents to develop books at home or in the classroom from low-cost materials.

The USAID Quality Reading Project obtained MOES approval of the project's Parents' Guide on the "Importance of Reading with Children in the Family," and the guide was printed and disseminated in both Tajik and Russian project schools and communities. The project delivered a total of 35,000 copies of the Parents' Guide to project schools for dissemination to parents through the regular teacher-parent meetings and library engagement activities.

The project worked with the MOES and the National Testing Center (NTC) to implement three rounds of the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) in 132 schools (66 treatment schools and 66 control). The EGRA data collection also included interviews with teachers, librarians, and parents and classroom observation.

By providing training in pedagogical skills and mentoring teachers in the classroom, the USAID Quality Reading Project had a positive impact on teaching practices, which can eventually influence reading outcomes. Overall, at endline, teachers in treatment schools were 20 percentage points more likely to demonstrate instructional best practices aligned with the teacher training. At endline, teachers also demonstrated a 14 percentage-point increase in having an active, student-centered focus in teaching. Teachers were also 10 percentage points more likely to have a lesson plan, 22 percentage points more likely to have supplementary materials in the classroom, and 24 percentage points more likely to have written notes on formative assessment.

The project study did not find evidence of program impact on reading outcomes at endline for Grade 2 or Grade 4 pupils. Although the endline scores in treatment schools were generally higher than in control schools, these differences do not provide evidence of program impact because the differences were not statistically significant. However, there were several cases of positive impacts on reading outcomes because of the USAID Quality Reading Project. For students in the longitudinal sample, the program positively impacted reading outcomes. The impact on reading comprehension for the longitudinal sample increased from 0.40 standard deviations at midline to 0.50 standard deviations, or 15 percentage points above 58.9% correct in the absence of the program at endline. Overall, girls in Grade 2 demonstrated a 6.7 percentage-point increase in listening comprehension (above 50.2% correct achieved in the absence of the program) because of the program, girls in Grade 4 demonstrated a 2.7 percentage-point increase in oral vocabulary (above 90% correct achieved in the absence of the program) because of the program, and pupils in rural schools in Grade 4 demonstrated a 4.6 percentage-point increase in oral vocabulary (above 89.1% correct achieved in the absence of the program) because of the program. These impacts were all on language comprehension skills among groups that underperformed.

The long-term sustainability of the USAID Quality Reading Project interventions and improvements in reading outcomes for subpopulations will ultimately require the MOES, its



sub-institutions, and teachers and community members to continue to supporting evidence-based reform and implement the new methods and support students in improving their reading with comprehension. One area in which the MOES took ownership of USAID Quality Reading Project reform activities related to transitioning to competency-based standards education. GPE-4 took over a process begun by the project to develop competency-based standards for all primary subjects, including the Tajik language subject begun during the first year of the project. The project staff worked closely with GPE-4 on revising the standards for Tajik language. The MOES and RTTI piloted the standards in project and non-project schools throughout the 2015–16 academic year and rolled out training to all primary-grade schools in August 2016. The project co-hosted mentoring and methodological training workshops with the Republican Methodological Center (RMC), RTTI, the Academy of Education (AOE), and the Education Development Institute.

Schools and districts have also taken on many of the low- and no-cost, out-of-school activities that engage and empower students and parents in reading, including Reading Buddies and reading competitions. Many schools have developed independent plans to continue integration of methods from the USAID Quality Reading Project trainings into the demonstration lessons that they deliver during Saturday Methodological Union Days and support cluster groups for sharing best practices with project and non-project schools.

To strengthen community engagement and continuity of messaging, the USAID Quality Reading Project developed six public service announcements (PSAs) on improving reading practices at the community level that aired on national and local television. The project also partnered with UNICEF and the Open Society Institute to develop 25 cartoons that focus on early child development including reading, and worked with the Aga Khan Foundation to unify strategies related to libraries and share best practices.

The USAID Quality Reading Project conducted a variety of workshops with education stakeholders, particularly the RMC and RTTI at local and regional levels, to share best practices for mentoring and IST and to foster sustainability for reading activities.

During its final year, The USAID Quality Reading Project shared materials and lessons learned with the USAID Read with Me! project to support the smooth transition from one project to the other. Equipment disposition to the MOES and its sub-institutions was completed in early October. During the closeout period, the Tajik staff completed their contracts in phases; all project staff finished their contracts by October 6, 2017.

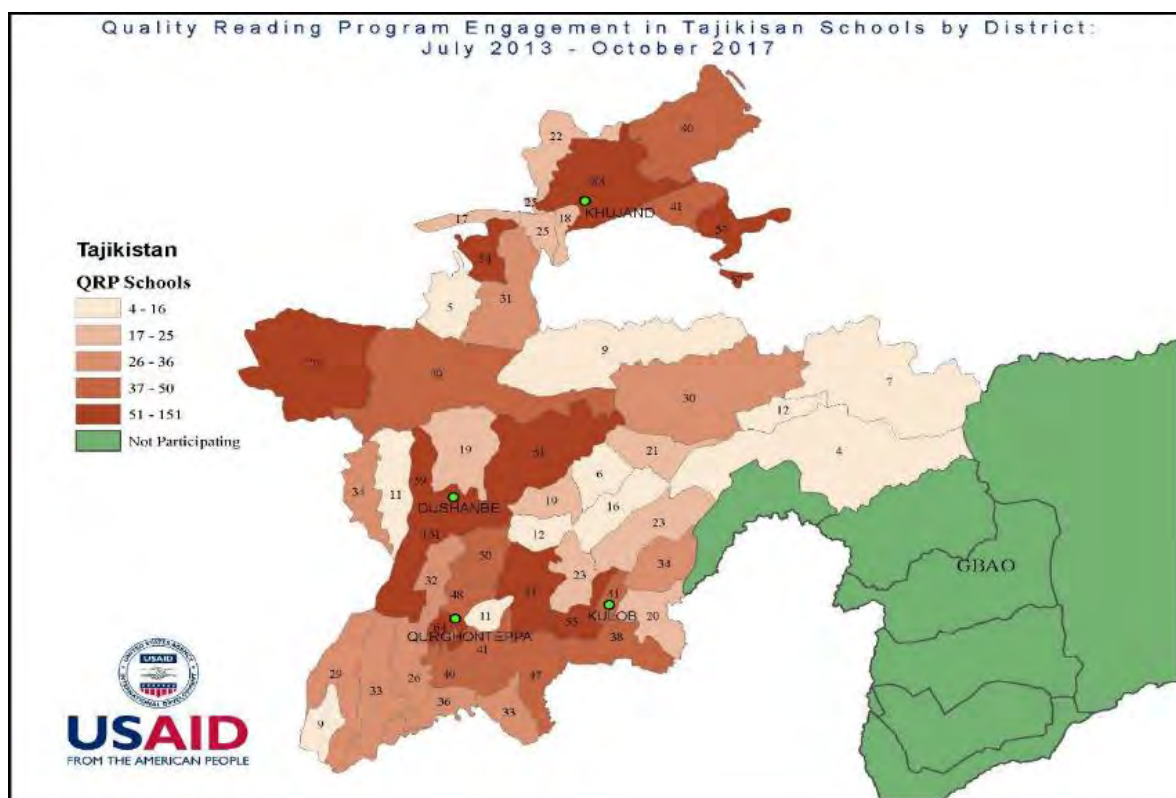
### III. Description of Accomplishments and Program Objectives (June 2013–October 2017)

#### Introduction

The 4-year USAID Quality Reading Project (QRP), implemented by American Institutes for Research (AIR) and Save the Children International, sought to improve pupils’ reading skills by building the capacity of educators at all levels, from the national government to the classroom, working within and through existing education systems. The project focused on four main goals: 1) improving reading instruction; 2) increasing the availability of reading materials; 3) increasing out-of-school reading time; and 4) increasing government support to improve reading. Through these interventions, the project saw an increase in the percentage of teachers using interactive teaching methods and an increase in the percentage of students who meet the minimum oral reading standards.

In July 2103, a Letter of Cooperation was signed with Ministry of Education and Science (MOES) that established the framework for cooperation between the USAID Quality Reading Project and the MOES. A Letter of Cooperation was also signed with the National Testing Center (NTC), although direct work with the NTC was delayed due to the university entrance exam reform process. The Letter of Cooperation with the MOES resulted in stronger lines of communication, aided in developing a mutually beneficial relationship built on transparency and trust, and served as the official project launch that built on the U.S. Government’s longstanding commitment to education in the Republic of Tajikistan.

The USAID Quality Reading Project in Tajikistan supported 1,807 schools, benefitting over 435,000 students and 20,000 teachers over the life of the project. The figure below shows the project’s coverage across the country.



## Overall Goal: Reading Levels Increased Among Grades 1–4 Students

### Intermediate Result 1: Improved reading instruction in Grades 1–4

#### *Sub-result 1.1: Conduct a baseline qualitative analysis (AIR)*

AIR worked with local research firm Zerkalo to conduct the baseline qualitative analysis. AIR’s Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Specialist and the M&E Specialists in each country worked closely with Zerkalo to launch the analysis in October 2013. Prior to the award, a team led by an AIR literacy specialist based in the United States worked on the development of tools for the classroom observation and focus group sessions. The tools used for the research were finalized after full consultation with USAID Quality Reading Project’s M&E and Lead Education Specialists based in Tajikistan. The findings from the baseline analysis were in line with the findings from the EGRA and M&E baseline; these findings include but are not limited to the following: not enough books in the household; children are not reading at home; a small amount of reading books, if any, in the classroom; and teaching is teacher-centered versus student-centered. These findings were expected, and the information helped the project in designing the IST package.

#### *Sub-result 1.2: Design in-service training*

**Grades 1–4 Reading Standards:** The USAID Quality Reading Project initiated the development of competency-based Grades 1–4 Reading Standards for Tajik and Russian languages. Tajikistan already had a draft of mother-tongue standards to use as a starting point for the development of Tajik and Russian mother-tongue standards. AIR’s literacy specialist based in the U.S. led this effort by providing guidance and technical support to a group of in-country developers consisting of specialists from the AOE and RTTI, as well as teachers and deputy school directors. AIR’s literacy specialist led them through a process of understanding and then developing competency-based standards based on the current curriculum, and comparing those standards to other countries by looking at their components and targeted outcomes. The MOES and AOE reviewed the mother-tongue standards and divided them into separate language and writing standards.

The USAID Quality Reading Project developed the first draft of the standards for Grades 1–4 in the Tajik mother-tongue language in 2014, and based on this model, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE-4) continued developing standards for all grades and all subjects. At the request of the MOES, the project worked closely with GPE-4 on revising the standards for the Tajik language. The MOES and RTTI piloted the standards in project and non-project schools throughout the 2015–16 academic year. The GPE-4 pilot program ended in May 2016. The first months of the pilot program brought the standards’ main weaknesses to light. Those evident weaknesses, mostly related to the standards for Grades 2 and 3, were immediately



*QRP and GPE-4 workshop to review and finalize the Tajik language competency-based standards*

addressed without waiting until the completion of the pilot period. Problems identified included the following:

- Definition of *competency* needed more clarification.
- Group work was difficult to implement in some schools due to classroom size, inappropriate furniture, and student numbers.
- Formative and summative assessment was a new topic for teachers and required substantial clarification and expanded training time and resources.

Within the GPE-4 collaboration framework, the MOES asked the USAID Quality Reading Project to develop an 18-hour IST module on standards for mother-tongue and a teachers' guide on standards for primary schools using Tajik as the language of instruction. Two specialists who had been involved in developing the standards and the IST package also developed the IST module and teachers' guide to introduce the standards. The 18-hour IST module was used to conduct trainings on the competency-based standards in GPE-4 pilot schools, followed by the national rollout of the standards by GPE-4, RTTI, and the MOES in August 2016.

### IST Training Manual Development

The USAID Quality Reading Project, in cooperation with MOES, local and international consultants, and other stakeholders, developed the IST package for Regional Teacher Training Institutes (TTIs) on formative assessment, vocabulary, language issues, reading fluency, and reading comprehension. The package also included a guide for training of trainers, a mentoring guide, and a guide for portfolio development. The overall objective of the training was to equip all primary grade teachers with practical tools and techniques to

effectively teach children how to read. Training modules covered the five key reading skills (letter knowledge, phonemic awareness and phonic decoding, vocabulary, reading fluency, and reading comprehension). In developing this teacher training package, the following research-based principles were applied:

- Learning to read is neither simple nor automatic; teachers need to teach component skills deliberately.
- Training is more effective if it is done regularly and frequently (rather than one-off), and if it is school-based and with smaller groups of teachers (rather than large groups in district-wide or province-wide training).
- Teachers must practice skills between sessions.
- Teachers must reflect on practice when they return for the next training session.
- Explicit links must be made to national government curricula and textbooks.

**In Their Own Words: Quality Reading Project Creates Quality Pedagogical Resources**

"The IST modules developed by USAID Quality Reading Project are indeed a very useful pedagogical resource for the primary teachers in Tajikistan. The language of the modules is easy for primary teachers to understand, and the methods of teaching recommended are up to date. As reading is a cornerstone of all education, IST provides very comprehensive modules on Reading and Comprehension, Reading Fluency, Vocabulary, Letter Knowledge and Phonemic Awareness and Grammar and Language Issues. I would be glad if all primary teachers would receive the IST set, as most of the teachers besides the textbook do not have any methodological guides. It would also be very productive if they receive trainings based on the modules. I'll recommend to MOES the approval of the IST and its dissemination in all the primary schools in the whole country."

— Mr. Mahmadullo Lutfulloev, professor, AOE



The IST package was a locally-adapted version of Save the Children’s Literacy Boost, which focuses on developing the five reading skills during lessons through effective teaching methods, reading assessments, and enrichment of the classroom reading environment. The USAID Quality Reading Project adapted Literacy Boost in consultation with the MOES, the AOE, RTTI, and local education specialists to ensure that it reflected the needs of teachers in terms of Russian and Tajik mother-tongue instructional practices.

The IST package was reviewed by Mr. Lutfulloev Mahmadullo, a professor at the AOE, one of the most prolific writers for the primary grades, and a well-known scholar of primary education. After reviewing, he recommended printing the set for all the primary schools of Tajikistan. The IST package was edited by Mr. Kamoliddinov Bahriddin, a professor and well-known Tajik language specialist in Tajikistan.



*Tajik and Russian IST manuals*

After final editing and integration of all feedback, the set of IST modules was approved by the Collegium of the MOES in December 2014 (Decree 27.12.2014, #25/25). The Russian IST package was combined with the Tajik IST package upon submission because the methodology and content was identical to that of the Tajik. However, the Russian IST package received official approval in 2016. The IST package was printed and rolled out nationwide through the three-level cascade model, described in full below.

***Sub-result 1.3: Conduct in-service training for teachers and other educators***

In Tajikistan, the IST process was implemented in a cascade model covering 72 hours of training in 10 days (or 12 days in the winter for weather and daylight considerations), involving five cohorts. The training focused on providing participants with skills and knowledge that would enable them to train others to conduct comprehensive, school-based training on teaching reading, with a focus on the five reading skills discussed previously.



*A group of Cohort 2 Master Trainers after finishing their IST workshop, Kulob*

The cascade model was implemented at three levels: National Training of MOES literacy and education experts (Level 1); Master Training of three representatives from each target school (deputy director, head of the methodological union [HMU], and an experienced teacher) (Level 2); and school-level trainings of the remaining primary-grade classroom teachers (Level 3). Level 3 trainings took place throughout the school year, primarily on Saturday Methodological Union Days. All the Master Trainers were provided with stationery and materials to conduct training in their schools during Saturday Methodological Union Days. During the Level 3 Saturday training sessions, primary-grade teachers received 3 hours of IST from their Master Trainer colleagues with support from city, district, and regional methodologists and USAID

Quality Reading Project staff. The Level 3 training was conducted over 23 weeks during the required Saturday Methodological Union Days.

These school-based trainings focused on the application and practice of teaching reading. The training reached approximately 60% of public primary schools in the country (1,807 schools). See Table 1 for the distribution of project target schools across Tajikistan. Cohort 5 did not add any additional schools; rather, all Cohort 5 schools were selected from Cohorts 1 through 3 schools that had not completed previous rounds of school-level training for various reasons.

**Table 1. Distribution of USAID Quality Reading Project Target Schools**

Region	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4	Total # of schools
DRS		201	111	122	<b>434</b>
Dushanbe	33	44			<b>77</b>
Kulob	321				<b>321</b>
Qurghonteppa	451	1			<b>452</b>
Sughd	76	101	218		<b>395</b>
Zarafshon			126	2	<b>128</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>881</b>	<b>347</b>	<b>455</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>1,807</b>

The USAID Quality Reading Project targeted 17,500 educators at project schools, and reached 16,650 over the life of the project. See Table 2 for the number of teachers trained at project schools, disaggregated by gender and year. The project trained a total of 17,608 educators through the IST in project and non-project schools. Of this total, 16,650 trained teachers worked in the 1,807 target schools, with an additional 958 educators having participated in the IST program at some level. These 958 additional beneficiaries included methodologists from city, district, and regional education departments; IST program developers; and EGRA administrators, all of whom are critical to improved reading instruction in Tajikistan.<sup>1</sup>

**Table 2. Teachers Trained at USAID Quality Reading Project Target Schools, by Gender**

	2014 Actual	2015 Actual	2016 Actual	2017 Actual	Life of Project Actual	End-of- Project Target
Men	754	1,224	1,289	351	3,618	
Women	1,962	4,897	5,060	1,113	13,032	
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,716</b>	<b>6,121</b>	<b>6,349</b>	<b>1,464</b>	<b>16,650 (95%)</b>	<b>17,500</b>

RTTI considers a teacher to have successfully completed the USAID Quality Reading Project IST after completing at least 18 of the 23 Saturday Methodological Union Day sessions, which aligns with the project’s indicator of completing at least 61 hours of the 72-hour program. Although RTTI issued certificates to teachers who completed 18 sessions as part of their continuing professional development requirements every 5 years, teachers were required to submit a request to receive the certification. Because there is no system for incentivizing or

<sup>1</sup> 661 DED, CED, and RED methodologists and teachers from non-project schools; 27 IST training program developers from RTTI, AOE and MOES; and 270 baseline EGRA and classroom observation administrators and their replacements over the life of the project.

penalizing teachers for their certification status, many teachers chose not to request formal certification. Therefore, only 9,876 teachers received the formal certification from RTTI. In addition, 324 project schools had Uzbek, Kyrgyz, or Turkmen language-of-instruction classes. Many of these teachers reported participating in the Saturday Methodological Union Day trainings, bringing the new teaching methods to their classrooms and reaching additional students (and teachers) whom the project did not target nor track.

**Teacher Feedback on IST**

“I am working as a primary teacher for 25 years already. When I was nominated to attend IST conducted by the USAID Quality Reading Project, I thought that I already had wide experience and the IST was for young teachers. However, after the training I realized that it was very interesting and appropriate for me. From the training, I learned new teaching approaches, active teaching methods, use of portfolios and formative assessment techniques, and creating balanced score cards. I also got information on community mobilization and parental involvement with schools, which was very important for me. I am using the approaches and methods I gained during my own lessons on reading and in other subjects. During the IST, I learned about using formative assessment and balanced score cards to track students’ progress, working in groups and pairs, playing learning games like ‘secret words’ and ‘hot seat,’ and similar, interesting interactive activities. These have all helped me to identify students who are struggling with reading and need more support.”

—Bekmatova Saodat, primary teacher, school #21, Khujand

***Sub-result 1.4: Strengthen systems for teacher mentoring/coaching***

The USAID Quality Reading Project introduced the concept of in-class mentoring support as a key part of ongoing teacher professional development. The project developed a one-day training as part of IST to provide school staff with the necessary knowledge and skills to carry out mentoring and coaching in schools. Save the Children’s Education Advisor for the Asia Area, Mr. Colin Alfred, led the development of the mentoring training program (and its revision) along with MOES specialists and project staff.

The Russian equivalent for the term ‘mentoring’ (*nastavnichestvo*) is regularly used in Tajikistan and is reflected in the official decree on School Methodological Unions. *Nastavnichestvo* has historically signified an approach akin to inspection. Conversely, mentoring within the USAID Quality Reading Project focused on supporting primary-grade teachers to improve their skills to teach reading and build their confidence to solve problems. Within the project’s model, mentoring plays an important role in supporting the quality of teachers’ work in their classrooms. Mentors function as agents of change and bridge gaps between the project’s IST and day-to-day classroom work. The style of mentoring that the project put in place made classroom visits and feedback less punitive, reduced the “authority” gap between mentors and teachers, and taught mentors to share positive feedback along with areas in need of improvement. This approach built trust and improved the teaching and learning process. The mentoring guide developed by the project was included in the IST so that all teachers knew what to expect during the mentoring process. Distributing this information also helped build trust and mutual understanding between the teachers and the mentors.

The extensive geographic coverage of the project created a challenge for both program staff and government partners, such as District Education Department (DED) and RTTI staff, to reach all mentors during the school year. To address this challenge, the project organized cluster meetings by grouping schools nearby each other. Cluster meetings were structured around demonstration lessons and specific agendas and provided mentors with the opportunity to share their achievements, mentoring experiences, and challenges. Project staff monitored the mentoring process and provided support on a case-by-case basis.

Observation and discussions during school visits by the USAID Quality Reading Project team and DED and TTI methodologists, indicated that school-level training would benefit greatly from additional structured training for mentors. The project decided to increase its support to Master Trainers and methodologists with additional targeted support on mentoring and coaching. The project negotiated, and the MOES and RTTI subsequently approved, the content, timing, locations, and MOES and regional TTI participation in the mentoring workshops. The USAID Quality Reading Project and the Republican Methodological Center (RMC) implemented a 3-day mentoring workshop in January 2016 to support Master Trainers, regional and district primary-grade literacy methodologists, and IST methodologists related to Cohorts 1, 2 and 3. One additional training day was added to the Cohort 4 IST program, focusing explicitly on mentoring skills. Through additional training, group work, and experience sharing, the project aimed to improve the quality and frequency of school-based mentoring.



*Saturday Methodological Union Day in Nurobod  
(Level 3 – School-level training)*

Mentorship created a feedback loop for teaching reading, allowing teachers to reflect on their week’s lessons while receiving ongoing support. To support mentors, the project, along with the city and DED personnel, conducted mentoring and monitoring visits in schools and organized district-level methodological meetings to share information and consult on implementation during the academic year. In total, 5,412 teachers, methodologists, and HMUs participated in this training.

Many DED primary education methodologists continued to provide mentoring support to USAID Quality Reading Project schools in their respective districts, in addition to their existing workload, without direct support from the project. One example is the primary education methodologists from Vakhsh who participated in IST at the national level and became National Trainers for the project. They divided their district into two zones; every Saturday they visited two school-level IST sessions and provided mentoring support to primary teachers. Their enthusiasm in providing mentoring support and strengthening the capacity of the teachers in their district was clear. They provided an example of the potential for long-term sustainability of this practice, and a model for other districts.

As another example, in February 2017, school #38 in Yovon district organized a Methodological Union Day and conducted demonstration lessons for deputy directors, HMUs, and primary teachers. Thirty-six teachers from eight neighboring schools participated in the mother-tongue lessons for students of Grades 2–4. The wide range of active teaching methods and techniques presented were based on the teachers’ needs as identified by mentors using their teacher observation checklists, and relevant topics selected from the IST modules. After the demonstration lessons, teachers discussed their progress, challenges, successes; teacher-student engagement; documentation; and the requirements of competency-based standards. They shared suggestions and recommendations on using methods and approaches for children’s



literacy education that they had learned during IST. Especially young teachers said that demonstration lessons were helpful to them to gain more practical experience.

The DEDs of Bobojan Gafurov and Khujand organized demonstration lessons at the cluster level in April and May 2017. Primary-grade teachers, especially new teachers from project and non-project schools, participated in the demonstration lessons. The DED



Cluster meeting during Methodological Union Day in Yovon

primary-education methodologists encouraged the teachers to involve parents and community members in attending the demonstration lessons to better understand how the new methods contribute to improving their children's education, thus increasing parent-teacher collaboration on student learning. Parents who attended the lessons gave positive feedback to teachers about the impact of using the approaches and methods to better involve all children and improve learning.

***Sub-result 1.5: Implement classroom-based reading diagnostics; administer national, standardized reading assessments***

In collaboration and coordination with the Tajikistan MOES, the schools eligible to receive the intervention were randomly assigned. Schools were analyzed for eligibility based on the criteria in the table below.

**Table 3: Criteria for Eligibility for Participation as Treatment School**

School type	Eligible	Comments for eligibility and/or ineligibility
Gymnasium	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pupils selected via entrance exams</li> <li>• Utilization of intensive training programs</li> <li>• Extended training days</li> <li>• Assessment level and QRP tools not appropriate for the nature of these schools</li> </ul>
Lyceum	No	
Presidential	No	
Special schools for children with disabilities	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education approach not consistent with mainstream schools</li> <li>• Schools are outside of QRP scope of work</li> </ul>
Internat (e.g., boarding schools for orphans)	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow the usual training programs</li> <li>• Only public budgetary support; no other funding sources</li> <li>• Represent the common situation of the educational environment</li> </ul>
Public schools	Yes	

The criteria, and justifications of the eligibility criteria, were discussed and agreed between the USAID Quality Reading Project and the MOES. Out of the 3,067 eligible schools in the project coverage area, 1,721 were assigned and submitted to the MOES for approval in March 2014. The number of project schools were as follows, by region: 571 in the Districts of Republican Subordination (DRS), 450 in Sughd, 644 in Khatlon, and 56 in Dushanbe. The number of schools increased to 1,807 in 2016 due to an increase in project budget and scope.

## Assessment of Reading in Early/Primary Grades

To evaluate students' reading abilities in Tajik and Russian languages, the USAID Quality Reading Project administered the EGRA in 2014 (baseline), 2016 (midline), and 2017 (endline). Short assessments, called "subtasks" assessed various reading skills, such as alphabetic knowledge, phonemic awareness, decoding, reading fluency, reading fluency, listening comprehension, and writing.

The EGRA in Tajikistan did not serve as a diagnostic tool for individual students, nor did it serve as a high-stakes examination for teachers, schools, or regions. Instead, EGRA results highlighted nationwide progress and indicated where improvement was necessary.

The USAID Quality Reading Project established a close partnership with the NTC to develop the EGRA tools, conduct the EGRA, and present the results to the MOES. Despite the partnership, the NTC was not able to fully engage in the EGRA process until the midline data collection in 2016 due to human resources and time constraints related to university entrance exam reform.

To accurately measure pupil progress cross-sectionally (i.e., a different cohort of pupils at the same schools in the same grade in different years) and longitudinally (i.e., same pupils in different years) without the tests being exposed, the project employed different sets of equated assessments in the baseline, at midline, and endline. The assessments across different years were horizontally linked through the same set of common items used for vertical equating. Sets of EGRA instruments were developed in both Tajik and Russian for Grades 1, 2, and 4 assessments. A set of instruments for Grade 3 was added for the midline in 2016 for the longitudinal study. The EGRA instruments consisted of nine subtasks (see Table 4). Instruments were presented, reviewed, and agreed upon with the MOES and its sub-institutions.

**Table 4: EGRA Subtasks in Tajikistan EGRA Subtasks**

Subtask (Grade)	Reading Skills	Pupils were asked to:
1. Letter Name Recognition (1, 2, 3)	Alphabetic knowledge	Correctly identify letter names of the alphabet in lower and upper cases (TIMED)
2. Initial Letter Sound (1, 2, 3)	Phonemic awareness	Identify the first phoneme from 10 commonly used words by isolating and sounding out just the first sound (phoneme) from a whole word read by the administrator
3. Familiar Word Recognition (1, 2, 3, 4)	Word recognition and decoding	Read aloud 40 familiar, grade-appropriate words (TIMED)
4. Nonsense Word Recognition (1, 2, 3, 4)	Letter–sound correspondence, decoding	Read aloud 40 grade-appropriate pseudo words (TIMED)
5. Oral Vocabulary (1, 2, 3, 4)	Receptive oral vocabulary	Identify 10 objects from a set of pictures after listening to a list of objects read by the administrator (based on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test format)
6. Oral Reading Fluency (1, 2, 3, 4)	Reading with fluency, accuracy, and speed	Demonstrate oral reading of grade-appropriate passage (TIMED)
7. Reading Comprehension (1, 2, 3, 4)	Comprehension of text read	Demonstrate comprehension of a passage by answering three to five oral questions, including at least one inferential question

Subtask (Grade)	Reading Skills	Pupils were asked to:
8. Listening Comprehension (1, 2, 3, 4)	Oral language comprehension, vocabulary knowledge	Demonstrate listening comprehension of grade-appropriate text by answering four or five questions
9. Dictation (1, 2, 3, 4)	Oral language comprehension, decoding and writing skills	Listen to a sentence as it is read aloud and correctly reproduce it in written form

The project and the MOES collaborated to pilot EGRA tools in 20 randomly-selected primary schools (10 Tajik and 10 Russian language-of-instruction schools) in March and April 2014. Later, the tools were integrated into three finalized sets of instruments, one for each of the three grade levels to be tested (Grades 1, 2, and 4). Because the project in Tajikistan was unable to collect Grade 2 data in 2015, to ensure the longitudinal research design, the Grade 3 EGRA was administered in 2016. The Grade 3 EGRA instruments were developed in 2016 in collaboration with the NTC and MOES experts. Inclusion of Grade 3 in the 2016 EGRA was necessary to ensure sufficient data points for the longitudinal study and to track the progress of unique students over the life of the project.

Along with the EGRA, there were multiple M&E data tools, including interview protocols for parents, teachers, librarians, and primary-grade students and a classroom observation tool. An analysis of the EGRA results can provide evidence to support improvements in ministerial and local instructional policy, teacher training programs, and classroom-level approaches to improving reading outcomes.

#### Developing Performance Level Descriptors for Primary-Grade Reading

In collaboration with the MOES, the USAID Quality Reading Project developed performance-level descriptors for primary-grade reading. This process started in Tajikistan in June 2014 with the first training, in the multi-step effort to identify, describe, discuss, present, finalize and approve reading standards. Participants of the first training workshop were language specialists, experienced teachers, representatives of educational decision-making entities and authors of the reading textbooks. The workshop successfully built consensus of all participants around four categories of reading standards.

In August 2014, a 5-day workshop was held to develop detailed definitions for performance assessment categories and define cut scores. A meeting was also held with the MOES to discuss cut scores; the MOES, after much deliberation and discussion, decided on a minus-2 standard deviation level of error for the cut scores.

The project made a presentation on interim results and the decision models, and strongly recommended a conjunctive model for the decision-making process, with the rationale that students must master all grade-level requisite knowledge and skills in each of the five reading skills (fluency, reading comprehension, listening comprehension, phonemic awareness, and dictation). The project, in consultation with USAID, returned to providing the results in the compensatory model for the midline and endline reports, because it



*Grade 4 student taking EGRA vocabulary sub-test in Dushanbe*

provided detailed information on where improvements were needed versus a combined score and it better aligned with USAID’s EGRA guidance. The baseline was revised accordingly.

As a next step, the project conducted a 4-day workshop in June 2014 for developing detailed definitions of performance-level categories for each of Grades 1–4 and Tajik and Russian. Through consensus, the participants developed definitions for each competency within each component (e.g., phonemic awareness) for each of the Grade 1–4 content standards. Table 5 shows the definitions created and agreed upon by the MOES and AOE.

**Table 5. Reading Performance-Level Categories**

Categories (Levels)	Definition
<b>Advanced</b>	The learner demonstrates excellent knowledge, skills, and abilities in all areas of reading content standards in the appropriate grade (Grade 1: 37 or more words read per minute, Grade 2: more than 52 words read per minute, Grade 3: more than 72 words read per minute, Grade 4: 92 or more words read per minute).
<b>Proficient</b>	The learner demonstrates a high level of knowledge, skills, and abilities in all areas of reading content standards in the appropriate grade (Grade 1: more than 25 words per minute; Grade 2: more than 40 words per minute; Grade 3: more than 60 words per minute; Grade 4: more than 80 words per minute).
<b>Standard</b>	The learner demonstrates the requisite knowledge, skills, and abilities within the reading content standards in the appropriate grade (Grade 1: 25 words per minute, Grade 2: 40 words per minute, Grade 3: 60 words per minute, Grade 4: 80 words reads per minute).
<b>Below Standard</b>	The learner demonstrates partial knowledge and insufficient level of skills in reading content standards in the appropriate grade (Grade 1: up to 25 words per minute; Grade 2: up to 40 words per minute; Grade 3: up to 60 words per minute; Grade 4: up to 80 words per minute).

### EGRA Implementation

The USAID Quality Reading Project implemented three rounds of the EGRA and four rounds of M&E data collection. The baseline EGRA was conducted in May 2014, the midline in May 2016, and the endline in April-May 2017. Only M&E data collection and stakeholders’ interviews were implemented during in 2015. The 2014 and 2015 data collection exercises were paper-based, whereas in 2016, the project transitioned to digital data collection with the Asus Nexus 7 tablet with Tangerine software. See Table 6 for a breakdown of students who took the EGRA each year and the number of interview participants and classroom observations during each round of data collection.

**Table 6: Sample Sizes for Data Collection by Year**

	2014 Baseline	2015 Midline	2016 Midline	2017 Final
Schools	130	66	132	132
Grade 2	2,518	1,295 (survey only)	2,501	2,524
Grade 3			2,545	
Grade 4	2,421	1,295 (survey only)	2,538	2,561
Teachers	507	258	524	499
Parents	1,312	664	1,547	1311
Classroom Observation	509	264	477	514
Librarians	154	78	163	161

In 2015, the USAID Quality Reading Project hired a Census and Survey Processing System (CSPro) programmer to support the M&E manager in the development of a multilingual data-

entry application for the various instruments (in English, Tajik, and Russian languages). The use of the CSPro application was designed to improve data quality and data-entry efficiency through the reduction of human error in manual data entry for all project data. Transitioning to digital data collection and use of CSPro improved the quality and efficiency of the data collection process, reduced human error, and limited the amount of time needed for data entry and data cleaning.

For each round of data collection, the project's M&E staff, with support from AIR's researchers based in the U.S., trained Master Trainers and supervisors. These Master Trainers, in turn, trained team leaders and test administrators. Over the life of the project, the project trained 362 test administrators and supervisors from across the education sector, including representatives from the MOES, RTTI, RMC, AOE, NTC, and regional, district and city education offices.

In 2016, USAID contracted Research Triangle Institute (RTI) to evaluate the USAID Quality Reading Project's research design and review the validity of its EGRA instruments and findings. A Senior Education Evaluation Specialist at RTI observed the midterm assessment in Dushanbe/DRS and interviewed a variety of stakeholders. RTI's findings also highlighted the high quality of the research design and EGRA administration, and recommended some changes for improving the EGRA instruments. The findings from RTI's USAID Quality Reading Project's EGRA Evaluation Report were taken into consideration for the 2017 EGRA endline administration.



*Classroom observation in a control school in Kulob*

See the *USAID Quality Reading Project Republic of Tajikistan: Final EGRA and Impact Report 2013–2017* and the *USAID Quality Reading Project (QRP): Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan: Final Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Report 2013–2017* for findings from the annual EGRA and the M&E data collection.

## Intermediate Result 2: Increased availability of reading materials

### *Sub-result 2.1: Conduct a comprehensive review of primary grade-level reading material*

The USAID Quality Reading Project staff developed a report in 2014 on availability of grade-level-appropriate books in the Tajik and Russian languages. The report focused on books that could be printed and distributed, and included information on titles, authors, and publication. The report was submitted to USAID and was updated at each phase of book distribution. In sum, the report highlighted that there is a limited number of age- and grade-level-appropriate books available in the Tajik language, while age- and grade-level-appropriate non-textbook materials are imported from the Russian Federation.



## *Sub-result 2.2: Ensure that a mix of reading materials is used by schools and communities*

The USAID Quality Reading Project worked with the MOES to increase the number of available, low-cost reading materials by 569,137 over the life of the project. Ensuring that appropriate and engaging reading materials are accessible to students is a key factor in strengthening children’s reading skills. This activity consisted of three interventions: 1) purchasing age- and grade-level-appropriate non-textbook supplementary reading materials for each project school; 2) training teachers to create their own books with low-cost materials; and 3) encouraging parents and community members to donate books, children’s newspapers, and magazines—especially for primary-grade children—to school libraries and classrooms to increase the availability of non-textbook materials for pupils. Books from various publishing companies were analyzed based on the following criteria established by the MOES:

- Quality of the book (paper size, illustration, quality of the printing)
- Grade appropriateness
- Relevance of the content
- Illustrations
- Contextual considerations
- Language
- Promotion of national values and culture

The project had three phases of book distribution. During Phase 1 in 2016, the USAID Quality Reading Project delivered 116 Tajik language storybooks and non-textbook materials to all 1,807 project-supported school libraries. During Phase 2, the project delivered 111 Russian children’s book titles donated to schools with Russian language-of-instruction classes and seven children’s encyclopedias to Tajik schools. These 111 Russian titles roughly equalized the number of books distributed to Tajik and Russian schools. Books were also provided to the 66 control schools prior to the close of the project. In total, the project donated 232,790 books to all schools associated with the project.

Realizing the critical importance of having enough appropriate and engaging reading materials accessible and available to students in the project schools, a training session on this topic was developed and incorporated into the IST workshops. It focused on enriching classrooms with a mix of reading materials. One of the ways to achieve this goal was to advise teachers on how to create additional reading resources from low-cost materials. During the IST, teachers learned how to develop appropriate reading materials for primary-grade students. From field visits, it was clear that the Master Trainers were effectively engaging the classroom teachers in their schools in creating reading materials and visual aids from low-cost materials for their classes. This was a new and exciting trend to observe.

To increase the availability of supplementary reading materials the project also engaged parents and encouraged them to donate books to their children’s school. Book donations increased after the USAID Quality Reading Project began to help organize parent-teacher meetings, in which teachers reiterated the importance of parents’ involvement in encouraging their children’s literacy. In these meetings, they used lessons from the Parents’ Guide on the “Importance of Reading with Children at Home,” a flip-book developed by the project. Parent-teacher association (PTA) meetings also helped encourage parents to make donations and support teachers in organizing classroom reading, Book Corners, and reading events. During school

visits, the project staff witnessed that these book donations by parents to the classrooms where their children study increased the available reading material in those classrooms.

Teachers used these donations to create classroom Book Corners. In most of the project schools visited, it was observed that teachers had organized Book Corners with books that students could borrow to read at home. The number of titles in these reading corners gradually increased, and many teachers created a catalog of the books in their

Book Corner to keep track of the books that students borrowed. To reinforce students' reading-to-learn skills, teachers asked students questions about the books they borrowed and read to ensure they understood the content.

As a result of these strategies, classrooms in project schools were gradually becoming print-rich environments that promoted children's interest in reading and provided increased opportunities for meaningful reading practices.



*Students share books they made themselves from low-cost materials with their classmates*

### Intermediate Result 3: Increased out-of-school reading time

#### *Sub-Result 3.1: Increase public awareness about the importance of reading as a cornerstone of education and lifelong success*

The out-of-school program began later than the IST activities under the USAID Quality Reading Project, with most out-of-school activities starting in 2016. This was due to the focus on setting up the IST and mentoring program earlier in the project, as well as delays in approvals from the MOES to begin the out-of-school activities. Once up and running, the out-of-school program included facilitating Reading Camps, supporting community and school librarians, engaging communities and parents, organizing "Reading Buddies," and organizing mobile theatre performances and media engagement through PSAs. Overall, the project held 4,851 out-of-school reading activities such as Reading Camps, Reading Buddies, mobile theatre, and one-time events like reading competitions.

The USAID Quality Reading Project worked in partnership with UNICEF and the Open Society Institute (OSI) to produce 25 child-friendly cartoons around early childhood development that included the promotion of children's literacy. The project staff contributed by subtitling the cartoons and guiding the script-development working group to include reading-related topics and imagery related to books, libraries, and children reading. The subtitles were designed for children of various literacy levels and aimed to engage them with the cartoons through reading, listening, and watching. The cartoons were designed to appeal to the whole family. The official launch of the cartoons took place in October 2016, and the cartoons were disseminated by UNICEF and OSI in 2017.

In April 2017, the USAID Quality Reading Project met with the Deputy Head of Khatlon Province, Ms. Marifat Khidirzoda, and briefed her on the project's achievements in Kulob and Qurghonteppa. At her request, the project team provided her with copies of the Parents' Guide on "The Importance of Reading with Children at Home" for distribution at meetings of the

District Women’s Committee Departments and at other community meetings. See Sub-Result 3.2 for information on the Parents’ Guide.

In total, the USAID Quality Reading Project delivered the Parents’ Guide on “The Importance of Reading with Children at Home” to all 1,807 project-supported school libraries, plus district and regional education offices and MOES sub-institutions. The project delivered a total of 35,000 copies of the Parents’ Guide to project schools for dissemination to parents through the regular teacher-parent meetings. See Sub-IR 3.2 for more information on the Parents’ Guide on “The Importance of Reading with Children at Home.”

#### Related Public-Private Partnerships

The USAID Quality Reading Project in Khatlon and DRS partnered with the Organization of Khatlon Women’s Groups (OKWGs), with over 6,500 members who work in 120 villages in 17 districts. The partnership engaged these groups in promoting the idea of women reading with their children at home, and more generally the family’s role in their children’s education. The OKWGs conducted workshops and meetings for 42 women’s groups in 2017 on the importance of children’s education and use of the Parents’ Guide on the “Importance of Reading with Children in the Family.” This guide also promoted Tajikistan’s law on the “Responsibility of Parents in the Education of their Children.”

Many Tajik men go to work in Russia, so there is a significant number of female-headed households in which the women must provide income, take care of their children’s education, as well as manage all the household affairs. In rural communities, women do a large share of the agricultural work. Despite the demands on their time and energy, one topic they frequently raise in the women’s group meetings is the importance of their children’s education, and of reading with their children at home.

Librarians and teachers from project schools have therefore involved the OKWGs in the parents’ meetings and events at schools. The USAID Quality Reading Project, together with the OKWGs, also invited parents, community members, and women’s groups to participate in out-of-school activities and awareness-raising events. The OKWGs encouraged parents and community members to collaborate with schools. They promoted the family as the environment in which a child’s interest in reading and love for books is formed and nurtured. Close cooperation among the family, schools, and libraries was therefore the most effective way of supporting children’s literacy development. The OKWGs involved parents and community members in the celebration of International Book Day, reading competitions, Teachers Days, and “Storytellers for Children During Break” activities, all of which contributed to increasing children’s interest in reading.

The USAID Quality Reading Project worked with the Aga Khan Foundation and the European Union to share best practices for school-level activities as well as to strengthen policy and education assessment. The project worked with the Aga Khan Foundation on public engagement events such as Book Day and Teacher’s Day and to develop and disseminate a Library Guide for primary schools. The Aga Khan Foundation and



*Grade 4 students present reading materials they developed during the Teacher’s Day Celebration*



European Union representatives participated in EGRA item development and capacity-building workshops. These partnerships helped to ensure unified voices and activities around reading and to reduce duplication.

### Reading Buddies

In almost all primary-grade classrooms, the number of students averages 35 to 40 per class. Therefore, it is difficult for one teacher to work individually with the students who fall behind the reading standards. During IST and field visits, teachers were encouraged to use the “Reading Buddies” approach, in which the teachers involve older students to work with younger students who needed more support with reading. For this purpose, teachers in many project schools involved students from Grades 8, 9, and 10 as Reading Buddies for the primary students on a 1:1 ratio. Students who needed more support were identified based on the balanced score card reading indicators. The practice was well received by teachers as it was in place during the Soviet period but since fell into disuse. To provide tips (especially for younger teachers) on engaging Reading Buddies and criteria for choosing the Reading Buddies, the USAID Quality Reading Project developed the “Reading Buddies Guide”. The Guide was incorporated into the IST for Master Trainers from Cohort 3 onward, and was shared at school-level IST with other teachers. For Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 Master Trainers, this session was conducted during the mentoring trainings. The Reading Buddies approach proved valuable in supporting students who were struggling with basic literacy and empowered older students to help younger students (and their siblings) to excel in their education.



*Reading Buddy from an upper grade reads a story to younger students from a storybook made with low cost materials*

During monitoring visits to project schools, the Reading Buddies activities continued without direct support from project staff and in line with the plans the teachers developed themselves. Reading Buddies were also able to support underperforming students and children with disabilities who had less access to education and reading instruction. For example, when primary-grade teachers organized PTA meetings, the Reading Buddies helped them by relaying information to parents about the meetings. In addition, the teachers and Reading Buddies developed new plans and visited children with disabilities who were unable to attend school to conduct reading activities with them during the summer vacation period. This way, children with disabilities were involved in an adapted summer Reading Camp-style program.

### Campaign on Reading at Home and in the Community

The USAID Quality Reading Project developed a variety of large-scale public campaign products to promote a culture of reading. Promotional calendars and videos about the role of reading at home were distributed by the USAID Quality Reading Project. These public awareness materials were so well appreciated by representatives at the MOES that they were shared with the Minister of Education, who lauded their quality.

The central component of the campaign was six PSAs on reading that aired on national television. The six PSA videos were based on the messages in the Parents' Guide on "The Importance of Reading with Children at Home" and include content on the following:

1. **Family Reading:** The critical role of the family in setting aside time for children to read, together or separately.
2. **The Children's Schedule:** Parents should make time to talk with their children daily about school, reading, and learning.
3. **Lead the Way:** Because children naturally imitate their parents, it's important that parents set a good example for their children in terms of inculcating a love for reading.
4. **The Best Gift:** There are many gifts we can give our children, but the best gift is the gift of books.
5. **Together Is Better:** Children do not have to read alone; they can read in groups of friends and peers.
6. **Sweet Dreams:** Reading to a child before bed broadens a child's vocabulary and helps the child relax before sleep.

These public-awareness materials were approved by the MOES, and the Minister instructed the Committee of Television and Radio to broadcast the PSAs on Television Tojikiston, TV Safina, and the Children's Television Bahoriston.

### *Sub-Result 3.2: Implement out-of-school reading activities*

#### Parents/Family Program



*Parents' Guide developed by QRP*

To increase the number of parents and other adults reading non-textbook materials to students at home, a Parents' Guide on "The Importance of Reading with Children at Home" was developed by the USAID Quality Reading Project team with the support of a well-known writer of children's books, Mr. Azizi Aziz. The Parents' Guide was approved for printing and dissemination by the MOES. The Head of the Primary and Secondary Education Department, Mr. Aliev Abdujabbor, emphasized

that this guide made a tangible contribution in fostering the involvement of parents in their children's at-home reading and other studies.

The USAID Quality Reading Project conducted Parents/Family Program trainings for educators and PTA members in November and December 2016. The Parents' Guide on "The Importance of Reading with Children at Home" was disseminated during these trainings. Teachers used the guide to create awareness among parents and the community about the importance of reading with children in the family, and to involve parents and other caregivers in supporting the reading and learning of their children at home. Teachers from project schools conducted a parents' meeting at the school level, and copies of the Parents' Guide were presented to community members and parents.

One of the PTA members who participated in the Parents/Family Program training, Ms. Gulchehra Majidzoda, said: "I participated in the 2 days of Parents/Family Program Training and gained new knowledge on involving parents to work with children at home. I liked the

points on how to practice key reading skills such as vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension, as well as foundational skills like letter and sound recognition. In addition to that, it engages parents and students to visit local libraries and encourage students to read non-textbook materials that increase their love for reading and learning in general.” Almost 3,000 educators and PTA members participated in the Parents/Family Program trainings.

In February 2017, the USAID Quality Reading Project, together with DEDs, conducted a reading awareness campaign in Shohin district. Reading Buddies and PTA members distributed 410 message cards from the Parents’ Guide on “The Importance of Reading with Children at Home.” The Head of the Education Department instructed his deputy to conduct such events with the collaboration of the project and PTAs in additional district sites.

“Raising awareness about reading with our community members, particularly parents as they have the greatest responsibility to educate their children, is a timely and very appropriate intervention.”

—Rozik Sodikov, Head, Shohin Education Department

In April 2017, the USAID Quality Reading Project and DEDs conducted a reading awareness campaign in Panjakent, Istaravshan, and Konibodom districts of Sughd province and the Kulob, Muminobod, Kabodiyon, and Panj districts of Khatlon province. Reading Buddies and PTA members distributed more than 1,200 message cards from the Parents’ Guide. Following the campaign, the Head of the Sughd Regional Education Department instructed his deputy to also conduct similar events, with the collaboration of the project and PTAs, in additional sites across the districts. The same activities were conducted in other non-target schools without direct project support.

#### Reading Camp and Mobile Puppet Theater

The USAID Quality Reading Project organized summer Reading Camps and mobile puppet theaters. The aim of these activities was to engage students outside the formal classroom setting and promote reading for fun.

The project developed the Reading Camp Guide, which was approved by the MOES and incorporated into the existing training for summer school camps for primary grades. In May 2016, the project conducted Reading Camp trainings based on the Reading Camp Guide for educators. The trainings for summer Reading Camps followed a cascade model similar to the one used for the IST. Five-day trainings for 160 participants (one participant per school) were held in Zarafshon, Sughd, Dushanbe, Kulob, and Qurghonteppa. Participants received a copy of the Reading Camp Guide, supplementary reading materials, and stationery for their schools. The project then supported those individuals in training other teachers and school librarians, based on the Reading Camp Guide.

The Reading Camp methodology and content were so well received by MOES that in June 2016, the Dushanbe TTI asked the USAID Quality Reading Project to organize a training for educators from non-project schools in Dushanbe. Accordingly, project trainers conducted the Reading Camp training for 21 educators at the Dushanbe TTI. Note that approval of the out-of-school program was delayed until late 2015, which resulted in the project piloting the out-of-school program in 2015 and rolling it out in the summer of 2016.

Reading camps engaged primary-grade pupils in reading activities for 30 minutes to 2 hours each day, for 14 days. Not all schools in Tajikistan were authorized to host summer camps, so the rollout of Reading Camps was not as pervasive as planned. The USAID Quality Reading

Project—in close collaboration with the MOES—conducted summer Reading Camps in June and July 2016 for pupils in Grades 1–4 in 80 project schools, with 2,736 children participating. Reading Camps used a structured approach to create a fun, informal learning environment in which children practiced key reading skills such as vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension, as well as foundational skills such as letter and sound recognition.



*Students participating in Reading Camps at School 2 in Shamsiddin Shohin and School 21 in Shahrinav.*

In collaboration with the Ministry of Culture, three puppet theatres, and the MOES, the project organized mobile theater and puppet shows for children in project school communities that conveyed different key messages on reading. The goal of the mobile puppet theater was to encourage pupils to visit school/local libraries, and to read to increase their reading fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and general knowledge. The project team developed a script, with the Ministry of Culture, on the importance of reading. In total, 128 mobile puppet theater performances were organized to engage children in the fun of reading. These performances engaged children in reading in fun, non-traditional settings.

#### Community/School Librarians

The USAID Quality Reading Project conducted nine 1-day trainings for school librarians in May 2016 at the TTIs in Dushanbe and Sughd based on the librarian training module developed in close collaboration with the Aga Khan Foundation/USAID Family Reading Project. The 930 participants of this training included librarians and methodologists from Zarafshon, Sughd, Dushanbe, and DRS. The heads and deputies of the TTIs were actively involved in the training process, which was



*DED Methodologist Safarmamad Alimardonov helped facilitate a QRP-organized librarian training in Qurghonteppe.*

facilitated by the project's National Trainers, including methodologists from the DEDs and TTIs. The trainings helped librarians to review book checkout and maintenance techniques, explore how they might make books more accessible to children, create child-friendly corners in their libraries, begin planning to conduct events on reading, and institute traveling libraries for children who are unable to come to the library to check out books. The trainings also encouraged librarians to involve and collaborate with community members and parents to encourage children to read storybooks at home.



One example of school-community engagement, school #3 in Panjakent, parents donated books to the classrooms in which their children are studying. Teachers used the donated books to create or expand their classroom Book Corners. In April 2016 the primary-grade teachers, school librarian, and children organized an awareness raising campaign with the theme “A book is a priceless treasure” for community members, parents, and children. The school librarian organized an exhibition of the books donated by the project and the homemade books donated by children and parents. The objectives of the exhibition were to attract parents’ attention to the school library and encourage children to read at home during the holidays. Children prepared a display with messages on “The Importance of Reading with Children at Home,” and the school librarian announced that the school had received children’s books from the USAID Quality Reading Project. A total of 210 participants attended the awareness raising event.

#### **Librarian Training Encourages Community Engagement**

This training is helping me on how to check-in and out books, explore how to make books more accessible to children, create child-friendly corners in the library, begin planning exciting events on reading, and institute traveling libraries for children who are unable to come to the library to check out books. Now, I encourage children to involve their parents in the school library and I have close collaboration with community members and parents to encourage children to read storybooks at home.

—Saidov Nazarali, Librarian, school #1, Jaihun

#### **Engaging Children with Disabilities**

The importance of reading and access to books applies to all children, not just children attending school. Some children with disabilities are unable to attend classes because of poor infrastructure, such as lack of access ramps or disability-friendly toilets, or because of distance and transportation issues. For these reasons, children with disabilities need to be accompanied to school. However, their parents and relatives cannot afford the time to take them to school every day. Children’s access to education is, in some cases, also constrained by the schools’ lack of understanding about their needs. The efforts of the school librarians, teachers, and Reading Buddies was therefore critical to helping these children improve their reading and writing skills and in reducing exclusion, discrimination, and barriers to learning and participation. The school librarians and Reading Buddies involved children with disabilities in the reading competitions at the school and district levels. They also encouraged parents and community members to come to schools during their free time. The project-school librarians developed schedules for parents’ visits to their school and prepared stories for them to read and discuss with the children, including the children with disabilities who attend these school events with their parents and family members.

One family who received reading support for their disabled child lived in Navruz village, Farkhor district, Kulob region. Ms. Ubaidova Bozorgul has six children, one of whom, Ms. Manonova Marhabo, had a disability and was not able to attend school. Ms. Zulfiya Goibova was the school librarian for many years, so she knew everyone in the village. She prepared a list of families who had children with disabilities that prevented them



*Zulfiya Goibova reading with Manonova Marhabo who is unable to attend school*

from attending school or visiting the library. She then developed a schedule of home visits for those children. She worked closely with Reading Buddies to reach out to these children. The Reading Buddies and school librarian visited families with disabled children and worked with these children during the winter holidays. The Reading Buddies told stories, read books with the children, and played literacy games. Ms. Ubaidulloeva Bozorgul said that after the visit from the librarian and Reading Buddies, she realized that she also should support Manonova Marhabo in reading. She also said that when she works with her daughter, the child says that reading stories with Reading Buddies is more fun, so she waits impatiently for the next visit of the Reading Buddies.

#### Intermediate Result 4: Increased government support to improve reading

##### *Sub-result 4.1: Increase dialogue about the existing environment for reading*

Throughout the years, the USAID Quality Reading Project engaged the MOES and its sub-institutions on the importance of reading in improving overall learning outcomes, motivating teachers and students, and engaging the community.

Project staff worked at all levels to strengthen collaboration and cooperation with the MOES and its sub-institutions on all aspects related to the project and to primary-grade reading in general. Regular meetings were conducted with the primary education specialists of MOES, AOE, RTTI, TTIs, REDs, DEDs and the Methodological Training Center to raise awareness of the importance of primary-grade reading. The project also facilitated regular visits by senior education officials to training events, workshops, cluster meetings, and site visits to project-supported schools so they could experience firsthand how the new teaching practices and out-of-school activities are implemented. The project staff worked with the RMC, RTTI, and AOE to develop a variety of workshops to discuss enhanced training methodologies, and ensured further engagement and ownership of project activities by the various MOES sub-institutions, with a view to ensuring sustainability of project accomplishments.



*Rasht DED Primary Methodologist talking about the IST manual at a mentoring workshop in Qurghonteppea*

One such initiative to increase the dialogue and share experiences were joint USAID Quality Reading Project and RTTI workshops on reading methods for primary-education methodologists from all the project districts. Two workshops were held in Sughd and Qurghonteppea in November 2015. A main objective of the workshop was to strengthen collaboration with the key stakeholder of MOES on teacher training. A second objective was to create a platform in which primary-education methodologists from all the districts could share and exchange their experiences with their colleagues.

Collaboration with the RMC was critical to ensuring ongoing methodological support for DED, RED, and city education methodologists. Several Primary Education Specialists of the RMC worked as National Trainers for IST; their roles included facilitating the IST and Mentoring Trainings in January 2016. In addition, monitors from the RMC observed the trainings and provided comments and feedback. During a meeting in February 2016, RMC Director Mr.

Shermahmad Yormahmadov said that RMC monitors gave high marks to the USAID Quality Reading Project trainings. In partnership with the RMC, the project subsequently co-hosted a set of mentoring and Methodological Union-strengthening workshops during 2016.

The USAID Quality Reading Project Education Manager and regional Education Coordinators attended meetings with the heads of regional TTIs of Sughd, Kulob, Qurghonteppa, and Dushanbe to enlist their cooperation with mentoring activities in schools. The idea was supported, and the directors of these regional TTIs agreed to mobilize their primary-education methodologists to that end. Collaboration between the project and MOES and its affiliates increased and grew stronger over the life of the project. The project team met on a regular basis with MOES primary-education specialists at all the education institutions to emphasize the importance of primary-grade reading.

As mentioned in Sub-Result 3.2, the USAID Quality Reading Project also worked very closely with Ministry of Culture on the development of scripts for mobile puppet theater. The goal of the puppet mobile theater was to engage students to visit school and local libraries and read more to increase their reading fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and general knowledge. Along with primary grade students, parents and members of women’s groups also came to the puppet show with their small children and received key messages through the performance. Lukhtak National Puppet Theater requested permission to continue using the reading scripts for future performances, and the project readily agreed.

Also, as highlighted in Sub-result 3.2, PSAs on the role of reading at home developed by the USAID Quality Reading Project were well received by MOES, particularly by the Minister of Education. The MOES approved them for airing through national TV Safina, and Children’s TV Bahoriston. In October 2016, the television stations aired the six PSAs twice a day, free of charge. And TV Bahoriston continued airing the PSAs into 2017 during unprogrammed air time. The six PSA messages supported the President of Tajikistan’s commitment to parents taking a leadership role in educating the future generations. Teachers, communities, and the MOES widely appreciated the PSAs. The Head of the Primary and Secondary Education Department of MOES, Mr. Aliev Abdujabbor mentioned that because of the quality and content of the PSAs, he often heard people talking about how the PSAs emphasize the importance of reading outside of school. He also said that television is the only media with such a wide reach, and that through such videos, we can increase the culture of reading in families and support children’s learning.

#### *Sub-result 4.2: Increase capacity to use reading assessment results*

The USAID Quality Reading Project organized a series of capacity building workshop for the staff from the NTCs of the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan with the purpose of transferring knowledge on EGRA, data processing, best practices, and instrument development between 2014 and 2017. The first round of workshops was organized by Mr. Abdullah Ferdous, PhD, who worked with the NTCs on assessment item



*Mr. Todd Drummond, PhD working with the KR and TJ NTC on psychometric data analysis*

development, benchmarking, and cut scores. Starting in 2016, Mr. Todd Drummond, PhD, led workshops on statistical and psychometric analysis. The workshops moved back and forth between Dushanbe and Bishkek to allow for the sharing of experience between NTC staff.

Overall, the MOES and the NTC reviewed and MOES approved the EGRA instruments three times: before baseline 2014, midline 2016, and final endline 2017. The process of review and approval made the MOES and the NTC very familiar with the EGRA and M&E instruments and created interest in results and finding from assessments.

The USAID Quality Reading Project presented the baseline EGRA results in December 2014, midline in January 2017 and summary endline results in September 2017 at public events with the MOES, USAID, the US Embassy, and other education and donor stakeholders.

Specialists of the MOES and its sub-institutions as well as NTC gained knowledge of theory and practical implementation of EGRA. Staff working for MOES and its sub-institutions and NTC were involved as supervisors and test administrators, and trained by the project to conduct the EGRA. Representatives from RTTI, RMC, and NTC were trained on conducting assessments starting from item development, piloting, to the analysis of psychometric data.

It was observed that the understanding and utilization of results of assessments increased among government officials. The Director of the NTC stated that his center would initiate an analysis of psychometrics data they collect during nationwide University Entrance Exams and share results with MOES, regional, and district authorities. The analysis can help officials to focus on weaknesses and make informed decisions for education reform.

Although the MOES was new to assessment, particularly national sample-based assessments, the project hopes that it laid the groundwork for the MOES to use educational assessments as the basis for data for decision making to guide the education reform process.

#### *Sub-result 4.3: Strengthen the enabling environment to support improved reading instruction reform*

Sub-result 4.1 and Sub-result 4.3 are directly linked and often self-reinforcing, as increasing public dialogue and strengthening the enabling environment go hand-in-hand. Over the life of the project, through monitoring visits, REDs and DEDs found the USAID Quality Reading Project schools work on primary education successful in terms of improving reading through various activities around vocabulary, language issues, letter knowledge, phonemic awareness, and comprehension. Often the MOES would select project schools as demonstration schools for airing open lessons on television so that non-project schools and the community were made aware of the activities and best practices happening in project-supported schools and classrooms. For example, the Khatlon RED selected one of the project school, filmed one of the lessons of the project's Master Trainers, and broadcasted the session on local Khatlon TV.

In addition, the project indirectly reached other non-project schools, gymnasiums, and lyceums. The Qurganteppa City Education Department requested to conduct a training based on the USAID Quality Reading Project IST in their schools with their own funds. They initiated and convened a conference on "Quality Reading" for primary school teachers in 2015. The conference was held at the school #10, Qurganteppa District with 64 primary teachers from 13 schools of Qurganteppa, six primary teachers from Lyceum Oriyono, one primary teacher from J. Rumi district, and one journalist from Khatlon Regional television.



As highlighted in Intermediate Result 1, the USAID Quality Reading Project worked closely with the MOES and GPE-4 on developing the Tajik primary-grade standards and related IST program. The project also completed a research study on the alignment and gaps among the proposed Grades 1–4 Tajik mother-tongue language standards, the project’s IST materials, and the available textbooks. As the MOES was not planning to revise the textbooks until 2020 at the earliest, the project staff provided recommendations to the MOES and GPE-4 on possible project support measures to address gaps in classroom materials. This process provided contextually-based recommendations that allow teachers to continue using existing teaching materials, textbooks and curriculum, while implementing the new competency-based standards approach until new textbooks and materials are ready after 2020. A literacy specialist at AIR, Ms. Pooja Nakamura, PhD worked with representatives from GPE-4 and the MOES to review the available materials and proposed standards. She also held a focus group with twenty GPE-4 pilot school trained teachers to better understand the on-the-ground implications for Tajik classrooms of the new draft standards as they related to the existing materials. The final report, “Teaching and Learning Materials in Tajikistan: How they align with Reading Research” was shared with the MOES and GPE-4 and was presented at the RMC workshops in 2017 and distributed the report in Tajik and English at the End of Project event in September 2017.

The project held regular meetings at the national, regional, and district levels to ensure active engagement from key stakeholders, answer questions about project activities and to plan for training and mentoring support throughout the life of the project. The Head of the Primary and Secondary Education Department Mr. Aliev Abdujabbor, RTTI Rector Mr. Qurbonzoda, RMC Director Mr. Shermahmad Yormahmadov, and Deputy Minister Ms. Latofat Naziri worked closely with the project staff through the entire period of performance. One particularly important meeting on June 2, 2017 was held between the USAID Quality Reading Project and the Deputy Minister where participants discussed the sustainability and replication of the project activities. Deputy Minister Ms. Latofat Naziri noted that after the project ends, the MOES committed to continuing the following activities with their own resources:

1. Saturday Methodological Union Days at school and cluster-levels
2. Use of formative assessment scorecards to analyze children’s reading skills
3. Use of the IST modules in lesson planning
4. Use of the lesson observation checklist
5. Out-of-school reading activities

### Cluster Meetings

Cluster meetings, started under IR 1 and related to IST and mentoring, became a major component for strengthening the enabling environment for reading. Project schools implemented the Saturday trainings based on the schedule developed at sub-district level (“cluster”). To share learning from the IST and support and work with one another, teachers took turns conducting monthly demonstration lessons for colleagues from project schools in their cluster. In the cluster meetings, teachers conducted sessions based



*Cluster meeting discussion after Mobile Theatre in Kulob*

on their needs and used IST modules as methodological guides for these sessions. Teachers in project schools took turns in delivering demonstration lessons during the cluster meetings. Although organized under the direction of the USAID Quality Reading Project, schools outside of the program but within the geographic cluster participated. This integration ensured all Tajik primary teachers gained access to the enhanced teaching methods related to reading.

#### High-level visits to USAID Quality Reading Project schools

Over the life of the project, there were a variety of high level visits from USAID, the U.S. Embassy, U.S. Department of State, UNICEF, the World Food Programme, and the European Union. These visits helped to highlight the strong partnerships between the project, the MOES, the donor community, and the U.S. government. Through these visits, the USAID Quality Reading Project demonstrated the work undertaken in partnership with the MOES. The visits allowed the teachers and students to highlight the work they were doing and the progress they were making around reading and child-centered learning.

The project team was pleased to show the progress of schools in rural Rasht on two separate visits by these various high-level delegations.

In November 2016, the US Ambassador to Tajikistan Ms. Elisabeth Millard, USAID Mission Director Ms. Kate Crawford, UNICEF Representative in Tajikistan Ms. Lucia Elmi, World Food Programme Tajikistan Country Director Mr. Paolo Mattei, and Deputy of the Primary Education Department of MOES Mr. Qutbidin Muhiddinov visited school #1 of Gharm in Rasht Valley. The head of the DED, the school director, primary teachers, and the USAID Quality Reading Project team received the delegation. One of the discussion points between the delegation and primary school teachers was the project's contribution to their school and how they benefited from it.



*US Ambassador Elisabeth Millard and USAID Country Director Kate Crawford visiting with Grade 4 students at Gharm School #1*

In May 2017, the United States Ambassador to Tajikistan, Ms. Elisabeth Millard, together with Mr. Daniel Rosenblum, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Central Asia, and Ms. Latofat Naziri, Deputy Minister of Education and Science, visited school #2, Shul village, Rasht valley. The Head of the DED, the school director, primary-grade teachers and the USAID Quality Reading Project received the delegation. One of the discussion points between the delegation and the primary school teachers was the project's contribution to their school and how they benefited from it. Another key topic was strengthening the quality and usability of the school libraries. Even with the donation of books, the school libraries are not particularly child-friendly.

During these visits, teachers expressed their gratitude to the U.S. government for its support to their schools through such projects. They mentioned that they were exposed to new teaching methods and pedagogy for improving their students' reading and learning skills. The visits highlighted the importance of education as well as the strength of the partnership supported by USAID.

## Comparative and International Education Society Conference

Participation in the 2015 and 2017 annual conferences for the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) allowed the USAID Quality Reading Project staff and related MOES stakeholders to attend presentations, meetings, and events on reading, standards, and evaluation from around the world. Lessons learned from this conference and meetings with the AIR reading, standards, and assessment technical experts were incorporated into project activities and within the MOES in each country.

### *CIES 2015*

The USAID Quality Reading Project was pleased to present the project's standards and assessment strategy at the CIES Conference in Washington, DC in March 2015. Ms. Baktygul Shamshidinova from the Kyrgyz NTC and Ms. Saule Khamzina from the USAID Quality Reading Project Kyrgyz Republic presented the results from the 2014 EGRA baseline in the Kyrgyz Republic. Mr. Aliev Abdujabbor, Director Pre-Primary and Secondary Education represented the Tajikistan MOES and co-presented with Mr. Fayziddin Niyozov, Education Advisor for the USAID Quality Reading Project Tajikistan, on the competency-based standards setting and assessment process undertaken in Tajikistan. Mr. Abdullah Ferdous, PhD, opened the panel with a presentation on standards setting within USAID's reading framework and its use in the USAID Quality Reading Project. Participation in the conference allowed project staff and related Ministry stakeholders to attend presentations, meetings, and events on reading, standards, and evaluation.

### *CIES 2017*

To continue the information sharing over the life of the project, the USAID Quality Reading Project participated in four panels at the CIES Conference held in Atlanta, Georgia, USA in March 2017. The project sponsored one participant from Tajikistan. Initially four participants from Tajikistan were scheduled to attend, but the President's Chamber did not approve the two MOES and NTC representatives' international travel. The fourth person scheduled to attend was the Project Education Program Manager, but unfortunately an emergency family issue prevented him from travelling. Mr. Suhrob Aminov, Tajikistan M&E Manager, presented on behalf of the USAID Quality Reading Project Tajikistan and the Tajik MOES. He shared the Tajik perspective on two panels.

1. *USAID Quality Reading Project in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan: Local Perspectives on a Large-Scale Intervention.* Chinara Kurbanova, MOES Kyrgyzstan, Baktygul Shamshidinova, NTC Kyrgyzstan, and Suhrob Aminov, USAID Quality Reading Project M&E Manager, Tajikistan presented USAID Quality Reading Project interventions and results from the perspective of the Ministry of Education and Science. Suhrob Aminov stepped in to present the Project's interventions for Tajikistan because the Tajikistan MOES participants were not able to attend.
2. *Research using EGRA in Central Asia: Research Innovation under The Quality Reading Project in the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan.* Saule Khamzina, Suhrob Aminov, and AIR Research Specialist Amy Todd presented 2016 mid-term EGRA and impact data.

While in Atlanta, AIR organized a half-day field trip to Woodland Elementary School for the USAID Quality Reading Project sponsored delegation. The school's Media & Educational Tech Instructor, showed the group around the school. The group visited a couple of classrooms, the library, and a resource room. There was lively discussion around leveling of the books, out-of-class reading activities, and support to classroom teaching of reading.



*KR and TJ delegation at Woodland Elementary School, Woodland, Georgia, USA*

### Partnerships

The USAID Quality Reading Project built strong partnership ties with key government institutions at the national and regional levels. At the national MOES and its sub-institutions and Ministry of Culture and donors like UNICEF and the Aga Khan Foundation. At the regional level DEDs/REDs were strategic partners for project implementation, and at the local level with parent's groups and local projects. The project conducted different components in cooperation with these organizations. Specifically, UNICEF and Aga Khan were key partners to celebrate major education events like Book Day and Teacher's Day, and to develop the Library Guide, and to collaborate on the cartoons. By working with Maorif (a government-sponsored publishing house), the American Corners, and 'Future English Leaders in Isfara' (FELI), the project put early grade reading on the agenda of different stakeholders.

### Presentations at American Corners on the importance of reading

Rasht Valley, M&E Coordinator Ms. Zhola Davlatmandova hosted a session on the *Importance of Reading* the Gharm American Corner and the Qurghonteppa American Corner during the final year of the project. During the 1-hour presentations about the importance of reading, several topics were discussed with the students:

- Reading develops important language skills: Whether it is books, magazines, or e-books, reading can help cement language skills.
- Exposure to language helps a child to further develop their vocabulary in ways that every day conversation cannot.
- Even at early ages when a child does not understand everything they read, they are able to come to conclusions about new words from the context of material.
- Reading opens up the world! Very few of us are world travelers and even those who are can only see so many places in one's lifetime. Being able to read opens the world up to a child. They can learn about different cultures, histories, and societies. It shows life in a different way, both real and imagined. It can inform about the past, present, and future.





*M&E Coordinator Zhola Davlatmandova presenting at Gharm (left) and Qurghonteppa (right) American Corners on the importance of reading*

The presentations also included a screening of several brief videos about the importance of reading that included students from different countries describing their own experiences with reading. The videos highlighted that reading can enhance social skills. This may sound like a contradiction since much of a person’s reading is done alone, but early in life, a child’s reading consists of being read to or going to “story time”. This makes books and reading something to be shared. It builds a relationship with reading. As time goes on and a person does more individual reading it can become a conversation piece much like a popular television show. A person who has just read a great book wants to share the story with someone else. In addition, being someone who is “well read” is a positive attribute in society as it often implies increased intelligence, being better cultured, and having a more interesting background for debates and conversations.

#### Workshop for Future English Language Teachers

The USAID Quality Reading Project partnered with the U.S. Embassy’s Innovation Fund provider, the Tajik NGO Jahoni Boz, to organize a 4-day workshop for ‘Future English Leaders in Isfara’ from April 19-22, 2017. The aim of the workshop was to help prepare 30 female high school students for entry to the Tajik State Pedagogical University to train as English language teachers. The project’s Education Manager, Mr. Sherali Saidoshurov, presented some of the IST approaches, child-centered methods, and explained to the participants in English how these active teaching methods are used with children in the classroom. The workshop participants liked the active teaching methods such as group and pair work, learning games for new vocabulary, and the use of formative assessment during lessons. The Tajik NGO Jahoni Boz covered all costs.



*Sherali Saidoshurov, QRP Education Manager, working with FELI students in Isfara*

### International Recognition for Tajik Children’s Book

On June 15, 2017, the second Eurasian International Book Fair, "Eurasian Book Fair - 2017"<sup>2</sup> opened in Astana, Kazakhstan. More than 90 exhibitors and book distributors from over 25 countries, presented at the exhibition.<sup>3</sup> On a particularly encouraging note, a Tajik book was awarded a medal, for the first time in the history of book publishing in Tajikistan. The USAID Quality Reading Project had purchased this book, titled "*Afsonahoi hulks Tojik*" ("Tajik Folk Tales") and printed by a government-supported publishing house, ‘Maorif’, for the 1,807 project schools. This support allowed ‘Maorif’ to submit this title for consideration at the Eurasian International Book Fair. It was awarded a special medal in the category of best children's books, as well as a bronze medal for illustration and decoration. ‘Maorif’ representatives expressed gratitude to the USAID Quality Reading Project for its support and collaboration on printing and for making this book available to all project school libraries.

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<sup>2</sup> See <http://eurasbook.com/eng-index.html>

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.publicnow.com/view/0C1478865126AB25F99D6129591E162D87BE47A4?2017-06-19-06:30:06+01:00-xxx3490>

## IV. Implementation Challenges and Lessons Learned

### Approval processes

The main challenge that the project team faced since project launch was the recurring delays with the approval process of the USAID Quality Reading Project activities and materials by the MOES and its sub-institutions. The project organized regular meetings with various departments of the MOES and its sub-institutions to overcome the challenges. This particularly proved to be a challenge regarding Tajik language materials where different sub-institutions have different perspectives on the structure of Tajik language. Also, as the MOES phased out its direct support to Russian language schools with the Russian language schools using materials developed by the Russian Federation, approval and support for Russian language activities was even further delayed. This change in MOES strategy caused delays related to approval of the USAID Quality Reading Project's Russian IST and the Russian language standards. GPE-4 was not able to adapt the Russian language standards for primary grades, as the MOES could not directly support Russian language as mother-tongue schools. As guided by the contract with USAID, the project continued to engage with the MOES and the GPE-4 to ensure consistent support to Russian language schools and quality literacy instruction for all 1,807 target schools. Constant delays in receiving approvals from the MOES or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (as their approval was required for internationally-funded project activities) regularly put the project behind schedule in implementing activities. Project staff worked actively with the MOES to plan to reduce the delays in approval but coordination with the MOES and its sub-institutions was a complex process.

The USAID Quality Reading Project worked to strengthen its relationship with the RTTI to enhance support to IST and out-of-school activities and with the RMC to transfer ownership of mentoring to RMC methodologists. Through this process, the project staff learned that there is a need to address and negotiate the issues with all the MOES sub-institutions and specialists on a regular basis until an agreement is reached and the process can move forward. Site visits from MOES, RTTI, RMC, and AOE staff to trainings and activities helped them to understand the value of the project's work to improve reading and learning outcomes, and as such improved coordination with government institutions. Due to the positive collaboration, constant dialogue, presentations, and relationships with the MOES and its sub-institutions, these delays dramatically reduced as the project progressed.

However, the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan regularly instituted policies and laws that influenced the implementation relationship. In late 2016, the President's Chamber implemented a requirement that they must approve all events, activities, and participation of international donors, governments, and NGOs. This brought several project activities to a halt. This added a layer of effort and time involved in obtaining approval (2-3 months) causing considerable delays and sometimes cancelations. Despite the delivery of "DipNotes" from USAID with supporting documentation, the project did not receive approval for the Book Day book distribution event in Hissor or for MOES and NTC staff to attend CIES in 2017. The project staff continued to work with the MOES, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the U.S. Embassy to move approvals forward. At times, the project was able to negotiate work-around solutions. For example, to avoid seeking approval from the President's Chamber, for a project sponsored mentoring workshop in May 2017, the Minister of Education issued an order for the RMC to host the mentoring workshop with support from the USAID Quality Reading Project.

This workshop then officially became Tajik led, not USAID led. This work-around was only possible because of the years of trust built between the MOES and the project.

### Competency-based Standards for Reading

The MOES, GPE-4, and the USAID Quality Reading Project closely collaborated on the revision of the competency-based standards for reading in Tajik language. There were ongoing discussions on the structure and content of the standards documents. The MOES rolled out the training for primary-grade, competency-based standards including Tajik Mother Tongue in August 2016 to all teachers across Tajikistan. The MOES requested and received a support from the USAID Quality Reading Project and other donors to cover the costs of the printing and the trainings. Through the Donor Coordinating Committee - Education Working Group, the MOES was informed of concerns over the quality and implementation of the training process and that no donor funds would be available. Regardless, the MOES proceeded with the competency-based standards training in August 2016. Unofficial feedback from schools indicated that these trainings were complicated; teachers expressed concerns about their ability to implement the standards, particularly without any written guidance. However, teachers who participated in the project's IST indicated that they were better able to understand the new standards and expectations related to competency-based standards, particularly for Tajik mother-tongue because the project's IST training included all the components of the competency-based standards. The physical structure of the GPE-4 standards are slightly different but the content is the same, so teachers indicated that they can use the USAID Quality Reading Project IST materials to guide them through the official transition to an education system based on competency-based standards.

### IST Implementation

The IST and mentoring training activities were often hindered by implementation and approval challenges. As mentioned, before any training or the printing of materials could be completed, the MOES needed to sign off on all aspects of the activity. Delays in receiving the approvals forced training to be moved, materials to not be available in a timely manner, trainers not available due to short notice between official MOES approval and workshop start dates. Also, different MOES sub-institutions required their own reviews and approvals for their staff to participate. The MOES would also invite schools and teachers to IST sessions outside of the project design framework thus increasing the number of participants, or did not invite schools designed to receive the USAID Quality Reading Project's IST.

In August 2016, the USAID Quality Reading Project hosted an abbreviated Cohort 5 Master Training. The schools invited to this training were the schools that did not complete school-level trainings under Cohorts 1-3 for various reasons. For example, some schools did not send the appropriate teachers to the Master Level Training; some schools were not able to participate due to logistical or scheduling conflicts; some Master Trainers were re-assigned, retired, or out on sick/maternity leave; other schools, particularly urban schools had showed limited interest in participating in the project activities. No new schools were added to the program. Cohort 5 was designed to fill gaps at schools that had difficulty delivering or completing quality school-level IST activities. Many Cohort 5 schools still not complete the school-level IST. Although it is not clear as to why, with a second round of support from project staff, many schools still have challenges implementing education and reading reform.

Several recurring challenges to effective IST implementation were:



- Not all the schools had strong Master Trainers to facilitate school-level training. Teaching to students and teaching to adults uses different methodologies.
- TTI and DED methodologists lacked resources (time and transportation) to visit all the project and non-project schools consistently to provide mentoring support.
- Mentoring support was not sufficient due to the workload of experienced/advanced teachers and lack of DED methodological support staff.
- Project activities overlapped with GPE-4 activities, making it difficult for teachers to prioritize activities and align expectations.
- Some teachers used the methods from IST incorrectly, which was not effective in helping students' learning. Due to the huge number of schools and lack of human resources, the project staff were not able to visit all these teachers and provide adequate mentoring support. However, over time the RMC increased its support to this process.
- Some teachers continued using traditional teaching methods, despite their exposure to the new methods in IST. This was either due to comfort level with traditional methods, or because the MOES did not issue a decree requiring implementation of the new methods.
- Completion of IST reporting was a challenge in some areas because of the high teacher turnover due to transfers, retirement, illness, or maternity leave. Some project schools could not complete and submit their training reports in due time.

High turnover, teacher attrition and new teachers coming out of pre-service institutions without the new teaching practices included in the IST of primary-grade teachers was an ongoing challenge, not just for sustainability of the USAID Quality Reading Project activities but for improved teaching quality overall. This high turnover reduced continuity and often placed teachers untrained in the new reading methods at a disadvantage, which affected the sustainability of project interventions and the quality of the teaching provided.

DED methodologists and primary-grade teachers faced challenges finding transportation to carry out their duties. They had to use their own personal resources for Saturday Methodological Union Days, attending demonstration lessons, and visiting schools to provide mentoring support. They were committed to improving the learning environment for their students, so they continued to travel and attend these important activities. New teachers just graduated from pre-service training institutions were using traditional methods. This created an extra burden for mentors, DED methodologists, and in-service TTIs as the new teachers need to be retrained to use active child-centered teaching methods. Although the continual training can be beneficial for maintaining and improving teaching practices, it is also time consuming, expensive, and a duplication of effort for the education system as a whole.

## EGRA

The MOES was not pleased with the baseline EGRA results and questioned steps taken from tool development to implementation to analysis. Based on discussions with USAID, the project did not collect EGRA data in 2015 and spent the year working with the MOES on data, assessment, and research capacity building. The MOES was wary of data collected by outside agencies, so the USAID Quality Reading project expanded inclusion of MOES experts into the

process of developing tools and definitions for performance-level categories. When the midline was implemented in 2016, it was reported that over a dozen control schools were instructed to prepare for reading assessments. Although not ideal for the research design, control schools taking a targeted interest in improving student reading is good for the education system. During the 2017 endline, it was reported that there may have also been some data falsification during the 2016 midline. The project had no way to verify the validity of these incidents and determined with USAID to limit public dissemination of the 2017 endline report.

The EGRA has some important limitations that policy makers and program designers should keep in mind when interpreting the EGRA and impact results. First, comparisons across the Tajik and Russian language groups are not an appropriate way to use the results. Learning to read in the Tajik and Russian languages can be considered two different processes, and differences in rates of acquisition, knowledge accumulation, and effective use are functions of the language properties in question as well as the sociocultural context of the learner. The EGRA results by language should be considered independently of each other.

Second, several subtasks contained a very small number of test items (e.g., Reading Comprehension, Listening Comprehension) and were, therefore, amenable to large changes in percent-correct scores attributable to a single item. In other words, a single item on a short test becomes “high stakes,” much more so than on reading assessments that may have a higher number of test items per assessment. Therefore, one should not over-interpret the meaning of the results on these subtasks nor make high-stakes decisions based on these subtask results.

Third, it is important to note that increases or decreases in subtask scores or proportions of students who demonstrated gains in proficiency levels cannot aid in directly answering the question of whether the project intervention contributed to improved pre-reading outcomes in the Tajikistan. These changes over time are descriptive only.

Finally, the project was limited by some known issues with contamination and low take-up as well as high attrition. There are several examples of contamination: as the IST packages were integrated into the existing teacher training system and conducted on a national scale, some teachers in the sampled control schools may have been exposed to the new training. Though the USAID Quality Reading Project only supported training in project schools (covering approximately 60% of the country), the teachers in the non-project schools may have had exposure to the project training through their local training institutions, cluster meetings, and teachers’ mobility between schools. Finally, not all teachers in treatment schools may have attended all Level 3 school-level trainings. These effects can influence the impact estimations in various ways, and it is hard to say that they would bias the results in any one clear direction.

#### **Availability of non-textbook materials**

The availability of reading materials in the home and in the classroom is critical for improved reading outcomes for youth. Through the formal data collection process and staff discussions with teachers and the parents, it became clear that the availability of grade-level-appropriate supplemental reading materials for students to use in the classroom and at home was well below what is considered meeting the minimum level of acceptability. There are a limited number of Tajik children’s book authors that produce Tajik language age- and grade-level-appropriate non-textbook materials for use in schools and libraries, which limits attempts to foster a culture of reading in the Tajik language. There is a long, proud history of Tajik authors and poets, but these great works are not appropriate for early grade reading. Support to develop

age- and grade-level-appropriate Tajik language books is necessary to build the language capacity of students to eventually read and appreciate the works of authors such as Rumi and Tursunzoda.

The strategy for developing low-cost materials at the school-level and asking parents to donate is only a short-term fix for the shortage of non-textbook and supplementary reading materials in classrooms. Handmade materials have a short life expectancy, cost some money to procure the supplies, and take a considerable level of effort for teachers or parents to develop. Parents, especially those in rural areas, have limited resources to purchase and donate books to the classroom Book Corners and school libraries. The MOES should develop a strategy for ensuring that every classroom has a diverse set of supplemental non-textbook reading materials. Unfortunately, current budget shortfalls prevent the MOES from implementing any short or long-term solutions.

### **Out-of-School Activities**

Some of the out-of-school activities were postponed due to delays in approval from the MOES and its sub-institutions and the approval of the USAID Quality Reading Project revised budget in 2016. The project piloted many of the out-of-school activities and trainings so that as soon as the MOES approved the activities, they would quickly roll out. However, the Reading Camps, mobile theater, and Reading Buddies activities were still postponed to the later years of the project. The classroom and out-of-school activities should have been implemented in tandem to complement each other.

Additionally, only schools approved by the MOES were authorized to implement Reading Camps. This restriction limits the ability of teachers to convene Reading Camps in school communities that could benefit from the non-traditional reading instructional practices. Based on the EGRA, out-of-school reading activities like the Reading Camp showed that attendance at an afterschool reading activity was associated with higher achievement at Grade 4. The model explained 9% of the variance in outcomes for the Tajik pupil group and 11% of the variance for the Russian pupil group. Significantly, attending afterschool reading activities was associated with improvements in oral reading fluency scores for both Tajik and Russian Grade 4 pupils. For the Tajik group, pupils who attended such activities scored 7.7 wpm more than their peers who did not attend. The association for Russian Grade 4 pupils was 14.4 wpm on oral reading fluency. Considering these gains, it is important to consider the role in expanding Reading Camps and other out-of-school reading activities.

The partnership with UNICEF and OSI ran more than one year behind the original timeline because of the MOES approval processes. Although the UNICEF delay was unfortunate, it increased the opportunity for the USAID Quality Reading Project to have greater influence on imagery, messaging, and scripts in support of a reading friendly environment. Finally, the MOES, UNICEF, and OSI, together with the project, developed 25 child-friendly cartoons that promoted children's literacy with Tajik subtitles.

### **Engaging Students with Disabilities**

Ongoing support to children with disabilities to engage in school and improve their reading continued to be a challenge. The MOES does not have the resources to support children with disabilities in the classroom or those who are homebound. However, the MOES is working with UNICEF to improve policies and programs to improve inclusion and access. Multiple

competing interests make parental engagement in education even more challenging when they have children with disabilities, but as students and parents see the new enthusiasm for reading, there is hope that the activities to support reading and education for children with disabilities will continue.

#### **VAT exemption**

USAID and the U.S. Embassy submitted the VAT exemption request to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for processing in July 2016. The previous VAT exemption expired and vendors required payment. In the short term, long-standing vendors worked with the project to delay payment while awaiting the VAT exemption approval, but eventually all vendors required VAT payments. After delays with obtaining MOES approval of age- and grade-appropriate non-textbook materials and ordering sufficient quantities of books from local vendors, the lack of VAT exemption further delayed the book donation procurements as the project waited for VAT exemption in the hope of purchasing a greater number of books. The project was also required to pay VAT on cell phone and internet services, transportation, training and event costs, and printing. From July 2016 through closeout in October 2017, the project did not have VAT exemption.

## V. Recommendations

Improved reading instruction, child-centered learning and classroom practices, and reading outcomes require long term and ongoing reform and engagement strategies. The USAID Quality Reading Project in Tajikistan trained over 17,000 primary-grade teachers in modern reading pedagogy and classroom practices to teach reading with comprehension, but without national system-level policy reform and updates to pre-service instructional curriculum, project implemented activities will not be integrated into the system and sustained. Inclusion of an independent Education Policy expert in the MOES to support MOES senior leadership in understanding and applying evidence-based best practices for informed literacy and education reform would help MOES officials gain knowledge and capacity and ensure that new education policies and regulations include the new methods and activities.

Despite all the schools and districts that showed enthusiasm for the new teaching methods, many did not take full ownership. Some teachers reported that, since the new methods were not required by the MOES, and there are so many other MOES requirements, learning and implementing the new methods was not a priority. Project staff shared such feedback with the new European Union Quality Education Support Programme and the USAID Read with Me! project staff in the hope that they will be able to influence official policy changes. Overall, the USAID Quality Reading Project hopes that teachers see the benefit of these new methods as their peers continue to use them to improve teaching and learning.

The mentoring system introduced by the USAID Quality Reading Project should be institutionalized through incorporating it into the official scope of work for primary-education methodologists and HMUs. Such inclusion would encourage teachers and education officials to consider mentoring as part of their responsibility to not only improve classroom management, but also to provide continuous professional development for teachers. It is also important for the MOES to provide guidance and regulations on the terms of service, scope of work, and qualifications for HMUs. Revised policy mandates from Dushanbe are necessary to formally change this role from inspection and reporting to capacity building and mentoring. Many primary education methodological specialists have taken on this new role with enthusiasm, but any changes in leadership without a change in office policy and scope of work may force them to return to their original role of inspector.

A thorough analysis of EGRA results can provide evidence to support improvements in ministerial and local instructional policy, teacher training programs, and classroom-level approaches to improving reading outcomes. Wider dissemination of EGRA results can also encourage greater community and parental involvement in early childhood education and literacy initiatives. The use of EGRA and other data for informed decision making is critical to improving teaching instruction, allocation of resources, assignments of teachers, etc.

The USAID Quality Reading Project recommends the following considerations for future programming based on challenges and lessons learned.

- Organize centralized approval process of materials and activities to reduce duplication of effort, competition between sub-institutions, and conflicting guidance from various areas of the Tajik government.















- Include student-centered teaching and improved literacy instructional practices in the pre-service pedagogical institutions. If teachers graduate from pre-service pedagogical programs without current best practices, retraining them through IST is expensive.
- Coordinate with the MOES to ensure that training programs approved by the MOES are included in the MOES and RTTI professional development requirements. There is limited incentive for teachers to participate or continue implementing the new methods if they are not required or expected.
- Provide clear guidance on mentoring and capacity building separate from school inspections.
- Continue supporting out-of-school programs and engaging parents and community members as they empower families and students to read and support education outside of the classroom.
- Build capacity on various research and assessment strategies in education including but not limited to EGRA and formative assessment to improve teacher training and the education reform process.
- Increase the availability of non-textbook reading materials in classrooms and libraries.
- Provide targeted support to teachers and classes that change language of instruction to Tajik so that these students do not fall behind.
- Continue direct collaboration with the Education Working Group of the Donor Coordinating Committee and other education implementers.
- USAID should expand engagement in education sector policy and implementation discussions. Early childhood development lays the cornerstone for early grade reading acquisition and all future learning. Lessons learned from primary-grade reading IST can be applied to other subjects and grades, by presenting lessons learned and recommendations for education reform at events like the Joint Sector Review. Stronger engagement in dialogue with other stakeholders can be mutually reinforcing of the shared goal of improving the overall quality of education in Tajikistan.

## VI. Progress against Work Plan

### LEGEND

Status	Accomplished	Red Text	Deliverable
	Accomplished	Red Text	Deliverable
	Ongoing	Blue Text	Activity
	Not completed		

Table 7: Status of Activities USAID Quality Reading Project—Tajikistan

	Activities / Deliverables	Resp.	FY2013 (July-Sept. 2013)	FY2014 (Oct. 2013- Sept. 2014)	FY2015 (Oct. 2014- Sept. 2015)	FY2016 (Oct. 2015- Sept. 2016)	FY2017 (Oct. 2016- Sept. 2017)	FY2018 (Oct. 2017)	Status	Comments
<b>Program Start-Up</b>										
1	Contract key staff	AIR, SC							Accomplished	
2	Sign Letter of Cooperation with Ministry of Education and Science	USAID							Accomplished	
3	<b>Deliverable:</b> Finalize Implementation annual work plan	AIR							Accomplished	Year 2 Work Plan was updated and resubmitted Jan 2015
4	<b>Deliverable:</b> Finalize PMEP	AIR							Accomplished	PMEP baseline was submitted in 01 Nov 2014, revisions to PMEP based on baseline is submitted with the Oct-Dec 2014 Quarterly Report. A new PMEP was also submitted with the revised proposal in June 2015 for mod. #3.
<b>Intermediate Result 1: Improved reading instruction in Grades 1–4</b>										
<b>Sub-result 1.1: Conduct a baseline qualitative analysis</b>										
5	<b>Deliverable:</b> Submit baseline qualitative report	AIR, Zerkalo							Accomplished	Submitted March 2014. The qualitative study reinforced the need for teacher training and the need for reading materials at schools and in the communities.
6	<b>Deliverable:</b> Presentation of key findings baseline qualitative	AIR							Accomplished	Presentation of key findings presented at Dec 14' baseline dissemination workshop.
<b>Sub-result 1.2: Design in-service training (IST) package</b>										

	Activities / Deliverables	Resp.	FY2013 (July-Sept. 2013)	FY2014 (Oct. 2013- Sept. 2014)	FY2015 (Oct. 2014- Sept. 2015)	FY2016 (Oct. 2015- Sept. 2016)	FY2017 (Oct. 2016- Sept. 2017)	FY2018 (Oct. 2017)	Status	Comments
7	<b>Deliverable:</b> Finalize reading standards for Grades 1–4	AIR							Transferred to GPE-4/MOES	The MOES under GPE-4 took over the competency-based standards setting processing for rollout to all grades in all subjects. QRP continued to support the MOES/GPE-4 with workshops, developing training materials, and support during piloting. The MOES rolled out Tajik standards to all schools in August 2016.
8	<b>Develop teacher training materials/adapt literacy boost manual/translate</b>									
9	<b>Deliverables:</b> Final IST packages approved	SC, AIR							Accomplished	Tajik IST was approved by the Collegium of the MOES December 2014. The Russian IST was added to the Tajik approval by Deputy Minister Naziri in 2016 as the structure and content were the same as the Tajik. 30,116 IST packages distributed.
<b>Sub-Result 1.3: Conduct in-service trainings for teachers and other educators</b>										
<b>In-Service Teacher Training Conducted</b>										
10	Train National Trainers in IST delivery (Level 1)	SC							Accomplished	National Trainers selected from MOES, RTTI and regional TTIs, DED/RED and City Education Departments, AOE, RMC offices trained by QRP staff in IST
11	Train Master Trainers in IST (Level 2)	SC							Accomplished	Master Training for Cohort 1-4 (with Cohort 5 refresher training) with three teachers from each target school (Deputy Director, Head of the Methodological Union, advanced teacher). Training ranged from 10-12 days depending on August or January training.

	Activities / Deliverables	Resp.	FY2013 (July-Sept. 2013)	FY2014 (Oct. 2013- Sept. 2014)	FY2015 (Oct. 2014- Sept. 2015)	FY2016 (Oct. 2015- Sept. 2016)	FY2017 (Oct. 2016- Sept. 2017)	FY2018 (Oct. 2017)	Status	Comments
12	School-based trainings of IST through roll-out of micro-modules through Saturday Methodological Union Days (Level 3)	SC							Accomplished	Cohorts 1-5 completed. 16,650 teachers trained from target schools. 958 additional methodologists, educators, teachers from no project schools, and education completed the IST. 30,116 IST packages distributed.
13	Teacher Certification with RTTI	AIR, SC							Accomplished	QRP worked with TTIs to certify 9,876 QRP-trained teachers.
14	Develop and rollout of supplemental Formative Assessment Training video	AIR, SC							Accomplished	Based on feedback from teachers, methodologists, and midterm data collection, Formative Assessment proved most challenging for teachers, so the project developed a targeted training video with the MOES and distributed it to all project schools, DED/RED, City Education Departments, and TTIs.
<b>Sub-Result 1.4: Strengthen systems for teacher mentoring/coaching</b>										
15	Develop mentoring/coaching guide for reading instruction support (IR 1.2-part of teacher package)	SC							Accomplished	Mentoring Guide included in IST manual for use by all teachers. 30,883 mentoring guides distributed (included in IST).
16	Training for mentors and Distribute guide on Mentoring to regional In-service TTI staff and deputy school principals on primary-grade cohorts 1–4	SC, MOES							Accomplished	Mentor and coaching training for Cohort 1 schools in 2015, with targeted mentor training added to Cohort 2-4.
17	Provide mentoring support to teachers and methodologists	SC, MOES							Accomplished	Meetings are held at regional, district, and cluster level where mentors and deputy directors share lessons learned and support each other.
18	Implement portfolio system for teachers	SC							Accomplished	Teachers using personal and student portfolios to track lessons, activities, progress.

	Activities / Deliverables	Resp.	FY2013 (July-Sept. 2013)	FY2014 (Oct. 2013- Sept. 2014)	FY2015 (Oct. 2014- Sept. 2015)	FY2016 (Oct. 2015- Sept. 2016)	FY2017 (Oct. 2016- Sept. 2017)	FY2018 (Oct. 2017)	Status	Comments
19	Participate in monthly DED meeting to strengthen school level mentoring and DED and TTI oversight and support	AIR, SC							Accomplished	USAID QRP staff participates at DED meetings based on agreed work plan with DED specialists.
<b>Sub-Result 1.5:</b> Implement classroom-based reading diagnostics (process focused); administer national, standardized reading assessments (outcome focused), such as an EGRA, in a representative sample										
20	Review of EGRA (both mother tongue and Russian) and other assessments and M&E instruments (outcome focused) identify gaps	AIR							Accomplished	Completed for baseline, midline, and end line.
21	Conduct test item development workshop for outcome focused assessment tool	AIR							Accomplished	Baseline instruments developed and piloted in FY2014. Grade 3 was added in FY2016.
22	Develop EGRA and M&E data collection instruments with MOES and NTC stakeholders	AIR, NTC, MOES							Accomplished	
23	Develop EGRA Optimal Mark Recognition (OMR) form template	AIR							Accomplished	
24	Develop and pilot test instruments for outcome focused assessment tools	AIR, NTC, MOES							Accomplished	Grade 3 instruments piloted in February 2016 for April/May data collection.
25	Training of Test Administrators, Team Leaders, Supervisors, and IT support (for FY2016 and 2017 data collection)	AIR							Accomplished	
26	Baseline, Midterm, and Endline EGRA and M&E Data collection	AIR, NTC, MOES							Accomplished	FY2015 data collection did not include EGRA after discussions with USAID and the MOES.



	Activities / Deliverables	Resp.	FY2013 (July-Sept. 2013)	FY2014 (Oct. 2013- Sept. 2014)	FY2015 (Oct. 2014- Sept. 2015)	FY2016 (Oct. 2015- Sept. 2016)	FY2017 (Oct. 2016- Sept. 2017)	FY2018 (Oct. 2017)	Status	Comments
27	<b>Deliverable:</b> Reading assessment report (base line Cohorts 1-3, mid-term Cohort 1, mid-term Cohort 2&3, end-line Cohorts 1-3)	AIR							Accomplished	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EGRA baseline report submitted September 2014</li> <li>• M&amp;E (no EGRA) midline report submitted December 2015</li> <li>• EGRA midline report submitted September 2016 followed by an Impact Report</li> <li>• EGRA endline report including impact results submitted August 2017</li> </ul>
28	<b>Deliverable:</b> Raw data submitted to USAID	AIR							Accomplished	Submitted in 2015 for baseline and midline, 2016 midline and 2017 for endline.
<b>Intermediate Result 2: Increased availability of reading materials</b>										
<b>Sub-Result 2.1: Conduct a comprehensive review of the quantity of primary grade-level reading material available in Tajikistan</b>										
29	<b>Deliverable:</b> Develop a detailed list of appropriate, Tajik and Russian language books for reproduction and distribution	SC< AIR							Accomplished	Market research with title, content and grade and age appropriateness reviews conducting for Phase 1 title selection with the MOES.
30	Market survey of available Tajik and Russian age- and grade-appropriate books	SC, AIR							Accomplished	Market research with title, content and grade and age appropriateness updated for Phase 2 title selection in partnership with the MOES.
<b>Sub-Result 2.2: Ensure a mix of reading materials are used by schools and communities</b>										
31	Provide low-cost, primary-grade materials available for classroom use and at home in all targeted communities	AIR, SC							Accomplished	Phase 1 – FY2016 Phase 2 – April-May 2017 Phase 3 (Control Schools) – August-September 2017 232,790 books donated by QRP 336,587 books, newspapers, magazine facilitated by QRP with parents and communities.
<b>Intermediate Result 3: Increased out-of-school reading time</b>										
<b>Sub-Result 3.1: Increase public awareness about the importance of reading as a cornerstone of education and lifelong success</b>										
32	<b>Parent/Family Program</b>									

	Activities / Deliverables	Resp.	FY2013 (July-Sept. 2013)	FY2014 (Oct. 2013- Sept. 2014)	FY2015 (Oct. 2014- Sept. 2015)	FY2016 (Oct. 2015- Sept. 2016)	FY2017 (Oct. 2016- Sept. 2017)	FY2018 (Oct. 2017)	Status	Comments
33	Development and rollout of Parents' Guide to the Importance of Reading in the Family	SC							Accomplished	"Flipbook" and note cards developed and distributed to all target schools and districts.
34	<b>Deliverable:</b> Parents and community guidance on how to read with children	SC							Accomplished	
35	Train volunteers and members of groups to conduct community reading awareness campaign to encourage parents reading to their children	SC							Accomplished	Materials distributed and trainings held across Tajikistan with 2,951 Community Members trained on the Family Program in addition to Librarians and methodologists.
<b>School/Community Libraries</b>										
36	Library Guide	SC							Accomplished	Developed a library management guide in collaboration with AKF.
37	Conduct outreach programs to children and communities to promote reading in all project districts	SC							Accomplished	Trained librarians in the use of the library guide and the Parent's Guide for out-of-schools reading activities.
<b>National Book/Literacy Day Events</b>										
38	Conduct a variety of competitions and community mobilization activities around reading	SC, DEDs							Accomplished	Engaged Organization of Khatlon Women's Groups, District and Regional Ministry of Culture, and Community Libraries. Activities
<b>Media/Public Awareness Reading Campaigns</b>										
39	Public Service Announcements on Reading aired on Tajik TV	AIR, SC, MOC							Accomplished	Creation of 6 PSAs. PSAs aired on national TV in the mornings and evenings starting in October 2016. The PSAs are included in CD/DVD of materials distributed to all schools, DEDs, REDs, City education departments, education sub-institutions.

	Activities / Deliverables	Resp.	FY2013 (July-Sept. 2013)	FY2014 (Oct. 2013- Sept. 2014)	FY2015 (Oct. 2014- Sept. 2015)	FY2016 (Oct. 2015- Sept. 2016)	FY2017 (Oct. 2016- Sept. 2017)	FY2018 (Oct. 2017)	Status	Comments
40	Open Lessons, reading events, workshops aired on local TV and articles included in local newspapers	SC, Teachers							Accomplished	Open lessons and reading events aired on local TV channels. Teachers, Directors, Trainers and Methodologists writing literacy and reading articles for local newspapers.
41	Cartoon Animation Project with UNICEF and OSI	SC, AIR, UNICEF, OSI							Accomplished	QRP supported UNICEF, OSI and the MOES to subtitle 25 cartoons and include reading messages and literacy. Cartoons are finalized for airing on Tajik television pending UNICEF distribution.
<b>Mobile Theatre</b>										
42	Work with Ministry of Culture and theatre groups on Mobile Theatre for reading	SC, MOC							Accomplished	Develop scripts with Ministry of Culture and three local children's puppet theatre. 129 school communities visited by mobile puppet theatres presenting plays on reading based on messages from the Guide to Reading in the Family. Lukhtak National Puppet theatre continues to host shows across TJ with approved QRP reading script.
<b>Sub-Result 3.2: Implement out-of-school reading activities</b>										
<b>Extracurricular activities to promote reading</b>										
43	Conduct extracurricular activities at school level	SC, DD, teachers							Accomplished	Reading Buddies, Reading Competitions, community events with libraries, mobile libraries organized by librarians. 88,618 of 540,271 eligible students participated in project-supported Reading Camps, Reading Buddies, and one-time events. Students who participated in JumpStart or Reading Camps that were not directly supported by the project were not included.
<b>Reading Camp</b>										

	Activities / Deliverables	Resp.	FY2013 (July-Sept. 2013)	FY2014 (Oct. 2013- Sept. 2014)	FY2015 (Oct. 2014- Sept. 2015)	FY2016 (Oct. 2015- Sept. 2016)	FY2017 (Oct. 2016- Sept. 2017)	FY2018 (Oct. 2017)	Status	Comments
44	<b>Deliverable:</b> Reading Camp Curriculum and materials adapted and incorporated	SC, Dept. for Out of School Activities							Accomplished	Reading Camp Guide approved in 2015.
45	Implement Reading Camps in approved schools	SC, Dept. for Out of School Activities							Accomplished	2,736 students participated in QRP supported Reading Camps in 2016 in schools approved by the MOES. An additional 2,441 students are reported to have participated in Reading Camp activities without QRP support.
<b>JumpStart</b>										
46	Develop and rollout JumpStart Program	SC, AIR, MOES							Accomplished	JumpStart included in IST for all Cohorts. In FY2015, the MOES included JumpStart literacy activities in the official Before ABC: Getting Reading for School program.
47	<b>Deliverable:</b> Jump Start Program and Learning materials incorporated into Before ABC: Getting Reading for School program.	SC, MOES							Accomplished	
<b>Reading Buddies</b>										
48	Train deputy directors and methodologists to plan and facilitate Reading Buddies approach in target schools	SC, MOES							Accomplished	Part if IST. 5,012 Reading Buddies engaged at most QRP target schools and work with teachers and librarians to support students.
<b>Library (linked to IR2)</b>										
49	Develop and Disseminate Librarian Training Guide	SC							Accomplished	Developed with AKDN to ensure similar messages and activities for all primary-grade librarians.
50	Support School/ Community Libraries with donated books	SC							Accomplished	232,790 books donated by QRP 336,587 books, newspapers, magazine facilitated by QRP with parents and communities.
<b>Intermediate Result 4: Increased government support to improve reading</b>										
<b>Sub-Result 4.1: Increase dialogue about the existing environment for quality reading</b>										
51	Hold policy workshops best practices/policy	AIR, SC							Accomplished	Workshops with RMC on mentoring and coaching.

	Activities / Deliverables	Resp.	FY2013 (July-Sept. 2013)	FY2014 (Oct. 2013- Sept. 2014)	FY2015 (Oct. 2014- Sept. 2015)	FY2016 (Oct. 2015- Sept. 2016)	FY2017 (Oct. 2016- Sept. 2017)	FY2018 (Oct. 2017)	Status	Comments
52	Hold bi-annual high-level forums on quality reading	AIR, SC							Accomplished	Workshop with RTTI on IST and mentoring. End of Project Best Practices Workshop.
53	Hold quarterly briefings with MOES	AIR, SC							Accomplished	Quarterly Meetings held with MOES and sub-institution stakeholders, USAID, and project staff.
54	Special Events related to reading	AIR, SC							Accomplished	CIES 2015 and 2017, JSR, Kyrgyz Sustainability Workshop.
<b>Sub-Result 4.2: Increase capacity to use reading assessment results</b>										
55	NTC and MOES Capacity Building Workshops	AIR, NTC							Accomplished	Workshops held in partnership with QRP KR with representatives from both NTCs on item design, psychometric and statistical analysis and reporting.
56	Present findings on reading assessments to MOES, NGOs, and stakeholders	AIR, NTC, MOES							Accomplished	Baseline – December 2014 Midline – January 2017 Endline – September 2017
<b>Sub-Result 4.3: Strengthen the enabling environment to support improved reading instruction reform</b>										
57	Media Public Awareness Reading Campaigns (with Sub IR 3.1)	AIR, SC							Accomplished	PSAs aired on national TV. Open lessons and events on local TV. Reading friendly cartoon partnership.
58	Promote laws, policies, regulations, and foundational education documents developed or modified to support improved practices	AIR, SC, MOES							Accomplished	MOES took ownership of the competency-based standards reform process. New decrees issued in July 2017 from the MOES that include teaching requirements/inspection on child-centered learning, and formative assessment, among others.
59	<b>Deliverable:</b> Develop a strategic plan to scale-up successful project interventions, including major challenges	AIR, SC, MOES, NTC							Accomplished	Sustainability Plan developed based on one-on-one meetings with education officials on activities that can continue to be implemented without QRP support.
60	CD/DVD distribution for all QRP materials and videos	AIR							Accomplished	All QRP materials made 2,200 CD/DVD available to all target schools, control schools, DEDs, TTI, etc.
<b>Monitoring &amp; Evaluation</b>										



	Activities / Deliverables	Resp.	FY2013 (July-Sept. 2013)	FY2014 (Oct. 2013- Sept. 2014)	FY2015 (Oct. 2014- Sept. 2015)	FY2016 (Oct. 2015- Sept. 2016)	FY2017 (Oct. 2016- Sept. 2017)	FY2018 (Oct. 2017)	Status	Comments
61	Finalize PMEP								Accomplished	PMEPs were submitted with annual reports, except for 2015, where it was submitted with modification.
62	<b>Deliverables:</b> Quarterly Performance Reports	AIR							Accomplished	
63	Participant Training Reports	AIR							Accomplished	Updated Quarterly
64	<b>Deliverables:</b> Annual Performance Reports	AIR							Accomplished	1 <sup>st</sup> Annual Report submitted October 2014. 2 <sup>nd</sup> Annual Report submitted November 2015. 3 <sup>rd</sup> Annual Report submitted October 2016. 4 <sup>th</sup> Annual Report submitted October 2017.
<b>Program Closeout</b>										
65	Program Staff Phase-out								Accomplished	SC staff begun phasing out in January 2017 with all staff (SC and AIR) finishing by October 6, 2017.
66	USAID QRP Project Office Closes								Accomplished	Dushanbe office official closed September 29, 2017 with final staff finishing October 6, 2017.
67	Equipment disposition								Accomplished	USAID approved the Equipment Disposition plan in July 2017 and all equipment was delivered to MOES partners by October 6, 2017.
68	<b>Deliverable:</b> Final Reports								Accomplished	Final PMEP, and Annual Report, Close Out Reports submitted. PMEP revised and resubmitted, Annual Report submitted, revised and re-submitted. Close out report submitted January 2018.

## VII. Progress against Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Plan

The overall goal of the M&E data collection was to capture the full, nuanced picture of early-grade reading levels in the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan. To reach this goal, midterm data collection focused on two major kinds of data: (1) student reading outcomes and (2) other classroom and background characteristics related to reading. The EGRA instrument captured student reading outcomes and included a series of questions that asked students for background information about their home, family, and experience in school. The EGRA and Impact Reports included a detailed description of the EGRA instruments and findings. For copies of the other instruments and further information, please see the annual and final PMEP reports.

Other contextual data were collected through the following instruments:

- Classroom observation instrument
- Teacher survey
- Librarian survey
- Parent survey
- Student survey (part of the EGRA)

The **classroom observation instrument** captured data on teaching practices, classroom surroundings, and class makeup. The instrument had 91 questions, divided into nine sections. First, a section on background information documented the grade, demographics, and size of the class. The second section focused on the physical environment of the classroom. The third section focused on basic teaching practices. This includes, for example, how the teacher interacted with students, how the teacher formed student groups when doing group work, and the types of questions the teacher asked of students. The third section also noted the language used in the class, both by the teacher and the students. The fourth section addressed activities related to various reading skills (phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, and writing). The fifth section focused on how reading skills were assessed. The sixth section documented any supplementary reading materials used in the class. The final sections covered the assignment of homework and any other comments. Data collectors needed to be very familiar with this instrument because it was not designed for chronological use during a class. Instead, during the class observation, the data collector recorded data simultaneously under different sections.

The **teacher survey** included 73 questions in six sections: interview background, teacher information, reading lesson plan, reading materials, teaching reading skills, and student assessment. Most questions were asked directly of the teacher, except items that document whether the teacher can produce the item under discussion (e.g., “Please show me your [e.g., lesson plan for the day]”).

The **librarian survey** included 19 questions designed to capture the availability, quantity, and accessibility, age, and language of non-textbook reading materials at the school. This survey also asked librarians about reading events. In addition, data collectors recorded observations on the physical condition of the library.

The **parent survey** included 44 questions in two sections. The first section collected background information, including mother or primary caregiver and father or secondary caregiver education level, home language, and number of books in the home. The second section used Likert-scale items—from which respondents chose a response from a 5-step

scale—to capture parental attitudes toward reading and frequency of reading activities in the home.

The **student survey** included 35 questions in one section. For both countries, this was included in the EGRA instrument.

All schools were randomly selected at the beginning of the project for use throughout the life of the project. Endline data were collected in 132 schools in Tajikistan (66 treatment and 66 control schools). Two schools were added in Tajikistan in 2016 to ensure better balance between treatment and control schools in the Zarafshon and Districts of Republican Subordination (DRS) regions. Two control schools were replaced: one in the Dushanbe region and one in the Zarafshon region. The reason for this change is that the school in Dushanbe (a Russian-language control school) had closed Russian classes, and the school in Zarafshon had no primary-grade students in the Tajik language of instruction; the students were taught in Uzbek.

The classes for the classroom observation instrument were also randomly chosen within each grade. One class from each grade in Grades 1–4 was randomly selected and observed. Exceptions were made if schools did not have reading classes for the needed grade on the days of data collection. As a result, in some cases a school includes more than one observation of a single grade. The teachers interviewed for the teacher survey were, when possible, those whose classes were observed. When teachers were not at school, or refused to give consent for the interview, other teachers were randomly selected. Parents were randomly selected from the list of students who were taking EGRA tests.

Details on the sampling procedure for selecting students within each school to take the EGRA are available in the EGRA report. As well as expanded descriptions and additional results and related analysis.

The final PMEP report for the project shows indicators over the life of the project based on the PMEP and data collection plans described and approved by USAID.

## VIII. Reports, Deliverables, and Presentations Produced

### *Quarterly and Annual Reports*

- USAID Quality Reading Project Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan Quarterly Report July–September 2013
- USAID Quality Reading Project Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan Quarterly Report October–December 2013
- USAID Quality Reading Project Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan Quarterly Report January–March 2014
- USAID Quality Reading Project Quarterly Report April–June 2014
- USAID Annual Report October Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan October 2013–September 2014
- USAID Quality Reading Project Tajikistan Quarterly Report October–December 2014
- USAID Quality Reading Project Tajikistan Quarterly Report January 2015–March 2015
- USAID Quality Reading Project Tajikistan Quarterly Report April 2015–June 2015
- USAID Annual Report Tajikistan October 2014–September 2015
- USAID Quality Reading Project Tajikistan Quarterly Report October 2015–December 2015
- USAID Quality Reading Project Tajikistan Quarterly Report January 2016–March 2016
- USAID Quality Reading Project Tajikistan Quarterly Report April 2016–June 2016
- USAID Annual Report Tajikistan October 2015–September 2016
- USAID Quality Reading Project Tajikistan Quarterly Report October 2016–December 2016
- USAID Quality Reading Project Tajikistan Quarterly Report January 2017–March 2017
- USAID Quality Reading Project Tajikistan Quarterly Report April 2017–June 2017
- USAID Quality Reading Project Tajikistan Annual Report Tajikistan October 2016–October 2017
- USAID Quality Reading Project Tajikistan Final Report–December 2017
- Work plan for each year

### *Deliverables*

#### Technical Documents

- Baseline Qualitative Report
- Draft Mother Tongue Standards Grades 1–4—Tajik Language and Russian Language and Tajik Standards IST Manual for use by GPE-4/MOES
- In-service teacher training (IST) package for Tajik primary schools for mother tongue (Tajik) language of instruction and in schools with Russian as the primary language of instruction.
- Parents’ Guide on the “Importance of Reading with Children in the Family” with palm cards
- Six Promotional Public Service Announcements (PSAs) about the role of reading at home
- Librarian Guide

- Reading Camp Guide
- Reading Buddies Guide
- Teaching and Learning Materials in Tajikistan: How Do They Align With Reading Research?
- Formative Assessment Video
- CD/DVDs with all project training materials in Tajik and Russian to MOES and all schools
- CD with all materials in Russian, Tajik, and English delivered to USAID

### Assessments

- Grades 1, 2, 3, and 4 Early Grade Reading Assessment instruments, data collection training manuals in Russian, Tajik and English
- USAID Quality Reading Project - Tajikistan - Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) 2014 Baseline Data Analytic Report (Revised)
- USAID Quality Reading Project - Tajikistan - Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) 2016 Midterm Analytical Report
- USAID Quality Reading Project - Tajikistan Final EGRA and Impact Report 2013-2017

### PMEP

- M&E Data collection instruments: Classroom Observation, Teacher, Parent, Librarian Interview protocols in Russian, Tajik, and English
- IST pre-and post-tests
- USAID Quality Reading Project - Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan - 2014 Annual Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Report
- USAID Quality Reading Project - Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan - Annual PMEP Report Oct 2015-Sept 2016
- USAID Quality Reading Project - Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan Final PMEP Report 2013-2017

### *Presentations*

- MOES/USAID/Quality Reading Project Quarterly Meetings
- Topic specific presentations by USAID Quality Reading Project staff and workshop with RMC, RTTI, AOE, and GPE-4 stakeholders.
- Comparative and International Education Conference, Washington, DC, USA (March 2015)
- Comparative and International Education Conference, Atlanta, Georgia, USA (March 2017)
- Inclusive Education and Reading in USAID Quality Reading Project at USAID Reading Together/Quality Reading Project Kyrgyz Republic Sustainability Workshop – June 2017
- MOES USAID Quality Reading Project End of Project Summary Presentation (October 2017)



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