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IMPROVING READING, EQUITY, AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE DRC – ACCELERE!

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IMPROVING READING, EQUITY, AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE DRC (ACCELERE!)

Contract No. AID-660-C-15-00001
Improving Reading, Equity, and Accountability in the DRC (ACCELERE!)

United States Agency for International Development (USAID)/Education Office

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ACRONYMS

ACCELERE!	Accès, Lecture, Retention et Redevabilité
ALP	Alternative Learning Program
APS	Annual Program Statement
21CBP	21st Century Best Practice
CAP	Centre d'Apprentissage Professionnel
CATED	Centre d'Appui Technique de l'Éducation
COGES	Comité de Gestion Scolaire
ComCon	Comité de Concertation
COP	Chief of party
COPA	Comité de Parents
COR	Contracting Officer Representative
CRS	Centre de Rattrapage Scolaire
DCOP	Deputy Chief of Party
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
DGENF	Direction Générale de l'Éducation Non Formelle
DIPROMAD	Direction des Programmes et Matériels Didactiques
DIVAS	Division des Affaires Sociales
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
EAGLE	Empowering Adolescent Girls to Lead through Education (USAID)
EGMA	Early Grade Mathematics Assessment
EGR	Early Grade Reading
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
ELAN	Ecole et Langues Nationales en Afrique
FHI360	Family Health International 360
FLS	Fundamental Literacy Skills
GDRC	Government of the DRC
I-READ	Improving Reading, Equity, and Accountability in the DRC
IT	Information Technology
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MAS	Ministère des Affaires Sociales
MEPS-INC	Ministère de l'Enseignement Primaire, Secondaire et Initiation à La Nouvelle Citoyenneté
MEPT	Ministère d'Enseignement Professionnel et Technique
MOU	memorandum of understanding
NGO	non-governmental organization
OIF	Organization of Francophony
OPEQ	Opportunities for Equitable Access to Quality Education (USAID)
PAQUED	Projet d'Appui à la Qualité de l'Éducation (USAID)
PMEP	Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Plan
PROVED	Provincial education office for the MEPS-INC
RFA	Request for Application
RFP	Request for Proposals
RFQ	Request for Quotations
SEA	Senior Education Advisor
SERNAFOR	Service National de Formation
SIP	School improvement Plan
SRA	School Rapid Assessment
STTA	Short Term Technical Adviser

STS	School-to-School International
Sous-PROVED	Sub-provincial education office for the MEPS-INC
UKAID	United Kingdom Agency for International Development
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Le projet ACCELERE! initialement sous le nom « I-READ » fut lancé le 1^{er} juin 2015. Sa nouvelle dénomination en français traduit sans équivoque la volonté qu'il a d'élargir l'accès scolaire (ACCE), d'améliorer sensiblement et durablement la qualité de l'enseignement en portant tous ses efforts sur l'amélioration des habiletés de lecture (LE) au primaire de la 1^e à la 4^e année, et enfin de redevabilité (RE) en matière de gouvernance en éducation publique. En combinant les effets surmultipliés de ces trois volets complémentaires, ACCELERE! entend creuser une véritable et durable brèche dans le taux d'illettrisme en RDC qui s'élève aux alentours de 40% selon des enquêtes récentes. Ce qui est encore plus remarquable, c'est qu'ACCELERE! soit le fruit d'un effort original de coopération internationale en matière de développement entre l'agence de développement internationale américaine (USAID) et l'agence de développement internationale britannique (DFID désormais connue sous le sigle UKAID). En décidant de mettre commun expertise et financement, l'intervention unique qui en résulte (baptisée « Apprendre pour tous les Enfants ») comprend quatre volets (nommé Activités), dont ACCELERE! constitue le premier (dit Activité Un). Chemonics International, dirigeant un consortium de quatre partenaires nationaux et internationaux, met en œuvre ce premier volet. L'Activité Deux, dirigée par Cambridge Education, travaille exclusivement sur la gouvernance aux échelons supérieurs de la hiérarchie scolaire. Activité Quatre, qui échoit à l'UNICEF, vise à rejoindre les plus démunis et exclus du système éducatif public de la DRC. Activité Trois, cible l'évaluation d'Activité Un, Deux, et Quatre. Une telle concentration d'effort n'a pu voir le jour que grâce à la détermination du GRDC, et en particulier du Ministère de l'Éducation (primaire) qui espère ainsi engager un processus unique et irréversible en RDC d'avancer l'alphabétisme et l'intégralité en accès à l'éducation. L'image convenue par l'acronyme française du projet signifie particulièrement bien cette volonté de précipiter les efforts vers le succès et ainsi d'accélérer la disparition de l'illettrisme en RDC.

ACCELERE! a démarré le 28^e Mai, 2015 et vient donc de conclure quatre mois d'activité. Le projet est donc sorti de sa phase de mise en place, ce qui a inclus ; l'engagement des membres de son équipe tant au plan national qu'international, l'identification de ses locaux permanents à Kinshasa et à Lubumbashi, l'instauration de protocoles de travail avec l'ensemble des partenaires locaux, finalisation de son plan initial de travail. Aucun projet ne peut prétendre ignorer les leçons enseignées par les nombreux projets qui l'ont précédé, ce qui fut donc sa responsabilité première. Les quatre mois passés ont permis à l'ensemble de l'équipe d'ACCELERE! de se familiariser avec l'essentiel des défis et conditions particuliers à la RDC et tenter de comprendre le capital éducatif légué par ses nombreux prédécesseurs.

La cadre de travail formel du projet ACCELERE! renvoie à trois grands domaines d'intervention qui doivent se soutenir mutuellement, chacune la responsabilité d'une équipe déterminée. Ces domaines sont l'inscription équitable à un environnement éducation de qualité, l'amélioration de la qualité d'éducation, et l'amélioration du gouvernance et la responsabilisation. Depuis le lancement du projet, l'équipe Un a eu pour première responsabilité de confirmer le choix de nos sous-province éducationnelle qui avait été effectué en amont en collaboration avec les cadres supérieurs du MEPS-INC, en consultation constante avec l'USAID. L'équipe Deux, responsable des éléments qualité en éducation, s'est penché sur la révision des documents existant en Swahili et Français pour les 1^e au 4^e années du primaire, tout en alignant avec l'approche phonétique. Ces documents sont en sous forme pour vérification par nos partenaires, et l'impression pour usage en en janvier 2016. Grâce à une étroite collaboration avec la DIPROMAD et le SERNAFOR qui ont participé régulièrement à cette initiative, l'équipe Deux est désormais en mesure dès le début du prochain trimestre à compléter cette tâche avec succès. Finalement, l'équipe Trois qui se penche sur la gouvernance et les politiques scolaires en rapport avec l'amélioration des habiletés de lecture au primaire, a pu mettre en marche le processus de révision de la feuille de route en lecture pour le document national. Il est en voie de finaliser les démarches pour assurer qu'ACCELERE! co-préside le nouvel Observatoire National de Lecture. Il a également initié en coopération avec ses collègues de

l'équipe Deux, les travaux visant la mise sur pieds des évaluations scolaire rapides, premier exercice vers le développement des plans d'amélioration scolaire basée sur un profil de l'école d'ACCELERE !, qui permettra aux collègues en place d'évaluer objectivement leurs efforts de progression vers des objectifs simples en matière de meilleure salubrité et sécurité de l'environnement scolaire.

Le démarrage d'ACCELERE! a connu certains défis, y compris le recrutement d'un Conseiller en Education Principal et un Conseiller en Lecture Principal, les délais dans la préparation du plan de travail, et la finalisation de la sélection des sous-provinces, qui ont retardé le progrès vers les résultats visé. Ces processus se poursuit et doit absolument conclure aussi tôt que possible au cours du prochain trimestre. Mais parmi tous les défis que nous avons rencontrés durant ces quatre premiers mois celui qui de loin nous a causé le plus de difficulté fut le calendrier de mise en œuvre. L'ensemble des activités de démarrage étaient originalement programmées de telle sorte qu'elles auraient dû avoir lieu au courant du trimestre de printemps, mais le projet a lancé le 28^e Mai 2015. De ce fait, un grand nombre d'activités s'en sont trouvées bousculées avec des échéances rapides. La priorité fut mise sur le développement de matériel scolaire avant toute autre activité, puisqu'il s'agissait de documents utiles aux enfants que nous nous proposons de servir.

En dépit de ces défis, l'équipe ACCELERE! a réussi à établir des ponts durables et cordiaux avec nos partenaires du MEPS-INC et surtout a su rapidement s'imposer sur la scène locale de l'éducation comme un joueur incontournable sur lequel on peut compter dans la course vers l'élimination de l'illettrisme. En particulier, au cours de la retraite professionnelle parrainée par le Ministère le 23^e au 24^e juillet, alors que Son Excellence Maker Mwangi Famba dirigeaient les travaux de révision annuelle du PIE, ACCELERE! a eu l'opportunité d'être introduit largement et avec grand succès à un parterre de Ministres provinciaux de l'éducation et de tous les acteurs internationaux présents en RDC grâce à l'appui direct de la Direction de l'équipe éducation de l'USAID.

Effectivement, beaucoup reste encore à faire puisque nous n'avons que quatre mois de travail à notre actif. Le premier article a l'ordre du jour demeure la nécessité de finaliser notre stratégie de mise en œuvre sur la base incontournable des meilleures pratiques de l'heure en enseignement des habiletés de base en lecture, et en réforme éducationnelle. Le partenariat unique et original entre l'USAID et l'UKAID, avec la direction du gouvernement de RDC, a formulé les buts et objectifs d'ACCELERE !, ce qui ne peuvent que bénéficier le pays hôte et ouvrir de nouveaux horizons en développement international. Ensemble et en étroite collaboration, avançons vers la croissance équitable des taux d'inscription et d'alphabétisation, et la gestion saine d'éducation.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

A. Background

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is one of the most populous, least developed, and poorest countries in the world. With an estimated population of 80 million inhabitants, the country ranks 186 out of 187 on the human development index.¹ While the DRC has experienced a positive trend in the average years of schooling, 3.5 million children remain out of school and there is a high inequality in the mean years of schooling for female students (2.1 years) compared to that of their male counterparts (4.1 years).² The inequality in education opportunities in the DRC is compounded by the poor learning levels at the primary school level, which are demonstrated by the fact that over two-thirds of children in grades three and four were not able to read a single word of text.³ While the education system in the DRC continues to be fragile, the Government of the DRC (GDRC) has increased their commitment to education and the ACCELERE! project aims to capitalize on this commitment through collaboration with system actors to increase access to quality education environments for vulnerable populations, improving the quality of education, and improving the governance and accountability by stakeholders.

B. The ACCELERE! Project and Activity One

USAID in collaboration with the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID) has committed to implementing a primary education initiative to improve equitable access to education and learning outcomes for girls and boys in the DRC. This collective initiative, entitled ACCELERE! (*Accès, Lecture, Retention et Redevabilité* or access, reading, retention and accountability), aims to support the GDRC's commitment to free universal basic education and improved learning outcomes as articulated in the GDRC's Interim Education Plan, the Education Sector Strategy, and other reform efforts in the sector.

As one component of this joint program, Activity One of ACCELERE! is the project led by Chemonics International under the Improving Reading, Equity, and Accountability in the DRC contract with USAID (AID-660-C-15-00001) awarded on May 28, 2015 in collaboration with partners FHI 360, Cambridge Education, School-to-School International, and Caritas Congo. The period of performance for this contract runs from May 2015 to May 2020 with a total estimated cost and fixed fee amount of \$134 million.

The purpose of ACCELERE! Activity One is to improve educational outcomes for boys and girls in select education provinces in the DRC. To achieve this purpose, ACCELERE! Activity One (henceforth referred to here simply as ACCELERE!, with the understanding that this refers only to the contract held with Chemonics International unless otherwise stated) will support education service delivery in at least 25 education sub-provinces across four target areas formerly known as Katanga, Kasai Occidental, Kasai Oriental, and Equateur.⁴ ACCELERE! will support improved learning outcomes in the government of the DRC (GDRC) public primary schools and schools supported by religious networks which are recognized by the GDRC. In addition, project staff will support nonformula schools (*centres de rattrapage scolaire*

¹ Human Development Report 2014: Sustaining Human Progress: Reducing Vulnerabilities and Building Resilience
http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/COD.pdf

² Human Development Report 2014: Sustaining Human Progress: Reducing Vulnerabilities and Building Resilience
http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/COD.pdf

³ Accelerating Progress to 2015: Democratic Republic of the Congo, A Report Series to the UN Special Envoy or Global Education, April 2013 Working Paper, pg. 6.

⁴ With an understanding that the former provinces of Katanga, Kasai Oriental, Kasai Occidental, and Equateur are in the process of *découpage*, this report will refer to the provinces using their previous names, as the project has yet to identify in which of the 14 new provinces it will work.

or CRS) in these four provinces as well as North and South Kivu, and in vocational schools (*centres d'apprentissage professionnel* or CAPs) in Katanga, North Kivu, and South Kivu.

To achieve ACCELERE!'s objectives, we will help catalyze and further strengthen partnerships across the education system to achieve better learning outcomes for more students: between the government center and decentralized actors, between communities and schools, and between the public and private sectors. In particular, ACCELERE! will support:

- Communities, children/youth, schools (formal and nonformal), religious network staff, and GDRC officials to develop common expectations and standards around school access, quality, and governance (the school monitoring and support framework is described below)
- Education-sector actors to mobilize support to meet those standards (ACCELERE! will support community-led school improvement plans or SIPs, teacher/director professional development, and policy research, development, and implementation)
- Communities, school staff, and GDRC officials to evaluate progress, communicate outcomes, hold sector actors to account if they are impeding progress, and plan the next cycle of support.

C. The ACCELERE! Results Framework

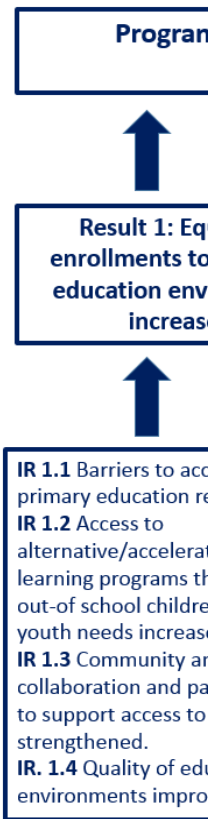
As depicted in the results framework below, the objective of the ACCELERE! project is to improve educational outcomes for boys and girls in select education provinces in the DRC. To attain this objective ACCELERE! will work to (1) increase equitable enrollments to a quality education environment, (2) improve the quality of education, and (3) improve the governance and accountability by stakeholders.

In order to achieve Result One: increasing equitable enrollments to a quality education environment, ACCELERE! will (1.1) reduce barriers to access for primary education, (1.2) increase access to alternative/accelerated learning programs that address out-of-school children and youth needs, (1.3) strengthen community and school collaboration and partnerships to support access to education, and (1.4) improve the quality of education environments.

The achievement of Result Two: improving the quality of education will be attained through (2.1) improving the quality of instruction at the primary level; (2.2) ensuring that teaching and learning materials are used effectively in the classroom; and (2.3) increasing community participation to support school-based and extracurricular learning.

In collaboration with the forthcoming DFID-financed project Improved Governance and Accountability in the Education Sector in the DRC, ACCELERE! will work to achieve Result Three: improving governance and accountability by stakeholders by focusing on (3.1) strengthening the development and implementation of policies for improved access and learning; (3.2) strengthening school leadership and management; and (3.3) increasing community and civil society oversight and accountability at the local level.

The ACCELERE! Results Framework



*

*This contract will support local level activities for IR 3.3 while provincial, educational provinces, and some sub-province level activities are covered under another contract for ACCELERE!, which additional IRs under Result 3, 3.4 (Effective resource allocation and execution in the education sector strengthened) and 3.5 (Strengthened systems and capacity at the national, provincial and school levels) are also covered through this separate contract.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

A. Overview

Progress to Date

Despite many challenges inherent to start-up and additional challenges encountered along the way, much progress has been made to launch the ACCELERE! Activity One in the time since the contract was signed. This includes significant strides in the areas of operations, pre-selection of sub-provinces, work planning and roll-out in the field, initial collaboration and coordination, initial communications and outreach, preparing for grants and procurement for technical activities, preparing for establishment of our monitoring and evaluation (M&E) plan and systems, and producing a high number of key deliverables critical to strategically guiding the programming work of the project. The subsections below cover each of these categories in further detail.

To initiate the start-up efforts, one of the first steps was to bring all four current ACCELERE! Activity One consortium members together to review the project approach and plan, particularly given the later start-date than had been anticipated for the contract. Much effort has been made to build mutual rapport, coordinate understanding of the project plan, and understanding of each member's role and window of insertion into ACCELERE!. This resulted in the first draft of the work plan. That such an intricate, yet critical initial exercise took place when the project was still housed in tight temporary office location was a real accomplishment. As a result, it brought all parties together for successful initial technical and managerial alignment.

The next and almost immediate management step undertaken was to open up channels of communication with key Ministry partners. Formal introductions were promptly facilitated by the USAID Mission Director for the COP to meet with HE Minister Maker within a few days of reporting to post. Following this, the much larger task of establishing cordial yet business-like rapport with our senior colleagues in the MEPS-INC was an immediate priority that we successfully met during the week of July 13, 2015.

Concurrently, ACCELERE! start-up has also included critical exchanges and on-going communication and coordination with both USAID and co-funder UKAID, both regarding expectations, challenges, and strategies for the Activity One project but also as links to the other Activities of ACCELERE!. One of the earliest of such exchanges was during a two-day technical session led directly by USAID/Washington's Education Team to share the most up-to-date views around USAID Goal One and Goal Three projects as they are both distinctly present in the ACCELERE! mandate. This assisted with prioritizing our agenda for action, as it became even more obvious that the most critical of all programmatic activities was accelerating the pedagogical document drafting process in order to be ready to introduce the materials as soon as possible in support of Ministry mandated reading standards for early grades. Further conversations with UKAID and the new Activity Two team have also opened up many new opportunities for synergies across the ACCELERE! portfolio that will be further pursued as the Activity Two team hones its own work plan.

Also during the reporting period, much progress was made in identifying and selecting the target sub-provinces for the project generally, and the first five sub-provinces for Katanga specifically. Immediately after the contract was signed, the ACCELERE! team performed a highly detailed analysis of possible target zones based on the mandated criteria. From this, five initial sub-provinces were identified for Katanga: Sakania, Lubumbashi two, Likasi, Kipushi, and Kamina. Subsequently, there have been delays in finalizing this list as exchanges with USAID and UKAID continue. As a result, many subsequent activities depending on this decision have been delayed, including roll-out of communications at the sub-provincial level and early implementation activities such as the "Je Suis Présent(e)" communications campaign for the beginning of the school year. However, the project has endeavored in the meanwhile to

forge ahead with as much provincial-level contact and planning as possible, and to make initial contacts and assessments in the sub-provinces likely to be approved.

In the meanwhile, the ACCELERE! team with support from Chemonics home office grant experts successfully developed the project Grants Manual and conducted training for field staff on grant issuing and management. This has effectively set the stage for issuing an Annual Program Statement for grant making during Year One of the project.

Finally, all of these efforts were made possible through huge strides on the operations side of start-up, including overcoming multiple challenges in order to get the project staffed up (ongoing), housed, equipped, and able to move forward on multiple fronts in support of the highly ambitious ACCELERE! technical program. As one of the greatest operations accomplishments of the quarter, we have secured office space in both Kinshasa and Lubumbashi to house not only ACCELERE! Activity One but Activity Two (Cambridge Education International) as well.

Management milestones per the work plan achieved this reporting period:

- All required deliverables submitted (see list in Annex A) and several revised
- Initial list of first 5 Katanga education sub-provinces determined and submitted for approval; Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) forthcoming in the following quarter once the list is finalized and validated with USAID
- All other project sub-provinces provisionally selected and choices made vetted by stakeholders and partners
- Coordination and communication plan for overall local ACCELERE! program partners
- Working groups established with MEPS-INC
- Provincial leaders sensitized to program objectives via systematic presentation of ACCELERE! to education provincial leaders and in meetings with civil society leaders (Governor) in Katanga through September 2015 and through a joint meeting with both groups in South Kivu in early September.
- Coordination with external evaluator for sampling plan

Additional accomplishments include:

- Provincial civil and education authorities informed and invited to interface with local implementation team, including in South Kivu
- Project name in French collaboratively developed and adopted through consensus
- Initial Planning workshop held (week of July 15, 2015)
- Positive collaboration Modus Operandi established between ACCELERE!, DIPROMAD & SERNAFOR
- Consulted with external evaluators to advise on project baseline
- All proposed Katanga sub-provinces have been visited

Additional work plan milestones originally expected in the reported period towards which important progress has been made:

- Final Year One Work Plan submitted; pending final approval
- Provisional work plan shared and agreed upon with donor, GDRC, and religious network counterparts
- Agreed-upon role of local inspectors and *conseillers technique* with GDRC and religious network authorities
- Initial ACCELERE! Steering Committee meetings held (prefaced by work that had already begun to collaboratively develop the Terms of Reference and identify members)

- Working groups developed with all other relevant DRC counterparts (MAS, MEPT, religious networks, civil society groups), including supporting the provincial establishment of working groups subordinate to the central level education *Comité de Concertation* (ComCon)

B. Challenges and Adjustments

Many of the challenges faced by ACCELERE! during the reporting period have to do with the fact that, as a result of a later-than-expected contract award, the project could not be fully present in target sub-provinces and schools by September 7, 2015 (back-to-school day in the DRC). Moving forward, we are working to make good on our strategy for adaptability and flexibility in project implementation that allows us to be responsive to the dynamic and ever-changing realities on the ground.

Chemonics has been responsive and committed to the ambitious project deliverable schedule outlined in the ACCELERE! contract, and has met all contractual deliverables to date. In some instances, project deliverables requiring intimate knowledge of the rural operating environment and its stakeholders were required before project staff had had the opportunity to travel to the sub-provinces, resulting in deliverables that will have to be further complemented and ground-truthed.

As pioneers in the implementation of this joint-funded education initiative between USAID and UKAID, we are excited to see such significant resources focused on achieving shared results for the DRC and our early grade beneficiaries. As we begin this historic collaboration between the two funders, we have had to navigate new aspects of reporting, communicating, collaborating, and managing of development initiatives. Eager to learn from our UKAID colleagues, and they from us, we look forward to more seamless coordination and collaboration in the coming years.

C. Progress on Management Activities

Operations

Progress highlights

- **Completed legal registration:** We successfully addressed and resolved issues regarding Chemonics International Inc. (prime contractor) DRC registration, allowing the company to operate with full legal capacity in the DRC.
- **Secured office space in Kinshasa and Lubumbashi:** In August and September respectively, we identified and leased office space for our two main project offices that will house ACCELERE! over the life of project. The ACCELERE! Activity One team moved in to the Kinshasa offices on August 27, 2015, and in to the Lubumbashi office on September 9, 2015.

In Kinshasa, we managed to ensure co-location with project partners implementing ACCELERE! Activity Two (Cambridge Education International). This co-location will significantly increase collaboration and coordination across the ACCELERE! program. The offices are now located at 11, Avenue des Cocotiers in the commune of Gombe, Kinshasa, an optimal location meeting all of our following joint requirements:

- Co-location of staff from both Activity One and Activity Two
- Located within a five minute car ride to all Ministry offices
- A mere 10 to 15 minutes to USAID Mission, and
- Very close to central Kinshasa

In Lubumbashi project offices were secured at 3, Avenue Nyota, Golf Quarter, ensuring a safe and secure locale easily accessible to project counterparts and stakeholders. In order to maximize

communications and collaboration across all ACCELERE! projects, office space has also been made available to ACCELERE! Activity Two (Cambridge Education International).

Although the opening of the Bukavu and Goma offices is not slated until 2016, pending a clearer vision of the exact sequencing of schools and sub-provinces for project interventions, preliminary scouting for possible locations will begin this year, 2015.

- Staffing: As of September 30, 2015, the project has hired approximately 50 percent of staff for Kinshasa and Lubumbashi, with preliminary recruits on-going for additional staff which will be on-boarded as project activities increase. Leading up to this achievement were multiple steps, including:
 - In recognition of the complexity of local labor law in the DRC, and the intricacies of the local employment process, establishing a close working relationship with an experienced local labor lawyer to guide project hiring in full compliance with the DRC labor code
 - Honing job descriptions for and recruiting all local staff in accordance with fair hiring practices and the local labor code
- Transport logistics: In the course of the first three weeks of start-up, the COP was able to negotiate with the USAID Mission the transfer of four four-wheel-drive vehicles in excellent shape over to ACCELERE! The transfer was finalized in early September, with project drivers on-boarded shortly thereafter. Two of the vehicles were shipped to Lubumbashi. Additionally, ACCELERE! is currently in the process of purchasing additional vehicles for existing needs, as well as for anticipated Year Two needs in the Kivus (Bukavu/Goma) and additional provinces.
- Policy and procedures manual: A comprehensive ACCELERE! policy manual, designed to give project staff a clear understanding of Chemonics' employment policies, practices, and procedures, was finalized during the reporting period. The manual provides general information about the policies under which the project operates, with each staff member being responsible for reading and understanding the manual and expected to be familiar with, and comply, with its provisions. In addition to Chemonics policies, the manual adheres to relevant labor laws, the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR), and contract- or USAID-specific regulations.

Challenges specific to operations and steps taken to address these challenges

- Establishing office space. The process of establishing offices in Kinshasa and Lubumbashi took longer than initially estimated, with staff initially working out of less than optimal temporary offices established in a local hotel (Kinshasa) and in an existing Chemonics project office (Lubumbashi). The delays and challenges in obtaining permanent office space were mostly due to the following reasons:
 - Commercial real estate values in the DRC have gone up significantly since cost estimates were made in 2014. This forced a complete reassessment of office space needs with a view to still keeping costs at a reasonable level, which meant having to engage in multiple negotiations with property owners that in the DRC are often based off-shore, further complicating the negotiation process.
 - Dearth of adequate office space, of the size and specifications needed to house the ACCELERE! project, in Kinshasa and Lubumbashi.
 - Complex leasing requirements instituted by local landlords and local custom, requiring the time-consuming interventions of local lawyers to navigate the processes.
- Staffing. In response to changing programmatic needs, and the fact that sequencing of project activities (selection of sub-provinces and schools, for example) has not been finalized, the project organizational chart development process has gone through several drafts and is still evolving.

Additionally, local recruitment has taken longer than expected due to difficulty in finding qualified professional to fill our project positions. Once identified, verification of employee references and receipt of adequate backup material to justify proposed salaries has not been as swift as originally anticipated.

At the technical level the greatest challenge has been the absence of the Senior Education Advisor and the Reading Advisor, two expatriate positions that have been difficult to fill. In response to this challenge, these responsibilities have been taken up by additional STTA, the COP, and home office technical support, including Chemonics's newly on-boarded technical director Dr. Jennifer Swift-Morgan. At the writing of this report, a temporary Senior Education Advisor STTA has just been approved for three month assignment, with fielding by early November, 2015. Additionally, negotiations with a permanent SEA are being finalized in the coming days, with an approval request slated to be sent to the Mission in early November and a permanent on-boarding of early 2016.

Highlights of key upcoming operations milestones

- Local Staffing at 75 percent by the end of the first quarter, 2016
- Senior Education Advisor and the Reading Advisor fielded by the end of the first quarter, 2016
- Kinshasa and Lubumbashi offices fully optimized, including minor renovations and foolproof communication systems, by the end of the first quarter, 2016
- Finalized and fully adopted policy and procedures manual for Kinshasa, Lubumbashi and Kivu field offices in line with current DRC practices and USAID regulations
- Completed large-scale procurement agreements in place for purchase of project goods (vehicles, for example) and services (translation, etc.)
- Security/evacuation plan and procedures in place and tested with new security service provider.

Sub-province selection

Progress highlights

ACCELERE! established initial contacts with provincial-level authorities and partners to introduce the program. Upon establishment of the office in Lubumbashi, DCOP Lorraine Denakpo began to initiate a wide range of formal contacts with provincial and sub-provincial education authorities, as well as with civil authorities. For instance, she engaged in discussions with the Sous-PROVEDs of Kipushi and Lubumbashi two, met with the Assistant Mayor of Likasi and with some Catholic and Protestant stakeholders, and traveled to Sakania to meet with the Sous-PROVED. As Project management developed a clear sense of and feel for four of the five selected sub-provinces, they continued to meet with local prominent community members to learn more about those same sub-provinces. For example, a meeting with the CSR manager at a mine that has supported education in Kipushi on September 15 led to obtaining more contacts and helped initiate discussions around anticipated role for CRS in ACCELERE!. Thanks to a meeting with the education advisor to the Minister and in response to a request from the Sous-PROVEDs of Lubumbashi two, Our Katanga management team proceeded to draft and compile a list of questions to provide to each Sous-PROVED that will guide all future meetings with them in an effort to streamline communication and collect relevant and consistent information about our selected sub-provinces. This will in turn help us better devise and adapt intervention according to varying local situations and needs.

In Kinshasa, the project has also met officials of the Technical Education Support Unit (CATED), the Directorate of Planning, the Sous-PROVED, and the coordinators of the subsidized schools. In addition to these institutional actors, we also held various meetings with other partners involved in the field of education (UNICEF, PAM, Project EAGLE, Project Vas-y Fille, UNESCO, UNICEF) Although these meetings were first and foremost consultative in nature (i.e. receive ideas, suggestions and

recommendations as to how best arrive at the balanced education sub-province selection we were working to achieve) they were also an opportunity to present project essentials and identify possible areas of future collaboration with these partners through implementation phase. In September, the ACCELERE! Activity One COP also traveled to the Kivus and met with local CRS/CAPs, local provincial authorities (including the governor and a number of other ministers) as well as other local education-focused NGOs, and formally presented the program.

During this quarter, ACCELERE! completed provisional education Sub-Province selection, adhering to all relevant criteria required by the project contract. These criteria included engaging a critical mass of sub-provinces in order to have a cohesive (rather than scattered or diluted); supporting synergies between existing donor interventions in education, health, water and sanitation; prioritizing education sub-provinces where there is little or no education support from external agencies; and supporting education where there is the greatest need.

While the priority was to identify five project implementation areas in Katanga, the process for selecting the sub-provinces for ACCELERE! Activity One began with a review of the provincial scale-up plan over the entire project period, and especially over Year One through Year Three. The conclusions to the initial analysis of potential target sub-provinces are offered in Annex E and resulted in the identification of 38 potential sub-provinces. ACCELERE! vetted this list by MEPS-INC senior management through formal working sessions with colleagues over the week of August 10, 2015, first with CATED, then DIPROMAD, then SERNAFOR, and finally with Minister Senior Advisor M. Jovin. The next step consisted of a series of dialogues with other project partners, namely UNICEF, Project EAGLE and Vasy-fille. With all comments compiled, the project first presented our initial provisional education sub-provinces selection for the entire five-year life of ACCELERE! for concurrence with the USAID/DRC Education Team on August 10, 2015.

Based on this master list, the project staff then analysed the potential population of sub-provinces for the first province of Kantaga, where the project is starting in Year One. From the list of eight possible sub-provinces in Katanga, the project then honed in on five that presented the best opportunity for starting in the province, based on key security and accessibility criteria. The DCOP engaged in a systematic series of field visits in order to validate these selections, completing visits to four out of the five sub-provinces (in Sakania, Lumbumbashi two, Likasi, and Kipushi). Contact was made via phone and email with the fifth proposed sub-province (Kamina). During site visits, ACCELERE! staff met and introduced the project to key government actors and religious coordination offices. Although the entire process that we followed in order to identify the 5 sub-provinces that we will concentrate on in Year 1 may seem overly complex, one must take into account the multiple range of mandates that the project needed to observe. Once the lengthy process was concluded – basically relying on information from different sources (Ministry figures, country made regional maps, NGO documentation and previous projects data in particular), the high level of unreliability of data collection in the DRC is such that a thorough field review was needed in order to confirm even existence of schools in many regions, and during her very meticulous visits and meetings with local provincial authorities, the DCOP found a large number of discrepancies that would have eluded us had we not ensured a field validation of choices made. This, in spite of the fact that our provisional choices had been thoroughly vetted by MEPS-INC senior management.

The following provisionally selected educational sub-provinces in Katanga were presented to USAID, UKAID, and MEPS-INC, for concurrence on September 21, 2015: Sakania, Lubumbashi two, Likasi, Kipushi, and Kamina. This selection would afford ACCELERE! the opportunity to work with just over 500 local schools in an immense geographic area, with Kamina in particular being slightly more difficult to reach than the other four areas. At the time of the writing of this report, USAID has requested that the ACCELERE! team review this list in order to meet updated Mission priorities for creating synergies with other USAID-supported programs in the province. This will likely result in a change to the final list,

anticipated to be validated in the following reporting quarter. Once the list of the first five sub-provinces is finalized in the following quarter, ACCELERE! will carry out a two-day information and planning workshop with all sub-province actors.

Challenges resulting in delays or other changes to activities per the work plan

Establishing the first five sub-provinces for ACCELERE! activity has taken longer than expected. To date, this list is not yet approved and, as described above, will be revised per recent USAID request. This has led to delays impacting our ability to move forward with the introduction of the program in those sites, as well as further planning, and initial implementation. This has also affected our ability to assemble plans and protocols for embedding staff in provincial and/or sub-provincial offices of MEPS-INC and religious networks.

For this reason, we propose the following changes to the work plan:

- Finalize the list of initial sub-provinces in November rather than in August of this year.
- Sign MOUs for sub-provincial selection with national, provincial, and sub-provincial authorities following final validation of the list in November rather than in September of this year.
- Develop protocols and MOUs for embedding staff in central and sub-provincial offices (of MEPS-INC or religious networks) in November rather than in October of this year.

Highlights of key upcoming milestones

- List of sub-provinces finalized
- MOUs with target sub-provinces signed
- Information and planning workshop with all key sub-province actors held
- Protocols and MOUs for embedding staff in central and sub-provincial offices (of MEPS-INC or religious networks) established

D. Project roll-out

Progress highlights since project began

After working together to determine a French name for the project, Improving Reading, Equity, and Accounting in the DRC (I-READ) is now referred to as the first Activity of project ACCELERE! – *Accès, équité, lecture, rétention et redevabilité* – or accelerating equitable access to school, reading, student retention, and accountability. We followed a simple and inclusive process with all consortium partners. The selection was held as the final exercise of our in-country joint series of meetings during the week of July 13, 2015. Key stakeholders were invited to try and devise a French language acronym that would be representative of all three key project activities, and have some simple, positive connotation for all to capture easily. The choice was made through consensus and then formally approved by the Mission.

Through a consultative and participatory process, we completed our work plan by the July 28, 2015 deadline. We held a two and a half-day work planning workshop from July 15-17, 2015, with a wide range of project partners and local stakeholders from MEPS-INC. During this workshop, ACCELERE! staff explained the work planning process, and consortium partners interfaced with MEPS-INC management in key directorates (DIPROMAD & SERNAFOR in particular) to lay out the road map for project implementation. In addition, the workshop initiated key project partnerships that will guide implementation through the life of the project. For instance the COP saw it of prime importance that ACCELERE! signal within its first few days of operation that for us, engaging colleagues does mean asking for them to join us in our project working groups as well as offering our technical support whenever and wherever MEPS-INC will request it. This is why colleagues representing the SG's office, the IG's and the 3 other key directorates were invited to our opening workshop, which was extremely well received as an initial signal of good-will and genuine cooperation in support of Ministry agenda.

Following this activity, the draft work plan was developed and submitted. In response to USAID comments and questions, we prepared and submitted a revised work plan on September 2, 2015. Further clarifications, updated information, and responses to USAID's questions were included in a matrix response and milestones chart submitted on October 6, 2015. We are currently working on an updated Gantt chart to represent the updated work plan sequencing and milestone timing as it stands now.

ACCELERE! has established relationships with key MEPS-INC partners, in particular His Excellency MEPS-INC Minister Maker Mwangu Famba, Secretary General Mr. Lufunisabo Bundoki, and Inspector General Mr. Michel Djamba Kaombe. We also established relationships with key partners in the Cabinet, including CATED Technical Support Unit Lead Professor Valere Munsya, DIPROMAD Director Mrs. Anne-Marie Nzumba, and Head of SERNAFOR, Mr. Edgard Bal-Mayel, who lead key Partner Directorates. The Chief of Party was introduced formally to the Minister on June 6, 2015, to make initial contact, discuss project staff embedding proposals for consideration by the host Ministry, and to generally set the tone for what all parties hoped will be a very close cooperation of effort in support of the GRDC's education reform agenda. This approach served to make all essential counterparts aware of ACCELERE!, and to establish cordial and professional rapport.

Challenges resulting in delays or other changes to activities per the work plan

Because of the delays with the selection of the sub-provinces as described above, the following activities have been delayed and will now take place in the following quarter:

- Present final work plan to MEPS-INC, MAS, and religious networks
- Agree with MEPS-INC, PROVED, - Sous-PROVED, and religious networks on the role of inspectors/advisors in ACCELERE!
- After sub-province selection, sign MOU with national, provincial, and sub-provincial levels

Highlights of key upcoming milestones

- Deliverables revised and submitted, as necessary
- Work plan presented, and *inspector/conseiller* role in ACCELERE! established.
- Updated Year One work plan Gantt chart reflecting updated sequencing and approach complete
- Planning workshop on updated work plan for MEPS-INC, MAS, and religious networks held

E. Collaboration and coordination

Progress highlights since project began

Coordination with USAID

ACCELERE! held a decisive two-day session from July 13-14, 2015 with Mission colleagues, over the course of which USAID provided clear and transparent guidelines for implementation of projects that fall under Goal One of the 2011 USAID Education Strategy. This informative session was facilitated by Ms. Koli Bani of USAID Africa Education Team, and included a comprehensive power point presentation delivered remotely from Washington, DC by USAID Goal One advisor Ms. Rebecca Rhodes. Ms. Rhodes articulated a thorough review of the Agency's Goal One programs, and defined the specific requirements of any education development project that is implemented under Goal One. ACCELERE!'s targets directly and systematically support this goal of 100,000,000 children reading.

The second day of the meeting was entirely devoted to ACCELERE!, and offered the project staff a great opportunity to ask clarification questions, with a view to ensuring as tight an alignment as possible between USAID Goal One guidelines and current project efforts. The following questions were among discussion points during the meeting:

- How can ACCELERE! ensure that the centrality of the 5Ts approach in early grade reading will be in our work, namely to be visible in student texts, teachers' guides and scripted lessons, and manuals for coaches and trainers?
- How will we deploy Reading Coaches to provide adequate support time to teachers?
- How will ACCELERE! support the MEPS-INC to transition to a phonics-based early grade reading approach, considering the prevalence of whole-word reading methodology in documents drafted by the International Organisation of Francophone, which are currently widely in use in schools in DRC?
- How will our education sub-province selection process match the patchwork linguistic geography prevalent in the DRC?
- What is the anticipated timing for completion of the ACCELERE! baseline assessment, given the importance of this assessment to the project's Activity One contract deliverable calendar?
- When will ACCELERE! be in a position to effectively deploy interventions in project schools, given necessary intermediate steps (such as recruitment, preparation and distribution of texts) with the impending end of the current school year?

It was quite helpful that these key questions and challenges (that are truly at the heart of the project in terms of specific strategies for field implementation) were raised during this July meeting. This led to initial conversations with Mission colleagues about adjustments that might need to be made to the project approach and timeline in order to ensure that the team is set up for success regarding its most important outcome measure: hundreds of thousands of children reading at their grade level. We appreciate the cordial understanding and sincere willingness shown by USAID colleagues to work with Activity One leadership to arrive cooperatively at strategies for addressing the questions and challenges raised.

ACCELERE! has established a cordial and professional rapport with the project COR and the USAID/DRC Mission Education Team. We have a meeting on a weekly basis every Monday from 3:00pm to 4:30pm at the Mission Office. In addition, the Chief of Party traveled with the Mission's Education Team on a one-week mission to the Kivus from October 31 to September 4, 2015. During this trip, ACCELERE! was privileged to make initial key contacts with a number of local CRSs and CAPs, as well as other local organizations active in education and in the promotion of literacy in particular. The COP formally presented ACCELERE!'s program to local provincial authorities in attendance, including the governor and his representative, and a number of other ministers.

Coordination with UKAID and the other ACCELERE! partners

Because of other cross-donor involvement by USAID and UKAID in overseeing ACCELERE!, we have established excellent professional rapport with colleagues in UKAID. We have conducted initial courtesy visits, and invited UKAID participation on numerous USAID meetings in order to discuss practical operational details of our joint work. We also held a joint formal review of the DOA, the overarching document between donor governments that establishes the basis for a functional partnership to jointly implement ACCELERE!. Together with UKAID and USAID, we established a meeting calendar and finalized our communications protocols, in order to facilitate seamless and transparent communication and information-sharing.

In the course of the next quarter, ACCELERE! meetings will be scheduled so that each donor may opt to be present at the other's internal meetings, while a joint USAID/UKAID session will be held on the last Wednesday of each month. As Activity One implementers, Chemonics will continue to have regular weekly meetings with the COR and Education Team Leadership to ensure close monitoring of all project field activities. All parties have agreed on a format and draft Terms of Reference for the ACCELERE! Steering committee, which is shared in Annex G and will be finalized early in the next quarter.

In addition, project leadership met at length on August 8, 2015 with UNICEF Education lead Mr. Ephraim Baohgwerhe, in order to investigate jointly how Chemonics (in implementing Activity One) and

UNICEF (under Activity Four) could combine energies and ideas for cost effectiveness as we jointly work under ACCELERE!

Communication and coordination with education authorities and related partners

ACCELERE! has established modes of coordination with MEPS-INC sub-agencies CATED, SERNAFOR, and DIPROMAD. As a first step, they include formal registration with and inclusion in the CATED mailing list, which ensures that project managerial and technical leadership (the COP, DCOP, Education Policy Advisor Didier Niki-Niki, and Results 2 lead Hortense Bulungu) remain continuously informed about and invited to all education events and/or key meetings of all working groups in the city. We still need to finalize a similar process with MAS and other sub-agencies, including Special Education and DGENF. ACCELERE! is officially a full member of the National ComCon, and our Katanga Team is working to strike similar contact with provincial ComCons in the province.

ACCELERE! met with national level stakeholders via a number of key MEPS-INC sponsored events, to ensure ACCELERE! presence and visibility ahead of field implementation. The meetings and engagements are as follows:

- July 20-21, 2015: The MEPS-INC sponsored a workshop on UNESCO's financing of a new EMIS initiative, which will launch this year and expand in a number of provinces where ACCELERE! will be active. This session allowed for early professional networking and collaboration.
- August 17, 2015: The MEPS-INC sponsored a ceremony launching the national school registration campaign, financed by UNICEF. This is similar to the type of event that ACCELERE! intends to co-finance and lead for the 2016-2017 school year as part of the full "Je Suis Present(e)" campaign. This offered a valuable forum to project a positive USAID vision of education initiatives in the country, and send a strong and authentic message of support to the authorities. With ACCELERE! in full start-up mode, we were not be directly involved in this event's planning and financing, but we anticipate greater involvement in the coming years.
- August 25-26, 2015: The MEPS-INC sponsored a showcase event to present a number of innovative activities in education in DRC to officials and the public at large.
- August 27-28, 2015: The MEPS-INC held their annual workshop to formally review the Ministry's Program Interimaire de l'Education. This is essentially a state-of-education analysis spread over two full days, offered by a range of senior Ministry Directorates as well as invited prominent donors. USAID & UKAID jointly introduced ACCELERE! to members, and the Chief of Party met formally and informally with provincial education ministers that the project will interface with over the next five years. The event offered an excellent venue to learn about the primary curriculum, notably to confirm that early grade reading is mandated for the 2015-16 school year with 45 minutes of instruction per day in grades 1-4. Participants also shared how proposed changes are received by the provinces; this information was extremely useful intelligence for ACCELERE! as we prepare for implementation.
- September 23, 2015: CATED sponsored a workshop and presentation of ACCELERE! for all ACCELERE! implementers to discuss our respective roles in project implementation.

Communication and coordination with other potential project partners and education actors:

ACCELERE! has met with donor-funded projects and other local actors working in education, governance, water, sanitation, and hygiene, health, and nutrition, to identify opportunities for collaboration. Meetings include the following:

- **Caritas Congo:** Caritas Congo is a project consortium partner, and their sub-contract is still being finalized at this time. ACCELERE! proposes to issue an intermediate minimal sub-award with Caritas or another qualified organization, if available, that will allow us to conduct a detailed field survey of existing schools, schools to be built, CRSs and CAPs, local NGOs, and document the state of out-of-school children in the five identified Katanga sub-provinces.

- **Humana People-to-People Congo:** Humana People-to-People has been very active over the past decade and more in supporting primary education in the DRC. Their leadership has shown a keen interest in contributing in some form to ACCELERE!, and discussions are on-going on the basis of a concept paper they shared with the project.
- **GirlsRising:** GirlsRising is a small USAID-funded organization that supports girls' education, sharing similar goals and focus on similar targets as ACCELERE!. Project Director Ms Carla Bachecci reached out to ACCELERE! about potentially relevant materials, strategies (such as the use of "immersive script" technology in support of reading materials), and cross-project collaboration. , and shared with us relevant materials and strategies.
- **Les Bantous:** Les Bantous is a Youth organization comprised largely of university graduates. The group is mainly present in and around Kinshasa, and has now just opened a branch in the Lubumbashi area. We envision that Les Bantous could potentially contribute to ACCELERE!'s search for reading coaches and other support personnel.
- **DRC Protestant Schools Network:** The DRC Protestant Schools Network operates a large network of schools (primarily based in the two Kasais), and is well positioned to identify schools in need of ACCELERE! support for renovation. Project director Gwanda Fletcher expressed interest in collaborating in this regard, which we will explore and develop in the coming year.
- **The DRC's Salvation Army:**The DRC Salvation Army operates 12 schools in Katanga. We met with Education Representative Mr. Lucien Lamartiniere to discuss ways that ACCELERE! may be able to support Salvation Army schools through our school renovation initiatives.
- **ELAN International Organization of Francophony (OIF):** We met with OIF delegate Charline Darmailac, who is embedded within DIPROMAD, to discuss issues of common interest around early grade reading.
- **FHI360:** We met with FHI360 Country Director Dr. Bienvenu Morcos to discuss issues of common interest, given that FHI 360 is also a member of our consortium. We also had the opportunity to discuss Project EAGLE, which also addresses promotion of girls' education.
- **International Rescue Committee:** We met with implementers of Vas-y-fille to discuss best practices and lessons learned on how to best promote girls' education.

Challenges resulting in delays or other changes to activities per the work plan

The following activities were originally anticipated during the current reporting period, but will now be conducted in the following quarter:

- Meet with other national level stakeholders such as parents' associations, teacher unions, and education NGOs.
- Hold an annual internal alignment meeting with project partners and resource groups, and cement working relationship with the ACCELERE! Steering Committee.
- Further alignment of ACCELERE! work plans across activities.
- Establish modes of collaboration established with MAS sub-agencies, including determination regarding potential opening provincial ComCons.
- Discuss with USAID/UKAID about establishing steering committees with system actors to monitor the project, as appropriate
- Determine the most effective way to collaborate with the new Ministry of Professional and Technical Education.
- Meet with national religious networks to agree on how to operate in religious network schools.

Highlights of key upcoming milestones

- Coordination and Communication plan with implementers of Activity One and Four created
- Annual coordination meetings and quarterly meetings held
- Participated in first official USAID/DFID ACCELERE! Steering Committee meeting

- Effective coordination organized with all relevant DRC counterparts (MEPS-INC, MAS, religious networks, civil society groups, MEPT, etc.), and provincial working groups subordinate to the ComCon established.

F. Communications and outreach

Progress highlights since project began

In terms of operational communications, ACCELERE! has established communications norms and protocols to ensure effective internal communication within the project. This includes a weekly teleconference with the Chemonics home office and ACCELERE! field offices, as well as a summary of approval requests that the COP and COR review during their weekly meetings.

In terms of technical communications, conversations on technical implementation occur at least once per week between the Chief of Party and Deputy Chief of Party in the Kinshasa and Lubumbashi offices, and as of September with the new home office technical director. Electronic communications channels are used to dialogue between Activity One and Activity Two projects under ACCELERE! and their leadership teams convene at least monthly, and additionally as needed, to check in on implementation progress and challenges. Communication between local implementers is channeled through respective donors, and includes approved deliverables, consultant scopes of work, and meeting notes as applicable.

We have introduced the program to inspectors, advisors, and school directors of selected schools, CRSs, and CAPs within selected sub-provinces in Katanga via formal meetings. More substantial workshops with these actors are scheduled to be held by the end of November 2015.

ACCELERE! has coordinated with the Government of DRC and other partners to support the Promotion Nationale Scolaire. ACCELERE! engaged in discussion with UNICEF as implementer of Activity Four to become a full partner in the next school year's registration campaign, in support of the Ministry's back to school campaign. The project has also engaged GirlsRising to join the school attendance campaign in order to add special focus on promoting education for girls.

Challenges resulting in delays or other changes to activities per the work plan

Because of delays in selecting the initial target sub-provinces and other challenges encountered in start-up, the project was unable to launch the "Je suis present(e)" campaign at the beginning of the school year. Instead, we now envision taking the time now to develop the key messages and communication strategy in a participative way, and testing these messages and outreach strategies (e.g. local language messages on local radio, push messages via SMS, and door to door visits) in the second half of Year One to encourage attendance and retention. This will allow us to be ready to launch the full campaign at the beginning of the 2016-2017 school year.

Immediately following formal approval of the project work plan, ACCELERE! will work to introduce the detailed plan to provincial actors, including the provincial governor, provincial minister of education, PROVED, and provincial SECOPE. In the meantime, initial general presentations have already been conducted, in particular during the meeting held on September 24, 2015, sponsored by CATED. Several further presentations and exchanges are already planned at the provincial level.

Highlights of key upcoming milestones

- Provincial leaders, Sous-PROVED staff, religious network staff, and school directors sensitized to program objectives

- Initial messages developed with stakeholders and partners at the community, sub-provincial, provincial, and national level to be used for the “Je suis present(e)” campaign, likely with an initial pilot in Year One.
- Official project launch event held
- National coordination meeting held

G. Grants and procurement

Progress highlights since project began

During this reporting period, ACCELERE! successfully established a USAID-approved Grants Manual and received a Chemonics Home Office Grants Start-up Specialist who traveled to Kinshasa in August to train the grants, administration and finance, and technical teams on the future ACCELERE! grants program. The staff were trained on the different types of grants mechanisms the project will be utilizing, roles and responsibilities for the different teams, and the next steps for the grants program.

In addition, the project has developed a calendar of activities for the first cycle of grants, so that grants would be available in the second and third semester of the school year for both the formal and informal education sectors. Additionally, ACCELERE! has consulted with other partners on the successes of their grant programs and collected information on potential awardees; and initiated an examination of how vulnerable children are currently identified and supported. The program is mobilizing grants mechanisms, including adapting “getting to grants” training, and is actively working to identify and put in place mechanisms for overseeing grants (particularly block grants to schools) to ensure compliance with the terms of the grant.

As the project is still in its start-up phase, the project has had a high number of procurement opportunities since the project was awarded on May 28, 2015. The project is currently finalizing the selection for a blanket purchase agreement for materials typesetting and printing. The blanket purchase agreement will allow ACCELERE! to print the education materials that it needs as the project grows.

In addition, the project has begun procurement for equipment and services that will help support project operations. On July 9, the project submitted its ADS Program-Funded IT Review Request to the ADS 548 review, and the project has launched requests for proposals for the purchase of information technology equipment, as well as internet services. The project has also launched requests for quotations for local and U.S.-based translation services, office furniture, guard services, and cleaning services.

Challenges resulting in delays or other changes to activities per the work plan

Great strides were made in the past quarter towards issuing the RFP/RFQ/BPA for printing and distribution of materials. Both Katanga Provincial Team Leader and Grants Manager met on September 19 regarding planning for grants to benefit schools (access, retention, improved pedagogy, and improved school management). They concentrated on identifying potential grantees -- organizations that would then get grant resources to the schools or school stakeholders, communities. ACCELERE! will first focus on having a system to award in kind grants of less than \$50,000 each. The potential grantee list will include the Sous- PROVEDs, the corresponding religious units that oversees schools, provincial level federations of PTAs, and other such "federating groups". Our Team envisage identifying between 30-50 such groups, then work on developing one or several RFAs and the various groups will be in a position to respond. It is envisaged that ACCELERE! will need to provide the groups with information and training to enable them to respond. Current calendar projects issuing the APS beginning in January to start making procurements of resources in support of education. ACCELERE! Katanga Team’s overall goal is to have up to 30 grants of \$50,000 each; one RFA will focus on support to public education/confessional schools and a second RFA will focus on the centre de ratrappage and/or CAPs (Katanga and the Kivus). We anticipate that the

ACCELERE! Activity One evaluation committee for this award will convene early in the following quarter to select the best bid or bids.

During the reporting period, work was initiated to determine the best way forward for developing and issuing an RFP/RFQ for tablets, including further conversations with Orange. This work will now continue through the next quarter, when we aim to at least have an initial procurement of tablets for the baseline data collection to be conducted by the end of December.

While much progress was made towards grant making with the adoption of the Grants Manual and related training for project staff, we will now be developing and releasing the APS, identifying potential target grantees and hold training in the third quarter of Year One. The overwhelming reason for delays encountered has been the project calendar ending up unreasonably compacted due to mandated deliverable schedule. It was simply not possible for either project office in Kinshasa and Lubumbashi to launch into a major Grants-supported initiative without having a clear sense of the field challenges and without the benefit of fully staffed team to investigate, conceive, plan, initiate, and support a grants program within the initially scheduled timeframe.

But the specifics of the DRC are also an essential factor to consider now as much as through ACCELERE!'S next five years of implementation: anything involving financial awards requires extreme caution and multiple safeguards in order to achieve planned goals due to rampant corruption practices. Distances and the difficulties encountered in communication (including unreliable phone lines and even worse in-country internet links) also tend to add much time to any movement and/or implementation process.

Highlights of key upcoming milestones

- RFP/RFQ/BPA awarded for printing and distribution of teaching and learning materials
- Grants APS released and potential target grantees identified.
- RFP/RFQ for tablets issued and awarded

H. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning

Progress highlights since project began

Recruitment and onboarding M&E and research personnel. ACCELERE! has hired the Director of M&E, and recruited an M&E Specialist based in Kinshasa and two M&E Coordinators who will be based in Lubumbashi to oversee the monitoring and evaluation activities within our target sub-provinces. In Kinshasa, we recruited an M&E Specialist who will oversee the DevResults system and support the implementation of the project's monitoring and evaluation plan. We plan to complete the M&E team with the recruitment of the M&E Coordinators for the North and South Kivu provinces in the coming year.

Also during this reporting period, the scope of work for the subcontract with ACCELERE! Activity One consortium partner School to School International (STS) was finalized. STS hired three staff at their US office with relevant technical and language skills. These are:

- Ms. Sandhya Kitchlu was brought in as Senior Program Manager. A seasoned project director with experience managing education projects in Africa, she will be overseeing the overall subcontract for STS.
- Ms. Fernanda Gándara was hired as a Research Coordinator. An assessment expert with experience working in the DRC, Ms. Gándara will be one of the primary technical leads for STS' contributions to the project.
- Ms. Selene Rangel was brought on board to serve as the Administrative and Finance Assistant.

- STS began the process of recruiting for a proposed full time local hire (Mr. Olivier Mumbere) to serve as STS' point person on the ground and provide day-to-day support in the field.

Two STS staff members, Dr. Mark Lynd and Ms. Candace Debnam, traveled to Kinshasa to participate in June work planning meetings, provide input into the project work plan, and share lessons learned from previous early education projects. The STS team continued to participate in technical meetings and discussions remotely from Washington, D.C., discussing roles and responsibilities, revisions to the work plan, and development the M&E plan and learning agenda.

Collaboration with MEPS-INC and MAS staff to align our M&E systems and ensure that we collect data that monitors progress against the goals of the national Plan Intérimaire de l'Éducation. To ensure that project indicators and data collection contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the Interim Education Plan of Government of the DRC, we plan to strongly cooperate with the officials of the office of education of the DRC. To this end, ACCELERE! held several meetings in Kinshasa and Lubumbashi with the officials of the MEPS-INC and MAS and their equivalents at the provincial level to introduce them to the project and its implementation strategies and discuss with them the indicators of the project and the indicators of the national Intermediary Education Plan.

Coordination with external evaluator. During the start-up term, the M&E team consulted with USAID and the third-party evaluator RTI to better understand the plan for baseline data collection on student reading performance using the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) tool, on student performance in math using the Early Grade Mathematics Assessment (EGMA) tool, and the Snapshot of School Management Effectiveness survey. The ACCELERE! Activity One team provided RTI with the school lists we secured from the local education authorities. RTI then worked to train enumerators through October from a local partner and to test the instruments developed in French and Swahili. RTI plans to work with a local partner to perform the external baseline data collection using these tools. Many discussions between ACCELERE!, RTI and the Mission's Education Team were held to try and determine optimal timeframe to conduct the baseline initiative. Although 2015 DRC back-to-school date had officially been set for Monday, September 07, 2015, schools as rule do not see full enrollment until late in October as many parents try to save money on high tuition fees. Following input for Kinshasa AID's education team lead, baseline work is now scheduled for late October/early November 2015.

Drafted project Operations Research Plan for the project learning agenda. We developed and submitted the Operation Research Plan in August to strengthen ACCELERE! results chain towards increasing the efficiency, effectiveness, and quality of ACCELERE! implementation in close collaboration with the GDRC and other counterparts.

Initial work on developing the PMEP and initiating staff to the M&E approach for this project. Meanwhile, we are continuing work on the documents to establish the rest of the project learning agenda including the development of our Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Plan in anticipation of approval of the Annual Work Plan. To this end, we are developing the project's Monitoring and Evaluation system, as well as data collection on the number of schools and the number of students in the five provinces of intervention and the reference sheet for the project's indicators. When finalized, the PMEP will guide the project teams and stakeholders in collecting high quality data pertaining to the performance of the education system and managing project activities, monitoring progress, and communicating verifiable, evidence-based results. The M&E team also reviewed and provided feedback on USAID's proposed new methodology (as circulated to all Goal One projects implementers around the world) of measuring the count of children reading.

Preparation project-led collection of baseline data. The Result 2 team has worked to identify the main assessment tools needed to support upcoming ACCELERE! interventions, and consultants from STS have

begun to draft relevant baseline assessment tools to be employed for data collection before the December 2015 training cycle for trainers, teachers and school directors, and before other interventions begin. These tools will be finalized in conjunction with the draft PMEP under development.

Initial work to set up DevResults and K-Mobile data collection system. While the setup of our DevResults project management tool and K-Mobile data collection system will be conducted after the approval of the PMEP by USAID, we began the process of identifying the methods to incorporate these systems for Monitoring and Evaluation.

Challenges resulting in delays or other changes to activities per the work plan

As the submission of the PMEP is related to the approval of the Work Plan of the project, the late approval has stalled some components of the PMEP, including set-up of the DevResults and K-Mobile Data Collection Plans. Additionally, the implementation of the monitoring plan, and the finalization of collection tools and the training of actors on the Monitoring and Evaluation system of the project depend on final approval of the PMEP and the choice of indicators to follow. In that regards, the complexity of the educational system of the DRC and the diversity of actors will be a challenge for data collection. With the breadth of ACCELERE!'s intervention, there are multiple questions that the project staff will have to examine the challenges for data collection including the school's willingness to provide information transparently.

Highlights of key upcoming milestones

- Monitoring and evaluation system established and operational.
- Revised Operations Research Plan reflecting USAID comments and questions
- Draft PMEP once the Year One Annual Work Plan is approved
- Baseline data collected by external evaluators
- Additional baseline data collected by the project

I. Deliverables

Progress highlights since project began

All planned deliverables and revised deliverables have been submitted according to the established deadlines. Please see the table in Annex A for the list of deliverables submitted and the date submitted.

Challenges related to deliverables

The compact schedule for deliverables during this reporting period saw two deliverables due 60 days after contract award and another six due 90 days after award. This intense schedule required staff to work on all deliverables almost simultaneously in order to meet deadlines. Additionally, the ACCELERE! team has observed that the DRC Mission has undergone multiple staff turnovers in the Education and Contract offices, which has increased the amount of time necessary to review certain technical and travel approvals. Additionally, the Embassy of the Democratic Republic of the Congo introduced changes in processing visa applications during the reporting period, which led to delays of up to two weeks in turning around visas. This has led to the team to ensure that we are planning sufficiently well in advance for consultant travel, in order to ensure that valuable consultant time is not lost.

The combination of all three challenges as described above, in addition to other factors, has meant that certain deliverables necessary to inform our work plan have not yet been fully approved, which means that completion of the work plan has taken place over several phases. Development of a clear, realistic, and ambitious implementation strategy remains one of our greatest priorities for the following quarter in order to ensure project presence in schools in January 2016.

Highlights of key upcoming deliverable milestones

- Final versions of the following deliverables: Work Plan, Operations Research Plan, Conflict, Management, Business Continuity
- Draft versions of the following deliverables: PMEP, Annual Coordination Meeting Presentation, Annual Coordination Meeting Aide Memoire
- Events: Attend/Host Quarterly Coordination Meeting, Host Annual Coordination Meeting

J. Challenges and steps taken to improve activity performance and impact

As stated previously, many of the challenges faced by ACCELERE! during the reporting period have to do with the fact that, as a result of a later-than-expected contract award, the project could not be fully present in target sub-provinces and schools by September 7, 2015 (back-to-school day in the DRC). Since the initial, quite optimistic version of the project work plan was drafted, we have come to understand that project resources should be honed in Year One. Moving forward, we are working to make good on our strategy for adaptability and flexibility in project implementation that allows us to be responsive to the dynamic and ever-changing realities on the ground.

The timing of project award also coincided with staffing changes at the Mission, with several education team staff members (including our first COR) leaving the Mission within days of contract award, and our CO being reassigned to other duties. These initial staffing changes, although since corrected, resulted in unexpected delays in fielding resources and initiating start-up activities. Other programmatic challenges, such as those related to delayed selection of sub-provinces, will hopefully be resolved early in the following reporting period.

Additional start-up challenges included normal delays in fielding our DCOP and M&E director to Lubumbashi, as they needed to finish their assignments with USAID in other African Missions. To mitigate this delay in fielding, we deployed a seasoned consultant with prior management experience on USAID programs in the DRC to help jump-start our work in Katanga. And at the technical level the greatest challenge has been the absence of the Senior Education Advisor and the international Reading Advisor, two expatriate positions that have been difficult to fill. In response to this challenge, these responsibilities have been taken up by additional STTA, the COP, and home office technical support, including Chemonics's newly on-boarded technical director Dr. Jennifer Swift-Morgan.

Despite the expected start-up challenges stated above, the COP and the rest of the project leadership were able to make great strides, particularly in:

- Forging of linkages with our DRC Ministry colleagues both in the capital and in the provinces in order to ensure full buy-in towards sustainability
- Synthesizing the history of previous education projects in the DRC, and extracting lessons learned and possible pitfalls, in order to better inform the honing of ACCELERE!'s unique implementation strategy
- Directing consortium partner efforts so their combined actions create impactful ACCELERE! dynamics that will lead to implementation success and result in getting 1st-4th grade students in project schools to read.
- Managing personal and professional interaction across projects donors and stakeholders to achieve mutually shared goals.

K. Lessons Learned

Operations and project roll-out

- Recognize that start-up of a project of this size and complexity in the DRC will take longer than originally anticipated
- Acknowledge peculiarities of operating in the DRC, such as the difficulty in traveling to project sites and the dearth of reliable commercial flights to other parts of the country, results in logistical obstacles that impact project operations
- Consider that sub-provincial selection may continue to take more time than initially anticipated given the changing priorities on the ground, and the political criteria inherent to the selection
- Plan for the effort that it will take to find a truly operational mode of “communicating with local stakeholders” and navigating the hierarchical complexities of DRC ministries, which will require much more time than anticipated for project staff to be seen as partners.

Technical approach and programming

As very early lessons learned based on the wide range of exchanges to date with partners and stakeholders coupled with experience from elsewhere, the COP together with other project leadership have been engaging in the following reflections that are now informing the honing of the ACCELERE! Activity One technical approach.

- ACCELERE!’s unique challenge is as one of the first education projects whose success will be rated largely on how well we manage to achieve successful early grade reading at scale in an environment more challenging than most. This simple observation brings us to make sure we are integrating as much fresh thinking and adaptable modern, 21st century best practice approaches as possible into our work across all result areas.
- ACCELERE! is also jointly implemented through dual-donor financing that is a unique initiative that must be given all chances of success. Such unique, purposeful international cooperation in as crucial a development domain as education has the potential of writing a new page in this field; we cannot not succeed, and we will. But, it behooves us as implementers (including all consortium members) to pause and ensure that we are focusing all energies on the known and proven mechanics of EGR and the system aspects needed to support learning, measured by student reading performance. We are working now to do exactly this as we move forward.
- A slew of education projects have attempted to improve pedagogy and learning in the DRC over the past 10 to 12 years, all with varying degrees of success. In fairness, few were aiming solely at objective, measurable increases in children’s reading abilities. This is not the case for ACCELERE! and so this must be our cue to ensuring that we do not engage in a 2nd or sometimes even a 3rd version of any previously designed and implemented DRC education project. Conversely, impact assessments of these past projects consistently underline how difficult it has been to even make a dent in the very low DRC literacy rates. This is one more indication for ACCELERE! that our methodologies must offer different options:
 - In terms of training – we know that cascade training is intrinsically limited and generates huge loss of knowledge transfer, so *what can we do differently, such as by deploying master trainers together with local trainers at the sub-provincial level and effectively implementing ongoing professional development at the cluster and school level?*
 - In terms of education coaching – we know that the coaching function is not only new in education (even on Western shores), but in total contrast with the traditional inspectorate mandates still found in many emergent countries, including the DRC; so *how are we going to bring it to our initiatives so that it will be well received and modeled properly, and if necessary, help adjust policy accordingly?*
 - In terms of general pedagogy – we know that chorus reading instead of allowing teachers to reach a large mass of students in fact drowns out clarity of pedagogical input, so *how can we craft our*

instructional and learning materials and approaches to best support individual learning, even in the challenge context of Congolese schools?

- In terms of teaching reading - we know that too many Congolese teachers have received little to no formal training and will have difficulty internalizing elaborate pedagogical support documents, and that reading instruction must be explicit, structure, and systematic, so *how can we best ensure that the teachers' guides that ACCELERE! is developing are as user-friendly and contextualized as possible?*
- In terms of learning materials for students – we know that 21st century students, even in the DRC, are many times more visual in their perception than students were anywhere in the past century, so *how can we make our learning materials as appealing and engaging as possible?*

The updated technical approach note included in Annex B of this report is an attempt at furthering our thinking to plan for practical, workable answers to this (not exhaustive) list of essential issues.

PROGRESS MADE TOWARDS ACHIEVING ACCELERE! RESULTS

A. Overview

Progress over the past year

Progress towards Result One: During the reporting period, the ACCELERE! team has targeted our efforts on rapid technical and operational start-up, setting the foundation for progress in all project results areas. With respect to Result 1, we have identified several local organizations that operate ALP's or training in some sub-provinces in Katanga and South Kivu. We also held an initial series of focus group discussion with parents and out of school children in Katanga, to discuss their perceptions of challenges in sending children to school, and particularly for girls.

Progress towards Result Two: ACCELERE! has focused the bulk of our technical efforts on Result Two, and particularly on the development of early grade reading materials. Faced with an unprecedented volume of work to accomplish in a mere three months – four grades' worth of teacher, student, and training materials for two languages – the Results Two team did the near impossible in succeeding in producing draft materials by September as promised. Through these efforts, we successfully drafted all early grade reading materials for Swahili and oral French, as well as teacher training materials, for use in formal and non-formal schools during the first trimester of the coming school year. This was without the benefit of a posted Senior Reading Advisor or Senior Education Advisor. It is at this time that we are conducting a thorough review and revision of the draft materials to ensure that they are in accordance with international best practices and the latest science around reading instruction and learning.

Progress towards Result Three: The ACCELERE! team was able to make significant progress on Result Three objectives. The Result Three team lead, in collaboration with the Result Two team, developed a framework for conducting rapid school assessments (RSA). The team conducted field visits to ensure that proposed schools are on board to proceed with the RSA in mid-November, with a view to gathering content to develop the School Profiles (formerly referred to as School Report Cards). In addition, ACCELERE! staff engaged with various government counterparts to engage their support and trust for ACCELERE! policy and capacity building initiatives under Result Three. Through discussions with DIPROMAD and SERNAFOR, these bodies are supportive of the proposed review of the National Reading Roadmap. In addition, MEPS- INC has invested trust in ACCELERE! to co-lead revision of the National Reading Observatory, which will serve as a springboard for education policy reform.

Highlights of synergies across Results: While we acknowledge that ACCELERE! progress in achievement of results has proceeded at a slower pace than expected, we believe that the progress made since project start-up in June sets the foundation for sound technical implementation and collaboration with USAID, UKAID, government and partner institutions, and local authorities. We have focused on aligning our approaches with the USAID Education Strategy, and on ensuring synergy across results team by sharing ideas on determining success indicators, as well as engaging in formal project strategy discussion and review.

Technical milestones per the work plan accomplished in the reporting period, from each of the Result areas:

- Result One
 - No work plan milestones were anticipated for the current reporting period.
- Result Two
 - Draft student and teacher materials for reading and writing developed for grades one and two in Kiswahili with teachers' guides

- Draft student and teacher materials for oral French developed for grades one and two,
- Draft student and teacher materials developed for French reading and writing for grades three and four
- Result Three
 - Reviewed current policies related to access , reading, gender, inclusiveness, and conflict, and recommended appropriate solutions

Milestones for which important progress has been made:

- Teacher training schedule is in place and training documents now need to fully reflect project strategy (the December holiday break will be used for that initiative)
- Trainers to be hired and trained in December 2015
- SERNAFOR, DIPROMAD and CATED participated in initial review of the draft teaching and learning materials
- MEPS-INC materials validation committee discussed with the Inspector General
- Drafted a Rapid School Assessment plan to be implemented in mid-November in Katanga in pre-selected schools, ready for this initiative
- Engaged in initial conversations with MEPS-INC on review of the National Reading Roadmap and the current status of the National Reading Observatory Launching into a review of the National Reading Roadmap with a view to establish a functional National Reading Observatory that will advocate for a greater quality in EGR teaching and especially a greater importance for EGR in the national DRC primary curriculum project introduced and reflection on barriers to access, literacy and governance completed
- Key dialogue about Observatoire de Lecture successfully engaged with DIPROMAD
- Katanga actors that will support change identified

It is worth noting that ACCELERE! managed to achieve the accomplishments above despite absence of the key positions of Senior Education Advisor and the Senior Reading Advisor

Highlights of key upcoming deliverable milestones

- Result One
 - Focus group report on dialogue with out of school children complete
 - School safety, access, quality, and governance standards agreed upon
 - Establishment of initial safe school program approach
 - NGOs identified for grants and materials to run CRSs
- Result Two
 - 1st edition of Trimester 1 materials finalized
 - Books and student kits delivered to formal schools for the first and second trimester
 - Training materials printed and delivered to training sites
 - Reading coaches hired
 - Teacher trainers trained and train teachers
 - Coaching training and guide for school-based mentors created
 - Reading coaches and itinerant inspectors trained on coaching
 - Student texts for first and second trimesters of programming delivered to schools
 - Materials delivered to training sites
- Result Three
 - Reading observatoire fully established
 - Reading Road Map updated in collaboration with the MEPS-INC
 - Study report complete on characteristics of effective schools
 - Training materials developed on instructional leadership, personnel management, and financial management for school directors

- School management support framework established

Challenges encountered to technical programming and adjustments to the workplan

Probably the biggest challenge that ACCELERE! has encountered on technical programming since the project began is that of the absence of a Senior Education Advisor and a Senior Reading Advisor. This has entailed additional reliance on current long-term staff and consultants, and created the need to work very quickly to accomplish tasks within deadlines. We are continuing to prioritize senior technical recruits, and we hope to have positions filled as rapidly as possible.

In addition, delays in selecting the sub-provinces and therefore the school-communities also meant that it would not have been possible to launch the early grade reading program at the beginning of the school year. We have made use of this delay to take the additional time necessary to review the materials drafted to date, and are now preparing for introduction of revised 1st generation materials in time for the second trimester of the 2015-2016 school year (January 2016).

The ACCELERE! is aware that the phonics-based approach to reading is not prevalent in the DRC, and is committed to building understanding of (and capacity to implement) this approach. The materials development team has strived to navigate introduction of phonics-based best practices for reading instruction while adhering to the Ministry's recently-adopted reading standards and skill-based scope and sequence that is to guide development of new reading curriculum and materials. This has been challenging, and we recognize that additional effort is needed to clarify the ACCELERE methodology and improve our materials accordingly. This will be the project's number one technical priority at the beginning of the following quarter.

In addition, while the DRC has made very public commitments nationally and internationally to reintroducing national languages as the language of instruction in early grades (eg. during the Global Partnership for Education's 2012 international conference on reading in Rwanda), this endeavor continues to be sensitive politically. ACCELERE! understands and upholds the academic benefits of mother-tongue instruction, but also recognizes the political tensions around moving in this direction. We look forward to continued discussion with USAID, UKAID, MEPS-INC, and other stakeholders as we navigate the complex political issue of language.

A final important challenge that ACCELERE! would like to acknowledge is the interrelation between delays in project roll-out, and progress towards project results. The ACCELERE! team has been making concerted efforts to revise our work plan and milestones, and to work with USAID to complete selection of sub-provinces in line with established criteria. Being that both of these processes have taken longer than anticipated, there have been accompanying delays in activities that rely on these final products. ACCELERE! remains committed to close collaboration and communication with USAID on these items, and any other challenges or potential delays that may arise, so that we can develop strategies for adapting to the realities of implementation together.

In view of challenges that we have met through our first four months of field presence in the DRC, the following offers a brief summary of adjustments made to overcome program and/or implementation challenges in an attempt to increase activity performance and impact. As presented in our October 6 response to USAID's questions and comments on the draft Year One Annual Work Plan, we have defined the Year One approach as one of development and piloting of interventions, and comprised more specifically of:

- focus on building relationships with our key GDRC partners in the relevant ministries and other, non-governmental partners at the central and provincial levels (this will take some additional time now that the choice of sub-provinces has evolved and is just now being finalized);
- building relationships at the school/community level once schools are chosen;
- collecting school statistical data and conducting baseline research on key measures like teacher practice and school safety before any interventions begin;
- developing our activity models and training plans with these stakeholders (e.g. further adapting the Doorways manuals for use in ACCELERE! schools, identifying the appropriate CSOs for collaboration on ALPs and together conducting needs assessments and curriculum reviews to determine how best to move forward with CRS & CAP development plans, honing the school management framework and report card plans, developing training materials for all actors, developing messaging for the Je Suis Présent campaign, etc.)
- conducting initial operations research for a limited number of diagnostic studies needed to better inform activity design;
- testing aspects of our activity models in our initial school/communities together with our governmental and non-governmental partners, such as the 1st generation of our EGR materials;
- initiating a number of other interventions, such as initial small grants work, to send signals about the types of work that is possible in school-communities; and
- Overall laying the groundwork for full activity implementation with tested materials starting in Year Two.

The updated work plan Gantt chart that we will submit in mid-November will reflect this approach, and incorporate the most recent reflections on the technical approach in general as presented in the Lessons Learned section above and in the technical note in Annex B.

B. Result One: Equitable Enrollments to a Quality Education Environment Increased

Overview

Under this result, resources are being employed to improve equitable access in quality education environments by targeting barriers to equitable primary school access, strengthening accelerated and alternative learning programs, and promoting quality education environments which support learning and are equitable and safe for girls and boys.

Initial focus groups with out of school children and parents in selected sub-provinces completed

Other successes:

- Although embryonic at this early stage, contacts with religious groups has been initiated (Salvation Army, Protestant Reformed Church for instance) but must now be widely extended in the field
 - Initial contacts with prospective partners in South Kivu have been engaged
 - Team Leaders for both South and North Kivus have been hired and trained

C. Progress per Intermediary Result

1.1 Reduce barriers to access for primary education

Activities accomplished per work plan, including anticipated milestones successfully met and any other accomplishments or successes

During the reporting period, the project conducted initial focus group discussions with parents and out of school children in five suburbs of Lubumbashi around the challenges associated with school access, achievement, inclusiveness, and safety. During this same trip, the project conducted a brief and preliminary review of organizations currently operating CRS's, and others that may be interested in running CRSs. ACCELERE! drafted a detailed scope of work for a local subcontractor to conduct a complete analysis regarding out-of-school children in the five targeted sub-provinces in Katanga, to conduct more in-depth focus groups with parents and out of school children. In addition, the local subcontractor will be responsible for collecting data on existing and planned primary schools and community based organizations working in the education sector. Finally, the scope of work includes a component that lays the groundwork for ACCELERE! to engage in community mobilization, by researching best practices regarding community mobilization in the education and other relevant sectors in the DRC and internationally.

Obstacles encountered and delays or potential delays in fulfillment of activities in the work plan

Delays in the execution of the aforementioned and other activities are due to a series of obstacles as previously noted, including but not limited to: the late start of the program in conjunction to the start of the school year; difficulty engaging provincial and sub-provincial partners during summer holidays at the same time period; and challenges in setting up program offices and hiring staff. During the reporting period, time constraints and ambitious timelines for activity completion have caused the ACCELERE! team to prioritize Result Two activities.

As a result of these challenges, the timeline for the following activities will be updated in the revised work plan Gantt chart to be shared in mid-November. In the meanwhile, we already anticipate conducting the following activities in order to catch up and accelerate progress in this Result Area:

- Using existing household surveys and local informants, identify geographic areas with out-of-school children in South Kivu, North Kivu, and Katanga
- Survey selected sub-provinces in Katanga to identify schools with space to expand enrollment or areas with new schools built/planned
- In target areas (North/South Kivu and selected sub-provinces), hold focus groups with out-of-school children and their parents to identify barriers specific to each location
- Identify local leaders (political, religious, traditional, women's/mother's groups, youth groups) that can push forward the project's goals, and engage them to share "Je suis présent(e)" messages
- Identify vulnerable children eligible for scholarships to both formal and non-formal schools (orphans, girls, children with disabilities, etc.)
- Survey civil society organizations in Katanga and the Kivus to identify those currently running CRS and those interested in doing so
- Using competitive process, identify CSOs interested and able to run additional CRS (provide capacity building as needed); award and monitor grants.

Proposed changes to the work plan

In our revised plan to address the delayed activities listed above, we have devised the following strategies. First, using existing household surveys and local informants, ACCELERE! intends to use a local subcontractor to identify geographic areas in South Kivu, North Kivu, and Katanga with high concentrations of out-of-school children. The subcontractor will hold focus groups with out-of-school children and their parents in these regions to better determine existing barriers to school enrollment and retention specific to these geographic areas. ACCELERE! will also continue to collect data from partners based in the field, as well as from the GDRC. The findings of these focus groups, as well as those of other data-collecting initiatives, will be used to inform project activities going forward.

As part of this initial data collection process and in order to better guarantee student enrollment and retention, ACCELERE! plans to survey selected sub-provinces in Katanga to identify schools with space to expand enrollment, as well as to identify areas that have planned to build, or have recently built, new schools. Identifying areas with the capacity to absorb new pupils will be important to retain students.

ACCELERE! will work within local communities to identify leaders who can serve as bellwethers for the projects' "Je suis présent(e)" messages, and work with the community to better understand, communicate, and invest in ACCELERE!'s goals by effectively communicating the potential benefits to the community.

In the second and third trimesters of the school year, ACCELERE! community mobilizers will conduct a door-to-door campaign in key catchment areas to identify and engage out-of-school children and their caregivers, with the goal of enrolling children in school. The program will also share relevant information with caregivers about accelerated and alternative learning programs designed especially for out-of-school youth, as well as *rattraper*/catch-up programs for children who start the school year late.

ACCELERE! has begun data collection on the civil society organizations in the province formerly known as Katanga, North Kivu, and South Kivu in order to identify civil society organizations that are currently running CRS, and it will continue this work in the next quarter. It will use this information to prepare a database that will aid the project in identifying organizations that are currently operating alternative and accelerated learning programs, where the centers are located, and the capacity of the organizations to expand to respond to the needs of local communities.

This information will feed into the project's current grants strategy to address the needs of out-of-school children and learners by providing information about the current organizations that are running alternative/accelerated learning programs, where the programs are located, and the capacity of the organizations to expand to respond to the needs of local communities with large number of out-of-school children. Using a competitive process to be carried out in December 2015, ACCELERE! will designate CSOs to run additional CRS, and award and monitor grants in the future. The project will provide capacity building support as needed. Also in the second trimester, ACCELERE! will identify vulnerable children who may be eligible for program scholarships, which can be used at both formal and non-formal schools. ACCELERE! will provide block grants to schools to fund attendance, schools kits, and uniforms of the selected children.

1.2 Increasing access to alternative/accelerated learning programs that address out-of-school children and youth needs

Activities accomplished per work plan, including anticipated milestones successfully met and any other accomplishments or successes

According to the ACCELERE! milestones matrix and work plan, activities and deliverables under intermediate result 1.2 do not begin until the following reporting period. As such, the program does not have significant accomplishments and milestones to report at this time.

ACCELERE! has begun data collection on the civil society organizations in the province formerly known as Katanga, North Kivu, and South Kivu in order to identify civil society organizations that are currently running CRS, and it will continue this work in the next quarter. It will use this information to prepare a database that will aid the project in identifying organizations that are currently operating alternative and accelerated learning programs, where the centers are located, and the capacity of the organizations to expand to respond to the needs of local communities.

This information will feed into the project's current grants strategy to address the needs of out-of-school children and learners by providing information about the current organizations that are running

alternative/accelerated learning programs, where the programs are located, and the capacity of the organizations to expand to respond to the needs of local communities with large number of out-of-school children. Using a competitive process to be carried out in December 2015, ACCELERE! will designate CSOs to run additional CRS, and award and monitor grants in the future. The project will provide capacity building support as needed.

Proposed changes to the work plan

As a result of the challenges encountered as described above and the revised approach to Year One, the timeline for Result 1.2 activities had to be updated and will be further adjusted in the revised work plan Gantt chart to be shared in mid-November. Once community mobilizers are recruited and deployed, expected starting in January 2016, then progress on result 1.2 will accelerate. Also, with the joining in of ACCELERE! Activity Four, focusing on similar (yet distinct) issues, we anticipate strong collaboration with UNICEF in order to achieve a positive compounding effect of our efforts.

1.3 Strengthening community and school collaboration and partnerships to support access to education

Activities accomplished per work plan, including anticipated milestones successfully met and any other accomplishments or successes

Since project award in May, ACCELERE! has met with Sous-PROVEDs of Kipushi and Lubumbashi two, the Assistant Mayor of Likasi, and with some Catholic and Protestant stakeholders to identify potential field partners and grants beneficiaries for COPA school improvement grants. We also met traveled to Sakania and met with the CSR manager at local mine in Kipushi, and made contact by phone with the Kamina Sous-PROVED– all above were initial contacts scouting the field as we await Caritas field presence

Proposed changes to the work plan

As an update following the honed Year One approach, in November, ACCELERE! will hold a series of sub-province meetings, followed by school and community meetings to set the stage for project partnership and collaboration at each of these levels. In the coming quarter, ACCELERE! will organize meetings with community members, school staff, and students, to come to consensus on standards for access, safety, quality and governance. Initial discussions have taken place internally on the ACCELERE! team, and will extend to ACCELERE! Activity Two and Four and early next quarter. The project will discuss with its partners and stakeholders the importance of reaching consensus on standards and norms for various aspects of school access, quality, and management. These meetings will also serve as an opportunity to seek buy-in from key partners on having a standards-based strategy as a way to establish and monitor school improvements.

The ACCELERE! team recognizes the importance that all staff and partners understand how education reform focused on early grade reading must be articulated in the field for success in the classroom. Upon hiring a full-time Senior Education Advisor, we anticipate being able to push this agenda forward as a top priority in the coming quarter.

1.4 Improving the quality of education environments

Activities accomplished per work plan, including anticipated milestones successfully met and any other accomplishments or successes

While there were no specific activities anticipated this quarter for this Intermediary Result area per the work plan, the project engaged in a number of preparatory actions to ensure that work in this area moves forward quickly. In particular, ACCELERE! has produced a number of deliverables and reports intended to provide a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the DRC country context and will inform how best to improve education environments. In particular, the Gender Analysis and Gender Implementation

Strategy and the Conflict Sensitivity Analysis and Implementation Strategy have been instrumental in improving our contextual understanding and strategic planning all result areas; more specifically, these deliverables now provide the project with more targeted insights and recommendations especially for the successful improvement of the quality of education environments.

The Gender Analysis focuses on the gender gaps at the primary school level (e.g., leadership, learning, curriculum, school structure, role of religious institutions, and lack of strong policy). It sought to answer two overarching questions: 1) how will the different roles and status of girls and boys affect the work to be undertaken? and 2) how will the anticipated results of the work affect girls and boys differently? These questions guided the development of additional research questions that explored, for example, gender-related opportunities and barriers, institutional policies and regulations, and how to engage men and women in program implementation. Using the human rights-based approach to education framework developed by the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI), which addresses girls' and boys' rights to education, their rights within education, and their rights through education, the consultants analyzed current literature and research, reviewing all data and information in the context of the gender roles and relationships of women, men, girls, and boys.

Based on the findings of this desktop study, the consultants created a Gender Implementation Strategy to ensure ACCELERE! addresses gender constraints and leverages opportunities for optimal impact on project goals. The Gender Implementation Strategy addresses gender roles and relations at multiple levels and considers the varied contextual factors that drive outcomes for males and females, including discriminatory social norms. The Strategy offers tools and resources to guide programmatic thinking around integrating gender components, and was developed in collaboration with ACCELERE! staff to allow them to take ownership of gender approaches within their own areas of expertise.

The Conflict Analysis and Implementation Strategy, drafted this quarter, has already begun to provide project leadership and staff with a greater understanding of the DRC context from a conflict-sensitivity perspective and raise awareness of potential challenges they may encounter in implementing ACCELERE! The goal is not to prescribe solutions but rather to suggest a practical set of strategies to address and monitor these challenges in a way that supports achieving the project's stated goals. In this way, consistent with the "do no harm" principle which undergirds good international development practice as well as conflict sensitivity strategy, unintentional negative impacts of ACCELERE! will be minimized and opportunities for the Project to have a positive impact on social cohesion will be enhanced.

In addition to the gender and conflict analyses and recommendations, the project has consulted with topic area experts to further refine the ACCELERE! strategy and will continue to do so for the adaptation and creation of training materials. In particular, Chemonics home office education expert Jill Meeks has provided initial guidance on adapting the Doorways manuals for ACCELERE!, and we will continue to engage her during the material and training adaptation process itself.

Proposed changes to the work plan

Once sub-provinces are selected and ACCELERE! begins to work at the school-community level, likely beginning in January 2016, the project will begin participatory development of community school safety standards in conjunction with the adaptation of the Doorways manuals for safe schools. We aim to pilot these adapted trainings in Year One in order to roll-out fully in Year Two. This will include adapted codes of conduct, safety standards, teacher training, and coordination with referral services.

Activities that will lead to improving school learning environments are directly related to project initiatives under Result 3, through which ACCELERE! will establish criteria for school improvement and engage communities to create school improvement plans, and hold school leaders and local administration

accountable to standards. The results of our rapid school assessments will feed into the creation of locally specific School Profiles that are achievable, adapted for local communities, and target early grade reading skills acquisition. In that sense, a conjugation of activities under results 1.4 and 3.2, and 3.3 is necessary to ensure that school safety standards are incorporated into school profiles and school improvement standards. Ensuring this alignment is an ACCELERE! priority for the coming year. Our work plan will reflect this as the different timelines and initiatives are reviewed and chronologically reorganized. The RSA is scheduled to take place in November, and will result in a draft School Profile ready for piloting jointly as part of activities under Results 1.4 and 3.3 before the end of the 2015-2016 school year. Information from this assessment will help inform our assessment of school safety and development of safety standards.

D. Result Two: Improved Education Quality

Overview

Under this result, ACCELERE! is working to improve the quality of instruction for boys and girls in the lower grades of primary school. The project focuses primarily on early grade reading in national languages in grades one to four, French oral language acquisition in grades one and two, and a transition to French reading acquisition in grades three and four. Ultimately, the project is working to support an effective transition from national language reading acquisition in Lingala, Swahili and Ciluba to French language reading acquisition by the end of fourth grade.

Progress highlights since project began

Milestones per the work plan that we have accomplished in the reporting period:

- Draft student and teacher materials for reading and writing developed for grades one and two in Kiswahili with teachers' guides, for the first trimester of the new curriculum
- Draft student and teacher materials for oral French developed for grades one and two for the first trimester of the new curriculum
- Draft student and teacher materials developed for French reading and writing for grades three and four for the first trimester of the new curriculum

Milestones for which important progress has been made:

- Revision and validation of the materials for the first trimester

Adjustments made or anticipated

Our focus in the first four months of the project has been to define and draft the base methodology for our curriculum and materials for the new ACCELERE! approach to reading and oral French in preparation for reading. We now anticipate working to adapt these materials for alternative learning programs once we have had a chance to do a closer needs assessment and additional work we key authorities and stakeholders to better define how best to craft the learning strategy for these centers. We anticipate that this will be done starting in January 2016, at which point the materials adaption work will begin and piloted in time for use later in 2016.

First and foremost, it is important that ACCELERE! fine-tunes its strategy around making EGR acquisition as the centerpiece of all project initiatives. This takes time as it requires partners and especially community members, teachers, school administrators to fully internalize that ACCELERE!'s intervention intends to signal a new way of ensuring that all of our target learners are able to read.

E. Progress per Intermediary Result

2.1 Quality of instruction at the primary level improved; and 2.2 Teaching and learning materials used in the classroom effectively

Activities accomplished per work plan, including anticipated milestones successfully met and any other accomplishments or successes

Since the start of the project in June, ACCELERE! has worked to develop and adapt a new curriculum, teaching and learning materials, and training plans for early grades in Swahili and French in formal schools. This goal was achieved, as materials for Trimester 1 for all four early primary grades have been drafted. While this was challenging due to the lack of office space in Kinshasa and without a Senior Education Advisor and Senior Reading Advisor, we were able to accomplish this by following an ambitious work schedule and rapidly hiring experienced staff and materials development coordinators locally.

ACCELERE! reviewed existing student and teacher materials in Kiswahili for Grades One through Four, which entailed collecting texts from previous projects such as PAQUED, ELAN, CELTA, OPEQ, and others. ACCELERE! adapted these materials according to established criteria, and developed teaching and learning materials, including teacher guides, big books, and student texts. Materials have been developed for trimester 1 of the 2015-2016 school year for Kiswahili reading and writing in grades one to four, Oral French for grades one and two, and French reading and writing in grades three and four. The project has also created draft training materials for the Master Trainers, Coaches, and Teachers training on these materials.

Significant scope of work led rapid development of materials in a short period of time. Throughout the process, the materials development team has strived to uphold quality standards so that they align with the USAID approach to reading and the MEPS-INC's national reading and writing standards, benchmarks, and text leveling criteria. It is recognized that additional work is needed to revise and improve the drafts as they stand, and the team will be working very hard to make these improvements in the following quarter in time for teacher training in December.

Challenges encountered and delays or potential delays in fulfillment of activities in the work plan

The absence of a posted international Senior Reading Advisor has presented a serious challenge to developing ACCELERE!'s early grade reading program this year, both in terms of sheer quantity of pedagogical documents required and the need for these materials to be of high quality. This position is critical for ensuring that approaches leverage international, evidence-based best practices for teaching and learning reading and align with national reading standards and scope of skills developed in the DRC. We are currently recruiting for this position, and this is one of our top priorities for the coming quarter. In the absence of a long-term Senior Reading Advisor, ACCELERE! engaged short-term consultants Mary Denaw, Nathalie Louge, and Barbara Thornton to work with the local materials development team to complete the task. This was effective in advancing the technical work, but transitioning responsibility between consultants made ensuring continuity difficult.

Establishing consensus among consortium members around early grade reading methodology and ensuring alignment with Goal One of the USAID Education Strategy has been a key project priority over the course of ACCELERE! implementation. While recruitment of a posted Senior Reading Advisor continues, we are striving to engage consultants and external reviewers with a proven ability to develop quality pedagogical materials, in-depth knowledge of best practices in education, and extensive experience in educational development, in order to deliver quality products to clients, counterparts, and beneficiaries.

ACCELERE! is committed to applying a phonics approach to reading. We recognize that this differs from current Ministry practice in the DRC, and we are dedicated to bringing national and local-level education actors – including government and religious networks – on board with this approach. Indeed, the ACCELERE! materials development team has strived to effectively negotiate Ministry policy on using balanced literacy with the evidence-based best practices around the phonics approach, particularly given how important it is to ensure that counterparts and partners are on the same page about methodology and approaches to early grade reading instruction is critical to cohesion and sustainability. At the same time, we recognize that this endeavor has been quite challenging, and the initial materials drafted reflect this. In reviewing these materials towards the end of this reporting period, ACCELERE! and the USAID/DRC Mission noted improvements that are needed. In response to these observations, ACCELERE! paused materials development activities and is currently working to develop a point by point approach to address these concerns and return the initiative towards developing pedagogical materials that more explicitly reflect a phonics-based EGR method. Final correction and validation of these materials is anticipated to be complete in November, in time for printing to and teacher training in order to introduce the program in schools in Trimester Two of the 2015-2016 school year.

Proposed changes to the work plan

ACCELERE! has strived to adapt and develop new materials for all four grades and both languages in time for introduction in the schools by September or October, the review process coupled with the delays preventing the project from establishing its first target sub-provinces resulted in the start-date of the early grade reading and oral French programming to shift from the beginning of the school year to the second trimester of the school year. We will increase the size of our materials development team, in order to carry out the production of all Result Two deliverables relative to the reading program in additional languages: curriculum, materials, and programming adapted to ALPs; and teacher professional development. For this reason, several activities initially planned for the reporting period, will now be conducted in the following quarter.

In the coming year, ACCELERE! will closely collaborate with stakeholders including SERNAFOR, CATED, and DIRPOMAD, and will identify members of the consultation and validation committees and organize meeting dates. ACCELERE! staff will also meet with key stakeholders, such as the National Reading Commission, to discuss the state of the Reading Roadmap and organize modes of collaboration. Staff will also meet with the National SERNAFOR, Inspecteur General de l'Education, and religious networks to agree on the model of coaching and role of inspectors and pedagogical advisors. In addition, ACCELERE! staff will meet with provincial MEPS-INC, Public-Private Partners, PROVED, and school directors to agree on coaching practices and responsibilities.

The ACCELERE! team will ensure quality of education materials in the formal and non-formal classrooms. We will work to revise our draft formal school materials for the first trimester of grades one through four materials, and to print and distribute finalized materials, in the coming quarter. For non-formal schools, we will review existing student and teacher materials in French and Kiswahili for Niveau One and Two, from projects including PAQUED, ELAN, CELTA, Save the Children, OPEQ, and others. In the interest of time, we will adapt approved materials for grades one to four for use in ALPs for the 2015-2016 school year, rather than developing new materials. We will adapt these materials based on observed need, best practices, and lessons learned from other programs, with a view to creating, validating, printing, and distributing trimester one materials to nonformula in the coming quarter.

ACCELERE! will provide teaching training for formal schools during the coming year. We will collaborate with other initiatives in the DRC to ensure harmonization in teacher professional development. We have prepared draft teacher training materials for the first trimester for grades one, two, three, and four in French and Swahili, and which will be validated during the coming quarter. As part of the training program, ACCELERE! will produce teacher training video modules to support teachers in the

effective implementation of the reading program. To support teacher coaching and support, ACCELERE! will develop criteria for selecting school-based accompagnateurs de lecture (coaches), and recruit coaches. We will develop a coaching model and coaching training, and will train master trainers (including itinerant inspectors and/or other system actors) and coaches in the implementation of the reading program. The roll-out of the initial trainings will take place in late November for the Master Trainers and coaches and over the December holiday for the teachers. The project will then begin providing provide coaching visits to teachers over the coming year.

2.3 Community participation to support school-based and extra-curricular learning increased

Activities accomplished per work plan, including anticipated milestones successfully met and any other accomplishments or successes

While there were no specific activities anticipated in the work plan for this quarter under this Intermediary Result area, ACCELERE! undertook several activities to advance objectives in this area.

- Initial consultations at the community level were held in August by acting DCOP Leila Bogoreh (see trip report appended) and meetings held by DCOP in Likasi
- Clarification meeting held between Activity One and Activity Two to clarify perceived overlap in result 3.3. (as it pertains to respective roles at community level)

Obstacles encountered and delays or potential delays in fulfillment of activities in the work plan

- As soon as ACCELERE! School Profile has been drafted (see above notes) Results Two and Three Teams will need to join effort to draft a School Improvement Roadmap (SIR) collaboratively with system actors (Inspectors, Sous-PROVEDs)
- Such SIR will offer clear guidance to schools and communities as to what type of improvement must be identified then prioritized
- In turn, COPAS and COGES will be included in this process so as to guide and oversee grants allocation and field use

Proposed changes to the work plan

- Our work plan final review must finalize an orchestrated approach/strategy that actually fully matches field conditions.
- Building on focused community support to bring literacy to Early Grades in project schools needs more than dollars and cents: it must involve supporting communities in organizing themselves around their schools so that they see educational results for themselves in a durable way
- Although this issue appears to have been raised in our project proposal, an issue as simple as optimal number of project-supported community leads (or equally of project-supported literacy monitors) must be elucidated – that’s called engaging in authentic, genuine reform.

F. Result Three: Improved Governance and Accountability by Stakeholders

Overview

Through IR 3.1 the ACCELERE! Activity One project is working to identify and support analysis of key policy issues related to access, quality, and governance in order to support the development, implementation, rollout, and learning of key policies and strategies. These efforts are aligned with the DRC’s National Education Sector Strategy (2014-2023), the work of the National Reading Commission, and other key GDRC policies and actors. Through IR 3.2, the ACCELERE!-1 project aims to strengthen school leadership, supervision, and management to improve access, quality, and governance at the school and education sub-province levels, in order to promote equitable, inclusive, safe, and quality learning environments. Through IR 3.3, the ACCELERE!- one project will support schools, parents, community members, and the private sector to develop partnerships that strengthen local engagement, planning,

accountability, and oversight of education (including implementation of school plans, student/teacher attendance, teacher performance, student learning, and safe learning environments).

Progress highlights since project began

- The key accomplishments under Result Three achieved in the four months since the project begin include the following: ACCELERE! Project introduced to MoE and reflection on barriers to access, literacy and governance completed
- Intensive situational assessment of a wide range of policies completed
- Key dialogue with DIPROMAD about the proposed review of the Reading Road Map.
- Outline agreement with DIPROMAD about the proposals to establish an Observatoire de Lecture
- Katanga actors that will support change identified

In addition, important progress has been made with regard to preparing for the School Rapid Assessment (SRA). Planning for this is now complete and ready to proceed as part of ACCELERE!’s work to have a situational analysis of schools. Next steps are to pilot the SRA in 10 schools (the “SRA10”), review of that experience and updating of tools and approach as necessary, and then the roll out of the SRA in 100 or more additional schools in Year One (“SRA100”). This exercise will inform the development of the School Monitoring and Support Framework, which in turn informs delivery of activities under Results 3.2 and 3.3. Finally, ACCELERE! has made its proposal to embed technical assistance within MEPS-INC.

Other noteworthy successes

- Excellent rapport built between cabinet advisor Mr. Jovin, Prof. Valere MUNSYA head of CATED and Mrs Anne-Marie Nzuma Head of DIPROMAD
- Close coordination with Activity Two on Result 3.3 as they will be working on the same objectives but extended to provincial and national level.
- Close coordination within Activity One teams to ensure that the proposed SRA activity informs and is informed by other Result areas under the leadership of the COP.

Adjustments

Finally, ACCELERE! has made revisions to the label of some of the core activities to ensure an effective translation from English into French and reflect the latest updates to the approach. This is presented in the table below.

Proposal activity	Gantt chart activity
School Monitoring and Support Framework (SMSF)	Cadre de Gestion et d’Amélioration Scolaire (CGAS) Management and Improvement Framework (MIF)
School Rapid Assessment (SRA)	Profil de l’école (PDE) School Profiles
School Standards	Feuille de route des écoles School Road Maps
School Report Cards	Carte de Profil de l’Ecole, CPE School Profile Cards (SPC)
School Self-Assessment	l’Auto-Evaluation de l’Ecole -School Self Evaluation
School Performance Review (SPR)	Revue de Performance de l’Ecole, RPE School Performance Review, SPR

The above is a preview of the changes anticipated, as the final language and approach is being discussed now to help standardize language across results teams. These labels will be used in the revised work plan chart to be submitted in November. It is of key importance that once all components have developed a clear view of their key roles and activities under each sub result sought through their respective intervention, then they adopt a conventional homogeneous language to name - and thus better gauge progress – specifics of the strategy as they implement it through their own results-oriented initiatives. For instance, when anyone in ACCELERE! refers to SIP, all members should understand with a reasonable

degree of accuracy what this implies in terms of built-in elements, stages of development, key actors, means of assessment (tools) and articulation with which other segment(s) of implementation strategy for maximum added value.

G. Progress per Intermediary Result

3.1 Development and implementation of policies for improved access and learning strengthened

Activities accomplished per work plan, including anticipated milestones successfully met and any other accomplishments or successes

Since award, ACCELERE! has conducted an assessment of the actual situation of policies related to access, reading, girls' education, and free basic education, and the project has developed a recommendation of a contextualized response for DRC. In addition, the project has engaged in initial conversations with MEPS-INC technical staff about the Reading Road Map and the *Observatoire Congolais de la Lecture*. As a result of our conversations with MEPS-INC, the ministry has agreed to conduct a review of the Reading Road Map in November and concretize the steps that are needed to establish the *Observatoire Congolais de la Lecture*, which is a key activity outlined in the Reading Road Map.

In addition, the project has introduced ACCELERE! to government officials at the national and provincial levels as noted before (list of participants and dates) , as well as local organizations and potential beneficiaries in order to support reflection on the barriers to access, strong reading, and governance in the DRC (see as listed under each individual result). Through these conversations, the project has had the opportunity to make strong case for:

- Clear alignment on GRDC education mandates
- Interface with all current active financial MEPS-INC partners.

The latter point was particularly the case during the Zongo retreat (July 23-24) sponsored by MEPS-INC where ACCELERE! used this forum to present its scope and essential goals to the entire set of provincial education ministers and all MEPS-INC senior management. This was a privilege unique to ACCELERE! facilitated by the USAID/DRC Education Team Leader, Dr. Aissatou Balde.

Obstacles encountered and delays or potential delays in fulfillment of activities in the work plan

One challenge was the difficulty met by the Results 3 team leads their recruiting effort. The GRDC rightfully insists that visiting consultants be fully fluent in the French language, a pool of international professionals that is not very large, especially when projects seek very focused support such as was the case in School Improvement or Interface with senior ministry management for local capacity building.

Additionally and as noted elsewhere, the DRC embassies have in a number of worldwide locations significantly restricted granting of visas, thus restricting our consultants' ability to travel and join in support of our activities. This was particularly the case in August- September in the UK, resulting in delayed work on Result 3.

Proposed changes to the work plan

As noted above, the full update to the activities planned for Result 3 will be included in the revised work plan Gantt chart to be shared in mid-November. It will align with overall updated project implementation strategy for Year One and in will make a particular effort to:

- Create even closer association between Results 3.3. and 2.3. together with the grants program;
- Introduce the need for phonics-based instruction into the discussion with the Forum on National Languages as a component of the new role of the Observatoire de Lecture (yet to be defined collaboratively and with Cabinet input) as one focused on learning results, i.e; significant increase in

the number of children reading as result of project intervention; this will be done in a careful, politically savvy way given the clout of the OIF's whole-word methodology in the DRC;

- Invest in "Reading Celebration" calendars as a means to support community oversight of EGR results locally.

3.2 School leadership and management strengthened

Activities accomplished per work plan, including anticipated milestones successfully met and any other accomplishments or successes

Since the project began, the team's focus has been on reviewing existing education policy in the DRC to ensure solid comprehension of scope and intent with regard to whole school development, school monitoring and support including specific emphasis on early grade reading. Another key focus has been on the detailed preparation of the School Rapid Assessment which is now planned to commence in November 2015 with the SRA10 School pilot. Core components of the School Monitoring and Support Framework will be developed for the pilot and will be reviewed and amended with the wider SRA100.

In addition to the SRA preparation, the project team is presently discussing two current highly debated issues among GDRC circles:

- Introduction of *reading* as a full-fledged discipline in the primary grades and mandating its formal teaching for a full one hour/school day, six days a week. While this policy has been announced, it is still to be applied in schools and schools will need support with its application.
- Gradual introduction of reading in four national languages (ACCELERE! only deals with three) leading to a switch over to French from 2nd to 3rd grade

Although the first issue should not generate any significant opposition, the simple fact that this was mandated without proceeding with a thorough review of the time allocated to other curriculum disciplines has generated anxieties among teacher groups and school administrators while being fully supported by parents. ACCELERE! will need to reflect on the application of this policy to improve the potential of success.

The second issue will also require more reflection as most education sub-provinces, including those where ACCELERE! will be present are not linguistically homogeneous – which raises questions about school selection. This is something that ACCELERE! had sought to avoid by committing to serve ALL schools in any one sub-province selected. We will seek clarification on both issues in the coming quarter.

The above policy areas are obviously relevant to all ACCELERE! project implementers as well as with GRDC and highlight the need for ACCELERE! project implementers to discuss major policy initiatives to ensure effective collaboration.

Obstacles encountered and delays or potential delays in fulfillment of activities in the work plan

Once again, obstacles were more external to the project than internal and have been noted above. Notably, very short timelines generated by a compacted calendar from signing of the award, difficulty in locating French speaking consultants, as well as delays in both obtaining travel visas and concurrence from an understaffed Mission.

In particular, the work planned for August 2015 was affected by the decision to re-recruit the Ministerial Relations Coordinator and the School Improvement Specialist on the grounds of quality of applicant, and the combined time taken to approve short term scopes of work to enable some of the proposed delivery to be covered by short term consultants. ACCELERE! will now be ready to proceed with recruitment and appointments in November. We are confident that these delays will not impact on the overall targets for Result Three.

Proposed changes to the work plan

As noted above, the full update to the activities planned for Result 3 will be included in the revised work plan Gantt chart to be shared in mid-November. In the meanwhile, we present here the main aspects of the updated timeline and approach for R 3.2.

Over the next quarter, the core focus is to fully execute the SRA and define in near-final form the proposed School Profile, changed from “School Report Cards”. Note here that the semantic change to “School Profile” is intended to make it more neutral and less judgmental as the tool will be used by community members and school administrators (and other system actors of course, inspectors, Sous-PROVEDs, etc.). The first order of reflexive practice in education is to understand that objective assessment is a normal and indispensable part of mapping out for progress; that’s what this tool will be used for with strong and overt bias in support of progress on students reading.

Specifically, this means that the next quarter will be devoted to:

- Drafting the ACCELERE! School Improvement Roadmap which will be informed by the SRA and the proposed study to determine characteristics of effective schools in the DRC.
- Beginning to develop school leadership management training for directors based on a whole-school approach including school self-assessment.

Once sub-provinces and schools are selected and the early grade reading program is launched and the project begins to work in school-communities (anticipated in January 2016), we will begin engaging COGES and COPAS and determine how their current role will be harnessed to support school improvement and to oversee EGR progress.

3.3 Community and civil society oversight and accountability at local and sub-province levels increased

Activities accomplished per work plan, including anticipated milestones successfully met and any other accomplishments or successes

Activities under this Intermediary Result will begin once sub-provinces are selected and local activities begin in earnest, likely starting in January 2016.

Obstacles encountered and delays or potential delays in fulfillment of activities in the work plan

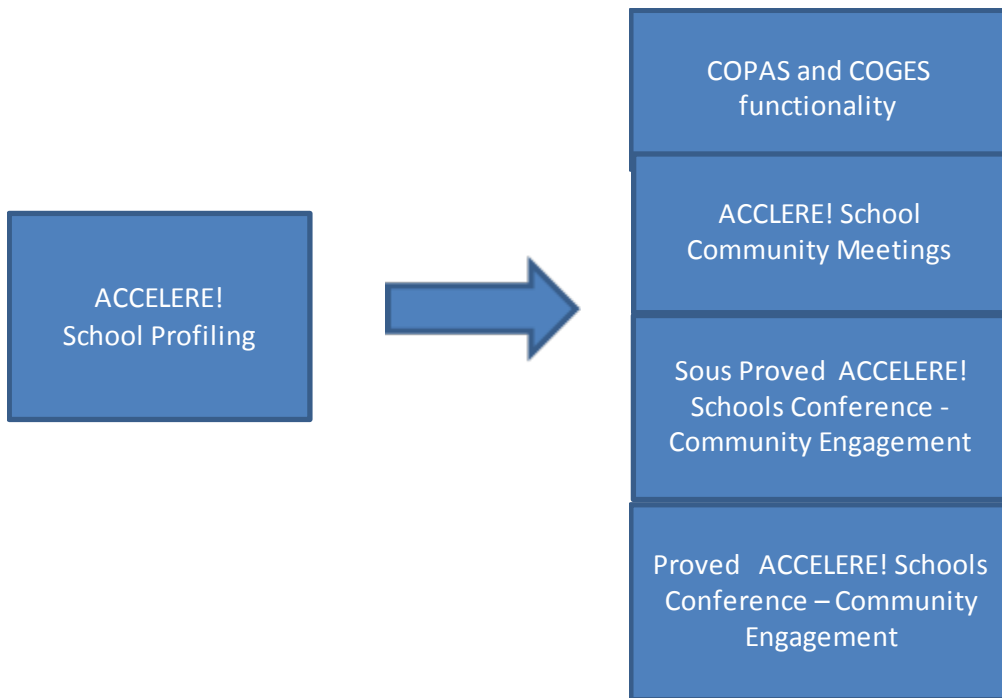
Result 3.3. has been affected by the delayed recruitment of full time national staff who will now be field based in November 2015. In the interim, all delivery has been completed by the Education Policy Advisor with support from Steve Blunden’s short term visits.

Furthermore, the Results 3 Team leader has concentrated his effort on Results 3.1 and 3.2 and has not yet visited the field as his entire attention was focused on engaging MEPS-INC senior management which was achieved quite successfully. Although the project encountered obstacles in the staffing of key Result 3 roles that are essential in the execution of activities related to Result 3.3., the Result 3 technical lead has worked with the chief of party and deputy chief of party to develop a revised plan for the execution of activities with the support of short term technical assistance.

Proposed changes to the work plan

As noted above, the full update to the activities planned for Result 3 will be included in the revised work plan Gantt chart to be shared in mid-November.

While the core of the R3.3 remains as proposed, we have revised some of the language and sequencing of the proposed intervention:



ACCELERE! focus on school governance includes:

- A wider understanding of the role of schooling in education. Our school, our road map, the school’s role and a wider understanding of the role of the family in education. Our family, our family road map, our role.
- Within the school, ACCELERE! will focus on improving the functionality of COPAS and COGES including the management of community participation in the school road map and school development planning.
- Improving community access to information about their school. Open meetings to present the road map and the school development plan. A commitment to transparency including school financial statements posted on the notice board.
- Active participation in the school road map and school development planning. Invitation to attend, training to enable active participation.
- Community participation in sous Proved school conferences. COPAS’s representatives will be expected to attend the Sous Proved school conference which will invite every school in the Sous proved to discuss school performance including the Sous Proved proposed school development plan to support school improvement responding to the needs identified in the school profile activity.
- Community participation in Proved schools conferences. Selected COPAS representatives will be invited to attend the Proved School Conference to engage with Provincial plans to improve school performance, responding to needs identified in the sous Proved school profile.

FORECAST OF ACTIVITIES FOR THE COMING QUARTER

A. Management

Sub-province sub-selection

- Adjust initial selection according to Mission request to focus more on Katanga economic corridor to derive maximum value from multiplicity of USAID-funded interventions in same areas
- Meet with MAS and DIVAs to coordinate project action with ALPs and CAPS
- Finalize embedding protocols with respect to Result Three

Project roll-out

- Present work plan to stakeholders
- Draft and sign MoU with national, subnational and provincial levels
- Finalize list of initial minimum of 60 schools for intervention in following quarter

Collaboration and coordination

- Host annual coordination meeting (USAID/UKAID)
- Establish Project Steering Committee
- Pursue discussion around regional ComCon in Katanga
- Attend quarterly coordination meetings as may be directed by COR

Communications and outreach

- Establish communication protocol norms
- Develop and launch Katanga based “Je suis presente” campaign
- Meet with inspectors/advisors and school principals of selected CRS/CAPs

Grants and procurement

- Issue and award RFP/RFQs for printing materials
- Identify and put in place mechanisms for overseeing grants – block grants to schools in particular
- Release APS and identify potential grantees

Monitoring and evaluation

- Collaborate with MEPS-INC, MAS to align M&E systems
- Establish project learning agenda & operations research plan
- Initiate rolling assessment procedures

Deliverables

- Submit final revised work plan and Gantt chart
- Submit PMEPE
- Submit next quarterly & financial reports

B. Result One – Equitable Enrollments to a Quality Education Environment Increased

1.1 Reduce barriers to access for primary education

- Use existing household surveys and locals to identify areas of intervention in N/S Kivus
- Liaise effectively with initially identified potential partners in S Kivu
- Survey civil society in Katanga and Kivus to identify those currently running CRS and potential partners

1.2 Increasing access to alternative/accelerated learning programs that address out-of-school children and youth needs

- Develop/adapt targeted curriculum in life skills and functional literacy/numeracy
- Support youth groups and CAPs
- Initiate local partnerships with local businesses to support and/or develop CRS

1.3 Strengthening community and school collaboration and partnerships to support access to education

- Establish consensus around school safety, security, health, access standards
- Develop training materials
- Train trainers to deliver training

1.4 Improving the quality of education environments

- Support COPAs to conduct community mapping exercises
- Support creation of school code of student conduct
- Support development of school community safety standards

C. Result Two – Improved Education Quality

2.1 Quality of instruction at the primary level improved

- Rec activate MEPS-INC validation committee
- Agree on coaching model
- Meet with SERNAFOR to validate coaching model and expand

2.2 Teaching and learning materials used in the classroom effectively

- Re-activate and reconvene MEPS-INC validation committee
- Finalize and print all pedagogical documents for 1st trimester in 2016
- Begin to plan for second generation documents to be drafted
- Offer teacher training

2.3 Community participation to support school-based and extra-curricular learning increased

- Hire and train ALs
- Create criteria for school clusters
- Distribute all materials for classroom use

D. Result Three – Improved Governance and Accountability by Stakeholders

3.1 Development and implementation of policies for improved access and learning strengthened.

- Conduct Rapid School Assessment
- Draft School Profile
- Draft School Improvement Roadmap

3.2 School leadership and management strengthened.

- Provide training to COPAS and COGES around current education legislation
- Develop school leadership/management training
- Train school principals (finance and HR management)

3.3 Community and civil society oversight and accountability at local and sub-province levels increased.

- Train COPAS & COGES so they can better meet their mandates
- Finalize criteria for school improvement along roadmap
- Design School Improvement Profiles

ANNEX A – DELIVERABLES SUBMITTED AND APPROVED

Deliverable	Date Submitted	Response Received	Revision Submitted	Additional Responses Submitted	Final Version Officially Approved
Branding Plan	June 17, 2015	July 10, 2015	July 22, 2015		August 14, 2015
Annual Work Plan	July 27, 2015	August 11, 2015	September 2, 2015	October 6, 2015	
Quarterly Report, Q3 2015	July 30, 2015	August 14, 2015	August 25, 2015		
Grants Manual	August 26, 2015				September 3, 2015
Business Continuity Plan	August 27, 2015	September 22, 2015	October 13, 2015		
Conflict Sensitivity Analysis and Implementation Strategy	August 28, 2015	September 17, 2015	October 7, 2015		
Gender Analysis and Gender Implementation Strategy	August 28, 2015	September 17, 2015	October 8, 2015		October 15, 2015
Operations Research Plan	August 28, 2015	September 24, 2015	October 15, 2015		

ANNEX B - UPDATED TECHNICAL APPROACH NOTES

21st Century EGR Best Practice: A Clearly-Defined Four-Layer Educational Reality

1. **Identify student safety and health, in a caring and engaging school environment as the pre-requisites to learning;** which means
 - Students are the key elements in primary schools and their education must take place under some specific conditions that allow them to develop, grow, and learn as individuals worthy of all adults' attention and care.
 - Centrality of children drives all efforts towards eliminating risk to their ability to attend and stay in school to learn
 - Children have a voice
 - Children have rights and responsibilities
 - All school/community adults have a duty of care for all children
 - Children have the right to learn
2. **Articulate FLS acquisition for mastery through the early grades with clarity of scope, design, and implementation referred to as Balanced Literacy (BL and 5Ts);**
 - **All children in primary grades can learn** how to read and conditions to make that happen must acknowledge current realities such as high PTR, lack of support learning materials, insufficient time on task, teacher isolation and/or lack of adequate preparation
 - **A best approach to acquiring FLS** includes balanced literacy skills acquisition through a strong phonics-based learning continuum
 - There is **no further learning without the acquisition of strong FLS** in the early grades
 - **Children that experience success** in EGR develop self-confidence in their ability to acquire further learning
 - **All children are different**
3. Define in great detail **how to best proceed through the early grades in non-homogeneous linguistic learning environments** so that children are exposed to FLS with optimal opportunities for success;
 - Reading skills acquisition depends on children's oral mastery of an essential linguistic corpus anchored in their mother tongue
 - This corpus must be circumscribed and itemized
 - It must be practiced extensively orally *in situ* prior to engaging EGR
 - Teachers, parents and community members are living repositories of the linguistic corpus
 - Systematic and progressive approach to FLS acquisition includes exposing learners to phonemics literacy leading to comprehension of phonics' graphic representation
 - Orally identify: sounds from speech segments; graphic representation of sounds
 - Combine sounds for meaning
 - Orally identify blocs of meaning
 - Learn graphic representation of sounds; combined sounds, blocs of meaning
 - Practice range of reading skills for communication. Comprehension, information, etc.
 - Set up contextualized support system where complementary roles are defined and documented through simple guides for:
 - Home-room 1-4 teachers
 - Project support staffs
 - System actors

- School Administration
 - Senior students
 - Parents
 - Community members
 - Regular and systematic objective assessment of student performance guide all learning
 - There is NO reading without comprehension
4. Make the case for a **“bottom-up” approach to education reform**, acknowledging that literacy cannot simply be decreed in a vacuum. Only a simultaneous push in support of learning for all **firmly anchored at the school and community levels** will ensure that education reform does take hold:
- Communities and schools that have fully internalized the child-centered approach perfected by ACCELERE! become unique reform advocates and make most literacy gains sustainable
 - Children’s learning successes act as powerful incentive for parents and teachers alike to continue to support the Learning Initiative and expend it further
 - Contextualized made-to-measure solutions always work best and different rates of progress are normal, but essential child-centered issues as well as key EGR techniques remain non-negotiable
 - Objective documentation of all initiatives’ successes and challenges is intrinsically part of the reform effort

ACCELERE! proposes to bring 21CBP in all project schools through a set of *synchronized, articulated and complementary interventions* that all converge to gradually bring to the Congolese primary learning environment the necessary conditions for all early primary grade students (1st to 4th grades) to acquire FLS mastery. Therefore, all project activities are uniquely based on and relate directly to any one or more of above four 21CBP characteristic domains:

Result 1 rests primarily on 1,2 &3; Result 2 rests on 2 & 3; and Result 3 rests on 2 & 4.

ANNEX C - DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL MITIGATION AND MONITORING PLAN (EMMP) ANNUAL REPORT

Since ACCELERE! has not commenced activities that were identified to have a negative determination in the IEE, the project does not have not any activities on which it can report.