EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT: APPROACHES TO CREATE SCHOOL COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS FOR LITERACY

MUREKE DUSOME ACTIVITY

March 31, 2021
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Overview of Mureke Dusome Activity (2016-2021)

Mureke Dusome is a USAID activity that aims to foster partnerships between schools and the broader community in a bid to improve P1-P3 students’ literacy outcomes.
Every child needs an enabling environment supportive of learning. Schools alone are not responsible for the educational experience of children; this is the shared responsibility of schools, parents and community members.

For years, research has shown that children who benefit from engaged parents and supportive communities are much more likely to succeed academically than those who do not.
KEY APPROACHES USED TO CREATE SCHOOL COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS FOR LITERACY

1. Create a nationally appropriate vision of effective school-community partnerships to improve student literacy.
2. Implement a scalable training approach to engage education officials and school leadership to raise parental participation and wider community involvement in the promotion of children’s literacy.
3. Implement and sustain SLM peer learning to promote literacy.
4. Engage partner organizations to mobilize and coordinate efforts to maximize reach to beneficiaries.
5. Apply Long-term Ministry of Education Engagement Approaches.
I. CREATE A NATIONALLY APPROPRIATE VISION
of effective school-community partnerships to improve student literacy

(a) Engagement of the Ministry of Education - Initial Steps

REB appointed its School Leadership and Management Director as the focal person for Mureke Dusome.

REB’s SLM team actively contributed in the design and implementation - including facilitation of key sessions - of workshops that framed the initial contents of the National Parent School Partnership Standards.
I. CREATE A NATIONALLY APPROPRIATE VISION (Cont.)

of effective school-community partnerships to improve student literacy

(b) Development of National Parent School Partnership Standards

Based on Epstein’s Model of Parental Involvement and on Rwanda Education Board orientation for School Leadership Development, Mureke Dusome developed the following standards:

- Sharing Responsibility
- Active Participation in School Life
- Communicating Effectively
- Supporting Learning
- Ensuring Equity and Inclusion
- Collaborating with the Wider Community
Based on the National Parent School Partnership Standards, Mureke Dusome developed a **Parent School Partnerships for Education Toolkit** that includes 6 self-study modules.
2. IMPLEMENT A SCALABLE TRAINING APPROACH

Engage education officials and school leadership to raise parent participation and wider community involvement in the promotion of children’s literacy.
Self-study approach

The modules were designed so as to prompt HTs and SGAC members to reflect on their current practices vis-à-vis the standards, identify their strengths and weaknesses, and take new actions to improve. 7767(2066F;5701M) participants including DDEs, DEOs, HTs and SGACs benefited from this learning approach.
Parents and Community sensitizations

The trained Head Teachers and parent representatives used the knowledge they got to sensitize parents during School General Assembly meetings and other community gatherings with local leaders.
Plan regular PLCs in 2018-2019; led by SEOs and bringing onboard other education stakeholders.

**Why?**

Evidence that: PLCs were successful in reminding HTs and SGACs of the school community partnerships for literacy strategies;

Evidence that: PLCs participants collaborative experience of sharing success stories and problem-solving strategies together inspired many initially reluctant participants to prioritize providing support for community-based literacy activities.
3. IMPLEMENT AND SUSTAIN PEER LEARNING CIRCLES (PLC)

**PLC Agenda**

- Self-evaluation in groups per school
- Plenary discussions to share experiences on: Achievements, challenges faced and contextualized solutions
- Reflection and new commitments

**PLC Participants**

Sector Education Officers (SEOs), Head Teachers (HT), School General Assembly Committee (SGAC), representatives of the National Council of Women and the National Council of Persons with Disabilities, Literacy Champions and Village Leaders.
3. IMPLEMENT AND SUSTAIN PEER LEARNING CIRCLES (PLC)

Results

• Bringing onboard different stakeholders such as representatives of women, representatives of persons with disabilities and local leaders who were more supportive of initiatives;

• Community sensitizations on promoting children’s reading through different existing forums (eg: women forums, community meetings with local leaders, etc)

• Community involvement to support children’s reading clubs: (identifying safe sites for reading clubs, agreeing on ways to keep reading materials safe)
EDUCATION COUNCIL MEETINGS FOR PEER LEARNING

Why?

- Education council meetings are government-mandated forums for education stakeholders to discuss education issues and find solutions together. Education stakeholders in districts and sectors convene quarterly to resolve education issues in their areas.

- To sustain peer learning for literacy, Mureke Dusome targeted Sector Level Education Council meetings to influence topics that are discussed in those meetings and introduced promoting children’s literacy.
Peer learning circle
structure

**Identification and Planning**

The first meeting is to identify concerns related to school Community Partnerships for improving children’s reading outside schools. PLC members will select strategies to try out and make a plan that can help to improve children’s literacy at both school and community. This meeting takes place in the first quarter of the year.

**First Review Meeting**

During the first review session, PLC members share experiences from try out and decide the most appropriate strategies to be implemented. PLC members make a plan for implementing best strategies. This meeting takes place in the second quarter of the year.

**Second Review Meeting**

During the second review meeting, PLC members will share the best practices, success stories and challenges of the appropriate strategies implemented and discuss the best way of overcoming the challenges encountered during the implementation of best strategies. This meeting takes place in the third quarter of the year.

**Reflection and Dissemination Session**

The reflection session completes the cycle. PLC members discuss the entire process, record lessons learnt, and build a step-by-step strategy that can be shared with other PLCs. This meeting takes place in the fourth quarter of the year.
Results

• More collaboration between schools and the community in the support of children’s learning in general and literacy in particular

• Community members including Literacy Champions, villages leaders, and other volunteers such as representatives of Faith Based Organizations supported schools to follow up on children’s learning when schools were shut:
  - Home visits to monitor learning of radio lessons
  - Lending books to families
  - Facilitating reading clubs

• School Leaders exchanged books with Literacy Champions for children to access a variety of book titles

• Education stakeholders identify volunteers to replace those who drop out
4. ENGAGEMENT OF PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

Member of the School Leadership and Management (SLM) taskforce

- Sharing plans
- Coordinating activities,
- Learn and support each other

Harmonizing Toolkits and Training Manuals

- Complementing each other’s messages, Mureke Dusome adopted VVOB’s model of peer learning, including School Community Partnership messages into the HT certification program, etc

Organizing Joint Trainings and Monitoring Visits

- Harmonizing messages designed for beneficiaries during joint trainings and monitoring visits.
Some testimonies

“I appreciated the strategies that you are using in overcoming challenges that hinder the good performance of your students and the promotion of children’s literacy. Literacy is a priority that you should always discuss in your education meetings and take tangible actions towards it.”

REB staff.

“Getting both REB, Mureke Dusome and VVOB’s interventions has helped me to learn more about how I can involve the wider community to promote children’s learning performance. Literacy is one component that helps to progress children’s learning. I have realized that I cannot achieve more if I don’t involve the wider community right from the setting of the school’s mission, vision and school improvement plan.”

Head Teacher
5. MINISTRY OF EDUCATION ENGAGEMENT

Engagement of the Ministry of Education

(a) MOU
(b) National Training Team
(c) REB staff involved in monitoring
(d) Embedding a staff in Rwanda Education Board

Advocacy

(a) REB gave guidelines to education officials about engaging parents and the wider community in the promotion of literacy and about renewing SGACs to include parents’ representatives with at least secondary school level;
(b) REB’s Monitoring and Evaluation plans include the monitoring of education council meetings;
(c) Different partners encourage schools to include community engagement to promote learning, numeracy and literacy in their plans and activities;
Initially, Head Teachers were reluctant to engage in monitoring reading activities that take place in communities beyond school walls.

- Mureke Dusome successfully worked with REB to provide guidelines on SEOs and HTs’ roles in promoting children’s literacy in the school community.
- Peer learning to share experiences and problem solving strategies.

Limited field presence resulting in:

- (a) challenges to meet districts’ expectations related to participation in District Joint Action development Forums (JADF)
- (b) Difficult to align plans with district priorities

- Creation of WhatsApp groups of Education Officials in each district to ease regular communication, share plans, lessons, best practices and reports.
- Field staff based in 8 districts in 2020-2021
MANAGING CHALLENGES (Cont.)

- Reluctance to conduct reading festivals and competitions due to lack of rewards for children
  - Homegrown solutions: collaboration between schools and local leaders to collect different materials, like notebooks, pens, soaps, etc, to award children who win reading competitions.
  - Messages to encourage intrinsic motivation to help children feel happy of their achievements and to work hard to have reading skills for their future learning, rather than working hard for being rewarded with materials.

- The Mureke Dusome phased approach (2 districts in 2016, +10 districts in 2017, +18 districts in 2018) and education staff movement to different districts caused situations of Education officials who missed trainings.
  - Peer learning was a solution: sharing learning and experiences
**LESSONS LEARNED**

- **Collaboration with various stakeholders** was key to successfully implement a nationwide intervention and build the capacity of school leadership members to engage the community in the promotion of children’s literacy.

- **Field presence in districts** improves collaboration with local authorities and coordination with other stakeholders at the local level, leading to maximizing project ownership by the local community. Participation in district Joint Action Development Forums (JADF) is key to influence district strategic and action plans.

- **Peer learning meetings** led stakeholders to identify and implement contextually appropriate responses.
CONCLUSION

Through implementing initiatives to strengthen the capacity of school leadership, Mureke Dusome succeeded to:

- Engage the Ministry of Education, Rwanda Education Board and local administrative entities to undertake plans and actions oriented to engaging communities in the promotion of children’s literacy.
- Build the capacity of a range of education stakeholders on engaging parents and communities to support children’s literacy.
- Maintain and sustain dialogue to share best practices and take actions through government mandated education council meetings.