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TEN YEARS OF EARLY GRADE READING PROGRAMMING: A RETROSPECTIVE

(2011–2021)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

GLOBAL SHIFT TO EARLY GRADE READING

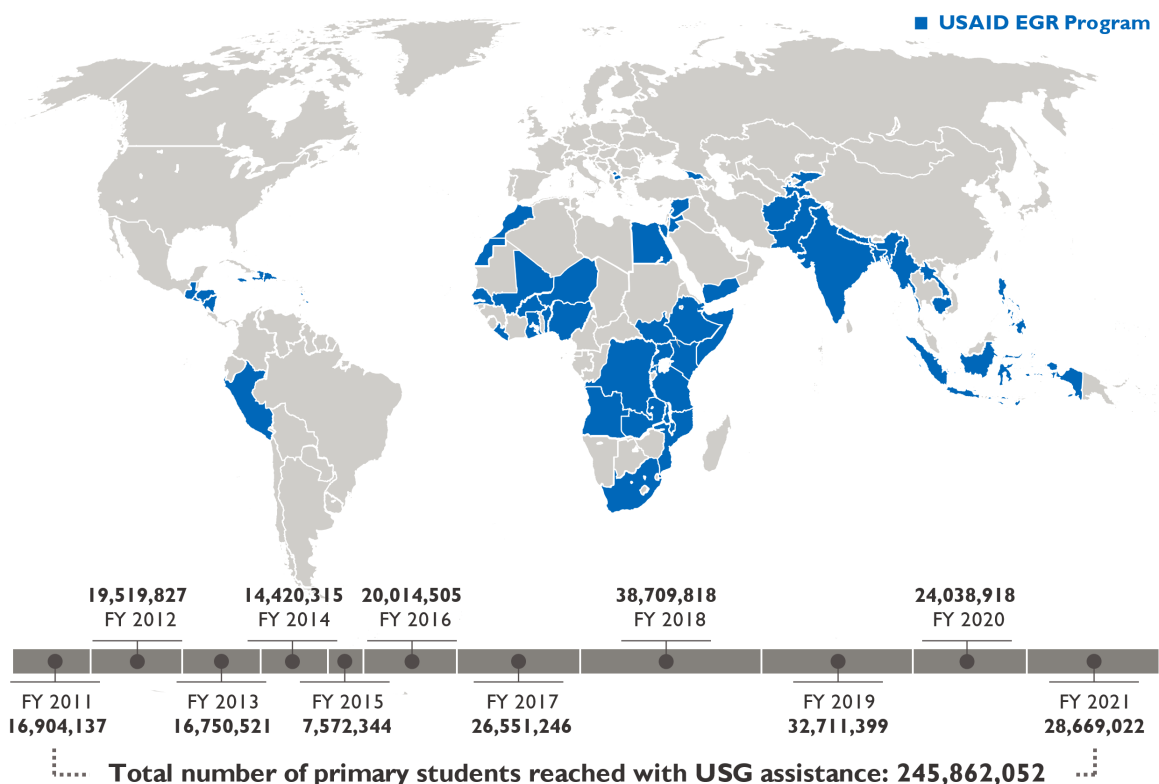
USAID has been a global leader in efforts to strengthen early grade reading (EGR) around the world. With the release of the 2011 USAID Education Strategy, USAID shifted global attention to the importance of early grade reading, and in particular the quality of reading instruction. To support this focus, USAID funded early grade reading assessments (EGRA) to highlight the magnitude of the challenge and use data and evidence to facilitate discussions around the urgent need for reform.

TEN YEARS OF PROGRESS

Since 2011, **USAID EGR programming has benefited an estimated 246 million students**, as well as **millions of teachers and administrators in 53 countries**. USAID programs have designed, produced, and distributed countless teaching and learning materials needed to support quality instructional practice. Additional achievements include:

- **Generating data** that provide insight into student learning and increase the focus on the **quality of schooling** in early grades.
- **Building the evidence base for effective approaches** to literacy acquisition and instruction, especially in multilingual contexts.
- Promoting **equity in learning, particularly for the most marginalized**.
- Promoting policies that support **children learning to read in a language they understand**.
- **Partnering with governments** to adopt materials, approaches, and systems to enhance student reading performance and **increase sustainability**.

Since 2011, USAID EGR programs have reached nearly 246 million students



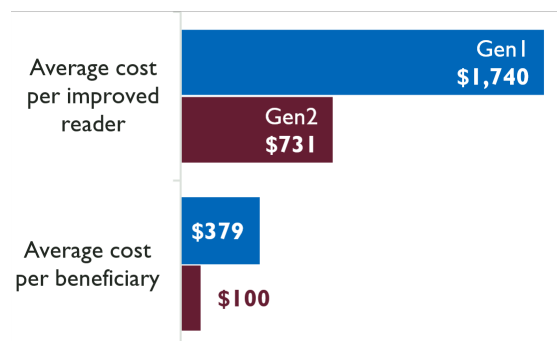
INCREASING IMPACT WHILE LOWERING COST

Analysis of USAID programming from 2011 to 2021 indicates that EGR programming is becoming more effective, with second-generation programs tending to reach a larger number of beneficiaries, improving reading¹ among a larger percentage of students, and having a lower average cost per beneficiary and per improved reader. The exhibits below illustrate the differences in Generation 1 and 2 programs observed among programs in this retrospective. Where Generation 1 programs are those procured before the required alignment with the 2011 USAID Education Strategy and Generation 2 programs are those procured following alignment in 2013.

Comparing number and percent of improved readers for Generation 1 and 2 programs included in this study



Comparing average cost among Generation 1 and 2 programs included in this study



UTILIZING LESSONS LEARNED TO IMPROVE PROGRAMS

USAID's early grade reading EGR efforts utilized data and evidence to improve programs, increase the understanding of promising practices in reading instruction, and help governments strengthen education systems.

Core elements in reading programs evolved from Generations 1 to 2, including closer collaboration with partner-country governments and greater integration of programs in existing systems; increased levels of available expertise in reading instruction; expanded use of research-based approaches in reading instruction and in the development of teaching and learning materials; more common use of language analysis and mapping; more effective teacher training approaches; and more systematic collection and use of monitoring data.

These improvements have not been experienced universally and many countries continue to struggle to ensure quality learning for all children. When improvements fell short of expectations, it was often in areas impacted by conflict and crisis and without strong support from partner governments. Conversely, even in complex environments, **USAID programs made significant increases in learning outcomes when they built on the success of multigenerational programs, utilized existing systems, and worked in partnership with governments to ensure sustainability.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

The systemic education reforms required to make meaningful and lasting improvements in student learning take time and sustained effort. To support meaningful reform, EGR programs must reflect a deep understanding of the local context, be based on close collaboration with partner-country governments, and apply evidence-based reading instruction approaches adapted to reflect existing capacity and systems. The time needed to integrate these elements into programs and the time needed for teaching staff, administrators, and ministries to adopt new behaviors is, however, frequently at odds with EGR programs' short-term student learning outcome targets. Reflecting on lessons gleaned from organizations implementing early grade reading programs, we draw the following top-level recommendations for EGR programming.



Build in time and resources needed to design and develop programs based on country context: Incorporate an inception phase or extend the period of performance on EGR programming to allow time for new programs to thoroughly research the country context and to work closely with partner-country governments and stakeholders on program design and implementation.²



Build flexibility into program design to maximize effectiveness: Build flexibility into program design and contract/agreement structures to accommodate design and implementation adjustments needed to maximize effectiveness.



Utilize research-based approaches: Encourage adherence to best practices in reading materials and instruction so that all programs benefit from research-based approaches.



Strengthen sustainability and use of data systems: Promote ongoing and sustained monitoring of progress through sustainable data systems and the identification of strengths as well as areas for improvement.



Make programming more equitable: Design programming in ways that engage and benefit the most marginalized.



Build resilience into program design: Integrate resilience into program design by developing effective and equitable distance and other alternative learning approaches to mitigate learning loss in times of crisis.



Develop system indicators: Measure system strengthening to both encourage and capture system-level program impacts that can frequently be detected before significant student learning gains become discernible.

LOOKING FORWARD

While much progress has been made over the last decade, COVID-19 has undermined improvements in school attendance and literacy rates, especially among the most marginalized learners. Addressing the learning crisis will take time and require focused, sustained, and substantial efforts. Incorporating lessons learned from the past ten years of USAID EGR programs will help USAID's efforts to support partner governments as they design and implement reforms to address the current global education crisis.

INTRODUCTION

USAID has been a global leader in efforts to strengthen early grade reading around the world. Learning how to read in the early grades is essential. The ability to read ensures that children can follow instructions, understand, and absorb subject matter content, understand and follow written instructions, and communicate in writing. Children who do not master reading early in primary school quickly fall behind their peers and are more likely to drop out of school.³ They are less likely to make positive social, economic, and political contributions to the often-fragile societies in which they live and are more vulnerable to negative influences such as misinformation and extremist narratives.

This retrospective explores USAID early grade reading (EGR) achievements in the past ten years and highlights observations made by those implementing early grade reading programs. The brief tracks substantial progress made in program effectiveness and reflects on challenges in supporting meaningful systemic reform in complex environments. The research team examined basic program characteristics and student outcome data from 45 USAID-funded EGR programs and interviewed a sample of implementing partners to capture observations regarding the evolution of early grade reading programs.

USAID EARLY GRADE READING PROGRAMMING

In recent decades, low- and middle-income country (LMIC) governments focused primarily on increasing access to primary schools. The impact of this focus was significant and, with average primary enrollment ratios in the 90s, LMIC enrollment neared those in high-income countries.⁴ Improvements in quality, however, did not keep pace with these improvements in access.⁵ Students were enrolling, but in many cases were not learning even the most fundamental skills. Many students completed primary school without mastering foundational skills including the ability to read.

SHIFT FROM ACCESS TO QUALITY

Many governments, which traditionally did not administer standardized tests until the fourth grade, were frequently unaware of the plight of quality in the early grades. The USAID-funded early grade reading assessments (EGRA) conducted in countries around the world helped raise awareness around school quality and the critical role of reading. In Malawi for example, a USAID-funded EGRA in 2010 revealed that 95 percent of second graders were unable to read a single word.⁶ A 2013 EGRA conducted in Ghana showed that the percentage of second graders unable to read ranged from 51 percent to 91 percent, depending on which language was assessed.⁷ Though not as severe as the two previous examples, USAID assessments revealed that 32 percent of second graders in Morocco⁸ in 2011 and 37 percent of second graders in Nepal⁹ in 2014 completed the school year unable to read a single word. These results demonstrated the gravity of the situation and mirrored those from many other USAID-supported countries throughout the world. The results were so stark and alarming that it was not uncommon for ministries to initially refute poor assessment results in their respective countries.

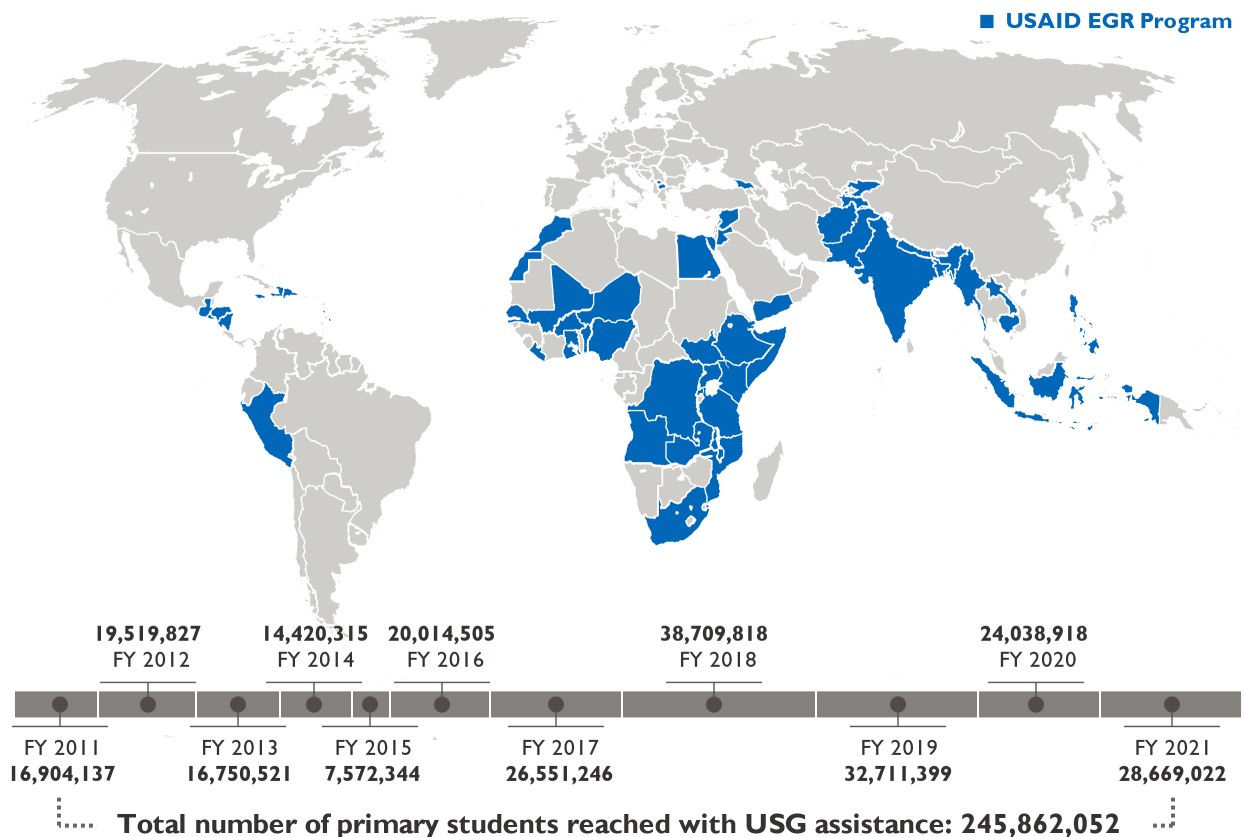
USAID's 2011 Education Strategy, with its substantial focus on early grade reading, ushered in a generation of reading-focused programs. **This focus raised global awareness among governments and stakeholders regarding the urgent need to prioritize education quality in grades 1 through 3**, particularly reading, a foundational skill that research has shown to be critical for success in school and later in life. This focus also acted as a catalyst for early grade reading research, increasing understanding of reading acquisition and pedagogical practices in USAID-supported contexts.

The implementation of reading intervention programs also provided insights into the strengths and weaknesses in countries' existing education systems and the ramifications they had on effective program implementation.

In close collaboration with partner-country ministries and local and international subject matter experts, USAID-funded programs created teaching and learning materials, trained teachers in best literacy acquisition approaches and learning assessment, and introduced and integrated support systems within government structures. USAID EGR programming reached 53 countries and nearly **246 million students** in primary schools¹⁰ between 2011 and 2021 (Exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1. Countries receiving USAID EGR support between 2011 and 2021

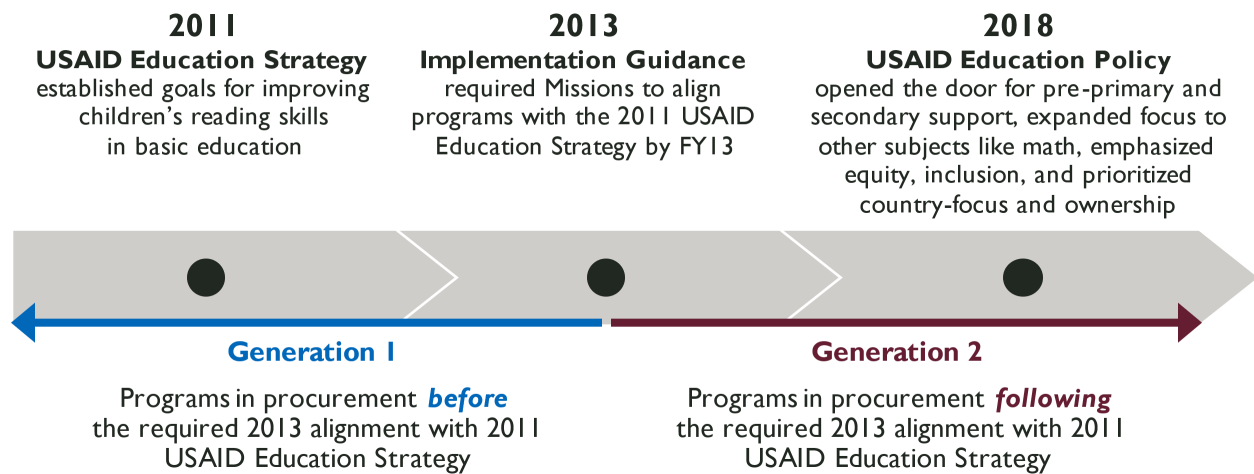
Since 2011, USAID EGR programs have reached nearly 246 million students



The 2011 USAID Education Strategy, recognizing the urgent need to increase the quality of instruction, put in place the ambitious target of improving reading for 100 million children in USAID-supported countries around the world. Motivated by this goal, USAID mobilized its country Missions and implementing partners to focus new programming on and pivot existing education programming to reading instruction. Grouping and comparing different generations of USAID EGR programs can help to highlight the important shifts in USAID's approach. Generation 1 programs are those procured before the required alignment with the 2011 USAID Education Strategy and Generation 2 programs are those procured following alignment in 2013. Original Generation 1 reading programs were based on initial pilot programs with highly structured designs, ambitious targets and timelines, and limited contextual adaptation. Post-2013, Generation 2 programs saw increased involvement of ministry staff in both the design and implementation of program components, greater flexibility and adaptation to country

contexts and priorities, and greater integration with existing ministry systems. Many Generation 2 programs in countries that already had an EGR program benefited from the materials developed, lessons learned, and the advocacy work and EGR champions that had been forged during earlier programming. Increases in positive outcomes were due, in part, to this continuity of programming.

Exhibit 2. Changes in USAID Education Strategy, Guidance, and Policy and Program Generation




In this brief, we explore differences in characteristics and outcomes of Generation 1 and 2 programs and reflect observations gathered from a sample of organizations implementing EGR programs. 45 major USAID EGR programs (27 Generation 1 and 16 Generation 2) with available EGRA data¹¹ and their related 90 EGRA data sets were reviewed in this study. The programs reviewed in this retrospective reached an estimated 61 million unique beneficiaries and represented an overall budget (ceiling) of \$2 billion. This study covered USAID-funded EGR programs from Asia (9), Europe and Eurasia (2), Latin America (1), the Middle East and North Africa (3), and Sub-Saharan Africa (28). See Annex 1 for methodology notes.

COMPARING GENERATION 1 AND 2 PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS

The majority of EGR programs have common elements that have remained fairly constant across Generation 1 and 2 programming. Commonalities in programming include:

- Use of learning assessments to highlight the need for reform and to monitor progress;
- Phonics-based reading instruction;
- Development and distribution of teaching and learning materials;
- Explicit time set aside for pre-literacy and reading instruction;
- In-service teacher training, and teacher supervision and/or mentoring; and
- Policy work, where findings from EGR assessment and programs were used to advocate for broader support for and reform of early grade education.

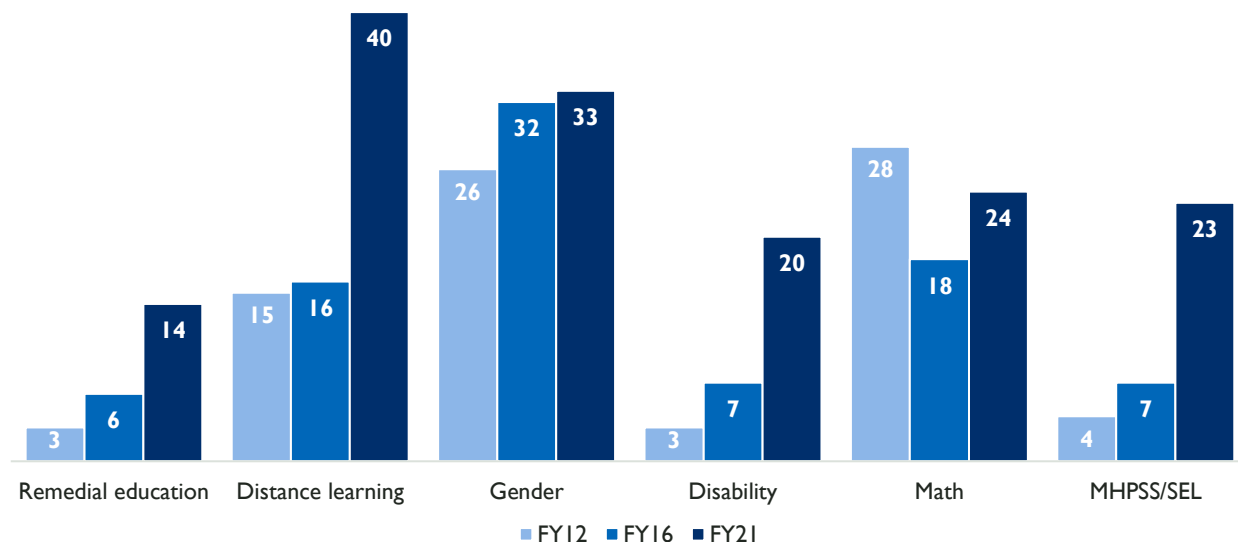
 Generation 2 programs tended to reach a larger number of beneficiaries than Generation 1 programs.

In addition to these core elements, some programs incorporated math instruction, mental health and psychosocial support/socio-emotional learning, equity focus (gender, language minorities, out-of-school populations, and children with disabilities), distance learning, remedial or accelerated learning, and community engagement. The application, design, and sequencing of these different components varied across programs and implementing partners. These programs evolved over time and across Generation 1 and 2 programs. This evolution reflects lessons that implementing partners have learned working in countries with different linguistic, political, and security environments, and different levels of system maturity.

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted and closed schools worldwide beginning in March 2020,¹² led USAID to further adapt and focus on distance learning, psychosocial support, safety, and social-emotional learning. As reported by USAID country offices, USAID began to focus on the return to learning, school reopening, and efforts to provide accelerated learning and remedial support¹³ (Exhibit 3).

Exhibit 3. Shifts in type of activity incorporated into USAID early reading programming by fiscal year reported

Number of USAID-supported countries by type of activity incorporated



Among the programs reviewed in this study, Generation 2 programs tended to be larger in scale, reaching a greater average number of beneficiaries than Generation 1 (1.7 million vs. 1.1 million).

Comparing further program characteristics among those reviewed, we see that most Generation 1 and 2 programs were conducted at the subnational level. Generation 2 programs tended to last longer (average 4.9 years) than Generation 1 programs, which included pilots (average 4.1 years). Generation 2 had an average budget ceiling more than twice as high (\$69.9 million) as Generation 1 programs (\$32.3 million).

OPERATING IN CHALLENGING ENVIRONMENTS

There are contextual characteristics in both Generation 1 and 2 program countries that make implementing EGR programs challenging, and these challenges can mitigate program effectiveness. Among the programs included in this retrospective, most were conducted in fragile states¹⁴ with low government effectiveness (average Government Effectiveness rating of -0.7 for each generation¹⁵). About one-third were conducted in conflict and crisis settings¹⁶ and many have substantial numbers of refugees (447,000 for Generation 2 vs. 154,000 for Generation 1).

In addition to these broad country-level challenges, many countries face education system-level challenges that further affect program effectiveness. At the ministry level, these include (1) low levels of teacher qualifications and capacity, (2) limited teacher accountability and associated absenteeism, (3) high levels of teacher mobility and attrition, and (4) frequent turnover in education ministry personnel and leadership which can quickly undermine progress made in building relationships and capacity and in identifying champions. USAID-supported countries commonly have complex multilingual contexts where there are multiple official languages of instruction and/or where students' and teachers' primary language frequently differs from schools' language of instruction. Finally, at the school level, many EGR program countries frequently face overcrowded classrooms with insufficient desks, insufficient teaching and learning materials, high rates of student and teacher absenteeism, high student repetition rates, and low levels of family engagement and support.

EGR PROGRAMMING ACHIEVEMENTS

Despite these very real challenges, USAID has had a substantial impact on early grade reading. Since 2011, **USAID EGR programming has benefited an estimated 246 million students**, as well as **millions of teachers and administrators in 53 countries**. USAID programs have designed, produced, and distributed countless teaching and learning materials needed to support quality instructional practice. Additional achievements include:

- **Generating data** that provide insight into student level learning and increase the focus on the **quality of schooling** in early grades;
- **Building the evidence base for effective approaches** to literacy acquisition and instruction, especially in multilingual contexts;
- Promoting **equity in learning, particularly for the most marginalized**;
- Promoting policies that support **children learning to read in a language they understand**;
- **Partnering with governments** to adopt materials, approaches, and systems to enhance student reading performance and **increase sustainability**.

Importantly, USAID programming has improved student performance in pre-literacy and reading skills. In the following section we compare learning outcomes among Generation 1 and 2 programs.

IMPROVEMENTS IN RESULTS IN USAID PROGRAMMING

Generation 2 programs benefited from lessons learned through Generation 1 programs. Among the programs included in this retrospective, Generation 2 programs helped improve learning outcomes for more students and the overall **percentage of improved readers was nearly three times higher for Generation 2 programs** than Generation 1.

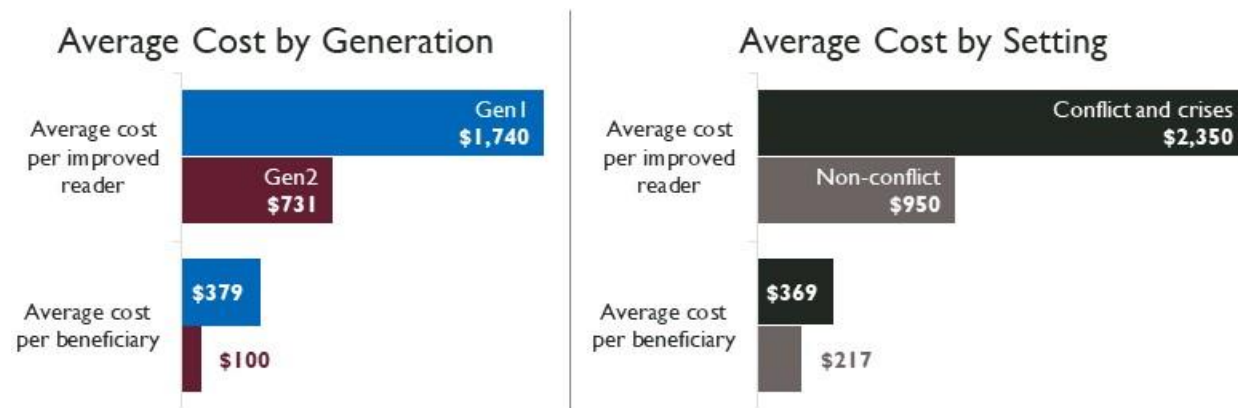
- 🔍 Generation 2 programs:
- Tended to improve reading among a larger percentage of students
 - Overall, saw a greater number of improved readers
 - Had lower average per-beneficiary and per-improved-reader costs

Exhibit 4. Comparing number and percent of improved readers for Generation 1 and 2 programs included in this study



Similarly, among programs included in this retrospective, average Generation 2 program costs per beneficiary were less than one-third of those in Generation 1 and costs¹⁷ per improved reader¹⁸ were less than one-half the equivalent costs for Generation 1.

Exhibit 5. Comparing per-student costs in EGR programs included in this study



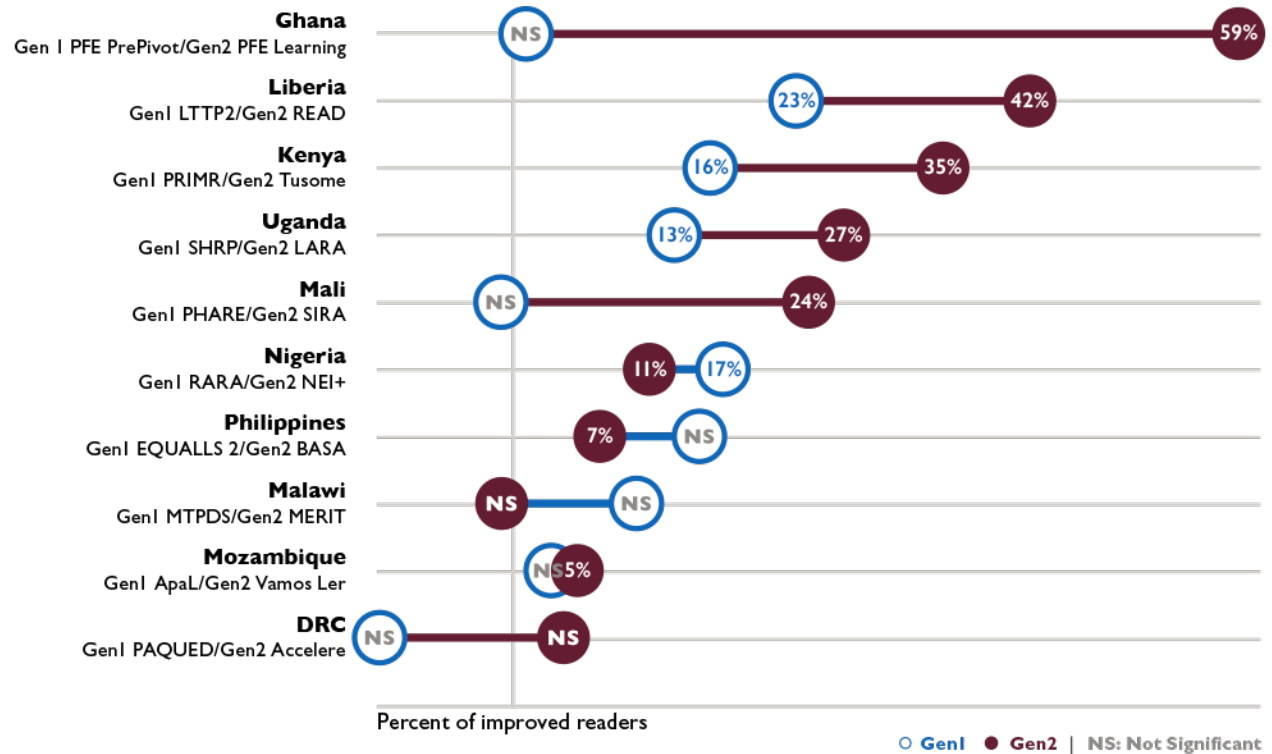
As noted earlier, countries that had more than one round of USAID reading programs benefited from the opportunity to build on the experiences, materials, advocacy work, capacity, systems, and connections forged through the Generation 1 program. Comparing pairs of Generation 1 and 2 programs (Exhibit 6) allows us to see more clearly the differences in performance across generations. The research team compared programming in ten countries that had follow-up programs. Among these, seven saw positive and statistically significant reading improvement from Generation 1 to Generation 2 programs.¹⁹ Those programs

- 🔍 Generation 2 programs were 27 percentage points more likely to show positive and statistically significant improvement.

where improvement in reading fluency outcomes was not statistically significant have been indicated by “NS.”

GENERATION 2 PROGRAMS TENDED TO OUTPACE GENERATION 1 PROGRAMS IN PERCENTAGE OF IMPROVED READERS

Exhibit 6. Percent increase in improved readers meeting significance criteria by Generation 1 and 2



As noted, Generation 2 programs tended to reach a larger number of beneficiaries and improve reading for a larger percentage of readers; consequently, they saw a greater number of improved readers.

Expanding our analysis to all 45 programs evaluated (Exhibit 7), we note that 29 of these saw a positive and statistically significant increase²⁰ in the number of students with improved reading. Seventy-seven percent of Generation 2 programs and 57 percent of Generation 1 programs saw statistically significant and positive improvement, suggesting that Generation 2 programs benefited from lessons learned and progress made during Generation 1 programs. Controlling for estimated cost per beneficiary, duration, footprint, number of languages implemented, and safety of the environment, Generation 2 programs were 27 percentage points more likely to show positive and statistically significant improvement. Exhibit 7 illustrates the percentage and number of improved readers where differences were positive and statistically significant. “NS” indicates where improvements did not meet the significance criterion.^{21 22}

GENERATION 2 PROGRAMS WERE MORE LIKELY TO HAVE A STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT AND POSITIVE INCREASE IN IMPROVED READERS

Exhibit 7. Percent and number of beneficiaries with improved reading by generation*

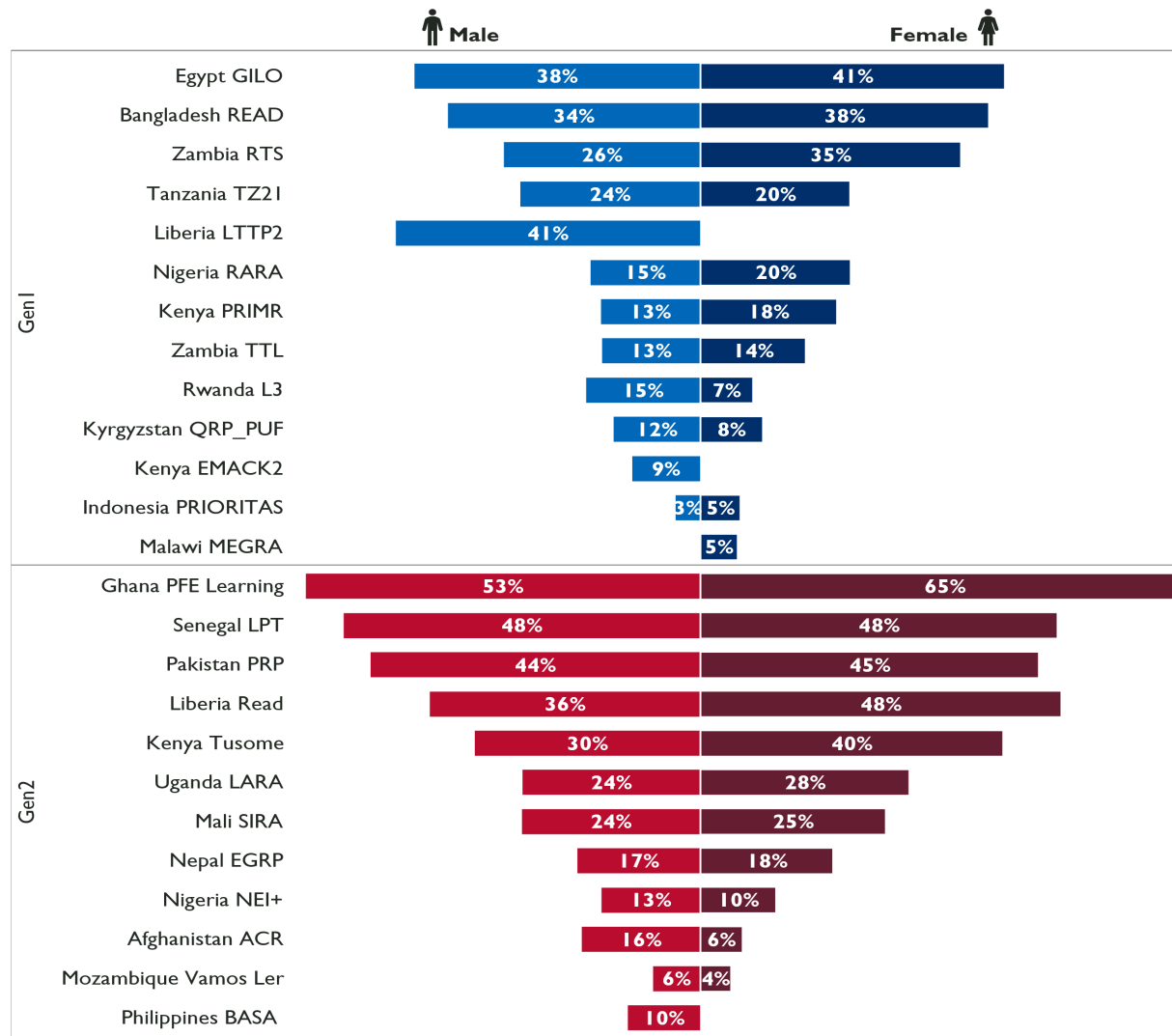
	Percent of improved readers	Number of improved readers		
Gen 1	Bangladesh READ	45%	503,707	
	Egypt GILO	39%	4,738	
	Zambia RTS	31%	241,385	
	Liberia LTTP2	23%	30,820	
	Tanzania TZ2I	22%	99,040	
	Georgia GPRIED	18%	28,122	
	Rwanda L3	17%	414,499	
	Nigeria RARA	17%	1,041	
	Kenya PRIMR	16%	13,026	
	Ethiopia Teach II	16%	7,344	
	Zambia TTL	14%	58,729	
	Uganda SHRP	13%	290,676	
	Kyrgyz Rep. QRP	11%	13,947	
	Macedonia RAL	8%	1,246	
	Kenya EMACK2	8%	15,835	
	Indonesia PRIORITAS	5%	222,186	
	Yemen CLP	NS	NS	
	Philippines EQUALLS 2	NS	NS	
	Mozambique ApaL	NS	NS	
	Mali PHARE	NS	NS	
	Malawi MTPDS	NS	NS	
	Malawi MEGRA	NS	NS	
	Haiti TOTAL	NS	NS	
	Ghana PFE PrePivot	NS	NS	
	DRC PAQUED	NS	NS	
	DRC OPEQ	NS	NS	
	Gen 2	Ghana PFE Learning	59%	415,898
		Senegal LPT	47%	248,879
		Pakistan PRP	42%	272,402
		Liberia READ	42%	80,047
		Kenya Tusome	35%	2,777,111
		Uganda LARA	27%	728,348
Mali SIRA		24%	96,030	
Nepal EGRP		17%	182,458	
Nigeria NEI+		11%	75,626	
Philippines BASA		7%	80,207	
Afghanistan ACR		7%	25,604	
Ethiopia READ		5%	252,946	
Mozambique Vamos Ler		5%	27,134	
Malawi MERIT		NS	NS	
DRC Accelere		NS	NS	

*Increases in improved readers meeting statistical significance criteria

GENERATION 2 PROGRAMS SAW GREATER POSITIVE INCREASES IN BOTH MALE AND FEMALE READERS, AND GIRLS TENDED TO OUTPERFORM BOYS ON MORE PROGRAMS

Twenty-five programs had positive, statistically significant improvements when disaggregated by gender.²³

Exhibit 8. Percent of improved readers meeting statistical significance criterion by Generation 1 and 2 and by sex



HIGHLIGHTING SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS AND LESSONS LEARNED FROM CHALLENGING CONTEXTS

Context, design, and implementation play key roles in program effectiveness and long-term sustainability. Below we highlight two programs (Pakistan Reading Project and Kenya Tusome) that were identified among the eight most²⁴ effective in significantly improving student learning and were supported by partner-country governments on a national or semi-national scale in a way that could be sustained once the programs ended. We then highlight two countries (The Democratic Republic of Congo and Malawi) with particularly challenging contexts for the implementation of education programs and lessons learned from these contexts.



PAKISTAN TEACHER READ ALOUD. SOURCE: IRC, PAKISTAN READING PROJECT

PAKISTAN READING PROJECT (PRP)



1.7 million
students reached



42%
students improved*



27,000
teachers trained



744
faculty from 110 TTIs



7 million
books and materials distributed

Led by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in partnership with Creative Associates, World Learning, and Institute of Rural Management, the Pakistan Reading Project (PRP) worked to enhance the government’s ability to teach and improve reading for 1.7 million first and second grade children.

Focus on learning quality: The program included developing teacher and student materials, applying structured teacher guides and guided reading lesson plans, phonics-based instruction, and increasing instructional time. In addition, the program supported the modification of 55 education policies, including an increase in instructional time.

Rigorous monitoring and evaluation and flexible iterative design: The flexible and iterative design of PRP allowed programs to revise iteratively, reflecting research findings, and identified teacher and broader system-level levers that affected program effectiveness. A rigorous research approach included three cohort groups to test the relative effectiveness of different approaches. Cost data were also collected to assess the cost-effectiveness of different approaches.

Integrating resilience: The program worked in conflict-affected areas of Pakistan and was able to incorporate “safe school” considerations into programming. In this way, PRP ensured that even children living in these crisis settings were able to learn. These same approaches helped the program to be better prepared when COVID-19 struck.²⁵

Partnership with the government to increase learning outcomes at scale and build sustainability: The seven-year at-scale program was designed with scalability, sustainability, and affordability in mind. Working closely with the government, the program integrated within existing government structures, and built capacity at every level of government. The extension from a four-year to a seven-year program with a narrower scope permitted program adaptation, capacity-building, and greater integration of PRP systems within the government.

Measurement of the program in 2018 showed that 42 percent of learners demonstrated improved reading²⁶ and there was an 18-percentage-point increase in the proportion of children reading with fluency.²⁷



KENYA TUSOME CLASSROOM. SOURCE: USAID

KENYA TUSOME



7.6 million
students reached



35%
students improved



101,000
teachers trained (as of 2019)



26 million
books produced and distributed
(through 2021)

Led by the Kenya Ministry of Education in partnership with RTI International and supported by Women Educational Researchers of Kenya, Worldreader, and Dalberg Global Development Advisors,²⁸ Tusome was a six-year at-scale program with the goal of strengthening the government's ability to improve students' learning outcomes in reading and math.

Focus on learning quality: The program worked to improve learning outcomes for 7 million children in public, low-cost private, and settlement schools by strengthening teachers' effectiveness in the classroom, increasing access to teaching and learning materials, and increasing teacher support and supervision. Core components of the program applied structured teacher guides, phonics-based instruction, and increased instructional time.

Rigorous monitoring and evaluation and building on previous models: The program utilized rigorous evidence-based approaches, systems, and materials that had been developed and tested for scalability and sustainability created under the predecessor USAID/DFID Kenya Primary Mathematics and Reading (PRIMR) program, which was also based on an earlier USAID EGR program carried out in the Malindi region of Kenya.

Partnership with the government to increase learning outcomes at scale and build sustainability: The program aligned with Kenyan government leadership priorities and goals and was implemented by the Ministry of Education with USAID-funded technical support by RTI International and its partners. To increase sustainability, the program was built on and integrated with existing government systems.

Under Tusome, 35 percent of learners enjoyed improved reading: The proportion of learners reading English fluently doubled (12 to 27 percent) and the proportion of children unable to read dropped from 38 to 12 percent. Similarly, the proportion of learners reading Kiswahili fluently increased threefold (4 to 12 percent) and the share of non-readers was cut in half (43 to 19 percent).²⁹ PRIMR developed teaching and learning materials that aligned with the Kenyan National Curriculum and were approved by the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD).³⁰



RURAL CLASSROOM DRC, USAID DRC.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO ACCELERE!



3.6 million
students reached



5,000
schools reached



3 million
Books and materials produced and distributed

Programming in conflict and crisis: The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is one of the poorest countries in the world, with 69.7 percent of its population living in poverty.³¹ The DRC's high fragility index of 110³² and low governance effectiveness index of -1.6³³ reflect the conflict, violence, and political instability that citizens in the DRC face.³⁴ These issues continue to disrupt millions of children and youth. In Kasai, one of ACCELERE's target regions, some schools were closed and turned into centers to accommodate displaced people, while others were ransacked or destroyed by conflict.

Impact on education: The ongoing conflict and instability in the region led to 22 percent of children being out of school,³⁵ and in rural areas this increases to 30 percent.³⁶ Those who attend school frequently do not complete their schooling, leading to a primary completion rate of 58.2 percent.³⁷ Schools lack infrastructure and teaching and learning materials.

Laying the foundation for systemic change and learning: In the midst of ongoing challenges, student learning rates remain low in DRC. However, gains in strengthening the education system can be seen across the ACCELERE! program, with teacher adoption of more effective reading instruction, increased community engagement and supports, and increased access to schooling for at-risk children.³⁸ The program supported 5,000 schools, training teachers and administrators and reaching 3.6 million students. The program developed and distributed nearly 3 million teaching and learning materials in four languages to strengthen reading instruction. Through coordination and partnership with the ministry, the program shared these materials with other implementers to be used in other schools, including an additional 10 million copies that were distributed in schools supported by the Global Partnership for Education (GPE). In addition, ACCELERE! worked to identify approaches to increase student retention in school, reduce gender-based violence, and reduce the gap in girls' and boys' performance.³⁹

Lessons learned: In challenging contexts, flexibility in contracting and program design are particularly important given the need to adapt to evolving conditions. While programs in challenging contexts are able to introduce new approaches, materials, and/or systems over the course of a program, it may take longer to effect substantial increases in student learning.



MALAWI CLASSROOM. SOURCE ELENA WALLS, USAID

MALAWI MERIT



6.3 million
students reached



6,000
teachers trained



11 million
books produced and distributed

Programming in challenging environments: Malawi is a challenging context for school reform. 73.5 percent of the population lives in poverty.⁴⁰ Population growth is high and school enrollment increased at an annual rate of 2–2.5 percent per year from 2015 to 2020, burdening schools.⁴¹ School construction was not able to keep pace with enrollment increases and the average class size in program schools evaluated in 2019 was 86 students. Among the first-grade classrooms evaluated, 23 percent had more than 120 students in a single class.⁴²

Impact on education: Historically, schools lacked critically important student teaching materials, with many students needing to share a single book. For example, a USAID-funded evaluation in 2015 recorded a student-to-textbook ratio as high as 276 among second-grade classrooms observed.⁴³ Overall, primary completion rates remain low (49.4 percent in 2020⁴⁴) and repetition rates high. Among the program schools, attendance rates are low, averaging from 60 to 69 percent in first and fourth grades, respectively.⁴⁵ These low attendance rates mirror the average attendance rates among schools throughout the country and represent a significant barrier to student learning.⁴⁶

Laying the foundation for systemic change and learning: While student performance had not changed at the time of the program midline assessment in 2018,⁴⁷ important groundwork had been laid for systemic change. The early grade reading approach introduced under USAID programming was adopted in the Education Sector Implementation Plan (ESIP) II and National Reading Strategy (NRS).⁴⁸ In addition, instructional materials and teaching approaches developed under MERIT and the precursor MTPDS program have been adopted by the Ministry of Education and are referenced in the Ministry's Education Sector Analysis Report.⁴⁹ The USAID MERIT program was able to reach 6.3 million students, develop and distribute critical teaching and learning materials including books in braille, and train over 66,000 teachers and 10,000 school administrators.⁵⁰

UNDERSTANDING THE EVOLUTION FROM GENERATION 1 TO GENERATION 2

To better understand the improved outcomes of Generation 2 programs, the study team asked EGR program implementers to describe the evolution of these programs and to share key observations and lessons learned. Lessons learned and program adaptations reported by implementing partners⁵¹ include:

PARTNER-COUNTRY GOVERNMENT ENGAGEMENT


Generation 1 programs focused on obtaining quick improvements in student outcomes. To mobilize more quickly, these original programs tended to develop pilot programs that relied on external, nongovernment staff, and developed teaching and learning materials with limited engagement with ministry personnel. As noted in the examples below, implementing partners explained that, in contrast, Generation 2 programs worked more closely with partner-country ministry partners in both the development and implementation of EGR programs. These second-generation programs reported relying more frequently on existing systems and resources.

READING INSTRUCTION

As noted above, all EGR programs had a set of common core elements⁵² and all reported applying some form of phonics-based instruction in their reading programming. Under Generation 2, increases in available expertise among implementers led to improvements in the quality of phonics-based instruction, the quality of teaching and learning materials, and improvements in teacher training programs. Generation 1 programs also had a dominant focus on decoding and phonics with less focus on language, listening, and reading comprehension, and almost no focus on writing. With the recognition that these are foundational or complementary skills, some Generation 2 programs reported using a more comprehensive approach that integrated this broader range of skills more purposefully.

LANGUAGE


Many of the countries that USAID reading programs have supported are complex sociolinguistic environments with multiple official languages of instruction and complex language dynamics. In these cases, implementing partners indicated the fundamental importance of having a clear understanding of the sociolinguistic landscape in the country's schools and a full understanding of the characteristics of the languages to be included in the reading program. Implementers noted that Generation 1 programs normally did not have sufficient time built into the program design to analyze local languages and fully map out language usage before developing teaching materials and approaches. Generation 2 programs more frequently applied language mapping early on in their programs. This mapping allowed implementing partners to understand the distribution of languages across the schools they would support, the language resources available at the schools, and the match or mismatch of teachers' and students' first language to the language of instruction. Generation 2 implementing partners also reported analyzing the languages to inform the development of teaching and learning materials.

 Generation 2 programs more frequently applied language mapping, which allowed implementing partners to understand the distribution of languages and resources across schools.

TEACHING AND LEARNING MATERIALS


Implementing partners have continued to use types of teaching and learning materials similar to those introduced in many Generation 1 programs. These materials typically included teacher guides, student textbooks, student exercise books, student supplemental readers,⁵³ and read-aloud books as well as word cards, alphabet and word posters, and other teaching aids. Implementers observed that Generation 2 materials were more likely to be closely aligned with research-based approaches to reading instruction. This alignment was reflected in word selection, progression of word difficulty, the amount of time allocated for student reading practice, and the availability of reading materials for reading practice at each progression level.

Regarding teacher guides, the majority of Generation 1 programs used lengthy and often complex scripted lesson plans; that is, lessons that spell out word-for-word what the teachers need to say in the lesson. The nature of these guides, which were in part intended to compensate for low teacher capacity or familiarity with the language in which they were teaching, limited teacher flexibility, initiative, and adaptation. In addition, the length and complexity of these initial teacher guides made them impractical for teachers to effectively or consistently apply and they were expensive to reproduce. Many Generation 2 implementing partners reported simplifying scripted lesson guides, with some only providing a general sequence for the lesson rather than scripting the lesson. Some implementing partners reduced the amount of guidance per lesson over the course of the year as teachers were expected to gain familiarity and confidence in the approach. Implementers noted that these lighter-touch guides permitted greater flexibility and creativity on the part of teachers, could accommodate differentiated instruction and learning more easily, and were less expensive for ministries to produce should interventions be adopted on a national scale.⁵⁴

 The simplified teacher guides developed under Generation 2 allowed for more flexibility and creativity on the part of the teacher and were less expensive for ministries to produce.

TEACHER TRAINING AND PEDAGOGICAL SUPPORT

Generation 1 programs typically invited teachers from USAID-supported schools to travel to attend five- to ten-day content-focused trainings. Implementers noted that these long residential trainings were expensive, and teachers had difficulty retaining or later applying what they learned in their classrooms. To address these challenges, Generation 2 programs were more likely to design training as ongoing activities and were more likely to adopt research-based adult learning practices. Implementing partners provided the following examples of more effective teacher training adopted:

 Generation 2 programs were more likely to design training as an ongoing program, utilize local (sometimes in-school) supports, and adopt research-based adult learning practices.

- Spread out shorter and more frequent training over the course of the year;
- Limited each training session to a small number of key instructional practices associated with stronger reading acquisition (rather than teaching all practices reflected in the teacher guide);
- Shifted training focus from content delivery to modeling and facilitating the application of new practices (with real-time feedback from peers); and
- Increased the use of experiential learning approaches.

TEACHER TRAINERS

Generation 1 programs tended to rely on external trainers, whereas Generation 2 programs tended to make teacher training more localized by increasing the use of ministry staff as trainers. Under Generation 2, some implementing partners noted that they recruited exceptional teachers to deliver aspects of training, while others trained principals/head teachers or other school staff to provide ongoing teacher support in their own or surrounding schools. Implementing partners also established “learning clusters” to facilitate teacher-to-teacher learning and support. Local-level training was seen to accommodate different proficiency levels among teachers in a way that was not possible in earlier central training sessions.

COACHING

In addition to formal training sessions, many EGR programs included coaching for teachers to provide ongoing support and monitor program implementation. Coaches typically observed teachers’ reading lessons, sometimes evaluated student performance, and met with the teachers to provide feedback and help them integrate new teaching approaches. Implementers noted that Generation 1 programs that used coaches frequently relied on external coaches hired by the program. Generation 2 programs, wishing to apply a more sustainable approach and build on existing systems and resources, were more likely to train and engage ministry staff who were already responsible for monitoring schools or providing pedagogic support to teachers. As transportation costs limited the frequency and sustainability of coaching visits, implementers noted that some Generation 2 programs either shifted to in-school support for teachers by principals or other staff or added in-school support in addition to coaching visits to ensure that teachers reliably and more routinely received ongoing support. Some Generation 2 programs also integrated information and communications technology for teaching support, where teachers used their phones or program-provided tablets to access recorded video lessons or received text messages with guidance on teaching approaches.

LEARNING FROM DATA

Generation 1 and 2 programs used monitoring and evaluation data to track changes in teaching practices and student performance. Implementers explained that Generation 2 programs increased the use of robust systematic data collection and monitoring systems. Implementing partners frequently integrated coaches’ use of tablet- or smartphone-based data collection, use of GIS⁵⁵ in data reporting, and the development and use of interactive dashboards. Generation 2 implementers used these dashboards or other monitoring data compilations to inform discussions and decisions by school, district, regional, or national ministry staff and leadership. They also used dashboards and other data compilations to track coaching activity. Generation 2 programs were also more likely to rely on existing school inspectors or coaches to help with routine data collection and student learning assessments.



Generation 2 programs increased the development and use of robust systemic data collection and monitoring systems.

OPPORTUNITIES TO STRENGTHEN READING PROGRAMMING

Although USAID programs have made great strides in understanding and strengthening EGR instructional approaches, and Generation 2 programs were successful in applying many of these practices, challenges remain that limit the effectiveness and impact of even the best-designed programs. Below we share some observations from implementing partners.

Systemic challenges such as low levels of teacher qualifications and capacity—combined with limited teacher accountability and associated absenteeism and high levels of teacher mobility—undermine program effectiveness. Low levels of government effectiveness and a lack of ministry buy-in can hamper program implementation and sustainability. Similarly, high rates of turnover in education ministry personnel and leadership can quickly undermine progress made in building relationships, identifying champions, and building capacity. More research is needed to understand the root causes of systemic barriers to effectiveness and programs should adopt strategies to address barriers and/or mitigate their impact on program effectiveness.

Education reform takes time, yet most EGR program designs expect to see meaningful change in a five-year period. There is an inherent tension between this desire for quick outcomes and the desire for lasting and institutionalized reform. Although Generation 2 programs were more flexible and had more time to collaborate with ministries, more time is nevertheless needed to research local contexts and tailor programs appropriately. Implementing partners reported that programs have the greatest chance for success when the country context is well understood and when relationships and trust have been established with the partner-country government representatives. Other research has shown that USAID programs built within existing government initiatives and policy shifts resulted in more sustainable change.⁵⁶ Implementers noted that longer-term programs⁵⁷ or those with an inception phase have an advantage, as there is adequate time to research and more fully understand the context and systemic barriers to effectiveness prior to delving into program and material design. These longer-term programs also provide time to build support for reform and identify relevant partner-country resources, systems, counterparts, and key champions within the ministry to involve in both the design and implementation of the reform. As noted before, programs that build on predecessor programs are, likewise, at a distinct advantage.

Similarly, implementers noted that carefully researching materials and approaches that reflect local languages, local systems, and teacher capacity, and working in close collaboration with partner-country counterparts, lead to teaching materials and approaches that are more relevant, effective, and sustainable. It is essential to ensure that teaching materials reflect research-based approaches and to test materials and teaching approaches in classrooms using all languages of instruction on a small scale prior to making needed adjustments and launching them in all schools. Programs should remain open to the idea that even after materials and approaches have been tested, refined, and launched in schools, revisions will likely be needed to continue to strengthen effectiveness.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Build in time and resources needed to design and develop programs based on country context

- Carefully research the education system to understand the root causes of low learning outcomes and develop sustainable programs that align with local government policies, goals, and existing capacity and systems.
- Investigate and take advantage of existing national capacity to build upon and extend strong teaching, training, and coaching practices.
- Foster relationships with ministry leadership and key education stakeholders to build buy-in and support for education reform efforts and collaborate with ministries to ensure that program designs align with country priorities and policies.

- Analyze languages used in schools to inform the development of teaching and learning materials and approaches.
- Pilot and then adapt teaching materials and approaches for each official language used in schools prior to rollout to a larger number of schools to ensure greater effectiveness.



Build flexibility into program design and contract

- Set program goals and targets that accommodate changes in approach so that program teams can adapt, introduce innovation, and maximize effectiveness from the inception phase through the life of the program.
- Build in flexibility to accommodate unforeseen crises such as COVID-19 so that programs can easily pivot when needed.



Encourage research-based approaches in reading materials and instruction

- Evaluate the quality of the teaching and learning materials to ensure that they reflect the best research-based approaches prior to going to scale.
- Assume and plan for the likelihood that materials and teaching approaches will continue to need revisions and refinements throughout the program.



Strengthen sustainability and use of data systems

- Develop cost-effective and sustainable data collection systems that can be integrated into existing government systems.
- Continue to research the most effective coaching and teacher training models for varying contexts.
- Continue to gather monitoring and assessment data to measure and report on the fidelity of implementation and make better use of these data to help identify needed changes in program design and elements.



Make programming more equitable

- Incorporate [universal design for learning](#) into reading programs and disaggregate data by sub-populations to ensure that even the most marginalized learners are benefiting from these reading programs and if they are not, make adjustments in design or program implementation.



Build resilience into program design

- In light of COVID-19 and other health emergencies, climate change, and other crises, research effective and equitable distance learning and other alternate learning programs to mitigate future learning loss during times of crisis.



Develop system indicators

- Develop systems indicators to capture important intermediate EGR program impacts, such as (1) system reform and strengthening, (2) ministry development or co-development of materials and approaches, (3) ministry adoption of approaches and materials, and (4) shifts in ministry prioritization, planning, policy, or government resource allocations.

CONCLUSIONS AND LOOKING FORWARD

Over the last decade, USAID EGR programming has had a profound effect on teaching and learning worldwide. Efforts have increased awareness and focus on the need to improve the quality of schooling in these crucial first years of education. USAID EGR programs have reached nearly 246 million primary learners and supported research that improved understanding as well as the application of approaches to increase literacy acquisition in countries around the globe. However, much remains to be done.

Responding to the impact of COVID-19 and the learning crisis: Many students' reading abilities have benefited from USAID programs, but the COVID-19 pandemic has undermined much of the progress made in the last decade, especially among the most marginalized learners. The Learning Poverty Report and the recent Transforming Education Summit highlighted the scale of the crisis, noting that 70 percent of ten-year-olds in LMICs are unable to read and understand a simple text. In addition, millions of children remain out of school, with girls and marginalized populations at increased risk of never returning to school.

Leveraging partnerships to respond together: Recognizing the severity of the learning crisis, the U.S. government, other governments, and organizations around the world have endorsed the [Commitment to Action on Foundational Learning](#), which sets the ambitious goal of reducing the number of ten-year-olds unable to read by half by 2030. Concrete steps must be taken to address the immediate crisis and the underlying systemic issues that continue to make greater and more equitable foundational learning challenging.

Building on a strong foundation: USAID can build on ten years of progress toward increasing student learning and strengthening the capacity of partner countries to respond to new global challenges. It is a complex undertaking that will require systems-level reform to be effective and sustainable. However, as this brief has demonstrated, substantial progress is possible when programs include time to research the context and reflect local needs, are flexible and adapt based on monitoring and evaluation, build on previous programs, utilize existing systems, and partner with the government to build capacity and ensure scalability and sustainability.

While the challenge is immense, USAID and its partners are equipped with the knowledge from the previous ten years to respond to the education crisis and help ensure all children and youth have access to quality education opportunities.

ANNEX I: METHODOLOGY

The research team examined basic program characteristics and student outcome data from 45 USAID-funded EGR programs and 90 EGRA datasets. Major USAID EGR programs were selected for inclusion based on the availability and quality of EGRA data. Of the 45 programs included, 27 were Generation 1 and 16 were Generation 2. The programs included in this retrospective reached an estimated 61 million unique beneficiaries and represented an overall budget (ceiling) of \$2 billion. This study covered USAID-funded EGR programs from Asia (9), Europe and Eurasia (2), Latin America (1), the Middle East and North Africa (3), and Sub-Saharan Africa (28). Among these programs, there were countries from EiCC (15) and non-EiCC (30) contexts.

ESTIMATING THE PERCENTAGE OF BENEFICIARIES WITH IMPROVED READING

In an effort to establish a common measure of program outcomes across these 45 programs and across regions and countries, following USAID guidance, the team calculated the USAID ESI.48-informed indicator using data from each program's EGRA datasets. USAID standard indicator USAID ESI.48 measures the "percent of learners targeted for USG assistance with an increase of at least one proficiency level in reading at the end of grade 2." Please see the [USAID compendium of standard performance indicator reference sheets](#) for more information on the ESI.48 and its calculation.

Fixed cut points were applied across all activities to determine student performance bins or proficiency levels indicated by ESI.48 to measure program impact. The cut points were used to create three proficiency bins: 0 to 10 correct words per minute (cwpm) (nonreaders), 11 to 44 cwpm (emergent readers), and 45+ cwpm (proficient readers). In this ESI.48 informed indicator the decrease between baseline and post-test (midline or endline) in the percentage of students in the 0–10 cwpm bin was combined with the increase in the percentage of students in the 45+ cwpm bin to estimate the percentage of learners who had increased their reading by at least one proficiency level. Note that these set cut points were used as policy linking had not been applied in the majority of countries to determine language-specific proficiency levels. USAID also requested that statistical tests be performed to analyze whether the change for each bin was statistically significant (meaning that the program had at least one of its bins meeting the criterion of significance ($p < 0.05$)). The programs where the change was not significant are noted in the relevant exhibits included in this retrospective.

Note that USAID requires that a single pre-test/post-test difference be conducted for the treatment group only for activities where pre-test and post-test data were computed at the same time in the school year and that a differences-in-difference be conducted when data was collected at different times in the school year and the data includes treatment and control (or comparison) groups.

The DEEP team reviewed the data and evaluation reports for these programs and held conversations with USAID to discuss on a case-by-case basis how to address specific circumstances, such as some of the activities containing multiple treatment groups, some containing assessments conducted in multiple languages, and some containing assessments that did not include Grade 2.

ESTIMATING THE NUMBER OF BENEFICIARIES WITH IMPROVED READING

USAID requested that the DEEP team convert the percentage of children with improved reading into the number of children with improved reading based on data for unique beneficiaries, when available, for reference. Whenever more than one language was assessed, the DEEP team reviewed reports and worked with USAID/W to estimate the unique beneficiary breakdown by language. This used many

historic estimations computed previously for the USAID’s 2011–2018 Education Strategy Goal I count, which involved discussions with Missions.

INVESTIGATING FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENT

The 45 programs included in this study were categorized based on whether they had met the significance criterion for the ES. I-48 informed indicator. However, two programs were eliminated from the analyses in this annex due to methodological concerns. One had met the study’s significance criterion and one had not, bringing the number of programs down to 43. Among these, 31 programs met the significance criterion, and the percentage of these increased by 39 percent (or 24.5 percentage points) between Generations 1 and 2. USAID/W also showed an interest in the number of programs that not only met the significance criterion but also had a positive ES. I-48 informed indicator; 29 out of the 31 programs had positive values for this indicator. The table below shows the number and percentage of programs that met the significance criterion and were positive by generation.

Exhibit 9. Number and percentage of programs for which the ES. I-48 informed indicator met this study’s significance criterion

	Gen1		Gen2		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
<i>Programs for which indicator met this study’s significance criterion</i>						
No	10	37.0	2	12.5	12	27.9
Yes	17	63.0	14	87.5	31	72.1
Pearson chi2(1) = 3.006, p-value= 0.083						
<i>Programs for which indicator met this study’s significance criterion and was positive</i>						
No	11	40.7	3	18.8	14	32.6
Yes	16	59.3	13	81.2	29	67.4
Pearson chi2(1) = 2.213, p-value= 0.137						
No. programs	27		16		43	

A logistic regression was used to investigate which program-level factors might be associated with a program having a *positive* ES. I-48 informed-indicator that met the significance criterion. According to the model—holding estimated cost per beneficiary, duration, and number of languages implemented constant—on average Generation 2 programs are 26 percentage points more likely to meet the significance criterion than are Generation 1 programs and this difference is statistically significant. Also statistically significant was the estimate that being implemented in an environment in conflict and crisis made a program 40 percentage points less likely to meet the significance criterion. The average marginal effect (AME) for each factor is in the table below.

Exhibit 10. Model used to investigate program-level factors associated with a program having a positive ES. I-48 informed indicator

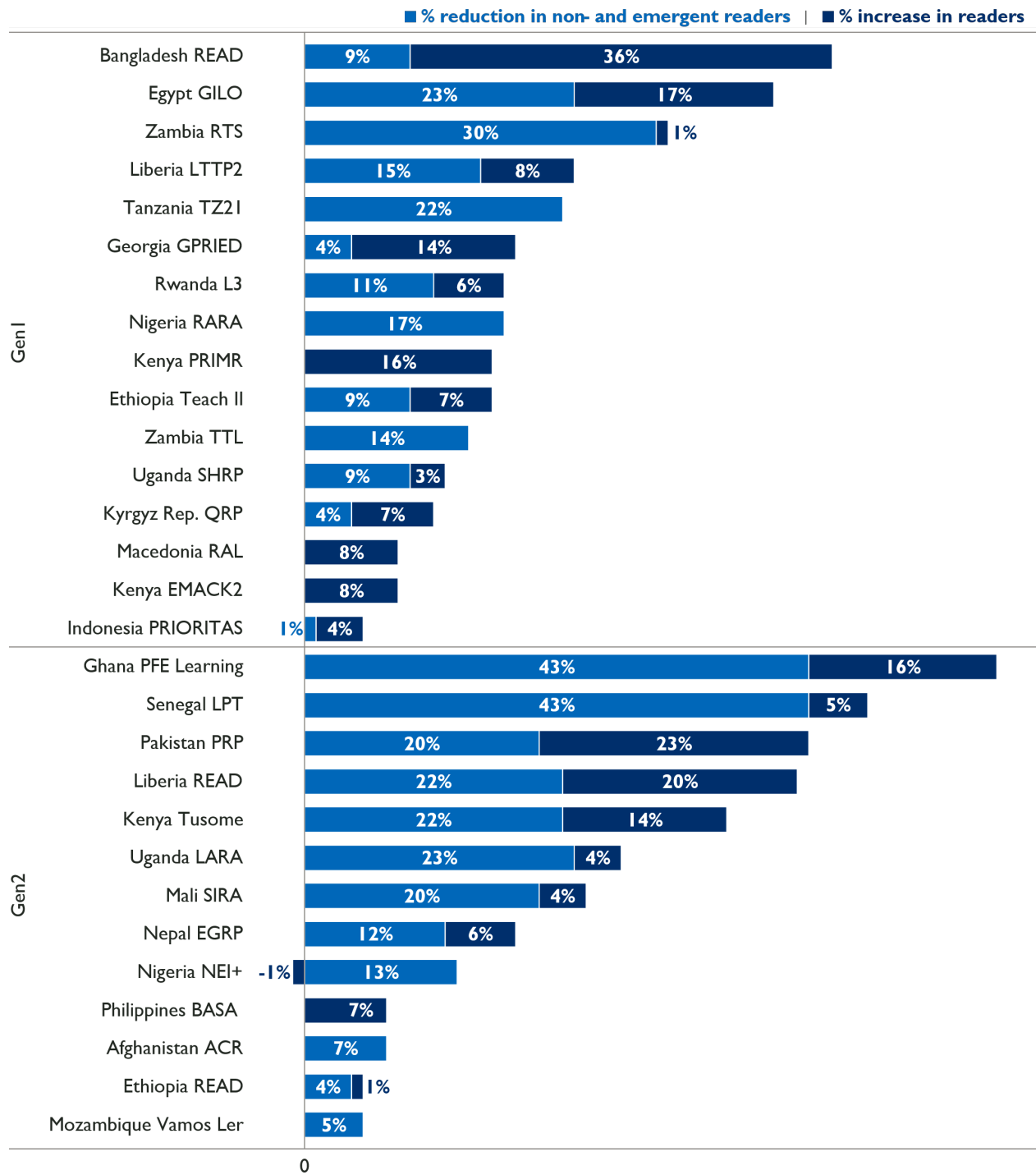
	Avg. Marginal Effect	
If Generation 2, instead of Generation 1	0.26*	(0.04)
If Education in Conflict or Crisis (EiCC)	-0.40**	(0.00)
If national, instead of subnational	-0.20	(0.25)
Estimated budget per beneficiary, in dollar per student	0.00	(0.17)
Duration, in years	0.01	(0.91)
Complexity: Implemented in 2 or 3 languages	0.24	(0.12)
Complexity: Implemented in 4+ languages	0.18	(0.35)
No. programs	43	

p-values in parentheses
** p<0.01, * p<0.05

ANNEX 2: IMPROVEMENT IN PROFICIENCY BY READER TYPE

USAID developed an indicator to measure improvement in reading across these different EGR programs. As noted earlier, this indicator was calculated by estimating the reduction in percentage of non-readers and emergent readers and the increase in proficient readers. Exhibit 11 provides a breakdown of these two reader categories by program, grouped by Generations 1 and 2.

Exhibit 11. Percent of improved readers where improvements were statistically significant by source of improvement



¹ USAID developed a reading improvement indicator informed by USAID ESI.48 for this study. For this indicator, **improved readers**, indicates a significant decrease in non-readers and emergent readers (those reading <11 correct words per minute) plus significant increases in readers (those reading 45+ correct words per minute).

² New programs are those in countries that didn't have an existing USAID EGR program.

³ Gove et al. [EGRA Toolkit Second Edition.pdf \(edu-links.org\)](#)

⁴ Gove et al. [EGRA Toolkit Second Edition.pdf \(edu-links.org\)](#)

⁵ Gove and Wetterberg. [The Early Grade Reading Assessment: Applications and Interventions to Improve Basic Literacy \(ed.gov\)](#)

⁶ EGRA Barometer. [EGRB | Results | Malawi | MTPDS 2010 - Assessment Outcomes \(earlygradereadingbarometer.org\)](#)

⁷ EGRA Barometer [EGRB | Results | Ghana | 2013 - Assessment Outcomes \(earlygradereadingbarometer.org\)](#)

⁸ [EGRB | Results | Morocco | 2011 - Assessment Outcomes \(earlygradereadingbarometer.org\)](#)

⁹ [EGRB | Results | Nepal | National 2014 - Assessment Outcomes \(earlygradereadingbarometer.org\)](#)

¹⁰ Note that beneficiary numbers are based on country-level estimates of USAID education indicators ES3.2.1-14 from 2011–2014, and ESI-3 from 2015–2021.

¹¹ Major USAID EGR programs were selected for inclusion based on the availability and quality of EGRA data. Correct words per minute taken from EGRA data sets were used to estimate an ESI.48 informed indicator that USAID requested for this study. In addition, sampled implementing partners were asked to describe the evolution that they had seen in EGR programs across the years and the contextual factors that influenced the impact of the program.

¹² [COVID-19 and School Closures: One Year of Education Disruption](#)

¹³ Note that remedial in this graph includes countries that reported “remedial,” “catch-up,” and/or “accelerated” learning programs.

¹⁴ Average Fragile State Index of 90.2 and 91.2 for Generations 1 and 2, respectively.

¹⁵ Average government effectiveness rating of -0.7 out of a maximum of 2.5 on the [World Bank Government Effectiveness Index](#).

¹⁶ 32 percent for Generation 1 and 35 percent for Generation 2. 15 of the programs included in this retrospective were conducted in EiCC settings.

¹⁷ Note average per-student costs were estimated using program award amounts, the number of beneficiaries, and the estimated number of improved readers.

¹⁸ USAID developed a reading improvement indicator informed by USAID ESI.48 for this study. For this indicator, **improved readers** refers to a significant decrease in non-readers and emergent readers (those reading <11 correct words per minute) plus significant increases in readers (those reading 45+ correct words per minute).

¹⁹ Statistically significant means that you can be confident that the differences in the number of improved readers are real and not simply due to luck.

²⁰ USAID developed a reading improvement indicator informed by USAID ESI.48 for this study. For this indicator, **improved readers**=the statistically significant decrease in non-readers and emergent readers (those reading <11 correct words per minute) plus the statistically significant increase in readers (those reading 45+ correct words per minute).

²¹ It is possible that improvements exist but there is not enough evidence in the data to support them (e.g. the evaluation data had variation in the groups that was too large, the sample size was too small, or the true effect size itself was too small). It is also possible that improvements were not captured due to the nature of the indicator (e.g. improvements within a single proficiency band).

²² To see a breakdown of the types of improvement in reading (reduction in non- and emergent readers vs. increase in readers) experienced by these different programs, please see Annex 2.

²³ Note our criteria considered differences between baseline and either midline or endline test results. We did not examine whether the differences between male and female students were statistically significant.

²⁴ Eight programs were found to be the most effective at-scale reading programs among 52 LMIC at-scale reading programs rigorously evaluated. Stern et al. [“Learning at scale: interim report.” October 2021 | UNESCO IIEP Learning Portal.](#)

²⁵ PRP findings, unless otherwise noted, were based on observations with the PRP Team.

²⁶ Using the ESI.48 informed indicator applied in this study.

²⁷ [Pakistan Reading Project \(PRP\) – 2020 Early Grade Reading Endline Assessment – Khyber Pakhtunkhwa \(usaid.gov\)](#).

²⁸ Tusome – Improving Early Grade Learning in Kenya | RTI

²⁹ Tusome – Improving Early Grade Learning in Kenya | RTI

³⁰ Tusome highlights, unless otherwise noted, drawn from Stern et al.

Stern et al. “[Learning at scale: interim report.](#)” October 2021 | [UNESCO IIEP Learning Portal](#).

³¹ [Congo, Dem. Rep. | Data \(worldbank.org\)](#) 2012 data.

³² [Fragile State Index](#) developed by the Fund for Peace “is based on a conflict assessment framework—for assessing the vulnerability of states to collapse.” A score of 0 indicates the most stable and a score of 120 the least stable. 110 is the average score from 2011 to 2021.

³³ Government effectiveness index ranging from -2.5 for weak to +2.5 for strong effectiveness. The figure represents the average for 2011–2021.

³⁴ Chemonics International Inc. “[ACCELERE! Activity I: improving education access, quality, and governance in the DRC: final report.](#)” May 2021.

³⁵ [UIS Statistics](#)

³⁶ International Business and Technical Consultants, Inc. (IBTCI). “ACCELERE! Activity I Reading Impact Evaluation Report.” June 2020.

³⁷ [SDG4 indicators, 2020](#)

³⁸ ACCELERE! Saw increases in reading fluency in Kiswahili and Tshiluba, however, these increases weren’t substantial enough to meet the EGR1.48 informed indicator used throughout this retrospective study. International Business and Technical Consultants, Inc. (IBTCI). “ACCELERE! Activity I Reading Impact Evaluation Report.” June 2020.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ [Malawi | Data \(worldbank.org\)](#) (2019)

⁴¹ [Malawi Education Sector Analysis](#). Data refer to the 2015–2020 period.

⁴² LaTowsky, Robert J., Ntenje, Cosnat., Mkandawire, Miriam. “USAID’s MERIT: The Malawi Early Grade Reading Improvement Activity National Assessment of Reading Instruction, Standards 1-4.” February 2019.

⁴³ Jere, Peter., Orr, Janet K., Bisgard, Jennifer., and Ogawa, Michael “Performance Evaluation of the USAID/Malawi Early Grade.” March 2015.

⁴⁴ [UNESCO UIS Database](#). SDG Indicator 4.1.2.

⁴⁵ LaTowsky, Robert J., Ntenje, Cosnat., Mkandawire, Miriam. “USAID’s MERIT: The Malawi Early Grade Reading Improvement Activity National Assessment of Reading Instruction, Standards 1-4.” February 2019.

⁴⁶ LaTowsky, Robert J., King, Simon. “MERIT: The Malawi Early Grade Reading Improvement Activity Early Grade Reading Assessment, Chichewa National Results for Standards 1 and 3.” June 2018 USAID, Infonex, RTI. Early Grade Reading Assessment 2018, Chichewa National Results for Standards 1 and 3 ([ierc-publicfiles.s3.amazonaws.com](#)).

⁴⁷ LaTowsky, Robert J., King, Simon. “MERIT: The Malawi Early Grade Reading Improvement Activity Early Grade Reading Assessment, Chichewa National Results for Standards 1 and 3.” June 2018 USAID, Infonex, RTI. Early Grade Reading Assessment 2018, Chichewa National Results for Standards 1 and 3 ([ierc-publicfiles.s3.amazonaws.com](#)).

⁴⁸ LaTowsky, Robert J., Ntenje, Cosnat., Mkandawire, Miriam. “USAID’s MERIT: The Malawi Early Grade Reading Improvement Activity National Assessment of Reading Instruction, Standards 1-4.” February 2019.

⁴⁹ [Malawi Education Sector Analysis.pdf \(unicef.org\)](#).

⁵⁰ [Building a Foundation for Learning in Malawi](#)

⁵¹ Note that a detailed analysis of characteristics and components of EGR programs that were successfully taken to scale may be found in the RTI/CDG “[Learning at Scale, Interim Report](#)”

⁵² The common core elements in reading programs include use of assessment, phonics-based reading instruction, development and distribution of teaching and learning materials, explicit time set aside for pre-literacy and reading instruction, in-service teacher training, teacher supervision and/or mentoring, and policy work where findings from EGR learning assessments and programs were used to advocate for broader support for and reform of early grade education.

⁵³ Supplemental readers are small reading books that the students used to practice their reading skills. These are typically decodable and leveled.

⁵⁴ For an in-depth analysis of different types of EGR teaching guides and teaching materials please see “[Teachers' guides in the Global South \(rti.org\)](#)” by Ben Piper et al.

⁵⁵ Geographic Information System (GIS)

⁵⁶ Podems, Donna. “Evaluation of Sustained Outcomes in Basic Education Synthesis Report.” MSI/USAID. March 2018 [PBAAJ315.pdf \(usaid.gov\)](#)

⁵⁷ Longer-term programs are those where a pilot EGR program is followed by a five-year EGR program or where you have two or more five-year programs that build on one another.