EdData II

Measurement and Research Support to Education Strategy Goal 1

Early Grade Reading and Math Assessments in 10 Countries: Dissemination and Utilization of Results–A Review

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Abbreviations

BESO	Basic Education System Overhaul (USAID project, Ethiopia)
CSO	civil society organization
DFID	UK Department for International Development
E3	USAID's Bureau for Economic Growth, Education, and Environment
EdData II	Education Data for Decision Making (project)
EGMA	Early Grade Mathematics Assessment
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
EGRP	Early Grade Reading Program, Egypt
FAO	United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization
GILO	Girls' Improved Learning Outcomes (USAID project, Egypt)
GIZ	German international aid organization
ICT	information and communication technology
IQPEP	Improving the Quality of Primary Education Program (Ethiopia)
LARS	Learning Assessment in Rwandan Schools (UNICEF program)
LQAS	lot quality assurance sampling
LTTP	Liberia Teacher Training Program
NALAP	National Literacy Acceleration Program (Ghana)
NESP	National Education Sector Plan (Kenya)
NGO	nongovernmental organization
PDIT	Programme Development and Implementation Team
PRIMR	Primary Math and Reading Initiative (USAID project, Kenya)
R&D	research and development
READ TA	Reading for Ethiopia's Achievement Developed Technical Assistance (USAID project)
RTI	RTI International (trade name of Research Triangle Institute)
SACMEQ	Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
SSME	Snapshot of School Management Effectiveness
STEP-UP	Strengthening Education Performance – Up (project, Zambia)
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Cultural, and Scientific Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
YEGRA	Yemen Early Grade Reading Approach

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August 2014

1. Background

The research documented in this report was carried out under the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID's) Education Data for Decision Making (EdData II) project, led by RTI International.

EdData II, which began in late 2004, provides survey expertise to help national and local governments as well as the donor community to assess their education status. Project advisors collaborate with USAID Missions and Bureaus, other donors, and host-country stakeholders to find innovative and cost-effective ways to gather and analyze education data. They can then jointly establish relevant benchmarks that help governments, teachers, and parents or guardians provide meaningful education for their children.

One task order under EdData II, called *Learning Outcomes Research and Assessment-Related Projects* (2009–2013), supported the conduct of early-grade basic skills assessments in 10 countries. The purpose of that task order was to "build on the measurement instruments developed and piloted under other EdData II task orders and to coordinate data, analysis, and reporting on learning outcomes with specific attention to early grade reading proficiency, early grade numeracy, and conditions of learning as indicated by school management effectiveness measures." The measurement instruments referred to were the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA), the Early Grade Math Assessment (EGMA), and the Snapshot of School Management Effectiveness (SSME). Experiences with the various assessments were documented in an EdData II publication, *Learning Outcomes Research and Assessment-Related Projects: Final Report,* dated October 2013.[1] That report summarized the experience in each of the 10 countries, describing the assessment purpose, the challenges encountered, and some of the initial in-country reactions to the assessment findings. It also provided links to country-level task order reports (see Bibliography), which summarized assessment findings and recommendations derived from them for improvements in educational policy and practice.

Current Review Objective

The final *Learning Outcomes* report covered initial country reactions to the assessments and their findings, but given the timing of the report, it was not in a position to track reactions beyond the main "policy dialogue" that followed the assessment in nearly all

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[1] RTI International (2013); see Bibliography for full reference information.

cases. Nor had the budgets and schedules of the individual country efforts allowed for such long-term observations. Obtaining a broader sense of the *Learning Outcomes* task order's impact on information sharing (i.e., dissemination) and results utilization required new information from well after the policy dialogues. Collecting that information was the purpose of the current review. Specifically, its objective was to "review country experience with EGRA and, where implemented, EGMA and/or SSME in a variety of countries, with particular emphasis on the sharing and utilization of the results of these assessments for policy formulation and other decision making." The EdData II task order *Measurement and Research Support to Education Strategy Goal 1* served as the vehicle for this internal project investigation.

Review Methods

This review employed three research methods: (1) document analysis covering the original assessments and related documents[2] from all 10 participating countries; (2) interviews with key informants via the telephone or Internet—usually RTI staff, but sometimes other agency personnel (see ***Annex A***) who were involved in the assessments in the various countries and/or follow-up activities; and (3) in-depth field studies in three countries, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Zambia (see ***Annex B*** for selection criteria and ***Annex C*** for the three case study summaries). These field studies included visiting government offices and agencies involved in EGRA/EGMA/SSME dissemination and utilization activities, gathering additional written reports, and interviewing key personnel using semi-structured interview techniques. This final report was crafted by combining information gathered through all three techniques.

2. The *Learning Outcomes* Assessments

The *Learning Outcomes* assessments were classified into two categories depending on the timing of their start-up: Year 1 (2009–2010) and Year 2 (2011–2012).[3] Year 1 efforts consisted mainly of supplementing or collating existing *early reading assessments* in five countries, adding—where feasible—background information to help policy makers and practitioners understand assessment outcome determinants. Year 2 efforts included new assessments of reading and math proficiency plus a comprehensive survey of school, classroom, and learning background conditions captured by the SSME instruments in five countries. Assessment features in the 10 countries, sorted by year (1 or 2), were as shown in ***Table 1***.

Interestingly, most of the follow-up assessments and interventions found in the *Learning Outcomes* countries were for early grade reading and not for mathematics. The exception

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[2] As an example, one country, Yemen, created its own EGRA website, which became a rich source of information.
[3] Two Year 1 countries started later: Yemen, in 2011; and Honduras, in 2012. There was also a Year 3 activity involving only one country, Ghana, which focused not on the EGRA/EGMA/SSME, but on piloting the use of the lot quality assurance sampling (LQAS) method in the education sector through a no-cost extension of the task order during 2013.

is Kenya, which conducted midterm and endline assessments in both under the PRIMR Initiative,[4] and in addition administered the SSME at both time points (with the idea of assessing the determinants of the *changes* in early grade skills). The emphasis on reading rather than math likely can be attributed to USAID's 2011 Education Strategy policy to prioritize early grade reading. For other donors it may have to do with the stronger branding that accompanies the EGRA, a name that is now recognized throughout the developing world. Thus, readers will note that the majority of the report necessarily emphasizes the reading impacts of *Learning Outcomes* more than the influence on mathematics or aspects of school management.

Table 1.   Characteristics of assessments in 10 countries

County	Activity	Instruments	Scope
Year 1 (2009–2010)			
• Ethiopia	Conduct EGRA and background survey	EGRA plus background survey	Large-scale assessment in six native languages in eight regions, covering 338 schools and 13,000+ grade 2 and 3 students
• Ghana	Implement formative evaluation of National Literacy Acceleration Program (NALAP)	EGRA-like instrument plus background inter-views and observations	Small-scale purposive samples in 3 native languages in 3 regions, covering 8 schools and 132 grade 2 students
• Honduras	Create video on best practices in reading instruction and EGRA administration	Video plus EGRA administrator manual and instructional presentations	Development of teacher training video and other presentation materials; workshop involving participants from 40 municipalities
• Mali	Compile and analyze data from early grade reading assessments carried out by others	EGRA	National-level analysis of survey results (drawing from assessments conducted by USAID and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation)
• Yemen	Conduct EGRA and survey of determinants	EGRA plus survey of determinants	Assessment in Arabic, covering 40 schools and 735 grade 2 and 3 students
Year 2 (2011–2012)			
• Dominican Republic	Carry out EGRA and EGMA plus SSME	EGRA/EGMA/SSME	Assessment in Spanish, covering 50 American Chamber of Commerce schools and 1,000 grade 1 and 2 students

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[4] See Bibliography for the midterm and endline reports (Piper & Mugenda, 2013, 2014).

County	Activity	Instruments	Scope
• Kenya	Carry out SSME to complement EGRA/EGMA funded by separate EdData II task order (Primary Math and Reading [PRIMR] Initiative)[5]	SSME (complementing EGRA/EGMA)	Assessment in English and Kiswahili in 3 regions, covering 230 schools and 4,385 grade 1 and 2 students
• Morocco	Conduct EGRA, EGMA, and SSME	EGRA/EGMA/SSME	Assessment in Modern Standard Arabic in 1 region, covering 40 schools and 772 grade 2 and 3 students
• Rwanda	Implement EGRA, EGMA, and SSME	EGRA/EGMA/SSME	National sample assessment in English and Kinyarwanda, covering 42 schools and 420 grade 3 and 5 students
• Zambia	Carry out EGRA, EGMA, and SSME	EGRA/EGMA/SSME	Assessment in Bemba in 4 Bemba-speaking provinces, covering 40 schools and 800 grade 2 and3 students

3. Results/Messages

The pupils' results on the assessments that were administered were, on average, weak to very weak in the seven countries for which EGRA (and sometimes EGMA and SSME) data were reported. For example, on the EGRA subtask that measured reading fluency, the averages by country spanned from 20% of students getting zero scores (grade 3 in a major metropolitan area) to 91% (in a rural area) in a relatively small country. Reading comprehension was found to be particularly weak in all cases, revealed by the more than 50% of test takers who obtained zero comprehension scores in most participating countries. Math scores were also quite weak, especially on subtraction questions; in many countries it took pupils more than 15 seconds on average to solve a single subtraction problem.

Assessments of school/classroom/teacher and student background variables revealed considerable convergence. For example, most country analyses revealed weak attention by teachers to the foundations of reading, as well as relatively little time to practice reading, ineffective and/or poorly distributed reading (and math) textbooks, weak student feedback mechanisms, weak support for reading at home and in the community (plus few books), and little emphasis on the teaching of reading skills in teacher training programs. Clearly there were numerous variations and divergences across countries, but these were outnumbered by convergences. The pattern of limitations listed above was apparent in the

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[5] Although technically the *Learning Outcomes* task order funded only the SSME portion of the survey work in Kenya, because the three assessments were always administered, analyzed, and reported on together, this review also addresses all three. See Annex C for more about this arrangement.

case study countries covered in Annex C: In all three countries, better reading performance was related to having help and/or reading materials at home, and, similarly, to having textbooks and other books of sufficient numbers and quality in the classroom. Two of the three countries also found reading skills to be connected to time for reading in the classroom and to the teacher providing feedback to students on their performance.

4.   Information Dissemination

Policy Dialogues

In all 10 countries, a draft assessment report was produced and distributed to senior education ministry officials who generally provided feedback that was incorporated into the ultimate version. Conclusions from these final reports were then discussed within high-level groups of educational policy makers and practitioners (from both government units and nongovernmental organizations [NGOs]) during "policy dialogues" in all but one of the 10 countries.[6] The mix of participants and topics discussed was different in every setting, depending on the scope of the assessment.

The policy dialogues had differing impacts. In many cases, especially for the Year 1 assessments, the focus of the dialogue was not so much on breaking new ground as it was on improving existing programs. For example, in Ghana, where the assessment was a formative evaluation of a national multilingual literacy program, the dialogue mainly centered on ways to improve the program's effectiveness. The dialogue in Honduras also concentrated on innovative uses of EGRA methods by teachers to assess students' reading skills and to identify those needing extra help. In Mali, a national EGRA workshop among civil society organizations (CSOs) was mainly about strategies for communicating—publicly and at the grassroots level—EGRA findings and the urgent need for improved reading skills in the country. Finally, in Yemen, where the dialogue was conducted via a videoconference due to the precarious security situation in the country, the dialogue was very positive and constructive, but not necessarily instrumental since plans to create an improved program for early reading instruction with USAID support were already under way before the dialogue was held.[7]

Policy dialogues in the Year 2 countries—Kenya, Morocco, Rwanda, and Zambia— generally covered a broader sweep of substantive and policy issues. For example, in Rwanda, the policy dialogue became the focal point for determining how to measure early reading skills. It turned out that the government official who had supported the use of EGRA had moved on, and the new group of officials felt more ownership of a

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[6] In the Dominican Republic, the holding of a policy dialogue stalled due to lack of support from the government and sponsoring NGO (American Chamber of Commerce). In that case, the key government stakeholders distanced themselves from the assessment since the country's approach to literacy instruction (whole language) was considered antithetical to that inherent in EGRA (phonics-based).

[7] It is likely, however, that the dialogue results reinforced the Yemen government's decision to move forward on its reading instruction program.

UNICEF-developed paper-and-pencil reading test, Learning Assessment in Rwandan Schools (LARS).[8] Eventually there was a decision to proceed with a joint policy dialogue (EGRA and LARS); at that time, government policy makers came to realize that the two instruments were complementary (LARS measured reading comprehension skills, but could not identify what was impeding them, and EGRA evaluated the basic building blocks of literacy). In Morocco, the EGRA/EGMA/SSME findings resulted in a wide range of recommendations for improving policy and practice in reading and math instruction, which were well received by education ministry and regional educational "academy" leaders. USAID/Morocco, including the Mission director, also engaged in a 90-minute briefing during which follow-up ideas were discussed.[9] Policy dialogues and other dissemination efforts for Ethiopia (Year 1) and for Kenya and Zambia (Year 2, both case study countries), are described in ***Text Box 1.***

Text Box 1. Policy dialogues and other dissemination activities: Ethiopia, Kenya, and Zambia

First-hand information gathered from key informants in the field for this review led to deeper insights into what had occurred during the policy dialogues, as well as additional communications strategies in the three countries. Summaries follow.

Ethiopia

Dissemination of EGRA results started with a senior-level policy dialogue at the education ministry within months of the assessment (September 2010). The results showed disastrous levels of reading performance across the country, especially in rural areas, and immediately led to questions concerning what to do about it. In federated Ethiopia, most educational programming takes place at the regional level, but the national government can still address serious policy questions about how reading skill acquisition is being addressed. During the policy dialogue, stakeholders made a quick decision to significantly reform the national mother-tongue curriculum; this meant immediately canceling a massive procurement of primary school language textbooks (which had been proceeding under a World Bank-led project) since they were then viewed as not sufficiently focused on reading.

USAID took additional steps to disseminate the results more broadly, not through the media or via document dissemination, but by policy dialogues at successive levels of government. To aid this plan, researchers produced regional results summaries, presenting *woreda* (district)-level breakdowns that allowed local leaders, during regional policy dialogues, to discuss intra-regional patterns of student performance and decide on regional interventions.

In many districts, results dissemination was taken one step further—down to the school level—as a way to bring head teachers and teachers into the dialogue, raising their awareness about both the alarmingly weak assessment results and what the assessment showed were their likely causes. In some cases, managers and teachers received this new information defensively (one district conducted its own reading assessment in part to cover more schools but also in part to gauge the validity of the EGRA results). However, in most cases the response was "We've got to do something about this."

Kenya

The education ministry and USAID sponsored high-level policy dialogue meetings to formulate policy and programmatic responses to the EGRA/EGMA/SSME baseline assessments in mid-June 2012. The

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[8] LARS was developed with the assistance of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to assess literacy and numeracy at the primary school level and was administered in Rwanda to a national sample in 2011.

[9] USAID follow-up did not materialize right away since basic education was not in the Mission's cooperative strategy at that time. By 2014, the prospect for follow-up had improved given its inclusion in the new strategy.

meetings primarily convened high-level education ministry officials (e.g., directors) and the education sector's Semi-Autonomous Government Agencies. More widespread dissemination followed the release of a report of the midterm EGRA/EGMA/SSME results that took place at the end of the first year of classroom interventions in EdData II Primary Math and Reading (PRIMR) Initiative treatment schools in late 2012. In this case, there was not only a national policy dialogue about the results, but also more localized dialogues at the regional level, bringing together officials from 4–6 counties to discuss the substantial improvements revealed by the midterm assessment. Many of these dialogues turned out to be even more interactive and engaging than the one at the national level.

Around the same time, some intergovernmental written communications—for example, a formal letter about improving early literacy—were circulated by one of the Permanent Secretaries. Statements and plans about improved early grade learning that appeared in the Sessional Paper No. 14 of 2012 and the National Education Sector Plan (NESP, 2013–2018), dated April 2014, have been more widespread and influential.

The government and its USAID counterpart for early grade learning—the PRIMR Initiative—opted to use government and agency channels to disseminate assessment results. However, at about the same time, a private regional organization, Uwezo—a citizen-led assessment group patterned after Pratham, an education-focused NGO in India—started conducting household surveys of reading and math skills. Uwezo's data also showed low performance levels, and they adeptly communicated those results broadly through mass media (mostly radio). This approach created a striking complementarity in which PRIMR and its Kenyan government partners led the professional community in the scientific assessment of early grade reading and math, and the creation and piloting of effective interventions for improving outcomes. Uwezo, through its public communications, helped to create a popular demand for such interventions and a readiness for change.

Zambia

Zambia's policy dialogue was held over a two-day period (November 21–22, 2011) and involved senior education ministry and specialized agency (e.g., examinations, curriculum, and communications) personnel, USAID officials, and the Family Health Trust (the NGO that carried out the field survey). Due to the shocking and sensitive nature of the study outcomes and to avoid finger pointing, an innovative approach—the use of role playing—was used to formulate assessment policy implications and recommendations. The participants did address the appallingly weak results constructively, but when the draft assessment report was shared and the hard facts were seen in print, the same group of stakeholders became reluctant to disseminate the findings. USAID respected the stakeholders' wishes and held off on widespread and public dissemination; instead, USAID discreetly put the word out to a limited number of government and agency stakeholders.

At about the same time, a surprising election victory by the Patriotic Front party led to the creation of a new government, which had run on a platform of educational reform. Within its first year in power, the new government administration created—together with its development agency partners—a new National Literacy Framework[10] and accompanying Primary Literacy Programme to improve early grade reading (incorporating a commitment in its manifesto to the use of local languages). By mid-2013, the government

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[10] The government and international donors were behind a host of programs, policies, and initiatives for reading improvement in Zambia. For reference later in this report, we list them all together here. First, DFID sponsored the **Zambia Primary Reading Programme** (1998–2005) to improve the reading and writing skills of learners in grades 1–7. In 2012 the government formed a **National Literacy Steering Committee,** through which a group of advisors support the education ministry's educational and literacy goals. One of its initial major tasks was to help formulate a guiding policy, the **National Literacy Framework.** The **Primary Literacy Programme** that evolved from the framework consists of a new curriculum focusing on reading skills development in six national languages in primary education. **"Let's Read, Zambia"** is a government-led publicity and mobilization campaign launched in mid-January 2014 to build support for the new curriculum and to encourage joint public and private sector efforts to build a culture of reading. **STEP-Up Zambia** (2011–2016), **Zambia Read to Succeed** (RTS, 2012–2017), **Time to Learn** (TTL, 2012–2017), and **Schools Promoting Learning Achievement through Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene** (SPLASH, 2011–2016) are USAID/Zambia-funded interventions that both support the education ministry and respond to USAID/Washington's global Education Strategy.

had shown its willingness to come to terms with the country's desperately low early grade reading results; it produced news releases, citing the EGRA findings on how few second and third graders could read.* Six months later, the government announced a national reading campaign, "Let's Read, Zambia," which was also featured in newspaper articles in which, for example, the U.S. Embassy Chargé d'Affaires was quoted on the reasons for poor reading results (all coming from the SSME findings).**

It took a change in government to open the floodgates of EGRA results dissemination in Zambia, but once citizens and action groups were involved in the conversation, the government and USAID developed another dissemination strategy to help steer the broader discourse. This led to the launch of a 5-year USAID-funded project (starting in 2012), Strengthening Educational Performance – Up (STEP-Up) Zambia, which in part intends to "promote well-informed policies and decision making, as well as bolster community support."

*"Government Disappointed with Low Reading Levels in Early Learners," *Lusaka Times, July 10, 2013.*
** "Zambia: Let's Read Campaign Launched," *Times of Zambia, January 17, 2014.*

Additional Dissemination

Determining the dissemination reach of the assessment findings beyond the initial policy dialogue events was challenging, but some patterns are beginning to emerge. For example, in Honduras, the main *Learning Outcomes* product was a communication tool, a video about best practices in reading instruction and EGRA administration, which has experienced fairly widespread dissemination through two channels: (1) the video has been used as a training tool to help teachers in the application of EGRA in their own classrooms; and (2) the video has been used in meetings with teachers, principals, and other education authorities to open discussions about early reading. This use and dissemination has been mainly in the context of a USAID-supported project, *EduAcción,* which followed the *Learning Outcomes* effort. It is unclear whether the education ministry or teachers' colleges have used the video outside of the *EduAcción* project.

In Mali, USAID's EdData II *Learning Outcomes* project and the Hewlett Foundation also supported the production of a video about EGRA and the importance of reading, and helped the education ministry organize a national press conference on EGRA results. Moreover, as a consequence of the workshop with CSOs (see paragraph 2 above in this Policy Dialogues section), one of the major teachers' unions in Mali received a grant from the Hewlett Foundation to produce a supplement within its newsletter that shared EGRA results with teachers throughout the country.

In Yemen, electronic media were also used for information dissemination, this time in the form of an EGRA website (called yegra.site11.com). This website (in Arabic) for spreading information about the follow-up Yemen Early Grade Reading Approach (YEGRA) project—part of a large USAID-supported Community Livelihoods Program—is produced entirely by local YEGRA staff. It contains several lively videos describing EGRA findings and the new (YEGRA) seven-step approach, which is being used to improve reading skills. The videos also include interviews with the head of YEGRA, the Minister of Education, and some parents. They show teachers/classrooms in action and report on positive findings from the program's use of baseline and midterm EGRA data on student progress. It is not clear how extensively used the site is, but it was easily downloaded from the United States for this review.

Additional dissemination efforts are described in Text Box 1 above for Ethiopia, Kenya, and Zambia.

Summary of Information Dissemination

In all three case study countries, EGRA-related interventions have since been taken to national scale (for details, see next section). The question remains as to which came first: a national-scale intervention or widespread dissemination of findings? The answer may lie in a deeper understanding of the forces driving the intervention.

In Ethiopia, there was no national reading program prior to the assessment except for a decision to produce new textbooks (with World Bank project financing). The dramatic EGRA results created a strong incentive to "do something," opening space for new interventions, starting with cancelation of the procurement of the textbooks, which were then judged to be underemphasizing early reading skills. In addition, awareness-raising about low student reading skills and their causes *at all levels of government* preceded policy making and program design, much of which emerged at the regional and local levels.[11]

In Kenya, the EGRA, EGMA, and SSME administrations were embedded in a program (the PRIMR Initiative) that already envisioned a future national-level scale-up, which was mandated by a national strategic plan; thus, a decision to scale up preceded dissemination of the *Learning Outcomes*/PRIMR EGRA/EGMA/SSME findings. However, the nature and timing of the scale-up[12] were highly influenced by PRIMR's midterm (October 2012) and endline (October 2013) EGRA/EGMA/SSME results, which were widely communicated through government channels. Thus, the influence went in both directions—policy proceeding information and information leading to policy. A complementary communication channel, Uwezo, also influenced the speed and scope of the scale-up (by creating popular demand and readiness for change).

In Zambia, the scale-up was energized by a new governing coalition, which made improving educational quality (including reading) a top priority. The promotion of the National Literacy Framework via the "Let's Read, Zambia" campaign involved the release of EGRA/EGMA/SSME results, but was not contingent upon them (although knowledge of the survey may have had a behind-the-scenes influence on the priority accorded to the new framework). The use of popular media to get the word out also was much more apparent here than in the other countries, suggesting, again, the use of assessment results as a way to *justify policy*. USAID programs that support social marketing have this same quality of building support for new (and potentially controversial) early grade reading and math policies and programs.

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[11] USAID also subsequently funded the Reading for Ethiopia's Achievement Developed Technical Assistance (READ TA) Project (2012–2017), designed to help improve the learning outcomes of primary school students in reading and writing. It involves materials development and teacher professional development in five regions and seven different languages plus English.

[12] See information about the *Tusome* national program later in this report.

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5. Use of EGRA/EGMA/SSME Results in Policy and Practice

Influence on Practice

In 8 of the 10 *Learning Outcomes* countries (excepting the Dominican Republic and Mali), the research carried out for this review revealed evidence confirming the continuation of early grade reading and math activities beyond the initial assessment phase.[13] Not all of these follow-up programs were fully under way as of this writing—in three countries, major government- and/or donor-funded reading (and in some cases, math) intervention projects were in the final preparation stages—but budgetary support was virtually certain for all. Additionally, not all of these activities can be traced directly to the *Learning Outcomes* events as their original stimulus; i.e., some of them were already under way when the *Learning Outcomes* assessments were conducted, and some were moving on a parallel track. Nevertheless, even when programs were not propelled by the *Learning Outcomes* assessment results, EGRA/EGMA/SSME findings often boosted the growth and/or quality of these early grade reading and math activities in some way.

> **Text Box 2. Agency partners in Kenya**
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> In Kenya, USAID's efforts to improve early grade reading and math skills through the EdData II PRIMR Initiative were eventually joined by the UK Department for International Development (DFID/Kenya), which was impressed by the project's experimental design and its solid midterm results. DFID's initial contribution was to extend the reading and math interventions to two rural counties (USAID PRIMR worked in urban/peri-urban areas) and to introduce the use of two regional languages. DFID also added a new stream of inquiry to test the cost effectiveness of different mixes of PRIMR components; and supported a joint study on the relative benefits of electronic tablets used by students, teachers, and district tutors to support reading. When the Kenyan government announced that it would launch a national reading program drawing upon USAID funds, DFID joined the initiative as a co-financer (of the *Tusome* program). While USAID and DFID were working together, regional NGO Uwezo was stirring up public interest in early grade reading through its annual household reading assessments and its radio programs on the results.

Most of the follow-up activities identified involved some kind of partnership with and financial support from an external agency. USAID was first among these; in fact, USAID supported interventions in all eight countries where there were follow-ups. This support is not so surprising, given that the portal to this review (the *Learning Outcomes* assessments) was USAID sponsored and is certainly a tribute to the Agency's tenacity and follow-through with this line of innovation. It is not just USAID, however, that is in this game: In 5 of the 10 countries, USAID has partnered with other agencies in supporting early reading and math work (see **Text Box 2**).[14] In four of the countries,

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[13] This evidence was collected through telephone/Skype calls to RTI program managers and key informants in other agencies. In addition, information was gathered from country, project (EdData II; YEGRA) and agency (USAID) websites. Finally, for the three case studies, data were gathered though a field visit.

[14] The agencies that most often partnered with USAID in early grade skills promotion were DFID, GIZ, the World Bank, and UNICEF.

NGOs were actively engaged in early grade work as partners or on parallel courses, using their own sources of funds to provide additional support, often reaching out to marginalized groups.

Joint action seems to be a frequent feature of early grade learning programs. One explanation lies in the fact that the cause is strongly promoted by the Global Partnership for Education, which has made the "dramatic increase in the number of children learning and demonstrating mastery of basic literacy and numeracy skills by grade 3" one of its Strategic Plan objectives. In addition, the World Bank, one of the early sponsors of EGRA development, has been advocating for the use of the instrument throughout the developing world over the past decade. Finally, in recent years many bilateral agencies have moved in the same direction. For example, at about the same time that USAID declared early grade reading to be its number one strategic priority for the education sector, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) announced it to be among the top three priorities on its global agenda.

Among the many kinds of EGRA/EGMA/SSME follow-ups implemented or planned in five or six of the eight countries with any follow-up activities, additional assessments were among the most popular. These assessments have been (or will be) of various sizes and shapes—from the use of EGRA by teachers in their classrooms (Honduras), to the use of the instrument in an experiment to track progress of an intervention (e.g., Ethiopia, Kenya, and Zambia), to the conduct of a full national assessment (Ghana, Kenya, and Zambia) as baselines for new national programs (see ***Text Box 3*** for information about Zambia's program). In Morocco, the new USAID Country Development Cooperative Strategy, which now includes a goal of improving early grade reading, specifies the standard USAID indicator

for success, namely the proportion of students "reading and understanding grade level text." This implies a national EGRA or EGRA-like assessment to track progress on that indicator. For this research, the number of *Learning Outcomes* countries that had conducted (2) or expected to conduct (3–5) a national-level EGRA totaled at least five, and potentially as many as seven. This rate of scaling up early grade reading assessments to the national level was probably not anticipated by the EdData II *Learning Outcomes* managers or by USAID.

> **Text Box 3. Zambia revs it up**
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> Zambia's initial EGRA/EGMA/SSME results were so devastating that education managers were at first hesitant to deal with them publicly. When a regime change brought in a new set of policy makers with an education reform agenda (including early reading in local languages), a new Primary Literacy Programme was conceived. With USAID's help (i.e., financing for four interrelated projects), the Primary Literacy Programme team revised the grade 1 syllabus within one year. It is on track to roll out an entirely new reading curriculum (plus learning materials) for grades 2–4 over the next 3 years in six local languages, which will be used in the nation's conventional and community schools.

Explaining the high scale-up rate is complex, but it is clear that in most cases, the initial EGRA (and for Year 2, EGMA and SSME), constrained by budget and thus in most cases done only in a few regions and/or in one or two languages, yielded results so startling that

quickly moving ahead with solutions became a mandate in many countries (see example of Ethiopia in *Text Box 4*). In some cases, a step in this direction involved expanding the assessment baseline to include additional languages—as in Kenya, where the only local language originally assessed was Kiswahili; and in Zambia, where the assessment was limited to Bemba. Another explanation, related to the small scale of the initial

assessments, addressed the need to implement a national-level baseline in preparation for a national-level intervention to improve reading (and in Kenya, math) skills (relevant in the *Learning Outcomes* countries of Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Zambia, and perhaps Morocco in the near future).

> **Text Box 4. Ethiopia quickly fashions a solution**
>
> When the disastrous EGRA results were first presented within a senior-level policy dialogue, decision makers immediately began to discuss what to do about them, and quickly decided to reform the national language learning curriculum. This approach also led to the procurement cancellation for books suddenly viewed as not sufficiently focused on reading skills.

 A scale-up of this magnitude is a rare event in countries that have used the EGRA, EGMA, or SSME. Previously, such a scale-up had been done in only a few countries, among them Egypt and Liberia.[15] The fact that more than half of this cohort of countries (i.e., 5 to 7 of the 10 *Learning Outcomes* countries) were moving from subnational pilot assessments to national-level assessments is impressive. The reasons behind the extensive scale-up are not readily apparent, but a confluence of factors may have contributed. These factors include the following: (1) a compelling first round of results, (2) the growing attention to reading instruction in native languages, (3) a supportive political environment (perhaps the result of the hand-picking of the *Learning Outcomes* countries), and (4) the readiness of USAID (and partner agencies) to keep financial resources flowing (see last section of this report for a deeper discussion of this topic).

Beyond additional assessments, follow-ups to the *Learning Outcomes* EGRA, EGMA, and SSME results have included a variety of **changes in educational programs and practices** (usually in the form of interventions designed to improve reading instruction). In six of the countries where follow-ups were undertaken, improved teacher education was the first intervention carried out, which primarily involved changes to in-service training and mentoring, with some attention to pre-service education. The emphasis in this area has been to improve teacher awareness and skills for establishing pupils' reading and math basics. In reading, intervention activities have included instructing teachers in how to teach letter and letter-sound recognition, phonemic awareness, word decoding, and reading fluency. In some cases, the instruction has been organized as a cascade system, starting with a training of trainers. In other settings, it has involved creating a corps of expert teachers or coaches who are called upon to mentor others.

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[15] National-level assessments in Egypt took place under separate EdData II task orders in March 2013 and April 2014. In Liberia, EdData II funded an experimental intervention and baseline, midterm, and endline assessments under the EGRA Plus: Liberia task order, and similar periodic assessments continue via the USAID Liberia Teacher Training Program (LTTP). See Bibliography for citations.

The next type of intervention being carried out or planned (in five countries) is **curricular revision and related learning materials development and provision.** In federated countries like Ethiopia, this has meant creating curricular guidelines (i.e., a syllabus) at the national level and then supporting regions in the detailed design of their own materials and textbooks (in regional languages). The curricular redesigns have emphasized the steps for language/math skills acquisition and not (as before) language and math as academic subjects. In cases like Kenya and Zambia, the curriculum design has involved intensive field trials of new, updated instructional systems and learning materials, including the design of supplementary readers in the relevant languages to entice and sustain the reading habit. This venture also has a logistical feature—systems for creating and distributing books and materials at the needed 1:1 textbook-to-pupil ratio.

Interventions implemented or planned as follow-ups to EGRA/EGMA/SSME assessments by four or fewer of the *Learning Outcomes* countries included the following:

- strengthening community/home support for improved reading and math skills acquisition (four countries);
- improving systems of teacher supervision and support and creating reading rooms in school or libraries (including mobile ones) (three countries did both); and
- using information and communication technology (ICT) (e.g., electronic tablets) in reading and math learning (two countries).

Collectively, these interventions cover most, if not all, of the recommended approaches found in the country-specific *Learning Outcomes* final reports analyzing EGRA/EGMA/SSME findings (see Bibliography).

Influence on Policy

In this review, *policy* in government settings is distinguished from *practice* in that the former is generally longer term and consists of a set of coherent decisions, often supported by special legislation or government decrees.[16] Typically, policies are what are used to institutionalize practices. In contrast, practices are generally shorter term and have no legal weight. For purposes of this review, it was difficult to determine the extent to which *policies* were changed in the various countries in response to EGRA/EGMA/SSME results. This was a challenge, in part, because the informants generally were either spokespersons for projects, or agency experts who were mainly cognizant of the development of interventions (i.e., practices). Timing also was an issue: Most of the *Learning Outcomes* follow-ups are still too recent to have been institutionalized through national policies. In this review, government informants were the main sources of information on relevant policy reforms during field studies in the

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[16] The definitions used here were influenced by an interactive academic blog post at http://www.researchgate.net/post/What_is_the_difference_in_meaning_of_the_terms_policy_planning_and_strategy

case study countries. Therefore, this section highlights mainly policy reforms in those three countries.

Policy Reform in Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, policy adjustment at the national level was one early approach to "doing something" in response to the *Learning Outcomes* assessment results. It is not clear how greatly the EGRA results influenced the raft of new and relevant policy changes that emerged, but these results at least had some connection to all of the policy changes. In the policy area concerning instructional approaches to early grade reading, the EGRA policy dialogue seems to have been the driving force. The immediate decision to cancel the impending textbook procurement was accompanied by a decision to strengthen the country's system for teaching reading in local languages by revising (with USAID's support) the mother tongue curriculum for grades 1–8. The revisions, which had been partly completed at the time of this research, involve the creation of a new, general national syllabus, drawing from EGRA findings and lessons learned, followed by adaptations to a set of regions and their seven main languages (which could eventually increase to 20).[17]

In addition, the education ministry is working to change teacher training policy. For pre-service, the ministry has taken steps to upgrade primary teacher preparation from a certificate program to a diploma-level program (including new modules on the teaching of reading). For in-service, a continuous professional development program was instituted with interventions at the zonal, *woreda*, and school level, which emphasize mother-tongue instruction through a set of teacher training modules. This program was evaluated after about one year and deemed to be less than satisfactory. As a result, as of this writing, the education ministry was revising the in-service training again, this time bringing in specialists in mother-tongue reading instruction and implementing approaches aligned with the new language learning syllabi (assisted by USAID's READ TA project).

Related to the reforms in formal teacher training and accreditation are changes in teacher management policy. A new policy on teacher licensing is being implemented wherein all teachers must submit to examinations as part of a path to relicensing (to be managed at the regional level). Salary increases will be connected to teachers' progress on the relicensing steps, and new teacher-support positions will be created, such as mentor teachers (who will be expected to help fellow teachers improve their teaching skills in areas such as reading). Also, going forward, a prerequisite for head teacher positions will be five years' experience as a classroom teacher. Moreover, the basis of the head teacher position will shift from administration to instructional coaching. Individuals recruited for these positions will be trained for the modified role and given commensurate salary increases.

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[17] Over 40 languages are in use in Ethiopia, and at least 20 are expected to become languages of instruction in the first 3–4 years of the mother-tongue program.

Policy Reform in Kenya

Kenya's most recent government aspirations concerning early grade reading and math appear in the NESP 2013–2018, published in 2014. The NESP lists *education quality* as third among its six main priorities. Within education quality, the NESP specifies the "Early Reading and Mathematics Quality Improvement Programme" among a list of seven subpriorities. The policy framework upon which this subpriority was built is the education ministry's Sessional Paper No. 14 of 2012, which emphasizes improving basic literacy and numeracy of children and calls for reforms that will "improve the quality of education and training so that Kenya's measurable learning outcomes in literacy, numeracy, scientific, and communication skills are in the upper quartile on international standardized tests" (NESP, p. 70).

The NESP cited the "government-commissioned" PRIMR Initiative as having influenced its goals for early reading and math skills improvement and having undertaken "research on how to improve reading and mathematics outcomes" (NESP, p. 69). Ultimately, the NESP goal formulated for this subpriority is "to ensure that all pupils read and do basic mathematics by the end of Grade 2" (NESP, p. 70).

The NESP is more of a statement of intentions than a pronouncement of policies. It does, however, touch upon a number of policy areas that will need attention in support of its plans, including (1) establishing systems for data collection on early grade reading and early grade math; (2) instituting programs for educating teachers about both pupil assessments and best practices in reading and math instruction; (3) making appropriate adjustments to the early grade curriculum; (4) establishing provisions for procuring early grade reading and early grade math instructional materials; and (5) enforcing (and clarifying) language-of-instruction policies for grades 1 and 2.

Because of its experience with PRIMR (both the EGRA/EGMA/SSME and the related interventions), USAID was invited by the education ministry to support it in the design and implementation of an appropriate *nationwide* early grade reading program called *Tusome*.[18] USAID's procurement document for that effort (which will launch in late August 2014) included a requirement that the contractor focus on "improvement of the policy environment that promotes reading skills" by undertaking a policy analysis early in the project and designing an intervention package to address identified policy gaps. Its tentative list of policies that need to be addressed include those mentioned in the NESP, as well as policies concerning the time that local tutors need in order to support improved reading, ways of working within the government's devolution framework (which grants counties new powers in education programming), and the role of universities/research institutes and teacher training colleges in promoting improved early reading skills.

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[18] Kenya is also gearing up for a national-level math skills development program, which is expected to be supported financially by a new grant from the Global Partnership for Education and is likely to incorporate learning–teaching strategies developed under PRIMR.

Many Kenyan informants noted the long time needed to change policies, especially in areas with well-entrenched interest groups that benefit from the status quo. On most policy issues related to early grade reading and early grade math, the USAID-supported reform programs have not been operating long enough to have had a substantial impact (i.e., PRIMR began in 2011 and the *Learning Outcomes*-assisted assessments took place in 2012). However, an important point to note is that PRIMR and related undertakings have prepared the "policy environment" for substantial policy change in the near future, as the country prepares for national-level scale-up of both early grade reading and math programs.

Policy Reform in Zambia

In Zambia, for decades, the national literacy curriculum has been a crucial arena for reform. In 1996, Zambia adopted a policy of introducing reading skills to children in "familiar languages." This policy was vigorously pursued between 1999 and 2005, with substantial help from DFID.[19] Although it was found to be effective in grade 1, the program eventually withered since it included only one year of local language learning and used a wealth of materials that could not be sustained once British aid ended in 2005.

Among the recommendations derived from the 2011 *Learning Outcomes* EGRA/EGMA/SSME results was a review of policies on early grade language curricular design and language of instruction. As noted above, it took a change in government administration that same year for these reforms to be considered seriously in 2012 by the new National Literacy Steering Committee. The language curriculum adopted by the education ministry, called the Primary Literacy Programme, includes reading skills development in six national languages over the first four years of primary education.[20] This program and a policy to introduce instruction in oral English (not reading and writing) in grade 2 constituted the language-of-instruction policy. An assessment policy also has been formulated, with the government opting to assess reading (and math) at the end of grades 1 and 4 (using a modified EGRA for older pupils for those in grade 4). With support from USAID, the ministry also decided to create a permanent early grade reading assessment at the Examinations Bureau of Zambia. Policies related to other features of the early grade reading program have not been clarified or were not discovered by this reviewer.

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[19] DFID's Primary Reading Programme made use of the Breakthrough to Literacy Programme curriculum and materials promulgated by the South African organization Molteno Institute for Language and Literacy.

[20] The new government also pursued a program of curricular change in numeracy, but this was not based on the EGMA and thus took a different channel of program development and relied on a different set of development agencies (e.g., Japan International Cooperation Agency instead of USAID). USAID had originally supported both literacy and numeracy in Zambia (in fact, the project that became known as Zambia Read to Succeed had originally covered them both), but with the shift in USAID's global Education Strategy, USAID/Zambia opted to concentrate on reading.

Summary of Influence on Policy and Practice

The findings from this research showed that three countries—Ethiopia, Kenya, and Zambia—committed themselves to a set of reforms in early reading (and math) instruction, which include the following:

- New curricula have been or are being developed and language-of-instruction issues clarified (the use of national and/or local languages);

- New textbooks and other learning materials have been called for;

- Teacher training strategies have been established and assessment processes clarified.

Much of this strategizing is being done within the context of development assistance programs (mainly USAID, but also DFID, Global Partnership for Education, and World Bank), and the extent to which the programs are fully "owned" by the government (and thus subject to firm national policy) is not entirely apparent. Time is an issue: These innovations are at most three years old, with many programs still in research and development (R&D) mode. Moving from R&D to policy is often a complex process.

Kenya has perhaps moved furthest toward institutionalizing its program by setting time-bound reading and math goals in its sector plan and calling for specific reforms, thus opening policy space and creating a receptive environment. In Ethiopia, recent policy changes have been made to teacher qualifications, licensing, and in-service education, and a new "mentor teacher" position also was created. All of these modifications provide openings for improved early reading but leave open questions as to whether they will be used to achieve it. In Zambia, the new government has moved ahead with its National Literacy Steering Committee, which has advanced the new Primary Literacy Programme using six native languages. It is not clear, however, whether the Steering Committee will be able to "make" policy or if that will require ministerial or parliamentary action (a question for all three countries).[21]

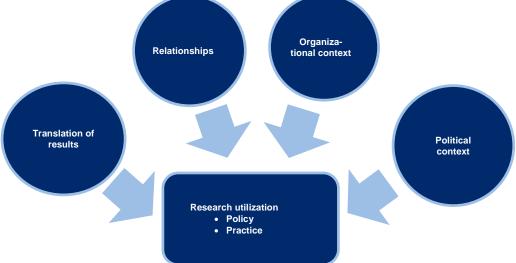# 6. Analysis of the Utilization of Assessment Results

This review has traced the trajectory of the *Learning Outcomes* assessments and related follow-up activity from the assessments themselves, to policy dialogue, to preliminary model building, and to scale-up at the national or subnational level. Despite very different assessment starting points in the participating countries and varying national contexts, this review revealed a surprisingly high rate of countries moving from initial assessments to scaled-up interventions. Throughout the process, the original and successor assessment

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[21] Egypt is a non-*Learning Outcomes* country in which the institutionalization of a government-operated early grade reading program (EGRP) is quite advanced. Examples of *policies* there are as follows: (1) a regulation that the time devoted to reading in primary schools classrooms is 25 minutes a day; (2) a requirement that new teachers master a Professional Academy of Teachers module on early grade reading in order to obtain or retain certification; and (3) a requirement that the content of reading textbooks be aligned with EGRP strategies (Nielsen, 2013).

results have been widely, and often effectively, communicated, with follow-up programs designed and implemented. In some cases, the causal chain showed direct and sequential links between assessment outcomes, policy and program discussions (dialogues), and action planning/implementation. In others, the connections were less direct—for example, as in the case of an intervention program already being conceived before the assessment results were in, with the results then used to justify the program or to contribute design features. This review considered either pathway—direct or indirect—to be a successful case of dissemination and utilization of early grade assessment results.

The last section of this review presents an analysis of explanations for the effective utilization of early grade assessment results, as shown in *Figure 1.* This model was, adapted from a conceptual framework created by researchers at the William T. Grant Foundation (Tseng, 2012). The focal points of this analysis are the three case study countries (Ethiopia, Kenya, and Zambia); however, other countries are brought in as appropriate.

Figure 1. **Framework for explaining the impact of *Learning Outcomes* EGRA/EGMA/SSME results on policy and practice**

Each element of the model depicted in Figure 1 is explained briefly below.

- **Translation of results:** the way in which the results are presented and translated to/by decision makers.

- **Relationships:** the relationship (feelings of trust) between the assessment professionals and assessment users, including the way intermediaries are used and "champions" are involved.

- **Organizational context:** the organizational setting in which the exchange or assessment results takes place, including the professional capacity of the actors,

the culture of the institutions and/or their programs, and the structure of the organizations involved.

- **Political context:** the values and ideologies of the leading actors and the power relationships that are in place.

Table 2 shows how each of the three case studies are positioned on the first two model dimensions, "translation of results" and "relationships." *Table 3* shows the positions on organizational context and *Table 4* for political context. Following the tables is a brief summary of case study country positions on each of the model dimensions.

Table 2.   Case study countries' positions on translation of results and relationships

Dimension	Ethiopia	Kenya	Zambia
Translation of results	*Learning Outcomes* country report conveyed results in an objective yet powerful manner, often having high shock value ("proportion students having zero scores"), and begging for response; policy dialogues at central and decentralized levels led to quick action	*Learning Outcomes* country report conveyed results in an objective yet powerful manner, often having high shock value ("proportion of students having zero scores"), and begging for response; policy dialogue was quickly followed by experimentation yielding early positive results. Earlier national/regional assessments (e.g., those completed by the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality [SACMEQ]) also showed declining results, lending credibility to the EGRA/EGMA/SSME results and increasing the sense of urgency for action, converging with the high priority given to improved basic skills by USAID, DFID, the World Bank, UNICEF, Global Partnership for Education, and others.	*Learning Outcomes* country report conveyed results in an objective yet powerful manner, often having high shock value ("proportion of students having zero scores"), and begging for response; policy dialogue created recommendations through role play; after change in government, results received media coverage. Earlier national/regional assessments (SACMEQ) also showed declining results, lending credibility to the EGRA/EGMA/SSME results and increasing the sense of urgency for action, converging with the high priority given to improved basic skills by USAID, DFID, the World Bank, UNICEF, Global Partnership for Education, and others.
Relationships	Over 10+ years (1995–2007), USAID provided support for transforming/ modernizing Ethiopian basic education through the Basic Education System Overhaul (BESO) project, which established the Agency as a trusted and reliable partner; overlapping in	Long history of USAID support to primary education, including an early small-scale EGRA and intervention that created a strong, trusting connection with the education ministry. The ministry and USAID	Long-serving and well-connected USAID Education Program Manager brought EGRA to Zambia and oversaw the launch of 4 interconnected projects in support of new literacy program, thereby contributing to the

Dimension	Ethiopia	Kenya	Zambia
	2002 was a successful Alternative Basic Education Program, which focused on access in remote areas. In 2009, USAID shifted support to quality improvement through its Improving the Quality of Primary Education Program (IQPEP), which further strengthened the Agency's bond with the education ministry and set the stage for EGRA and receptivity to the early reading reform agenda.	Mission have convergence of interests in improving math and reading scores. USAID's contractor for PRIMR includes prominent local analysts on its team and the head of the Kenya National Examinations Council to manage assessment logistics.	Mission's trusted position in this field. Contractor for EGRA intervention included in its staff key local personnel involved in an earlier reading improvement program.

Table 3.   Case study countries' positions on organizational context

Dimension	Ethiopia	Kenya	Zambia
Capacity	Ethiopian government offices at the central and regional levels are capable of moving quickly. One district already had an intervention in place within 3 months of receiving the news about its children's performance on the EGRA. This pragmatic approach to problem solving can get things moving quickly but sometimes lacks a strategic focus and/or grounding in theory and research, which is something that the *Learning Outcomes* EGRA brought to the table.	USAID's approach to this venture (through PRIMR) is to work cooperatively with skilled Kenyan professionals (language and reading specialists, researchers, assessment specialists, curriculum developers, instructional coaches and tutors) with the intention of further strengthening local capacity, which is said to have promoted national ownership of the program.	The main government agency to respond to the assessment results was the Kenya Institute for Curriculum Development; its director is experienced and savvy about reading instruction via local languages, having worked on the previous curriculum that followed the South African Breakthrough to Literacy model. A domestic source of relevant expertise is the University of Zambia, where currently 5 doctoral students are focused on early literacy, a domestic source for theoretical and practical expertise in this field (one of the doctoral students is currently the Deputy Director of the USAID Zambia Read to Succeed project).

Dimension	Ethiopia	Kenya	Zambia
Culture	Ethiopians are proud of living in one of the few countries in Africa that was never colonized, and that pride compels them to compare themselves favorably with neighboring countries on development indicators such as those in health and education. Their quick response to the EGRA results could be seen as a way to get a jump start on their neighbors who were also found to have weak reading scores. A similar logic holds for the regions in Ethiopia, which tend to compete on indices of progress and development, including those in the field of education.	A change in Constitution (2010) and in government (2013) ushered in an era of evidence-based decision making. This created receptive soil for the planting of early grade reforms and innovations that were based on solid cognitive science and adapted to the Kenyan conditions through a rigorous, randomized controlled group experiment.	Zambia had a history of advocating for and using local languages in early grade literacy starting in 1976—a little more than a decade after independence—and many national leaders were committed to the idea, including those in the political party that won the 2011 election.
Structure	Ethiopia's federal system—in which education services (like other services) are mainly managed/delivered by the provincial government—has led to a relatively well-developed state apparatus at local levels. This allows regions to take matters into their own hands through their own policies, plans, and financing. Combined with the competitiveness mentioned above, this can get local interventions moving quite quickly.	One Kenyan response to the EGRA results was the creation of a Programme Development and Implementation Team (PDIT), which is credited with building a coordinated government response to the EGRA/EGMA/SSME outcomes. Because of government's coordinating efforts and the credibility and conviviality of the PRIMR project, strong bonds have grown among agency partners, e.g., USAID and DFID in co-financing PRIMR activities, which significantly broadened PRIMR's scope. Also notable are links between PRIMR and local NGOs, such as Uwezo and Aga Khan Foundation.	Under the reformist government of 2011, there was a move to coordinate the strategy for early grade reading under a national literacy framework, which brought government, NGOs, and development agencies together.

Table 4.   Case study countries' positions on political context

Dimension	Ethiopia	Kenya	Zambia
Political context	There is strong political support for the use of regional languages as part of how regions are exerting their identity and authority. In terms of *Learning Outcomes,* the legitimacy of regional education authorities in	The launch of a new Kenyan Constitution in 2010 required some restructuring in the delivery of education (more decentralization), and a change in government in early 2013 set the stage for a	With a surprising electoral victory in 2011, the Patriotic Front, which had campaigned on a platform to reform education (including reading in mother tongue), took

Dimension	Ethiopia	Kenya	Zambia
	part hinged on their being able to demonstrate that they could respond to the poor results—in particular, helping students learn to read well in the regional language.	new era of educational reform.	seriously the EGRA/EGMA/SSME outcome messages and the suggested follow-ups.

Translation of Results

In these three cases, the assessment messages were generally conveyed in an objective yet powerful manner. One outcome indicator was particularly striking: the proportion of test takers having zero scores on the various test items (e.g., for fluency: the proportion unable to read a single word correctly from a simple reading passage). Such proportions were often higher than 50%, and were thus easy to communicate to others—e.g., "Our children are not reading," which begs for a response, "What can we do about it?!" The policy dialogues that were held at the national and (sometimes) subnational levels generally provided a good format for answering this question, or in other words translating research into action. In Ethiopia, those attending the EGRA policy dialogue quickly fashioned a solution that involved revising the reading curriculum and creating new textbooks. In Kenya, those involved in the policy dialogue translated assessment results into crucial changes in the intervention strategy; further efforts after the successful midterm and endline assessments contributed to the decision to proceed with scaling up the reading program to the national level. The fact that in only 1 of 10 countries were the *Learning Outcomes* results negatively received, despite the often appalling messages, suggests that the EdData II team's formula for translating results (through its reporting format and policy dialogues) was fruitful.

Relationships

For research utilization, the essence of building relationships is creating trust—specifically among the producers/sponsors of the research and policy and decision makers. Often such trust is built up over time—as in Kenya, where USAID developed a strong, trusting relationship with the education ministry during the decade before the EGRA/EGMA/SSME baseline, including through its support for a small-scale EGRA and intervention in 2007 that showed promise and built credibility. Organizations like USAID and its contractors can also build up trust by relying on recognized local "intermediaries." Examples include when USAID's contractor in Kenya brought prominent local data analysts into its research team and relied on the head of the Kenya National Examinations Council to manage assessment logistics. In Ethiopia, USAID also had developed a trusting relationship with the education ministry through its almost two decades of support to basic education (1995–2014), which in 2009 shifted to support for quality improvement, making it a trusted and credible source of ideas and instruments for innovation in early grade reading instruction. In Zambia, consistent leadership of the education program at the USAID Mission in Lusaka

built a sense of trust, as did the USAID contractor for the STEP-Up early grade reading intervention, by recruiting staff with knowledge derived from their participation in the earlier DFID-supported Primary Reading Programme. However, a counterexample can be found in Rwanda: There the education ministry official who had championed the use of the EGRA and EGMA was transferred, and it took some time for a sense of trust and credibility regarding the EGRA/EGMA/SSME results and approaches to be reestablished in the education ministry.

Organizational Context

For purposes of this research, "organizational context" was conceived of as a cluster of enabling conditions within the organizations that received the *Learning Outcomes* research findings (mainly the education ministry). Aspects of context that were investigated were *organizational capacity, organizational culture,* and *organizational structure*.

Capacity

In all three case studies, national and (in the case of Ethiopia) subnational education offices were found to possess the basic organizational capacity for implementing quality improvement programs. In Ethiopia, national and regional officers were decisive and fast moving. In Kenya, skilled professionals were found throughout education ministry departments and the sector's semi-autonomous organizations. In Zambia, expertise existed from the previous DFID early grade reading program from which the education ministry could draw upon. Basic capacity was sufficiently strong to support the adoption of an EGRA follow-up. However, in all case studies, specific individual and organizational capacity in the technical/innovative features of an EGRA/EGMA/SSME administration and/or a reading or math intervention required additional technical assistance, which was provided by a USAID contractor.

Culture

An ethnographic study of the implementing organizations in *Learning Outcomes* countries was beyond the scope of this review, but the three cases did reveal facilitating conditions for research utilization that are cultural in nature. For example, in Ethiopia, one of the driving forces appeared to be a pride in the country's never having been colonized, which has driven leaders to compare their country favorably with its neighbors. Likewise, within the country, regional pride and interregional competitiveness seem to be partly what drives regions to press forward. In Kenya's government, a relatively new "culture of decision making" has emerged, which is more *evidence-based* than in the past—a change that has made it receptive to the scientific rigor of EGRA/EGMA/SSME and the PRIMR intervention's experimental design (i.e., using a randomized controlled trial). In Zambia, going back nearly to the foundation of the independent republic, there is a history of support for the position that local languages should be used in early-grade literacy. This ideal appeared in the 2011 manifesto of the current ruling political party.

Structure

The organizational structure of an education ministry can also shape the pace and extent of its research utilization, a factor that appeared in the three case studies in different ways. Making a difference in Ethiopia was the decentralization of government services, providing a relatively well-developed government apparatus at the local levels for making and implementing decisions. Combined with the interregional competitiveness mentioned above, this feature set the stage for expeditious local program design and implementation. In Kenya, one response to the EGRA/EGMA/SSME results was the creation of a Programme Development and Implementation Team (PDIT), which is credited with building a coordinated government response to the assessment outcomes. Similarly, in Zambia, a structural and policy change—in the form of the National Literacy Framework—established the institutional foundation for a coordinated government, NGO, and partner agency response to the country's reading crisis.

Political Context

The broader political context in the country can also create enabling conditions for reading reform. Such appears to have been the case in two case study countries, Kenya and Zambia. In Kenya, the launch of a new Constitution in 2010, which required some restructuring in the delivery of education (e.g., more decentralization), and a change in government in early 2013, both set the stage for a new era of evidence-based educational reform. In Zambia, the electoral victory of the Patriotic Front put an education reform-minded government in power that positioned itself as the party to overcome the disastrous record of declining student reading scores that took place under the previous government. On the other hand, in one of the non-case-study *Learning Outcomes* countries, Mali, a 2012 coup d'etat closed down the civilian government and the USAID Mission, resulting in the suspension (at least for a time) of the *Learning Outcomes* policy dialogue session and any follow-up planning.

7. Summary and Conclusions

During 2009–2012, the seed of early grade assessment was planted with the help of the EdData II *Learning Outcomes* task order in 10 countries. The results of these assessments were subject to intense scrutiny by national—and sometimes regional—authorities who, through policy dialogues, translated them into insights, concerns, recommendations, and occasionally action plans (including additional dissemination events). In 8 of the 10 cases, the seed found ground receptive and fertile enough to sprout early grade reading and (sometimes) math *interventions*, usually with the financial and technical support of USAID and other agencies. In five—or, in all likelihood, six—countries, these interventions are being or will be scaled up to the national or near-national level, a testimony to the follow-through and tenacity of the national governments and USAID. Reasons for this success rate are not entirely clear, but in the countries moving to a national scale-up, there was a confluence of poor and compelling first-round results, a

precedent for reading instruction in local languages, a supportive political environment (partly the result of the hand-picking of the *Learning Outcomes* countries), and the readiness of USAID (and partner agencies) to keep financial resources flowing for this type of remediation.

Influence on Practice

Frequent types of follow-up to the original *Learning Outcomes* assessments were additional or follow-up assessments, which have taken place or will take place in five or six of the *Learning Outcomes* countries. Changes in early-grade *practice* (interventions) were found to cover (in the order of frequency) the following topics: (1) implementing some form of improved or focused *teacher training* (in seven countries); (2) carrying out *curricular and learning materials reform/revision* (in five countries); (3) *strengthening home and community support* (in four countries); (4) creating *reading rooms or mobile libraries* (in three countries), and (4) using ICT in early grade reading/math instruction (in two countries). Collectively, these interventions cover most, if not all, of the recommended approaches found in the individual final country reports of EGRA/EGMA/SSME findings.

Influence on Policy

Assessment results also had an influence on policy in the *Learning Outcomes* countries, but these were not as apparent as the impacts on practice—partly a consequence of less access to information on policy changes during this review. Policy changes were more apparent in the three case study countries where national scale-ups were under way, because of access to policy makers and government stakeholders during the field visits. This data collection revealed important policy changes with respect to curriculum and learning materials in all three countries (i.e., putting more emphasis on teaching pupils basic skills and the use of local languages). There were also cases of new teacher education and assessment policies. However, relatively few policies of a regulatory or legal nature were found, a likely reflection of the innovations' relative short life span to date, and the long and complicated processes for changing policies in country. The slow progress in making formal policy changes needed to *institutionalize* early-grade reading and math programs in the countries suggests that government ownership of them may not yet be full.

Reasons for Effective Utilization of Assessment Results

This review did an in-depth analysis of reasons for effective utilization of assessment results in the three case study countries where interventions are being scaled up at the national level: Ethiopia, Kenya, and Zambia. This analysis was framed by the use of a conceptual model which included as lines of influence (1) translation of results; (2) relationships; (3) organizational context; and (4) political context. Information on these dimensions for the three is presented in Tables 2–4 (above). Following are conclusions regarding sharing, publicizing, and using the *Learning Outcomes* assessment

findings and their spin-offs that could be considered by stakeholders undertaking early grade skills assessments and interventions in other settings.

1. **Appropriate dissemination of distressing evidence.** The translation of dire assessment results by researchers into language that was both objective and powerful often jolted the hearers into an immediate response and created a readiness to seek solutions.

2. **Policy dialogue sessions.** The policy dialogues that were set up served as another opportunity for government stakeholders to translate the results into insights, explanations, and recommendations, and in some cases into action plans. The more layers of policy dialogues (in a bureaucratic sense), the more engaged the local problem solvers became in finding solutions (see Ethiopia).

3. **Long-term USAID inputs.** A sustained presence of USAID in educational improvement efforts in the country (especially in Ethiopia and Kenya) helped to create a sense of trust among the governments, which facilitated government buy-in to both the EGRA/EGMA/SSME results and any newly proposed programs.

4. **Local expertise.** Local experts and specialists mediated between the USAID-supported programs and the government, and took central roles as researchers and program developers in the assessments and related interventions, lending credibility to these efforts.

5. **Ministry capacity.** Education ministry officials in the three case study countries were competent and already had some degree of experience with bilingual reading programs (supported by USAID in Ethiopia, USAID and Hewlett Foundation in Kenya, and DFID in Zambia), led by "champions" in the field in Kenya and Zambia (the latter since the change in government).

6. **Willingness to innovate.** Cultural norms conducive to taking up innovative ideas in education were important facilitative factors in the three countries—competitiveness in Ethiopia; a relatively new culture of evidence-based decision making in Kenya; and a history of support for teaching reading beginning with local languages in Zambia, significant enough to appear in the new ruling party's manifesto.

7. **Compatible government structures.** Integrative structures in ministries of education facilitated a relatively harmonized engagement with EGRA/EGMA/SSME outcomes and related innovations/interventions—for example, the PDIT in Kenya and the National Literacy Framework in Zambia.

8. **National political context.** National politics matter. The adoption of a new Constitution or installation of a new government can open new space for reform and/or new beginnings, as was the case in Kenya and Zambia. Change agents looking to introduce early grade assessments and interventions to a new country would do well to consider whether the politics are right for such a reform effort, or at least be aware of (1) the risks if a country's political context is shaky (as in fragile states); and (2) the possibility that political change along the way can open new doors, as in the case of Zambia.

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ANNEX A: Persons Interviewed

Kenya

Dr. Benjamin Piper, Chief of Party, Primary Math and Reading (PRIMR) Initiative (USAID), RTI International

Salome Ong'ele, Deputy Chief of Party, PRIMR, RTI International

Dr. Abel Mugenda, Monitoring, Evaluation & Research Director, PRIMR, RTI International

Dunston (Dan) Kwayumba, Monitoring, Evaluation & Research, PRIMR, RTI International

Ogle Mukhtar, Director, Kenyan National Examinations Council

Margaret Murage, Deputy Director, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Republic of Kenya

Alex Alubisia, Director, Education for Marginalized Children in Kenya (EMACK) Program, Aga Khan Foundation

Dr. Sara Ruto, Regional Manager, Uwezo East Africa

Dr. T. Wambui Gathenya, Education Program Management Specialist, USAID/Kenya

Lilian Gangla, Education Program Management Specialist, USAID/Kenya

Sandra Barton (by phone), Education Advisor, DFID/UKaid, Kenya

Zambia

Dr. Robert Serpell, Professor of Psychology, University of Zambia and Coordinator, Centre for the Promotion of Literacy in Sub-Saharan Africa

Guy Bostock, Reading and District Management Team, Read to Succeed (USAID/Zambia), RTI International

Dr. Tassew Zewdie, Chief of Party, Read to Succeed (USAID/Zambia), Creative Associates International

Francis K. Sampoa, Deputy Chief of Party, Read to Succeed (USAID/Zambia), Creative Associates International

Chitandra Rhodwell, Director, Monitoring, Evaluation & Research, Read to Succeed (USAID/Zambia), Creative Associates International

William M. Kapanbwe, Performance Monitoring, Read to Succeed (USAID/Zambia), Creative Associates International

Patrick Fayaud, Chief of Party, Time to Learn (USAID/Zambia), Education Development Center

Sergio Ramirez, Chief of Party, Strengthening Education Performance – Up (STEP-Up), USAID/Zambia, Chemonics

Samantha Chuula, Country Director, Room to Read (Zambia)

Maureen Simuchembu, Director of Literacy, Room to Read (Zambia)

Mr. Mwendende, Language Specialist, Curriculum Development Center, Ministry of Education, Republic of Zambia

Geoff Tambulukani, Language Specialist, Lusaka, Zambia

Wick Powers, Education Team Leader, USAID/Zambia

Mei Mei Peng, Education Officer, USAID/Zambia

Tnaya Zebroff, Education Advisor, DFID/UKaid, Zambia.

Ethiopia

Barbara Toye-Welsh, Chief of Party, Reading for Ethiopia's Achievement Developed Technical Assistance (READ TA) Project (USAID/Ethiopia), RTI International

Bureau Heads/Deputy Heads from the following Ethiopian regions: Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Region (SNNPR); Tigray; Somali; Amhara; Oromia

Solomon Shiferaw, Director, Education Management Information System (EMIS), Planning & Resource Mobilization, Ministry of Education

Eshetu Asfaw, Director, Curriculum Development & Implementation, Ministry of Education

Eleni Mamo and Tiye Feyisa, Education Specialists, UNICEF, Ethiopia

Ato Matias, Head Education Program, Save the Children (Ethiopia)

Berhanu Berke, Education Technical Advisor, and Ermias Tesfaye, Regional Program Advisor, PACT (Ethiopia)

Tazeen Fazih, Task Team Leader, General Education Quality Improvement Project II, the World Bank

Dr. Edward Graybill, Chief of Party, Improving Quality of Primary Education Program, FHI 360 (Ethiopia)

Ato Workiye and Dr. Solomon, Deputy Chief of Party and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Director, Improving Quality of Primary Education Program (IQPEP), FHI 360 (Ethiopia)

Dr. Falvia Ramos-Mattoussi, Consultant, Learning Systems Institute, Florida State University

Rahel Yirgashewa, Education Advisor, DFID/Ukaid, Ethiopia

ANNEX B: Selection Criteria for Case Study Countries

Criteria for the three countries to be selected for this research were as follows: (1) likely availability of rich data resources; (2) differing languages of assessment; (3) contrasting country conditions and institutional context; and (4) feasibility of visiting all three countries in a two-week period.

Two countries clearly presented themselves: Ethiopia and Kenya. The reasons they were selected are as follows:

- Both had abundant data, excellent key informants, and current USAID-supported projects in place (with strong USAID missions);
- Ethiopia's EGRA covered six (regional) mother tongues and was almost national in scope;
- Kenya's EGRA/EGMA/SSME covered just two languages (Kiswahili and English), providing an opportunity to compare results of national language assessment with that of an international one;
- Ethiopia's results were quickly taken up and used by regional education officials in planning new interventions;
- Kenya's results were used in the context of a national educational improvement program already under way (the Primary Math and Reading [PRIMR] Initiative);
- Although Ethiopia is in the horn of Africa, and Kenya is equatorial, they are contiguous, making travel convenient.

Concerning the third country, two candidates emerged: Zambia and Yemen. Zambia was slow in getting started with follow-up activities, but now has an abundance of early reading programs and support from different partners. Unlike the other two (Ethiopia and Kenya), the interventions were not already brewing at the time of the *Learning Outcomes* assessment but gradually grew out of the assessment, perhaps the result of a "conceptual change".[1] Zambia's assessment was in just one of its many regional languages, which left questions about representativeness that needed to be resolved. In addition, Zambia represented a third region in Africa (south), but travel would not be inconvenient—i.e., flight time between Nairobi and Lusaka is three hours (direct).

Yemen also has moved into high gear with the widespread implementation of a reading intervention package that resembles that of Egypt. The only language in which the EGRA was administered was Standard Arabic. There was a large USAID project there and many key informants, including those from other agencies. Being a Middle Eastern Arabic-speaking country, it presented many contrasts to the African countries. A drawback, however, was the prevailing political and social unrest and the fact that many regions were

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[1] RTI International (2013); see Bibliography for full reference information.

off-limits to USAID missions. There also was no direct air travel between Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and Nairobi, Kenya, to Sanaa. The shortest travel time from among those starting points and Sanaa was around 10 hours.

Given these considerations, Zambia was selected as the third country.

ANNEX C: Early Grade Review Project: Case Studies

The scope of work for this research encompassed an initial desk study followed by in-depth, in-country investigations of the experience in three cases chosen as most likely to be informative. This annex summarizes the results of the fieldwork, by country. Some of this material also was incorporated into the main text but is repeated here for completeness.

1. Kenya

EGRA/EGMA/SSME Events and Outcomes in Kenya

The assessment of early reading and math skills in Kenya was a joint undertaking involving the country's education ministry, its Semi-Autonomous Government Agencies (SAGAs) in the field of education (e.g., Kenya National Examinations Council, Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, Kenya Institute of Education, and Teachers' Service Commission), and the US Agency for International Development (USAID). The logistics of the assessment were managed through the USAID-supported Primary Math and Reading (PRIMR) Initiative, with two sources of funding. The EdData II PRIMR task order (RTI Task 13) supported the local adaption, application, and analysis of the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) and Early Grade Math Assessment (EGMA) instruments; EdData II's *Learning Outcomes Research and Assessment-Related Projects* task order funded adaptation, use, and initial analysis of the Snapshot of School Management Effectiveness (SSME).[1] EGRA/EGMA and SSME outcomes were ultimately analyzed together, given that the latter was designed to reveal determinants of student performance on the early grade reading and math tests, and the results were published jointly in a PRIMR report.[2] The overall PRIMR design was experimental, with the assessments conducted in three phases: (1) baseline; (2) midterm, after project-generated interventions were applied; and (3) endline. Each phase involved both treatment and control schools in Nairobi, Thika, and Nakuru counties.[3] The assessment

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[1] SSME is an instrument used globally to collect student, teacher, and school background information.

[2] Piper, B., & Mugenda, A. (2012). *The Primary Math and Reading (PRIMR) Initiative: Baseline report*. Prepared for USAID under the Education Data for Decision Making (EdData II) project, Task No. AID-623-M-11-00001 (RTI Task 13). Research Triangle Park, North Carolina, USA: RTI International. Retrieved from https://www.eddataglobal.org/countries/index.cfm?fuseaction=pubDetail&ID=480

[3] The SSME was administered at all three stages (baseline, midterm, and endline) and was continually used to explain student performance differences. However, it was funded under the *Learning Outcomes* task order only during the baseline. Since *Learning Outcomes* support for the SSME was intermixed with the PRIMR

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was conducted at grade levels 1 and 2 and covered elementary math and reading in both English and Kiswahili.

EGRA results from sample schools showed the students reading far below benchmark levels. In English, students from Nairobi read just over 20 words per minute (compared to the benchmark of 100); in the other locations, students read between 5 and 8 words. In Kiswahili, the results were 10%–33% lower. The proportion of second graders unable to read a single word from a grade 1 text was around 20% in Nairobi (somewhat lower in English) and between 43% and 53% for the two languages in the other locations.

In math, sampled students were slow to solve basic EGMA problems, averaging 9 seconds per problem for addition and 15 seconds for subtraction. On word problems, an average of 32% of second graders could not answer a single question.

The SSME assessment showed that during language lessons, teachers spent more time teaching informational content than reading skills. Conversely, pupils spent more time listening or copying than engaged in reading (12% of the time). Learning materials in the instruction observed primarily were the blackboard and pupil notebooks. Textbooks were used only 21% of the time, about 66% less than the blackboard. The strongest predictors of English-language fluency were student background variables, such as the grade level, availability of electricity and reading materials at home, and availability of a school computer. Significant school-level variables were a two-pupils-per-book (2:1) availability of textbooks, availability of electricity in the school, and existence of a school library. Significant classroom indicators included teachers periodically administering written tests of student performance.

Results Dissemination in Kenya

High-level policy dialogue meetings were held during mid-June 2012, sponsored by the education ministry and USAID, involving ministry officials (e.g., Directors) and SAGAs. These events engaged key players in formulating recommendations and follow-up ideas.

More widespread dissemination followed the release of the report on the midterm assessment that took place at the end of the first year of classroom interventions in treatment schools in late 2012 (see below under Program Development).[4] In this case, not only was there a national policy dialogue about the results, but also the Kenya National Examinations Council organized more localized dialogues at the regional level, bringing officials from four to six counties each to discuss the substantial improvements revealed

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EGRA/EGMA administrations at the baseline and reflected subsequently through SSME inclusion in new rounds of PRIMR assessments and *in classroom interventions based on EGRA/EGMA and SSME results*, all PRIMR activities beyond the baseline assessment stage are considered to have been at least partly influenced by *Learning Outcomes* support at the baseline.

[4] Piper, B., & Mugenda, A. (2013). *The Primary Math and Reading (PRIMR) Initiative: Midterm impact evaluation.* Prepared under the USAID EdData II project, Task Order No. AID-623-M-11-00001, RTI Task 13. Research Triangle Park, North Carolina, USA: RTI International. Retrieved from https://www.eddataglobal.org/countries/index.cfm?fuseaction=pubDetail&ID=486

by the midline assessment. Many of these dialogues turned out to be even more interactive and engaging than the one at the national level.

Around the same time, some intergovernmental written communications—such as a formal letter about improving early literacy—were circulated by one of the permanent secretaries. Statements and plans about improved early grade learning—which appeared in the Education Act of 2011, the Sessional Paper No. 14 of 2012, and the April 2014 National Education Sector Plan (NESP, 2013–2018)—were more widespread and influential.

USAID's contractor for PRIMR, RTI International, opted to disseminate its results primarily through government and agency circles rather than through public communications media, especially during PRIMR's first two years. (By late 2013 the program had a substantial presence in Kenya, and its products and events were being increasingly covered by the media.) However, the lack of an explicit PRIMR public outreach campaign did not mean a shortage of information to the public about student weaknesses in reading and math. At about the same time that PRIMR was being planned (2009) in Kenya, a private regional organization, Uwezo, was being launched in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. Patterned after the Pratham education nongovernmental organization (NGO) in India, this citizen-led assessment group initiated a program that conducted annual household surveys of reading and math skills and that also discovered low national performance levels.

Unlike PRIMR, with which Uwezo has a cooperative relationship, Uwezo regarded public communications to be its primary mission, and used radio in particular to spread word about the importance of children attaining fluency reading and math—along with the poor results on the recent PRIMR assessments—to the nation's households and communities. While at first Uwezo's message about poor student performance was rejected by education ministry officials, it was eventually embraced by them as a legitimate arena for government concern and new programming. Among parents and the public in general, the message generated a sense of outrage over the current situation and urgency about the need for reform.[5] The education ministry, Uwezo, and PRIMR all acknowledged the emergence of a striking complementarity: PRIMR led the professional community in the scientific assessment of early grade reading and math and the creation and piloting of effective interventions for improving outcomes; Uwezo, through its public communications, helped to create popular demand for such interventions and a readiness for change.

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[5]As mentioned, the formation of Uwezo predated the 2012 EGRA/EGMA/SSME baseline by three years and thus its founding was not influenced by that event. However, its work paralleled that of PRIMR in many ways, and the two programs had collegial relations. Without its influence on public opinion, it is doubtful that early grade reading would have been given such a high priority by the Government of Kenya.

Results Utilization in Kenya

Policy Development

The most recent government aspirations concerning early grade reading and math appear in Kenya's 2014 NESP (2013–2018). The NESP lists education quality as the third among its six main priorities, and within education quality it puts forward an Early Reading and Mathematics Quality Improvement Programme among its seven subpriorities. The policy framework upon which this subpriority was built was the education ministry's Sessional Paper No. 14 of 2012, which emphasized improving the basic literacy and numeracy of children and called for reforms that would "improve the quality of education and training so that Kenya's measurable learning outcomes in literacy, numeracy, scientific and communication skills are in the upper quartile on international standardized tests" (NESP, p. 70).

Among recent programs cited by the NESP as influencing its goals for early reading and math skills improvement was the "government-commissioned" PRIMR Initiative, which had undertaken "research on how to improve reading and mathematics outcomes" (NESP, p. 69). Ultimately, the goal formulated by the NESP for this subpriority was "to ensure that all pupils read and do basic mathematics by the end of Grade 2" (NESP, p. 70).

The NESP serves more as a statement of intentions than as a pronouncement of policies. It does, however, touch upon a number of policy areas that will need attention in support of its plans, including: (1) establishing systems for data collection on early grade reading and early grade math; (2) instituting programs to educate teachers about the systems; (3) making appropriate adjustments to the early grade curriculum; (4) making provisions for the procurement of early grade reading and early grade math instructional materials; and (5) enforcing (and clarifying) language of instruction policies for grades 1 and 2.

Because of its experience with PRIMR (EGRA/EGMA/SSME and related interventions), USAID was invited by the education ministry to support it in the design and implementation of an appropriate nationwide early grade reading program (see the next paragraph). USAID's bidding document (a request for proposals) for that effort, the contract for which was to be awarded in mid-2014, included a requirement that the contractor focus on "improvement of the policy environment that promotes reading skills" by undertaking a policy analysis early in the project and designing an intervention package to address identified policy gaps. The tentative list of policies that would need to be addressed included those mentioned in the NESP. However, the list also delineated policies concerning the time in school that local tutors need in order to support improved reading, ways of working within the government's devolution framework (which grants counties new powers in education programming), and the role of universities/research institutes and teacher training colleges in promoting improved early reading skills.

In sum, many informants noted the long time needed to change policies, especially in areas with well-entrenched interest groups that benefit from the status quo. On most

policy issues related to early grade reading and early grade math, USAID-supported reform programs have not been operating long enough to have had a substantial impact on policies (i.e., PRIMR began in 2011 and the *Learning Outcomes*-assisted assessments took place in 2012). However, an important point to note is that PRIMR and related undertakings have prepared the "policy environment" for substantial policy change in the near future, as the country prepares for national-level scale-ups of both early grade reading and math programs (see next section).

Program Development

Unique to Kenya, the PRIMR EGRA and EGMA (plus SSME) in three urban or peri-urban areas were conducted according to a robust experimental design for which the first PRIMR assessment (early 2012) served as a baseline. The pupils in the PRIMR treatment and control cohorts were then evaluated over the next two academic years at midterm (October 2012) and endline (October 2013).[6] At each assessment stage, the SSME survey was used to identify the most salient predictors of the status quo or (at the midterm and endline) of reading and math skills improvement in the approximately 500 PRIMR intervention schools (in comparison to that in randomly selected control schools).[7] The PRIMR technical team and advisors introduced continuous improvements in the reading and math interventions on the basis of these analyses as well as feedback from teachers, tutors and coaches, managers, and researchers.[8]

In response to the improvements already evident at the midterm, the British Department for International Development (DFID/Kenya) provided additional funding to PRIMR to broaden the field of its interventions to two primarily rural counties, where regional languages are used in schools. This expansion allowed PRIMR to experiment with early grade reading and math in two additional catchment-area languages.[9] DFID also supported a side study to determine the effect on student reading skills under different mixes of PRIMR interventions (teacher training, teachers' guides, and teacher coaching), to identify the most cost-effective package. Finally, both USAID and DFID supported a PRIMR experiment to examine the impact of information and communication technology (ICT) use within the intervention program, which was conducted in yet another county,

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[6] The original experimental design settled upon by the partners involved assessing reading in Kiswahili and English, the main languages of instruction in urban or peri-urban areas; this in turn led to a decision to sample schools in the urban and peri-urban of three counties: Nairobi, Thika, and Nakuru.

[7] Piper, B., & Mugenda, A. (2014). *USAID/Kenya Primary Math and Reading (PRIMR) Initiative: Endline impact evaluation.* Prepared under the USAID EdData II project, Task Order No. AID-623-M-11-00001, RTI Task 13. Research Triangle Park, North Carolina, USA: RTI International. Retrieved from https://www.eddataglobal.org/countries/index.cfm?fuseaction=pubDetail&ID=661

[8] Soon after the baseline EGRA/EGMA/SSME administration was completed and the analysis released, the PRIMR intervention was modified to include more teacher coaching and less collective (group) training sessions.

[9] DFID's engagement in the early grade reading improvement program in Kenya is consistent with its global agenda, in which improvement of early grade reading skills is one of its top three priorities.

Kisumu. The ICT study took place between January and October 2013,[10] and the endline assessment of the two counties using mother tongues has yet to be conducted (scheduled for late 2014).

As compelling results emerged for the impact assessments (the midterm showed twice as many students reaching the benchmark for reading fluency; the endline demonstrated three times as many) the education ministry made a decisive move toward filling its NESP commitment to improve reading outcomes by inviting USAID to support it in a national-level scale up of PRIMR. This scale-up program, *Tusome* (Let's Read), was to begin in the second half of 2014. DFID will contribute co-financing for this initiative as a "silent partner."

For math skills, the education ministry is nearing the completion of a proposal requesting assistance with a similar national scale-up (also using PRIMR approaches), with funding expected from the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), which has set aside grant funds for this purpose. The education ministry plans for this scale-up to launch at the beginning of the 2016 academic year. The ministry's grant proposal also is expected to ask the GPE to support the Kenya National Examinations Council's conduct of regular (every two years) early grade reading and math assessments (although there is no formal policy on this yet).

Factors Influencing Dissemination and Utilization in Kenya

Document analysis and conversations with key informants led to the compilation of the following list of factors that influenced dissemination and practical use of the combined *Learning Outcomes* and PRIMR Initiative education data in Kenya.

- **USAID institutional presence and credibility.** USAID was a key supporter of primary education in the decade leading up to the early grade reading and math program, helping with expanded education infrastructure and providing bursaries to enhance female participation (i.e., "wings to fly"). USAID also funded in 2007 a small-scale EGRA and intervention that showed promise; and made the EGRA available for additional assessment work in 2009, funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. Both of these activities contributed to USAID's credibility as a source for innovative instruments and solutions.

- **Government/USAID confluence of interests.** Falling national and regional achievement scores at the primary level following the Kenyan government's

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[10] Briefly, this study examined the effects on student reading outcomes of the use of ICT tablets during the instructional process by three different groups: students, teachers, and Teachers' Advisory Centre (TAC) tutors. The results showed that the use of tablets by the tutors had the greatest impact on student learning. Source: Field study discussion with PRIMR researchers, April 2014. Although not available at the time of this research, the Kisumu ICT endline analysis report has since been completed and posted: Piper, B., & Kwayumba, D. (2014). *The Primary Math and Reading Initiative (PRIMR)—Kisumu information and communication technology (ICT) intervention: Endline report.* Prepared for USAID under the EdData II Project, Task Order No. AID-623-M-11-00001. Research Triangle Park, North Carolina, USA: RTI International. Retrieved from https://www.eddataglobal.org/countries/index.cfm?fuseaction=pubDetail&ID=664

enactment in 2003 of a policy of free primary public education for all turned the education ministry's attention to improving education quality by the end of the decade, with growing attention placed on the unacceptably low reading and math scores (reinforced by early rounds of Uwezo household surveys). At about the same time in 2011, USAID issued its new Global Education Strategy that prioritized support for early grade reading as the critical factor in student learning outcomes at the basic education level. Within that same year, USAID and the Government of Kenya agreed to move forward together on an elaborate experiment (PRIMR) involving early grade learning assessments and program development.

- **Building partnerships and ownership.** USAID's approach to this venture (PRIMR) was to work cooperatively with Kenyan professionals (e.g., researchers, assessment specialists, language and reading specialists, and curriculum developers) with the intention of strengthening local capacity and creating ownership. In the early months of PRIMR, the education ministry created a high-level secretariat, the Programme Development and Implementation Team (PDIT), chaired by the education ministry's Senior Deputy Secretary for Education, to manage the national reading program. This team brings together education ministry officials, key academics, and actors from the SAGAs for advice and decision making on the program, which has contributed to a strong sense of national ownership.

- **Change in Constitution, government, and ministry approaches.** The launch of a new Kenyan Constitution in 2010 required some restructuring in the delivery of education (i.e., more decentralization). A change in government in early 2013 set the stage for a new era of educational reform—for example, the Minister of Education,[11] formerly a political appointee rarely well-versed in education, was to be an educational professional chosen for his/her qualifications. In addition, an increased reliance on data and empirical evidence came into play in policy making and program planning. This shift created receptive soil in which to plant early grade reforms and innovations based on solid cognitive science and adapted to the Kenyan conditions through a rigorous experiment (randomized controlled trial). By late 2013, a number of approaches to reading improvement were being piloted in Kenya. However, a main reason the PRIMR approaches prevailed in the design of the forthcoming national scale-up under *Tusome* was the strong effect sizes that were apparent at its midterm and endline assessments.

- **Champions in the education ministry.** Even before the change in government, the education ministry was led by a powerful Permanent Secretary who was a strong advocate of and driving force in bringing early grade reading in to the

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[11] The change in government in Kenya also resulted in a number of modified position titles at the cabinet and ministry levels as of July 2013. Among these, *Minister of Education* became MOEST Cabinet Secretary; *Permanent Secretary of Education* became Principal Secretary of Education.

forefront. His mantle has been taken up by a new set of leaders, with consistent leadership particularly from the PDIT. The experienced and dedicated PDIT chair has been able to build coherent support in the education ministry for prioritizing early grade reading.

- **Decision making based on evidence from scientifically grounded (controlled experiment) interventions, with an international perspective.** According to one of PRIMR's senior assessment specialists, a Kenyan, a sea change has occurred in the country concerning the use of data in decision making. Since the adoption of the 2010 Constitution, government agencies especially have come to "appreciate the use of data" in decision making. This sentiment is characteristic of the current Cabinet Secretary of Education and the Principal Secretary, who are technical staff who travel to the field—including participating in PRIMR major events—and understand and champion explanations based on data. The education ministry selected PRIMR as its approach to a national scale-up of reading instruction because of the strength of the evidence derived from its randomized controlled trial. Although there were other competing reading approaches, the data were not as strong as PRIMR's. The strength of PRIMR's evidence made it easier for the government to defend its decision to use its lessons learned for the national scale-up.

- **Appropriate communication of outcomes.** The full report of the baseline EGRA/EGMA/SSME was a standard EdData II research summary covering objective, rationale, methods, findings, and recommendations. The baseline report reached a receptive audience given the prevailing "appreciation of data." Subsequent to that, the education ministry organized the aforementioned regional briefings, covering all 47 counties in four clusters, and was able to discuss EGRA findings and recommendations with county education officials, head teachers, and teachers. At the county level, the education ministry found officials who were ready to take the initiative on new reading strategies given that basic school management was devolving to them. Subsequently, a new round of regional discussions was organized around the results of the midterm assessment. In both cases, the information led to meaningful conversations.

- **Quick and significant initial intervention results.** Despite the fact that the PRIMR methods were used in the classroom for only a few months in 2012 (interrupted, among other things, by a teachers' strike), results on the midterm assessment near the end of that school year showed dramatic improvements. At the end of the second school year (i.e., at endline, in October 2013), the results were even stronger. These quick and significant results gave the parents, teachers, country officials, national officials, NGOs, SAGAs, PRIMR staff, and the USAID office confidence in the intervention and a rationale for scaling it up. It also demonstrated that basic learning skills can be acquired quickly if taught effectively and with the right kind of material and tutoring support (coaching).

- **Good inter-institutional connections/cooperative arrangements/ complementarities.** Partly because of government efforts (i.e., the coordinating work of the PDIT), and partly because of the credibility and conviviality of the PRIMR Initiative, strong bonds have grown among agency partners. For example, the connection between USAID and DFID in co-financing PRIMR activities significantly broadened PRIMR's scope. In addition, important links and complementarities arose between PRIMR and NGOs, such as Uwezo and the Aga Khan Foundation. Scenarios are emerging in which Uwezo will complement PRIMR (and eventually *Tusome*) with its own interventions, based on the approach Pratham uses in India, to address the backlog of nonreaders in the upper primary grades, while Aga Khan will implement a model for raising the literacy and numeracy levels of pupils in the upper grades, who also would benefit from remedial instruction.

2. Zambia

EGRA/EGMA/SSME Events and Outcomes in Zambia

The EdData II task order for Zambia included the administration of the EGRA, EGMA, and SSME in four Bemba-speaking provinces—Central, Copperbelt, Luapula, and Northern—in July 2011.[12] The assessments involved 800 grade 2 and 3 students in 40 randomly selected schools.[13]

The oral reading assessment revealed language skills that were disturbingly low. The results showed that 91% of tested second graders and 78% of tested third graders were unable to read a single word in the narrative passage. For those third graders able to read more than one word, the average number of correct words per minute (WPM) was 21. On reading comprehension, 92% of second graders and 85% of third graders could not answer a single question correctly. Pre-reading skills were also found to be deficient, with more than 50% of second graders and 42% of third graders unable to name a single letter sound.

In math skills, tested students were slow on most of the EGMA subtasks. For example, grade 2 students answered only 2.6 of the missing-number items, 3.8 of the addition items, and 2.9 of the subtraction items correctly in one minute. The average numbers of correct responses on these subtasks for grade 3 were somewhat higher: 4.8, 6.7, and 4.9. These findings suggest that these students were nowhere near automaticity on these basic mathematics tasks, even in grade 3.

The analysis of SSME data considered possible school-, household-, and community-based contributors to early grade reading and math skills formation. The data collected via SSME interviews, checklists, and classroom observations revealed that:

- Availability of teaching and learning materials was low: Only 8% of visited schools had the appropriate number of books for their students, and slightly more than half of teachers had reference guides;
- Time set aside for reading at school and home was minimal;
- Teacher feedback (comments on exercise books) was variable: In only 14% of cases were there comments on every page, and in 12% of cases there were no comments at all;

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[12] EGRA was administered orally in the Bemba language. Bemba is one of the most widely used among the seven official languages of instruction in Zambia. The EGMA was also administered orally but in whatever language the children best understood.

[13] For more details about the assessment, see Collins, P., De Galbert, P., Hartwell, A., Kochetkova, E., Mulcahy-Dunn, A., Nimbalkar, A., & Ralaingita, W. (2012). *Pupil performance, pedagogic practice, and school management: An SSME pilot in Zambia.* Prepared for USAID under the EdData II project, Task Order No. EHC-E-07-04-00004-00 (RTI Task 7). Research Triangle Park, North Carolina, USA: RTI. Retrieved from https://www.eddataglobal.org/countries/index.cfm?fuseaction=pubDetail&ID=426

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- There was little evidence of the teaching of foundation skills (letter sounds, or one-digit addition) in either reading or math;
- Overall time on task was low (in part due to schools trying to accommodate large student populations via double and triple shifts), leaving little time for productive engagement with the subject matter; and
- Students whose parents were engaged in their learning (e.g., by encouraging reading at home) did better than those whose parents were not.

Results Dissemination in Zambia

Four months after the collection of data, during November 21–22, 2011, a policy dialogue session was convened to review study findings, examine implications arising from it, and make recommendations for inclusion in the assessment's final report. Participants included the Permanent Secretary of the education ministry (who gave the opening address); the Director of the Examinations Council of Zambia; and the USAID/Zambia Education Team Leader. Among the 40 other participants were senior education ministry staff from the Curriculum Development Center, Examinations Council, and Education Broadcasting; USAID; and the Family Health Trust (the nongovernmental organization [NGO] that carried out the field survey). Because the workshop planners were aware the participants might find the study outcomes shocking and sensitive, they arranged for small breakout groups to formulate the implications and recommendations using a role-play approach.

According to a key informant at USAID/Zambia, workshop participants were indeed shocked by the low results, but addressed them constructively, generating reasonable ideas on how to move ahead. Later, however, when the draft assessment report was shared and the hard facts were seen in print, the same group of stakeholders became reluctant to disseminate the findings. In fact, the findings were so bad that the leaders worried about their credibility among educators and the general public, and suggested that the results "can't be right." USAID accommodated these stakeholders by holding off on widespread and public dissemination of the findings; instead, USAID discretely shared the information with a limited number of government and agency stakeholders.

Fortunately, new political developments helped to open communication channels. In 2011, the Patriotic Front, an opposition political party, succeeded in acquiring enough electoral seats to form a new government in September 2011. The party campaigned on a platform of improving educational access and quality; within its first year in power, the party created, together with its development agency partners, a new national literacy framework and program for the improvement of early grade reading (and incorporating a commitment in its manifesto to the use of local languages). By mid-2013, the Patriotic Front had shown its willingness to come to terms with the country's desperately low early grade reading results. In a newspaper article, titled "Government disappointed with low reading levels in early learners," the *Lusaka Times* reported the Minister of Education's

disclosure of baseline data (i.e., EGRA/EGME/SSME results), revealing that second and third graders could not read. The article also reported that the Minister of Education appealed to the corporate sector for help in supplying adequate quantities of books to make a breakthrough to literacy. Not long after that (January 2014), the government launched the national reading campaign, "Let's Read, Zambia," with the help of USAID's public awareness project, Strengthening Educational Performance – Up (STEP-Up) Zambia (see below).

In contrast to the government's strategy in aftermath of the EGRA/EGMA/SSME in 2011, the Patriotic Front-led government's effort was all about public awareness. The Let's Read, Zambia campaign was reported on by both the *Times of Zambia* and the *Lusaka Times*. In the former publication, the Minister of Education announced a goal of creating 1 million new readers by 2016. He also asked parents to take an interest in children's reading, and he urged business owners, journalists, and concerned citizens to join the campaign. The US Embassy Chargé d'Affaires also spoke at the launch and was quoted as saying, "poor reading skills are a result of a series of broad-based issues, including the language of instruction, time on task, curriculum effectiveness, teacher preparedness, and weak oversight and accountability" (a clear reference to SSME findings). The *Lusaka Times* article reported the Minister's invitation to the private sector and general public to partner with the government in supporting the "development of a reading culture." The Minister specifically invited the business community to help stock school libraries with books and other educational materials. The *Lusaka Times* article was made available online and resulted in 19 reader comments, most of which were very supportive. One respondent asked where donated books should be sent, which the District Resource Center Coordinator specifically addressed. These articles also generated some resistance, with some calling the teaching of reading in mother tongues "total madness!"

A change in government helped open the floodgates for EGRA/EGMA/SSME results dissemination, but once citizens and action groups joined the conversation, the government and USAID developed another dissemination strategy to help steer the broader discourse. This new strategy involved STEP-Up Zambia (2011–2016, US$25 million), which was designed to help the country to "promote well-informed policies and decision making, as well as bolster community support." STEP-Up Zambia also aims to help improve the education sector's management information system with the use of innovative mobile technology to increase data collection efficiency and accuracy, giving the "ministry, provinces and districts the information they need to make good policy decisions and monitor progress."[14]

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[14] Quotations are from "Zambia: USAID launches ZMK122 trillion educational project," in *SHOUT AFRICA: Proud African News and Entertainment Hub,* February 22, 2012.

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Results Utilization in Zambia

Policy Development

For decades, the national literacy curriculum in Zambia has been a crucial arena for reform. In 1996, Zambia, a former British colony, finally adopted a policy of introducing reading skills to children in "familiar" languages. This policy was vigorously pursued between 1999 and 2005, with substantial help from the UK Department of International Development (DFID).[15] Found to be effective in grade 1, the program nonetheless eventually withered since it included only one year of local-language learning and used a wealth of materials that could not be sustained once British aid ended in 2005.

The policies on curricular design and language of instruction in the early grades got a new look as a result of the recommendations arising from 2011 EGRA/EGMA/SSME. The change in government that same year put these policies seriously on the table of a new National Literacy Steering Committee. The language curriculum adopted by the education ministry, the Primary Literacy Programme, accommodates reading skills development in six national languages over the first four year of primary education.[16] This revised curriculum, and a policy to introduce instruction in oral English (i.e., not reading and writing) in grade 2, comprised the language-of-instruction policy. An assessment policy also was formulated, with the government opting to conduct assessments in reading (and math) at the end of grades 1 and 4 (the latter using a modified EGRA for older pupils) and a decision to create a permanent structure for periodic early grade reading assessments at the Examinations Bureau of Zambia. Policies related to other features of the early grade reading program have not been clarified or were not discovered by this reviewer.

Program Development

Accompanying Zambia's National Literacy Framework policy has been the design of new syllabi and teachers' guides. This has been undertaken by the education ministry's Curriculum Development Center, local university professionals, and the USAID-funded, Zambia Read to Succeed (RTS) project. Together, these entities have designed and piloted materials in four languages in six provinces (18 districts). A USAID sister project, Time to Learn (TTL), was organized to pilot similar curricula and materials in community schools in three languages in six provinces (two overlapping with RTS).

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[15] DFID's Primary Reading Programme made use of the Breakthrough to Literacy Programme curriculum and materials promulgated by the South African organization Molteno Institute for Language and Literacy.

[16] The new government also pursued a program of curricular change in numeracy, but this was not based on the EGMA and thus took a different channel of program development and relied on a different set of development agencies (e.g., Japan International Cooperation Agency instead of USAID). USAID had originally supported both literacy and numeracy in Zambia (in fact, the project that became known as USAID Zambia Read to Succeed had originally covered them both), but with the shift in USAID's global Education Strategy, USAID/Zambia opted to concentrate on reading.

RTS completed the piloting of the grade 1 syllabus and learning materials. Through its own tracking system, RTS demonstrated enough student progress in reading skills that the education ministry adopted the syllabus and materials for national dissemination. As of 2014, the Primary Literacy Programme is now being implemented in all regular and community schools at the grade 1 level, and RTS and TTL are piloting and testing the grade 2 syllabus and materials. This approach will continue year by year through grade 4.

In addition to grade 1 textbooks, supplementary materials are to be provided for children. In grade 1, in which students will reach the level of reading only paragraphs by the end of the year, teachers are encouraged to write simple supplementary materials. Beyond that, the national literacy campaign has connected with the private sector and NGOs, which were already working to make reading materials available for new readers. For example, the international NGO *Room to Read* has established 467 libraries in schools in Eastern, Lusaka, and Southern Province, potentially reaching 290,000 primary school students with books in local languages (Chongwe, Nyimba, Petauke, Katete, Chadiza, Chipata, Kafue, and Mazabuka), and has trained teachers and librarians in their use. *Room to Read* also has supported workshops to help local writers and illustrators produce new children's books and bring their stories to publication.

Factors Influencing Dissemination and Utilization in Zambia

The research carried out for this review resulted in the following list of influences on dissemination and significant utilization of the EGRA/EGMA/SSME results in Zambia.

- **A long history of policy development in reading skills development, including a six-year period in which initial reading was successfully taught in local languages.** A 1976 policy mandating that local languages be used in teaching reading was enacted through the DFID-supported Primary Reading Programme of 1998–2005. Implementation of this program resulted in big improvements in first grade reading patterns and was used as a precedent for the government's current Primary Literacy Programme. One of the lessons learned from the DFID Primary Reading Programme was not to rely on numerous and expensive materials, which became unsustainable. Heeding this lesson, the current RTS initiative uses only three textbooks (one per term) and one teachers' guide in grade 1.

- **Involvement of key assessment and curriculum development personnel with experience in the earlier multilingual program in EGRA/EGMA/SSME adaptation and application.** Professionals and technicians who worked on the former DFID-supported program—including the language program head in the Curriculum Development Centre and the deputy manager of the RTS project— are also involved in the current government effort.

- **Shift in government power to the opposition party, which had run on a platform to improve educational quality and teach literacy in local languages.** The new government that came to power in 2011 was very receptive to the messages delivered by USAID about poor results from the

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EGRA/EGMA/SSME and earlier national and regional assessments carried out by the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ), and about ways to address the poor performance with new approaches to reading instruction.

- **Strong champion of a new approach to reading program in the education ministry.** The new government made a point to select skilled professionals to head its ministries, including in education. The Minister of Education who was appointed came from the academic community and was a specialist in language education. When the new Primary Literacy Programme was launched via the Let's Read, Zambia publicity campaign, the Minister of Education spoke eloquently about the need to create a reading culture and was confident enough to set the goal of creating 1 million new readers.

- **Continuity of capable leadership in the USAID/Zambia Mission.** The current education program head at USAID/Zambia was an advocate of assessing early grade reading and math in Zambia in the first place. He was also at the Mission during the administration of EGRA/EGMA and SSME in 2011 and opened the related policy dialogue. Under his guidance, four USAID education projects[17] were launched in 2011 or 2012 (totaling almost US$100 million), and all turned their emphasis to early grade reading.[18] To further underscore his support to improve early grade reading, he attended the Let's Read, Zambia campaign launch in early 2014. It was under his support and continuous leadership that this national reading program scale-up came to life.

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[17] Strengthening Education Performance – Up (STEP-Up, 2011–2016); Schools Promoting Learning Achievement through Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (SPLASH, 2011–2016); Read to Succeed (RTS, 2012–2017); and Time to Learn (TTL, 2012–2017).

[18] USAID/Zambia made a point to comply with USAID's 2011 global Education Strategy of prioritizing early grade reading, which in some cases meant backing away from program design features created before that.

3. Ethiopia

Early Grade Reading Events and Outcomes in Ethiopia

Ethiopia was one of five *Learning Outcomes* countries where only an EGRA was conducted. By implementing the EGRA, USAID was able to establish a reading performance baseline in the country. The original design was to assess early grade reading skills in two languages and in 80 schools, but the government urged USAID to expand the assessment to cover six languages in eight of the country's 11 regions, involving a sample of 338 schools and more than 13,000 students. Conducted at the second- and third-grade levels in collaboration with the country's education ministry, the Education and Training Quality Assurance Agency, and the existing USAID Improving the Quality of Primary Education Program (IQPEP) in May and June 2010, the initiative become the world's largest EGRA (from among 50 conducted by then). Given that the eight sample regions made up more than 85% of the country's population, it was virtually a national sample.[19]

The results of the assessment revealed low levels of reading proficiency among Ethiopian second and third graders. At grade 2, a significant percentage of children read zero words correctly (from 10% in Addis Ababa to 69% in Sidama District). Third graders tested better, but in most districts, zero scores among students were between 20% and 50%. Reading fluency was also a problem: In each of the eight regions, at least 80% of third graders—and in the case of Sidama, 100%—were not reading at the expected oral reading fluency rate. Finally, reading comprehension was also very low, with more than 50% of respondents in most regions unable to answer a single question, in contrast to listening comprehension, which was higher.

This survey did not involve the application of the SSMEinstrument, but it did involve administration of family background, head teacher, and teacher questionnaires to determine factors associated with student outcomes. Personal (student) variables associated with good performance included learning in the same language spoken at home, being in a family that helped with homework, attending kindergarten, and not repeating a grade. Significant school-level determinants of better reading skills included having a textbook provided by the school and attending an urban school (a reflection of rural-urban disparity).

Results Dissemination in Ethiopia

Dissemination of the EGRA results started with a senior-level policy dialogue at the education ministry within months of the assessment (September 2010). The results

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[19] For more details about the assessment and it results see Piper, B. (2010). *Ethiopia Early Grade Reading Assessment data analysis report: Language and early learning.* Prepared for USAID/Ethiopia under the EdData II project, Task Order No. EHC-E-07-04-00004-00, RTI Task 7. Research Triangle Park, North Carolina, USA: RTI International. Retrieved from https://www.eddataglobal.org/countries/index.cfm?fuseaction=pubDetail&ID=289

showed disastrous levels of reading performance across the country, especially in rural areas, and immediately led to questions concerning how to address the poor outcomes. Much of the movement on solutions took place at the regional level, given the country's federalized structure; but at the national level, there were also serious questions about how reading was being taught in the country. Almost immediately, national stakeholders made a decision to significantly reform the national language learning curriculum, and this meant canceling a massive procurement of primary school language textbooks (under a World Bank-led project), since they were suddenly viewed as not sufficiently focused on reading.

Steps were also taken to disseminate the results more broadly, not through the media or via document dissemination, but by policy dialogues at successive levels of government. To aid with this plan, researchers produced regional results summaries, presenting *woreda* (district)-level breakdowns that allowed local leaders to understand intra-regional patterns of student performance.

In many districts, this dissemination was taken one step further—down to the school level—to bring head teachers and teachers into the dialogue, raising their awareness about both the alarmingly weak assessment results and what the assessment showed were their likely causes. In some cases, managers and teachers received this new information defensively (i.e., one district conducted its own reading assessment in part to cover more schools but also in part to gauge the validity of the EGRA results). However, in most cases the response was "We've got to do something about this."

Results Utilization in Ethiopia

Policy Development

In Ethiopia, policy adjustment at the national level was one early approach to "doing something" in response to the *Learning Outcomes* assessment results. It is not clear how greatly the EGRA results influenced the raft of new and relevant policy changes that emerged, but these results at least had some connection to all of the policy changes. In the policy area concerning the language—or technically, "mother tongue"—curriculum, the EGRA policy dialogue seems to have been the driving force. For example, the immediate decision to cancel the textbook procurement under the World Bank project was accompanied by a decision to change the entire curriculum for language arts at the primary school level, better aligning the curriculum and any accompanying textbooks with the early acquisition of reading skills in local languages (starting with general syllabus revision, followed by adaptation to regions and their seven main languages, which could eventually increase to 20).[20]

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[20] Language of instruction is also being clarified. With the revision of the curriculum, it is clear that initially reading instruction will be in regional languages (mother tongues) starting with the seven most-widely used ones. However, there are over 40 languages in use in the country and at least 20 are expected to also become languages of instruction, at least for the first 3–4 years. Also, from grade 3, Amharic, the national language, will be taught as a

In addition, the education ministry is working to change teacher training policy. For pre-service, the education ministry has moved to upgrade primary teacher preparation from a certificate- to a diploma-level program (including new modules on the teaching in reading). For in-service, a continuous professional development program was instituted with interventions at the zonal, *woreda,* and school level, which put an emphasis on mother-tongue instruction, and was presented through a set of teacher training modules. This program was evaluated after about one year and deemed less than satisfactory. As a result, as of this writing, the education ministry was revising the in-service training again, this time bringing in specialists in mother-tongue reading instruction and implementing approaches aligned with the new language learning syllabi (assisted by USAID's READ TA project).[21]

Related to the reforms in formal teacher training and accreditation are changes in teacher management policy. A new policy on teacher licensing is being implemented wherein all teachers must submit to examinations as part of a path to relicensing (to be managed at the regional level, in line with the devolution policy). Salary increases will be connected to teachers' progress on the relicensing steps, and new teacher-support positions will be created, such as mentor teachers (who will be expected to help fellow teachers improve their teaching skills in areas such as reading). Going forward, school heads will be recruited after gaining 5 years' experience as teachers; however, their roles will shift from being administrators to instructional managers (i.e., following the school's progress more closely concerning building student reading [and other] skills, and receiving training for the new roles and commensurate increases in salaries).

Changes were also put into place at the **regional level,** as suggested in the next section, but detailing them all is beyond the scope of this paper.

Program Development

The national government pressed for conducting EGRAs in most of its regions, largely because these regions used different languages of instruction, and they are relatively autonomous in their shaping and delivery of basic education. In fact, each region—often through a special committee or task force set up for this purpose—launched programmatic quick responses to the assessment results, some quicker than others. For example, the region of Amhara developed a set of EGRA responses—all financed by regional funds—within three months of its *Learning Outcomes* policy dialogue.

Looking across the eight regions, it is clear that most of the regions responded to their own assessment results with a renewed emphasis on equipping their early grade teachers

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second language (except where it is already the language of instruction). English (oral only) will be taught as a foreign language starting in grade 1.

[21] The Reading for Ethiopia's Achievement Developed Technical Assistance (READ TA) Project (2012–2017) was designed to help improve the learning outcomes of primary school students in reading and writing. It involves materials development and teacher professional development in five regions and seven different languages plus English.

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with better teaching skills for reading, sometimes drawing upon experiences with the USAID-supported IQPEP.[22] In addition, many regions allocated their own regional funds to purchase textbooks and supplementary books; IQPEP helped schools set up Reading Centers in 2,600 schools in its regions. A number of regions also put greater emphasis on pre-primary education (i.e., policies and programs), based, in part, on the finding that students completing kindergarten generally did better on the assessment. Other more idiosyncratic approaches were taken: For example, one region reassigned its best teachers to grade 1; another designed programs to reduce student absenteeism; and yet others focused on improving school-parent relations.

At the national level, the education ministry quickly followed up on its decision to cancel the textbook procurement with a program, funded largely by USAID through its READ TA Project, to formulate a mother-tongue language syllabus for primary education (grades 1–8) and to prepare related new textbooks and teachers' guides. Although the syllabus reformulation was a central government effort, it was only the general syllabus ("scope and sequence") that was prepared at the national level. The syllabi are then adapted by regional teams to the language of instruction and sociocultural conditions of each of the seven regions. Similarly, language textbooks and teachers' guides are being developed in seven regional languages for grades 1–8 (in two phases: grade 1–4 by 2014 and 5–8 thereafter). Once these materials are produced, they will be published and distributed nationwide through the large World Bank-supervised Basic Education Quality Improvement Project (BEQIP).[23]

Related to this curriculum and textbook development effort are three additional READ TA components, covering:

- teacher training (pre-service and in-service, linked to the revised curriculum and textbooks);
- outreach (additional support for school libraries and reading corners, engagement of parents, and social marketing);
- institutional improvement (technical assistance support to the Regional State Education Bureaus and the education ministry)
- monitoring and evaluation (for example, help with formative EGRA-like assessments of reading progress and a more summative assessment at the end of five years of implementation).

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[22] For information about IQPEP programs during the immediate post-*Learning Outcomes* period, see USAID/Improving the Quality of Primary Education Program in Ethiopia (2011), *Quarterly Newsletter,* Issue No. 03, June 2011.

[23] BEQIP is a US$550 million, multi-agency project that combines financing from the International Development Association; GPE; and a multi-donor trust fund including DFID as the main contributor along with USAID, Italy, and Finland. It is designed to support the provision of learning materials for grades 1–12, a school improvement program (school grants), teacher development, and educational management and leadership. It became effective in January 2014.

The 2010 EGRA baseline results also boosted reading improvement projects managed by NGOs such as Save the Children and Pact. For example, Save the Children had a small early literacy program in Oromia Region prior to the 2010 EGRA, but a boost from the EGRA led it to expand the program into a 15-school pilot (2011)—with a heavy community action component—which was expanded again to 206 after a successful first year. Pact supported a program to provide basic education in the "hinterlands" prior to the 2010 EGRA. However, after its involvement in the *Learning Outcomes* EGRA policy dialogue, Pact instituted early grade reading improvement in more than 300 "alternative basic education" centers in difficult areas, based on EGRA baseline data Pact gathered itself from the centers, using trained facilitators armed with IQPEP reading skills modules. About a third of these center programs are now ready to be turned over to the regional governments.

Factors Influencing Dissemination and Utilization in Ethiopia

Strong influences on uptake and usage of EGRA results in Ethiopia were as follows.

- **Strong government ownership at the national level.** WILL NEED TO FILL THIS IN

- **Cultural values placing emphasis on national and regional pride and competitiveness.** Ethiopians are proud of living in one of the few countries in Africa that was never colonized; that pride carries over into their need to compare themselves with neighboring countries on development indicators such as those in health and education. Their quick response to EGRA results could be seen as a way to get the jump on their neighbors, who were also found to have weak reading scores. A similar logic holds for the regions in Ethiopia, which tend to compete with one another on indices of progress and development, including those in the field of education.

- **Regional administrative infrastructure supporting regional initiatives.** Ethiopia's federal system, in which education services (like others) are mainly managed/delivered by the provincial government has led a relatively well-developed state apparatus at local levels. This allows regions to take matters into their own hands through their own policies, plans, and financing. combined with the competitiveness mentioned above, this can get local interventions moving quite quickly.

- **Effective intergovernmental communication patterns.** The awareness-building effort, which quickly followed the release of the *Learning Outcomes* baseline EGRA findings, revealed the strength of intergovernmental communication patterns. Shortly after the national-level policy dialogue, regional briefing papers were created that were used at regional-level briefings; following those, many of the Regional State Education Bureaus (RSEBs) took the findings down to the district and even the school level. This may have been an even more effective way of dissemination than using mass media or printed circulars, because at each level,

participants were aware of the critical reading issues raised and were engaged in thinking about solutions and follow-up plans.

- **Good cooperative relationships among development agencies with strong government leadership.** Ethiopia's current strategy for early grade reading relies on numerous partnerships among development agencies and NGOs under strong federal government leadership. As an example, READ TA-designed student and teacher materials are programmed to be produced and distributed under BEQIP, which itself relies on a coalition of six multi- and bilateral agencies. In addition, some aspects of the READ TA agenda are being covered by an NGO (Save the Children), whereas gaps in READ TA (reaching alternative education centers) are being covered by another NGO (Pact), using USAID/IQPEP materials and methods. There are, of course, some overlaps and redundancies, but the education ministry is doing a credible job stitching things together.