

## Report on Phase 2 of the Let's Read programme in schools in the Kassena-Nankana West district in Upper East Region Ghana



### Contents

#### Introduction

#### Let's Read Phase 1: 2011 – 2014 (a summary)

#### Let's Read Phase 2: 2014 – 2017

##### Introduction

**Objective 1:** To consolidate Let's Read methodology in the original 11 schools and to introduce it to the 20 new schools

**Objective 2:** To further develop quality teaching

**Objective 3:** To build on the progress achieved in P1 – P3 classes and to embed LR in the upper primary classes (P4 – P6)

- Assessing impact: June 2017
- Sharing assessment feedback

**Objective 4:** To find ways of improving children's understanding of what they read.

- Local language with English: the research findings and the challenge where the local language is mainly oral
- Local language with English: the LR response to supporting literacy where the local language is mainly oral

#### Next Steps for Let's Read – Phase 3

#### Wider Recommendations

#### Conclusions

#### References

#### Acknowledgements

#### List of all schools in Let's Read Ghana

## Introduction

This report comes at the end of the 6th year of the Let's Read (LR) programme in the Kassena-Nankana West district of the Upper East Region of Ghana. It covers Phase 2 of the programme (2014 – 2017) and outlines how this builds on the work of Phase 1 (2011 – 2014) described in full in our earlier review (see [www.letsreadghana.com/achievement](http://www.letsreadghana.com/achievement))

### Let's Read Phase 1: 2011 – 2014 (a summary)

In 2011 we set up Let's Read with a 3-year pilot group of 11 schools. Our assessments, as part of an extensive review of the programme at the end of the pilot, showed excellent progress in lower primary classes with children in most schools acquiring the essential early reading skills of letter recognition and blending. This was particularly encouraging since our findings were supported by an external assessment carried out by World Vision with a larger group of schools using the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA), an internationally recognised tool for measuring progress in early reading.

EGRA uses different ways of measuring progress; one of these is to look at the percentage of children scoring zero in tests and this was used by World Vision in 2014 with a group of schools, some of them in the Let's Read programme and others not. The table below shows a comparison between the zero scores recorded in Let's Read schools, the other schools in the World Vision sample group and the EGRA averages.

**% children scoring zero**

	LR schools	Other schools	EGRA average
Letter sounds	3	61	76
Non words (blending)	4	94	90
Reading	53	65	68
Comprehension	70	87	97

(Data taken from Ghana 2013, Early Grade Reading Assessment and Early Grade Mathematics assessment Report of Findings, Section III, published July 2014.)

This confirmed our findings that LR schools were doing better in all areas than non-LR schools.

One of the most significant findings from this review was that progress was largely independent of class or school size and quality of buildings; one of our most successful schools was in the poorest buildings, with some classes under trees and almost entirely staffed by volunteer teachers. The major factor identified in successful learning for children was the quality of teaching. This does not mean that poor buildings, untrained teachers, lack of resources and so on have no impact. They do – but our findings showed that schools can achieve well in spite of being disadvantaged in this way. The essential ingredient for success, quality of teaching, is highlighted in major research reports, including EGRA 2014 and TENI 2013.

*“The large body of research ...points to one important ingredient.....lack of quality teaching and learning.” TENI Executive Summary, 2013, p2*

Let's Read helps teachers to move away from the traditional 'chalk and talk' method of teaching to use active learning methods and to develop the essential skills for reading with children so that:

*“.... when children have a grasp of some of the basic ‘building blocks’ in learning to read, such as understanding of letter sounds and the ability to decode or ‘sound out’ new words, they are more likely to be able to read fluently (e.g., quickly) and to understand what they read.” NEA 2014 p27*



Active learning – writing letters on backs

Despite this good progress with letter recognition and blending in our pilot group, however, all schools in the above assessments (including LR schools) had lower results for reading and comprehension. Hence a key target for Phase 2 of Let’s Read was to find ways of helping children to achieve the essential skills for reading with understanding, i.e. to achieve functional literacy.

In 2014 we were invited by Afrikids to expand Let’s Read to a further 20 schools for the next three years as part of a project funded by the Big Lottery Fund (BLF).

Our targets for Phase 2 were:

1. To consolidate Let’s Read methodology in the original 11 schools and to introduce it to the new schools
2. To further develop quality teaching in all the schools
3. To build on the progress achieved in lower primary classes and to embed LR in the upper primary classes
4. To find ways of improving children’s understanding of what they read.

## **Let’s Read Phase 2: 2014 – 2017**

### **Introduction**

We began work with the new schools in October 2014. Between 2014 and 2017 we continued our programme of workshops and school visits focusing on the new schools but with continuing, though less frequent, visits to the original group. Members of the Let’s Read Team made nine visits to Ghana over this period.

We had four main objectives:

**Objective 1: To consolidate Let's Read methodology in the original 11 schools and to introduce it to the 20 new schools**

*"NGOs come and tell us what to do. Then they go away again. You people sit down with us and ask us how it is going and what can you do to help." Head Teacher LR1*

We divided the new schools into two groups (LR2 and LR3) so that we could give them maximum support. We also responded to four schools that had not been included initially in the group of 20 and brought them into the programme later. Thus with the original 11 schools (LR1), we now had 34 schools in the LR programme. (Note one school was a double entry school and was therefore counted as 2 schools for this programme.)

We had planned to recruit a volunteer teacher from the UK to work with the larger group of schools but were unable to find a suitable candidate. So we agreed to continue to visit ourselves every term for two weeks. This had the advantage that we were able to engage two Ghanaian former head teachers to provide additional support. We later also contributed to a fund to support volunteers in schools lacking teachers; all these volunteer teachers attend Let's Read training.

*"My school hires teachers without special skills but we have all managed to learn how to teach using Let's Read." Head Teacher LR1*

At the end of Phase 2, June 2017, when pupils in our first group of schools reached their final year of primary education, we carried out a major assessment of all the Let's Read schools to assess the impact of our programme (see below, Objective 4).

**Objective 2: To further develop quality teaching**

*"We know you are coming back to assess our progress and that makes us work harder." Head Teacher LR2*

Quality teaching is not just about transmission of knowledge and skills; it includes all aspects of teaching, including good management, a positive classroom ethos and high expectations for pupil attainment and teacher and pupil behaviours. In Phase 1 we found teachers were willing to change their practice once they understood the reasons for doing so and could see the impact of the improvements. Effective change requires time and support. So in spite of the increased number of schools now in Let's Read, we remained committed to maintaining our close personal relationships with the head teachers and teachers.

The BLF funding enabled us to continue to provide training workshops and also some mentoring support between visits, as mentioned above, from a recently retired head teacher and a circuit supervisor both of whom who knew the schools well and had become actively involved with Let's Read.

We followed a similar programme of workshops and school visits to model good teaching, to encourage and support teachers and head teachers and to assess progress. Our assessment results are always fed back to the schools with suggestions for improvement. As there are now no national tests for primary schools, teachers and head teachers find this helpful and are happy to compare their results with each other.



Our first group of schools, LR1, was used to demonstrate Let's Read methodology to the new head teachers and this enabled the new schools to access the programme quickly. Some teachers already had knowledge of the programme and some had their own children in a LR school. In our first group we had seen little progress in several schools for the first year but the new schools took on the programme with enthusiasm and made good progress. This was even more rapid in some schools in the third group, showing the value of having an established group of schools in place to act as a model and to share experiences. This also has important implications for future potential scaling up of Let's Read (see below, Wider Recommendations)

For the first three years of LR we had focused most of our training and support on lower primary classes to develop early reading skills and we continued to do this with the new schools.

*"Recent evidence indicates that learning to read both **early** and at a sufficient **rate** (with comprehension) is essential for learning to read well."* EGRA toolkit p1, (emphases in original)

Not all believed there was a problem with reading, however, and most teachers including the circuit supervisors were unaware of the low level of literacy in their schools. Data is clearly not shared with teachers and many were shocked at the research evidence.

*"Consistently, research suggests that education and learning outcomes among Ghanaian children continue to be among the worst in the world: with less than 25% of Ghana's Primary class 6 children able to read and attain basic literacy skills after 6 years of public schooling."* TENI Executive Summary 2013, p6

### **Objective 3: To build on the progress achieved in P1- P3 classes and to embed LR in the upper primary classes (P4 – P6)**

*"Few pupils demonstrated these basic skills on the EGRA, in any of the languages assessed; and therefore it should not be surprising that few children in the EGRA study (on average, less than 2%) were able to read a passage fluently and with comprehension."* NEA 2014 p27

By September 2014 the first children in the programme were entering upper primary so we began to work with the teachers in these classes as well. This brought some fresh challenges as some of these teachers felt, regardless of the poor literacy skills in their classes, that phonics and early reading skills were not appropriate for older children.

One or two teachers said their timetable was 'full', so there was not time for LR; somewhat surprising to us as poor attendance and punctuality of teachers are often an issue for schools.

*"Instructional time is frequently wasted; some studies indicate that less than half of the available time is used for learning."* Gove, A. and P. Cvelich, 2011 p16

Some upper primary teachers had already taken an interest in the work going on with the younger children in their schools but others were not so easily convinced. The traditional teaching method of rote learning and teacher talk gives the impression that children are 'reading' and teachers could see that children were now *reading* more effectively, using phonic and blending skills taught in lower primary classes. But we needed to show teachers that children were *understanding* very little of what they were reading; even simple sentences were beyond the majority of children.

We also had to convince teachers that Let's Read is not another subject but supports and

strengthens what is already being taught, not only for English language but in all subjects, and that by doing the 15 minutes a day literacy sessions that we were recommending they would be improving children's learning in all areas.

Carrying out assessments and sharing the findings with teachers proved a powerful way of demonstrating the effectiveness of LR to those teachers who were initially sceptical.

### **Assessing impact: June 2017**

We decided on two forms of assessment: 1) phonic knowledge in all P2 classes and 2) comprehension assessments for P3, P4 and P6 classes according to how long the schools had been engaged in LR. The results are below.

#### 1) P2 classes letter sound recognition (phonics)

		June 2017
<b>LR1</b> (11 schools)	P2 - basic phonic knowledge	80%
<b>LR2</b> (9 schools)	P2 - basic phonic knowledge	79%
<b>LR3</b> (14 schools)	P2 - basic phonic knowledge	75%

Assessing basic phonic knowledge in all schools confirmed that this teaching was taking place, including in the schools where we had had reduced contact in Phase 2. This was reassuring and a good indicator of the schools' continuing commitment to the Let's Read programme.

#### 2) Comprehension results for June 2017 compared with tests taken the previous year

LR Group	Joined LR in	Form of assessment	Jun-16	Jun-17
<b>LR1</b>	Oct 2011	P6 - comprehension (cloze paragraph) whole class	26%	58%
<b>LR2</b>	Oct 2014	P4 - comprehension (sentences) whole class	25%	65%
<b>LR3</b>	Oct 2015 4 schls Oct 2016	P3 - blending (non words) individual assessments	0%	46%

These results support and reinforce what we are told by teachers at every visit – that Let's Read's simple and effective methods, which focus on the critical components of successful literacy acquisition together with good quality teaching, are raising standards, not only in basic reading skills *but also in comprehension*, so that children leave primary school functionally literate and able to access secondary education.

If this progress could be maintained and supported throughout the area, the schools in the Kassena-Nankana West district would be outperforming their peers in many other similar regions of Ghana (see below, Wider Recommendations).

### **Sharing assessment feedback**

We shared these assessments with teachers and showed them the sentences that the majority of children had failed to answer correctly. Then, in order to demonstrate with a hands on experience, we gave them a short passage to read which was based on made up, phonically sounded words and some simple comprehension questions. They were taken aback. "Is this Dutch?" asked one teacher. They soon realised they could read the words and even answer the questions quite easily. But when we asked them what it meant they naturally had no idea - it was

nonsense. Suddenly the teachers (and later on circuit supervisors and GES staff) understood what this meant for children struggling with an unknown language on a daily basis. This is aptly described in a report by the Early Grade Learning Community of Practice as “reading in the dark” p vi.

**Objective 4: To find ways of improving children’s understanding of what they read.**

*“The ability to read and understand a simple text is one of the most fundamental skills a child can learn. Without basic literacy there is little chance that a child can escape the intergenerational cycle of poverty. Yet in many countries, students enrolled in school for as many as 6 years are unable to read and understand a simple text.”* Early Grade Reading Assessment Toolkit, p1)

The relationship between children’s local language and English, is clearly a major problem for primary school children and a major barrier to literacy.

**Local language with English: the research findings and the challenge where the local language is mainly oral**

It is generally agreed that it is best for children to learn to read and write in their first language (L1) before moving on to a second language (L2). The National Literacy Acceleration Programme, (NALAP), first introduced to primary schools in 2009 states that:

*“Children learn how to read in one of the 11 Ghanaian languages approved for schooling. As they learn to read a Ghanaian language, children also begin learning oral English, Ghana’s official language, using the communicative approach. By Primary 2, when children have acquired reading skills and basic oral English proficiency, they begin learning to read English. The expectation is that by Primary 4, when instruction is all in English, children will be bilingual and biliterate.”* NALAP EDQUALL Project, Centre for Applied Linguistics

However, this assumes that all children have the necessary educational resources, books and materials as well as teachers who themselves read and write in L1. In the area where we work there are no street signs, posters or adverts, and few newspapers, television and library books. In the schools there are few books in local language and all the textbooks are in English from the start. To add to the problem, the local language, Gurune in most of the LR schools, is not one of the languages recognised by the government. Children are not encouraged to talk in class or to work in groups where they can develop their language skills in either or both languages and few have parents who speak English or are literate in their local language.

Not all teachers are themselves literate in L1 or in the same L1 as the children. Some are not confident enough to teach English effectively and rely heavily on the textbooks which are sometimes too difficult for the children. Some teachers admit that some of the texts in upper primary textbooks are too hard even for them: for example a Shakespearean sonnet in P6. Teachers face an almost impossible task.

With all the difficulties outlined above, it is not surprising that some teachers in lower primary classes use English only for timetabled English lessons saying that they have to teach exclusively in L1 because ‘children don’t understand English’. This means that some, even many, children move

on to P4 barely able to speak a sentence in English and are faced with a curriculum taught wholly in English.

*“By grade 4 the programme **assumes** pupils will have first become fluent speakers and readers of the Ghanaian language of instruction, followed by English”(p. 2). Ghana 2013 National Education Assessment: Summary of Results p27 (emphasis added)*

Without adequate materials and teacher training, together with an understanding of the different languages involved, this is clearly not going to happen.

### **Local language with English: the Let’s Read response to supporting literacy where the local language is mainly oral**

*“Reading to learn is the ultimate prize—a combination of fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary skills that allows a person to read independently and to understand and use the information they read. It is the difference between “reading it” and “getting it.” Gove, A. and P. Cvelich. 2011 p5*

It is unlikely that the government will fund textbooks in Gurune in the near future and children cannot wait. We have to accept that one size rarely fits all and find an acceptable pragmatic solution tailored to the needs of schools in different environments.

The traditional teaching method of ‘chalk and talk’ used in many Ghanaian schools is not conducive to developing language and thinking skills. Children need opportunities to use their language and in this case this means both L1 and English.

The LR response to this dilemma is to encourage teachers to do two things 1) use more English informally, to ‘chat’ to children and encourage them to do likewise, and 2) to link the two languages together in all lessons so that children develop confidence, thinking and reasoning skills and a wider vocabulary. This involves getting teachers to understand the importance of talking in class and using pairs or groups as part of their teaching practice. Where teachers have understood the value of this we see real progress and growing confidence in the children. NALAP calls this approach to learning ‘biliteracy’. NALAP EDQUALL Project, Centre for Applied Linguistics

When we visit our schools now we see a noticeable difference in classes that use both languages in this way. Not only do children show more confidence in speaking English, they also understand that their language can run in parallel with English and that they both languages are valued. One head teacher told us ...*“You have given us back our language.”*

In upper primary classes, when the languages are linked, more children are able understand new concepts, develop vocabulary and cope better with the texts in their books. As already mentioned, some of the textbooks contain material that is far too hard for children who are working in a second language. So we have also introduced teachers to a way of simplifying the texts and using children’s own words to understand and retain the content and meaning of the texts rather than merely copying words into their exercise books. Our approach has been welcomed by the circuit supervisors and the new Director of Education for the district.

Our assessment results in June 2017 demonstrate the success of these strategies.

## Next Steps for Let's Read – Phase 3

Our objectives for the next few years are:

1. To develop a structure in the group of schools to support and sustain the improvements already made with a view to becoming self sustaining. We already have Let's Read Champions in most schools, teachers who are committed to the programme and will act as lead teachers for Let's Read. We also plan to develop a small team of Expert Teachers who will be able to share their expertise with other schools, train new teachers and so on. Finally we hope to recruit a Project Manager to maintain and develop the programme.
2. Continue to work with a larger group of GES circuit supervisors in Kassena-Nankana West to share LR methodology and encourage them to work with schools to improve the quality of teaching and to embed Let's Read in the school curriculum
3. Consider whether it is possible and /or advisable to expand the number of LR schools, bearing in mind the potential dangers of scaling up a successful development programme.
4. Investigate further ways of developing biliteracy and language links, such as translating some of the LR books into Gurune so that children can read the same texts in both languages.

## Wider Recommendations

Our experiences over the last six years in Kassena-Nankana, and a study of the literature on developing literacy in Ghanaian schools, lead us to suggest that certain additions to the curriculum could make a real difference to the outcomes for all children.

These include:

- A daily literacy lesson in their timetables for all classes ref Gove, A. and P. Cvelich. 2011 p28
- The NALAP recommendation on biliteracy should be re-visited and teachers given clear guidance on strategies for managing the particular language situation in their schools. This also applies to pupil teachers in training.
- Quality teaching should be the major focus of training
- Teaching time in class should be regarded as the highest priority. Training and meetings should be held out of school hours and teachers should be in class and teaching when children are present.
- It would be very helpful if there was more strategic planning and coordination of the work of different NGOs so that training opportunities are spread throughout the district and all teachers were able to take part in training and development.

## Conclusions

Let's Read was designed specially for the children in the Kassena-Nankana district. It is simple, effective and does not require any special or expensive resources. It is supported by a minimum of materials including a structured reading scheme, assessment materials and guidance information. It is accessible to teachers at any stage in their careers and it has benefits for children, parents and teachers.

*"Since I learnt the letter sounds my own reading has improved." P4 teacher*

What it does require is teacher commitment and enthusiasm and a willingness to change practice. We have seen much of that in the schools where we have established Let's Read over the last six years. The assessment results show that improvement is possible – and exciting!





Further information on Let's Read activities including LR IT mobile laptops, LR Counts, LR Later and Summer Schools, as well as a list of workshops and examples of our reading books can be found on our website [www.letsreadghana.com](http://www.letsreadghana.com).

### Schools in the Let's Read programme

LR1	LR2	LR3
<b>Sirigu East &amp; West Circuit</b>	<b>Mirigu &amp; Yua Circuits</b>	<b>Kandiga &amp; Nabanga Circuits</b>
Amutanga	Aforagabisi	Aganda
Anerigo	Gingirigu	Akamo
Azudoone	Gonnum	Amenga-Etigo
Bugsogo	Kumbusingo	Anisoore
Dazongo	Mirigu	Alembila
Mother of Mercy	Saabisi	Atiyorum
Nyangolingo	Taribisi	Father Morin
Sirigu A	Wolingum	Gomongo
Sirigu B	Yua	Kaase
Tinginum		Kandiga
Wugingo		Kurugu
		Nabanga
		Nyongo
		Pingo

## References

### **EGRA**

Early Grade Reading Assessment and Early Grade Mathematics Assessment Report of Findings  
May 2014 (Final Version)  
Ministry of Education Ghana Education Service National Education Assessment Unit

### **EARLY GRADE READING ASSESSMENT TOOLKIT**

March 30, 2009  
Prepared for The World Bank Office of Human Development  
RTI International 3040 Cornwallis Road  
Post Office Box 12194 Research Triangle Park, NC 27709-2194

**Gove, A. and P. Cvelich.** 2011. Early Reading: Igniting Education for All. A report by the Early Grade Learning Community of Practice. Revised Edition.  
©2011 Research Triangle Institute.

### **Ghana 2013 National Education Assessment NEA**

Summary of Results  
May 2014 (Final Version)  
Ministry of Education  
Ghana Education Service  
National Education Assessment Unit

### **National Literacy Acceleration Programme, (NALAP)**

EQUALL Project, Centre for Applied Linguistics  
USA

### **TENI**

*The Quality and Inclusivity of Basic Education across Ghana's three northern regions: a look at change, learning effectiveness and efficiency*  
Final Executive Summary  
Research under the Tackling Education Needs Inclusively (TENI) Project  
May 31<sup>st</sup> 2013

## Acknowledgements

Many people in Afrikids have supported Let's Read Ghana and we cannot mention them all here, but we are particularly grateful to Nich Kumah, David Pwalua, Joe Asakibeem (and Matthew and Elijah in Sirigu), and Amy Parker in the UK

Thanks also to John Agangmikre and Clement Setiga  
Madam Emelia Abdulai, Director of Education Kassena-Nankana West  
Naba Atogumdeya Akwara III  
Sergious Before at World Vision

And, in particular all the head teachers, teachers, volunteers, circuit supervisors and children in the Let's Read schools.

Let's Read Team August 2017