Overview of the Innovation
The Rwandan Children’s Book Initiative (RCBI) supported the writing, publication and wide distribution of Kinyarwanda children’s books with a focus on Primary 1-3. The ultimate aim of the project was to improve literacy skills and learning outcomes for young children in the first years of primary school by increasing their reading, particularly of high quality and age appropriate books.

The project consisted of separate components implemented at National and District level. The National level focused on work with the Publishing Industry, the Rwanda Education Board (REB) and Rwanda Library Services to increase the number of quality Kinyarwanda children’s books available on the market. In Burera District the project piloted teacher training to promote reading alongside the procurement and distribution of books, book storage units and reading mats.

The project team has continuously evaluated the piloted approaches, applying learning and adapting to new opportunities as they arose. In the National level work with the publishing industry, this has been exemplified by the way in which the project has been providing hands-on support and mentoring to the key actors within the industry (e.g. illustrators, writers, publishers) to build their capacity to produce quality children’s books in Kinyarwanda, while at the same time engaging REB in a similar exercise, specifically in relation to assessment of reading materials.

The innovation trained 390 teachers in 87 schools. The budget of the innovation was GBP 695,000.

Grant Recipient:
The RCBI was managed by Save the Children (SC).

Contact:
Bethany Ericson  Bethany.Ericson@.savethechildren.org
Maya Richardson  m.richardson-brown@.savethechildren.org.uk

What makes it innovative?
The project has similarities to the Tanzanian Children’s Books Fund but is new to the Rwandan context. It introduces a new way of developing learning materials by taking a whole systems approach focusing on the entire value chain, including working with publishers, REB, Rwanda Library Services, decentralized levels staff and schools/teachers.

Another innovative project element is providing books in the classrooms through the classroom library model. A child-friendly storage unit enables easily accessible books to be kept in the rooms, instead of being inconveniently locked up in an office or separate library. Additionally, mats were provided for the rooms to foster an appropriate and learner friendly group atmosphere for “story-time” that has been widely appreciated by teachers and children.

Relevance to education priorities:
Main theme: effective teaching and learning
The need for more reading books in Kinyarwanda was highlighted in the 2010-15 ESSP. Reading to improve literacy skills has also been promoted through a number of the Government initiative ‘Rwanda Reads’.

Project Learning (activity/output to outcomes level)
- The project showed the benefits of a multi-actor approach with government, NGO and the private sector all playing their part. The linkages brokered between publishers and educators helped to develop quality products and successful outcomes for children.
- The project managed to change the classroom environment by introducing reading mats and book shelves, contributing to excitement, ‘eagerness to read’ and high levels of engagement.
among teachers and learners.

- A number of new activities were introduced and linked to the reading activities, e.g. sketches, role play, dialogue.
- Through the reading activity teachers and students had different roles, whereby students sometimes performed as facilitators of activities.

There were also some notable issues when implementing the reading activities, such as:

- Limited time for reading in classrooms as there was no time for reading allocated on the school timetable.
- More awareness raising with communities is required in relation to purchasing and maintaining books.
- Only Kinyarwanda teachers have been trained. When they leave the school there is none to replace them.

**Project outcomes and reflection on monitoring and evaluation**

The evaluation has one component for the national level and one for the local level. National evidence is through interviews and Focus Group Discussions analysed qualitatively, along with analysis of books available through RCBI. School level (local) quasi-experimental study (control and treatment groups compared at baseline and end-line) collects evidence through teacher and head teacher questionnaires, classroom observation and student survey. At the end-line students undertook a reading assessment test.

**The project outcomes include:**

At national level:
- The increased quantity of storybooks in the project schools and favourable analysis of the quality of the reading books;
- Publishers, authors and illustrators have the knowledge, skills and confidence to produce high quality children’s books in Kinyarwanda;
- Demand for quality children’s books is established and sustained and a range of mechanisms are in place that will stimulate demand in the future.

At school level:
- Teachers have the knowledge, skills and confidence to manage school book collections and use books to support reading and learning.
• There were a significantly higher percentage of classroom lessons in RCBI schools (as compared with control schools) with reading present, both through reading activities and teachers using storybooks.

Learners at RCBI schools performed better in reading tests at end-line, usually significantly so, than learners at control schools in their ability to read letters and words, take dictation, show comprehension through completing a sentence by filling in the missing word (‘cloze’ assessment), and being able to read a passage. The presence of story books in the school predicted student reading ability at end-line.

The evaluation is rigorous and transparent, with sound outcomes, but would be even more convincing if there was more evidence of the validity of the evaluation instruments (classroom observation and reading test).

**Conditions for success**

This project highlighted that innovation often means change to practices and attitudes at multiple points in the system and across a wide range of stakeholders. Within the publishing community alone, the project team worked with managers, editors, authors and illustrators, and this involved a significant capacity building element. The important connector role that SC played in the pilot will need to be played by the government in the future, and additional ‘system readiness support’ from SC may be required to achieve this. There is also an important need for the publisher’s association to be involved in advocacy activities vis-à-vis the government on the importance of children’s books and the support for market demand.

The successful implementation was also dependent on significant advocacy work about the importance of reading fiction, particularly in the early years, to develop basic literacy.

**Scale up and sustainability considerations**

Scale up and sustainability of the project is based on 2 scenarios. One is transferring the different components of the project to the Rwandan Government. In this scenario RCBI’s role will be limited to supporting the handover of the programme to REB.

The second scenario is for RCBI’s role to change from an implementer to providing technical oversight of the various elements of the programme from national to school level. This will avoid potential fragmenting of the intervention, maintaining the links in the system, and building institutional readiness within REB.

Scalability is feasible for both scenarios. A lot of groundwork has been completed, including development of materials, capacity strengthening of REB, training publishers, supporting Rwanda Library Services, etc.

The whole system approach is powerful. A crucial factor for successful institutionalisation is not to lose the comprehensiveness of the model and hold the various elements of the programme together. Scenario 2, with SC continuing to provide an oversight role, is seen as the best possible solution to scale up and successfully sustaining the intervention.

In this scenario, SC would focus on creating and/or maintaining the links in the system and between the actors (e.g. Publishing Industry, MINEDUC, the College of Education, TTCs, Local Government, Rwanda Library Services, and Development Partners), while also working on building institutional readiness for REB to take over this higher level coordination role.

Building this institutional readiness includes advocacy with the Ministry on various fronts, including:

• REB to use the capitation grant to provide story books for early grades
• Issuing directives for use of supplementary reading materials in the content areas to increase the chances for reading across the curriculum – advocacy during the pilot has already supported the integration of the use of supplementary materials in the new curriculum
• Advocating for an explicit time allocation in the new curriculum/school timetable for recreational reading.
Cost considerations
The economic analysis was based on the above scenarios and identified four types of cost categories (developmental costs; implementation costs; sustainability cost, and M&E and learning costs). In addition, unit costs for the various elements of the project were presented at both national and decentralised levels (school level cost; unit cost for materials, and unit cost for teacher training).

Total costs during the pilot intervention were GBP 5,807 per school.

Scaling up of the national level component will not be very costly as the intervention has already taken place at the national level, and a significant proportion of those working in the book industry have already been reached. Scaling up would involve continuation on a similar scale, with similar numbers of new trainees from the book industry.

Scale up of the classroom library component of the project in its current form is more challenging in terms of costs. Approximately GBP 150 per classroom has been spent thus far on the books (GBP 70), bookshelves (GBP 75) and mats (GBP 6). These amounts would be similar for scale up. The scale-up intervention would combine books material provision costs per school (GBP 2,950) with the teacher training costs per school (GBP 253) amounting to a total replication cost in schools (GBP 3,203), which is significantly cheaper in comparison with the pilot intervention. This amount for delivering at scale could potentially even be partially come from existing capitation grant provisions.

Although the economic analysis is generally strong, it could have been further strengthened by strengthening the case for the added value of scenario 2 above scenario 1, while in the current analysis the additional costs for growth scenario 2 (where SC will have an oversight role) are not specified.

Immediate Next Steps
• Continue working with all key actors in order to maintain the links in the system
• Continue advocating, influencing and developing partnerships with government and development partners with the aim to build institutional readiness and take the intervention to scale based on scenario two. This includes the identification of a donor agency to fund scale up
• Activities will include:
  o Presentation of the project to the Minister of Education and Development Partners
  o Development of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Rwandan Library Services
  o Commencement of peer learning circles in schools and integration of reading activities in wider teacher training initiatives
  o Meetings with REB’s DG to discuss improving book access in schools
  o Provide input to newly drafted Kinyarwanda P1-P3 teacher guides
  o Support to REB to refine the process for ordering supplementary resources
  o Mentoring schools on effective book ordering
  o Dissemination of project results, including endline evaluation results
  o Support to the publishers to establish supplementary readers aligned to the new curriculum
  o Presentation of Community Reading Habits research to GoR
  o Support Rwandan Library services in the strategic mapping of community libraries in Rwanda
  o Work with the auditing department to establish protocols for assessing schools’ regular use of books
  o Support Rwandan Library Services in the implementation of the National Book Development Policy
  o Invite REB project focal points & leadership to RCBI events and field visits to observe activities
  o Dialogue with other projects to identify areas of cooperation

This programme was piloted with support from the Innovation for Education Fund, a partnership between the Governments of Rwanda and the United Kingdom. The fund was managed by Cambridge Education, a member of the Mott MacDonald Group.