June 12, 2014 was a day of celebration when US Ambassador Scott DeLisi visited Lake Victoria Primary School in Entebbe and witnessed the success of the USAID/Uganda School Health and Reading Program. The Ambassador launched the distribution of over 400,000 supplementary books for Ugandan primary school children. Helping to develop school libraries is one aspect of the Program’s literacy work.

Ambassador DeLisi sat among Primary one children during an English reading lesson and later delighted Primary two children by reading to them from one of the story books donated to the school library.

The Entebbe ceremony was attended by senior officials from USAID, Ministry of Education and Sports, Entebbe Municipality, Lake Victoria Primary School and Program Staff. Saeeda Prew, the Program Chief of Party, stated that the supplementary books were mobilized by International Book Bank (IBB) and Books for Africa (BFA). The program works with partner organization Africa Development Corps to process books, establish school libraries, and train teachers in library management. They also helped distribute the books across 400 program schools.

In some primary schools, there is a complete absence of reading materials, certainly engaging reading materials, which are crucial for emerging readers and readers at all levels. A 2009 study published by two researchers at Makerere University found that on average a primary school with 1,000 students may have only 85 books.

The supplementary books are in addition to the primers for P.1 – P.3 that the program is currently rolling out to improve reading in Uganda with a particular focus on literacy in 12 local languages and English in the early grades.

Making Reading a Priority - HIGHLIGHTS

- 407 schools receive library books
- 404,113 books delivered by 30 Sept 14
- gift in kind value of over $2.3 million
Benefits of Learning to Read in Local Languages

Early Grade Reading Assessment Results

Research has shown that there are many benefits to learning to read in a local or familiar language. This allows the learner to use existing language skills to acquire strong reading skills – reading skills which the learner can transfer to reading in another language (such as English) in later years. Baseline Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) results illustrate this point. EGRA data were collected from randomly selected program and control schools and learners were assessed in English and one of eight local area languages: Ateso, Leblando, Luganda, Runyankore/Rukiga (Cluster 1) in February/March, 2013 and Leb Acoli, Lugbarati, Lumasaaba, and Runyoro-Rutooro (Cluster 2) in February/March, 2014.

Figure 1 shows the percentage of P3 learners who answered at least one question correctly about a story they just read - learners need to read with fluency but they also need to be able to understand what they are reading. Though many of the learners scored very low one message is clear: learners can answer more questions correctly in Local Language than English. In Runyankore-Rukiga, for example, only 4% of P3 learners could answer one or more questions correctly in English compared to over half (53%) in the Local Language. Though oral reading fluency (words read in one minute) is similar in English and local language, comprehension was higher in local language which confirms that learners can comprehend (understand what they are reading) better in a familiar language.

Learners understand more when they read in their local language

Where would you be if you couldn't read?

The ability to read is one of the most fundamental skills a child can acquire. Learning to read early and at a sufficient rate (fast enough) is essential for learning to read well. Children who do not learn to read in the first few grades of primary school are more likely to repeat and eventually drop out of school, a great loss to the individual and society.

USAID/Uganda School Health and Reading Program believes that, given the right environment and support, all children can and should, learn to read within the first few years of schooling.

Support Supervision: Supporting Teachers to Master Early Grade

Training without follow up support and guidance simply does not work, this is true for all of us and Ugandan primary school teachers are no exception. After training, teachers must be provided regular support and feedback to ensure that they are using new reading-specific teaching methods and guiding learners to properly utilize reading primers in the classroom. The School Health and Reading Program has developed a joint model of support supervision to ensure regular contact time between head teachers, CCTs, inspectors, PTC tutors and teachers in order to provide constructive feedback on strengths and areas of improvement in teachers lesson planning and classroom teaching. The joint support supervision is done by Program technical staff, NCDC, MOES, DES, district local government officials and college staff. Teams spend a week in each district, first planning the weekly program then fanning out to schools to undertake support supervision which includes reviewing lesson plans, observing a reading lesson and providing constructive feedback to teachers.

Over the past year, over 700 teachers have been observed and directly supported in the classroom through these support supervision visits and a plan has been put in place to ensure that CCTs and school inspectors carry out the visits on their own after participating in the program support supervision visits. To date, 127 CCTs, inspectors and associate assessors have observed over 1,000 lessons.
Youth Leadership Training
Preparing Future Leaders

The USAID/UGANDA School Health and Reading Program successfully provided training in youth leadership for 5,000 teachers and over 320 trainers at 14 sites throughout Uganda. The workshops were held in three multiple day sessions spanning from August 19 to September 4 of this year. The trainings tested a newly developed leadership manual across 11 Core Primary Teacher Colleges (CPTC), 2 Primary Teacher Colleges (PTC) and one secondary school.

The in-service training developed the capacity of teachers and head teachers to engage students and teachers in school leadership to both increase learners role in the functioning of the school and to better prepare them for future leadership roles.

According to Catherine Mugerwa of the Ministry of Education and Sports, including learners in school leadership has been missing from previous efforts and “fits in so well”. Ms. Mugerwa coordinated the development of the Education Management Strengthening Initiative which included a leadership module but, according to Mugerwa, the component of supporting learners to be leaders was missing. In her view the leadership training also blended with the child to child program which she undertook as a classroom teacher and fits in with the SMC handbook roles and responsibilities for stakeholders that had been previously developed.

“I am happy because there is that continuity. This fits with the national goals because these are the future leaders”.

At the Soroti CPTC, which hosted training to 687 teachers over two weeks, participants expressed eagerness to implement the strategies they learned in their classrooms. Jesca Tino, a P1 teacher to 155 learners at Arapo Primary School said, “Training in leadership helps the children to be creative and critical in their thinking.” Achai Noel, a P7 teacher from Apokor Primary School connected the leadership training to staff as well as students: “Coaching also applies to the teaching profession. We can help one another to refine the art of our teaching”.

The training manual, which is the first of its kind for the Ministry of Education and Sports, focuses on empowering teachers and learners to lead, guiding learners to mentor others, and supporting curriculum through leadership activities from collecting and producing learning materials to peer learning and teaching. Both the training and the manual include a component on Special Needs Education (SNE). Recently at our Special Needs training workshop, Mr. Omagor, Commissioner for Special Needs Education, encouraged participants to explore ways of addressing the special learning needs of learners.

Change Comes to Rongoro Primary School

At Rongoro Primary School in Mbale District, Nakhumitsa Hope demonstrates her reading skill when called upon to lead the class. In first term, the P1 student could not read a single word in Lumasaaba or English but today proudly says “I can now read and write on my own”.

With 37 years of experience, Lunyolo Agnes, Hope’s teacher, conducted the lesson with ease using the program’s early grade reading methodology during the monitoring and support supervision visit.

This was not always the case. During a school visit on 29th September, Agnes, who is from Nalondo village, explained to Nasimiyu Lynette, Program Field Assistant, that before the program, she could not lesson plan effectively but would guess at ways to occupy her class. The children had no desks, no reading and writing materials, and promotion to P2 was automatic.

Now, Agnes says she is very happy with the SHRP methodology and multi sensory approach. When asked how she kept pupils’ active during the lesson, Agnes attributes it to the reading materials provided for each child by the program, consistent lesson planning, headteacher support, and use of the teachers’ guides. Agnes said that she is “calling upon other teachers to support this program as it has reminded me about my duties as a teacher and the methodology used is quite unique and the pupils can now relate the words in Lumasaaba and English which is a step ahead”. 

Hope Nakhumitsa leads during an English lesson
Local Language Boards Key in Developing own Languages

USAID/Uganda School Health and Reading Program works closely with the Local Language Boards of Uganda who play an important role in strengthening and building capacity in the correct use of local languages.

The Language Boards are key and central for the development and use of Ugandan languages in education and society. The Boards are also Local Champions for mother tongue instruction.

The Program is:
- Leveraging the expertise of Language Boards
- Supporting Language Board (LB) effectiveness
- Working with the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) to review structure, mandates and functioning of LBs
- Training LBs to promote local language reading in the early grades
- Working with NCDC and LBs to develop and strengthen orthographies of target local languages.

In July 2014 three language boards namely: Lusoga, Ngakarimojong and Lugwere were inaugurated with Lukhonzo following in September.

So far all the twelve language boards in the program have been inaugurated. The orthographies of the languages have also been newly validated by the LBs. The orientation took place in four different districts, namely Kaliro (Lusoga), Kotido (Ngakarimojong), Kibuku (Lugwere) and Kabarole (Lukhonzo) attracting maximum participation from the board members.

Among issues discussed at the orientation were the mandate of the NCDC in the development of orthographies, the roles and responsibilities of the Local Language Board members, the constitutional framework, symbols and motto as well as the general guidelines for drafting work plans. The orientation also helped the board members understand the history of the Language Boards, their roles and the structural connection between the Language Boards and the Ministry of Education and Sports.

Peer Support in Health Education
Head teachers pledge support to peers

This commitment was made during a support supervision activity which included visiting schools and observing health activities taking place on the ground.

The program health teams sought to use a number of strategies while conducting support supervision to ensure that school visits are made more meaningful to yield better results. One of the strategies used by the teams was the involvement of head teachers from high performing schools. The head teachers of these schools joined the teams in visiting low performing schools with the aim of sharing their experiences.

The Head Teacher of Apuuton Primary School in Katakiw district, Mr. Daniel Akieng said that as the leaders of the schools rated high, they were willing to offer their expertise to those head teachers and schools who were having challenges. Akieng said that, in his school, he had guided teachers, particularly on the use of peer education, involvement of all teachers as a team, identification of School Family Initiative (SFI) coordinators, evaluation of previous topics discussed before starting on new topics to ensure that learners understood and the importance of updating records after every meeting.

“Successful implementation of school activities needs teamwork. This helps the learners enjoy learning and the school achieves its objectives”, said Akieng, who has been part of the support supervision teams. He advised teachers to consult as much as possible in areas where they need support and promote team work.

Dr. Sarah Kyobe, the program Health Advisor stated “As a program we highly commend the teachers who have taken initiative to mentor and support their colleagues. We believe this is the way to go and should be encouraged across all Program activities”.

The District Inspector of Schools Katakiw district, Patrick Ongwalu, emphasized ensuring successful implementation of government interventions. The District Inspector of Schools Katakiw district, Patrick Ongwalu, emphasized the need to keep records because they provide evidence for what has been done. He guided teachers on how to fill the SFI register and develop the SF work plan as a first step in implementation.

The involvement of headteachers from high performing schools is believed to be one strategy that is effective in not only bringing on board low performing schools but also acting as a motivator to the head teachers who are recognized as best performers among the many schools in the district. This has encouraged low performing schools to appreciate that if it has worked in one school, then it can also work in their own schools as well.