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Developing a Regional Standard for Assessment and Reporting in Early Primary:
A Case Study by Mango Tree Literacy Lab in the Lango Sub-region of Northern Uganda

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Overview of Mango Tree Literacy Lab's Work in the Lango Sub-region

Mango Tree Literacy Lab (MTLL) has been working on early primary literacy issues in the Lango Sub-region since 2010. In our initial funding cycle from 2010-2013, we developed a literacy model for teaching Leblango and English in Primary 1-3 that included Pupil Primers, Supplemental Readers, Instructional Charts, Teacher's Guides and over 50 Teacher Training Videos. An external evaluation of our model funded by the Hewlett Foundation in 2013 pointed to large gains in pupil performance.

Based on this encouraging data, we were able to acquire funding to scale up our work and do additional research of our model. From 2014-2017, the intervention was studied with a longitudinal randomized control trial (RCT) by Victoria Brown of Ichuli Institute with funding from the Raising Learning Outcomes Program under ESRC/DFID and Oxford University. Schools were randomly assigned into three groups: 1.) control; 2.) a full cost program implemented by MTLL's literacy specialists; and 3.) a reduced-cost version implemented by government tutors. Most notably, the study found that literacy levels raised equivalent to 6.3 grades for pupils by the end of P4 in mother tongue for the full cost program and 3.6 grades for the reduced cost program – among the largest improvements ever achieved for a randomized education intervention.[1]

In our most recent funding cycle (2017-2019) we have shifted our activities to support uptake of the Ugandan government's recently introduced ***National Literacy Model for P1 to P4***. This model, that includes a set of Pupil Books and Teacher's Guides for local language and English, was developed by the National Curriculum Development Centre with funding from USAID's School Health and Reading Project (SHRP). These materials have been distributed to nearly all the government schools in the Lango Sub-region.

A major component of our recent work has been the implementation of a ***Teacher Mentor Program*** whose stated objective is, "*to create a cadre of infant teachers in the Lango Sub-region with demonstrable expertise in the newly introduced National Literacy Model who can mentor other teachers to become proficient literacy instructors*." To participate in this program, teachers and schools were required to submit applications. Over 500 teachers in more than 200 schools applied. We currently have 225 P1 and P2 teachers in 89 schools in seven districts participating in the program. The teachers are continually assessed through classroom observations, support supervision visits, textbook assessments, paper-pencil tests and individual and group projects. Only teachers who meet our competency standards will receive certificates of completion.

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[1] McEwan, Patrick. (2015). *Improving Learning in Primary Schools of Developing Countries: A Meta-Analysis of Randomized Experiments*. Retrieved from https://bit.ly/2HMGQdd.

The Challenge of Assessment and Reporting of Pupil Progress

A major challenge Mango Tree has grappled with as we implement our Teacher Mentor Program is the incoherent system of assessment and reporting of pupils' literacy progress. As part of the Teacher Mentor Program we expect teachers to follow Ministry of Education policy on assessment which has been clear and consistent since the introduction of the Thematic Curriculum Reform of 2005 and is embedded in the framework for the National Literacy Model. Despite this, implementation of the Ministry's assessment policies remained problematic at the district level.

Most notably, the National Literacy Model has clear guidelines for end-of-term assessment, but many districts create their own or purchase commercial exams that they expect teachers to administer. These district exams tend to be poorly set and often do not reflect actual instruction during the term.

We also received feedback from our teachers that the National Literacy Model's tool for supporting continuous assessment needed revision. The Continuous Assessment Monitoring Form, known informally as the CAM Form, had three key challenges that needed addressing:
1. The CAM Form tried to capture too many competences. It needed to be simplified.
2. The CAM Form needed to be tailored to the specific competences taught during each term, rather than the current form that has to be used for all three terms.
3. Teachers wanted an additional CAM Form for capturing continuous assessment data for the non-literacy learning areas.

Finally, each school seemed to have its own version of a parent report card. These report cards do not reflect the continuous and summative assessments of pupil competences that teachers have done during the term. They also don't reflect the Ministry of Education and Sports move to a competency-based assessment model. And because they are written in English, parents find them challenging to interpret.

For several years now, Mango Tree Literacy Lab has been piloting simplified parent-friendly report cards in Leblango that support the MoES assessment policy. We've wanted to disseminate standardized, parent-friendly report cards written in Leblango for pupils in P1-P3, but recognize we won't have successful uptake until all the other early primary assessment components are in alignment with MoES policy and the national literacy model.

The Lango Regional Assessment and Reporting Task Force of 2019

In September 2018, recognizing we only had one more year in our current funding cycle, Mango Tree Literacy Lab decided to take a pro-active step toward addressing these issues by establishing a Regional Assessment and Reporting Task Force. We asked our main implementing partner, Loro Primary Teachers' College, to partner with us in this endeavor because, as a "Core" Primary Teachers' College, Loro has a mandate to support schools in all the districts in the Lango Sub-region.

In the final months of 2018, working in coordination with Loro PTC and regional education leaders on our Project Advisory Committee, we developed a one-year scope of work for the Assessment and Reporting Task Force. Our objective was to create a coherent, regional plan for assessing pupils' academic progress on a termly basis and reporting that progress in a clear and measurable way to parents and district officials. Our task was to develop the assessment tools and systems needed to implement a more coherent, regional assessment model in Primary 1-3.

The Task Force was launched on March 15, 2019 at Pauline Hotel in Lira with over 100 regional and national education stakeholders. All the districts in the Lango Sub-region pledged to support the work of the task force on that day. Immediately thereafter, an Assessment and Reporting Working Group of sixteen individuals was assembled, comprised of classroom teachers, head teachers, primary teacher college tutors and Mango Tree staff. The working group met on the last Friday of every month from March through October. Below is a table that outlines the order in which the content development tasks were completed:

Working Group Meetings 2019	Content Development Tasks
March	Revision of Literacy CAM Forms P1 – P3
April	Development of Math, RE and CAPE CAM Forms P1-P3
May	Finalization of all CAM Forms
June	End-of-Term Assessments P1 – P3 (Reading, Writing, English, Math)
July	End-of-Term Assessments P1 – P3 (Reading, Writing, English, Math)
August	Parent Report Cards P1-P3
September	District Reports of Literacy Progress by Schools
October	Teacher Guidebook Review by Working Group and District Officials

Based on the tools and systems developed by the working group, MTLL created a *Lango Regional Guidebook for Assessment and Reporting in P1 to P3* for each grade level. These guidebooks provide everything a teacher needs to know in order to implement the regional assessment model successfully. Samples of each of the CAM Forms, End-of-Term Assessments, Parent Report Cards and District Reports of Literacy Progress are included in the guidebook along with explicit instructions on how to use them properly. Record Sheets for compiling both continuous and end-of-term data are also included along with directions on how to transfer the data from the Record Sheet to the Parent Report Card. The idea is that when a district decides to implement this assessment and reporting system, they have one document that will provide complete guidance for all stakeholders.

Training Education Stakeholders in Data Analysis and Decision-Making

Along with complete instructions in how to use the assessment and reporting tools, the guidebook has two other important functions: 1.) training education stakeholders in the analysis of the collected assessment data and 2.) using that analysis to make instructional decisions, especially concerning remedial support for pupils who are not demonstrating the targeted competences.

Because most of the pupil performance data collected by teachers has been part of an incoherent assessment system, most teachers have never considered their data to be particularly meaningful. One of the unanticipated benefits of piloting these assessment tools with teachers in our mentor program has been to witness how excited and interested teachers are in tracking their pupils' progress in accomplishing key literacy benchmarks. Armed with specific data on weekly and termly performance, we are also helping teachers identify the ways in which they can use this data to make decisions about differentiated instruction. We still have a long way to go, but for the teachers who have had a chance to use these tools as part of our pilot, we are witnessing a powerful "aha" moment when they complete their data analysis and see the story told by the numbers begin to emerge.

Encouraging Community Dialogue on Literacy Benchmarks

An important component of our work from the beginning has been to foster a discussion on benchmarks for reading and writing among teachers, parents and the general community. Our premise is that because of the pervasive use of English for instruction in early primary prior to the 2005 Thematic Curriculum Reform, expectations for pupil performance in reading and writing have become very low. A 2010 study by RTI showed that 81.8% of pupils completing Primary Two in the Lango Sub-region could not read a single word in the local language[2]. Informal reports from teachers in our program indicate that many pupils in P3 are still unable to write their full name with correct spelling and letter formation.

In 2012 we produced a video about benchmarks that was widely disseminated and discussed. (See the link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYcn6-NFoLs) Our objective was to raise expectations of pupil performance among teachers, parents and education administrators. Until there is a paradigm shift among educators and parents about what we can expect pupils to achieve in reading and writing competences when they learn in their home language, it will be difficult to make the kinds of gains we hope to achieve. Additionally, until the education community has a set of shared standards for pupil performance, it is difficult to create accountability in the education system.

Over the years, we've continued to refine our benchmark messages. In 2018 we formulated a new message that we hope will gain traction and help move the conversation forward. We established "Big Benchmarks" for reading and writing in P1 to P3 that we hope are easy for parents and teachers to identify and measure. The following table outlines these big benchmarks for early primary:

Big Benchmarks	Primary One	Primary Two	Primary Three
Reading	Name at least 30 Leblango letters in one minute.	Read at least 30 familiar words in one minute.	Read with a fluency of about 60 words per minute.
Writing	Write full name with correct spelling and letter formation.	Write a meaningful story with at least 4 sentences.	Write a meaningful 3-paragraph story.

Our simple message to parents and teachers is, "If your child cannot demonstrate this reading and writing competence by the end of the school year, then they do not have the basic literacy skills required to succeed in the subsequent school year."

We've disseminated this message via our teacher mentors who have been required to organize parent engagement activities each term. We've created posters of the Big Benchmarks (see the following page) and have also developed a *Parent Literacy Guidebook* that includes the Big Benchmarks. This guidebook has been distributed to over 9,000 parents in our Teacher Mentor Program schools. An English version of the *Parent Literacy Guidebook* can be downloaded on our website by following this link: https://bit.ly/36Eie1N

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[2] Piper, Benjamin. (2010). *Uganda Early Grade Reading Assessment Finding Report: Literacy Acquisition and Mother Tongue*. Retrieved from https://bit.ly/2pZZ997. (page 54)
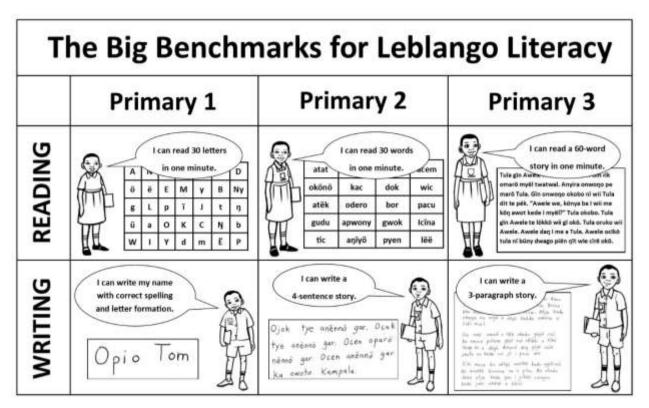
Fig. 1. English version of a poster that was disseminated to parents

The Big Benchmarks play an important role in the assessment and reporting tools and systems we've developed in the following ways:

- In responding to the request from teachers for simplified CAM Forms, we've decided to focus primarily on the Big Benchmark competences for collection of data on a daily basis. Teachers are still expected to do all the continuous assessment steps in the lesson plans of the National Literacy Model, but the amount of data they are expected to keep records on is reduced and focused on the Big Benchmarks for their grade level.
- The end-of-term assessments developed by the working group also track pupil performance on the Big Benchmarks.
- Each term requires teachers to compile and analyze the continuous and summative assessment data they've collected. To keep it simple, we focus on developing the teacher's ability to analyze and make instructional decisions about the Big Benchmark data.

Current Pupil Performance on the Big Benchmarks in the Lango Sub-region: EGRA Data

In November 2018 and 2019, three teams of external enumerators hired and trained by Ichuli Institute visited a total of 15 schools to conduct Early Grade Reading Assessments (EGRA) in our Teacher Mentor Program schools. Either 30 or 32 pupils were sampled in each school, depending on whether the school had three or four trained TMP teachers. An equal number of female and male pupils were sampled at every school.

The EGRA was administered *only* in Leblango. Below is a table of compiled results for each year, followed by some key takeaways.

EXTERNAL ENDLINE EGRA RESULTS 2018 & 2019			
PRIMARY ONE	**2018**	**2019**	**% IMPACT**
Letter Name Knowledge (Avg.)	8	16	100% increase
Letter Name Knowledge (Max.)	75	96	28% increase
Letter Name Knowledge (% Non-readers)	29%	29%	No change
Familiar Word Reading (Avg.)	0.3%	1.5%	80% increase
Familiar Word Reading (Max.)	23	43	87% increase
Familiar Word Reading (% Non-readers)	98%	80%	22.5% decrease
Oral Reading Fluency (Avg.)	0.5 wpm	0.86 wpm	72% increase
Reading Comprehension (# Correct)	5	15	200% increase
PRIMARY TWO	**2018**	**2019**	**% IMPACT**
Letter Name Knowledge (Avg.)	20	26	30% increase
Letter Name Knowledge (Max.)	90	99	10% increase
Letter Name Knowledge (% Non-readers)	11%	10%	10% decrease
Familiar Word Reading (Avg.)	2.2	4.2	91% increase
Familiar Word Reading (Max.)	49	45	8% decrease
Familiar Word Reading (% Non-readers)	82%	67%	22% increase
Oral Reading Fluency (Avg.)	3.2 wpm	3.6 wpm	13% increase
Reading Comprehension (# Correct)	41	54	32% increase

Key Takeaways

Letter Name Knowledge
- P1 pupils in 2019 can identify twice as many letters as P1 pupils in 2018.
- At the same time, the number of non-letter readers remained the same. Why no reduction?

Familiar Word Reading
- The average number of words read by P2 pupils nearly doubled in 2019.
- In this case, P2 non-readers did decrease by 22% as well.

Oral Reading Fluency and Reading Comprehension
- Performance improved on all indicators in both P1 and P2, but numbers are still very low.

Current Pupil Performance on the Big Benchmarks in the Lango Sub-region: Teacher Data

We trained TMP teachers to do end-of-term assessments on their pupils' progress in key reading and writing competences and then compile and analyze the results. Some of the tests were similar to the EGRA assessments (Letter Name Knowledge and Familiar Word Reading) but other tests were designed by MTLL to meet the requirements of the National Literacy Model. Below are the compiled results for all teachers. The first table are the results from P1 teachers in 2019. The second table includes results for P1 pupils beginning in Term 2 2018 and then extending into 2019 when the same pupils were in P2.

AVERAGE PERFORMANCE BY TERM FOR THE 2019 COHORT OF P1 PUPILS IN TMP SCHOOLS

END-OF-TERM TESTS TMP TEACHER REPORTED	Primary 1 Term 1 2019	Primary 1 Term 2 2019	Primary 1 Term 3 2019
Letter Name Knowledge (out of 50 letters)	8.5	15.3	21.4
Familiar Word Reading (out of 30 words)		4.0	5.9
Name Writing (out of 12 points)	7.4	7.5	8.6
Spelling (% of words spelled correctly)	40%	22%	45%
Letter Formation (out of 16 points)	7	9.9	11.6
Creative Writing (out of 15 points)		7.8	8.9

AVERAGE PERFORMANCE BY TERM FOR THE 2018 COHORT OF P1 PUPILS IN TMP SCHOOLS

END-OF-TERM TESTS TMP TEACHER REPORTED	Primary 1 Term 2 2018	Primary 1 Term 3 2018	Primary 2 Term 1 2019	Primary 2 Term 2 2019	Primary 2 Term 3 2019
Letter Name Knowledge (out of 50 letters)	14	17.8	21.7	24.3	29.1
Familiar Word Reading (out of 30 words)		6.3	7.3	7.8	10.3
Name Writing (out of 12 points)	8.0	7.9	9.0	9.5	9.6
Spelling (% of words spelled correctly)	33%	35%	39%	35%	42%
Letter Formation (out of 16 points)				10	10.1
Creative Writing (out of 12 points)		6.8	5.6	5.8	6.2

Conclusion

A complete set of draft documents was shared with district officials and Loro PTC staff at our biannual Project Advisory Committee Meeting in October. These stakeholders will now have a chance to review the documents and provide feedback. After their feedback is incorporated, a final draft will be produced in 2020.

We are also currently seeking funding to pilot these materials. Our hope is that if we emerge with a successful assessment system for the Lango Sub-region, we can then begin to influence our neighbours to the east and west and eventually provide infant teachers throughout Uganda with teacher-friendly assessment and reporting tools that will help bring coherence, accountability and improved pupil performance to Uganda's education system.