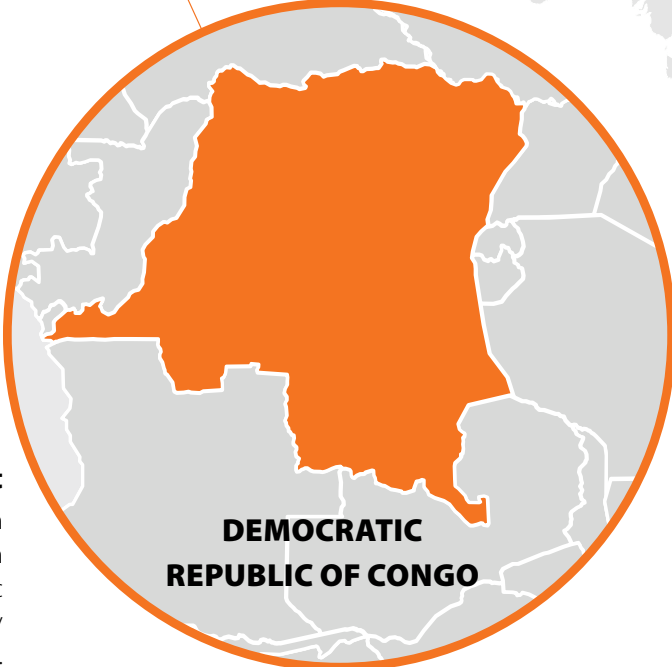
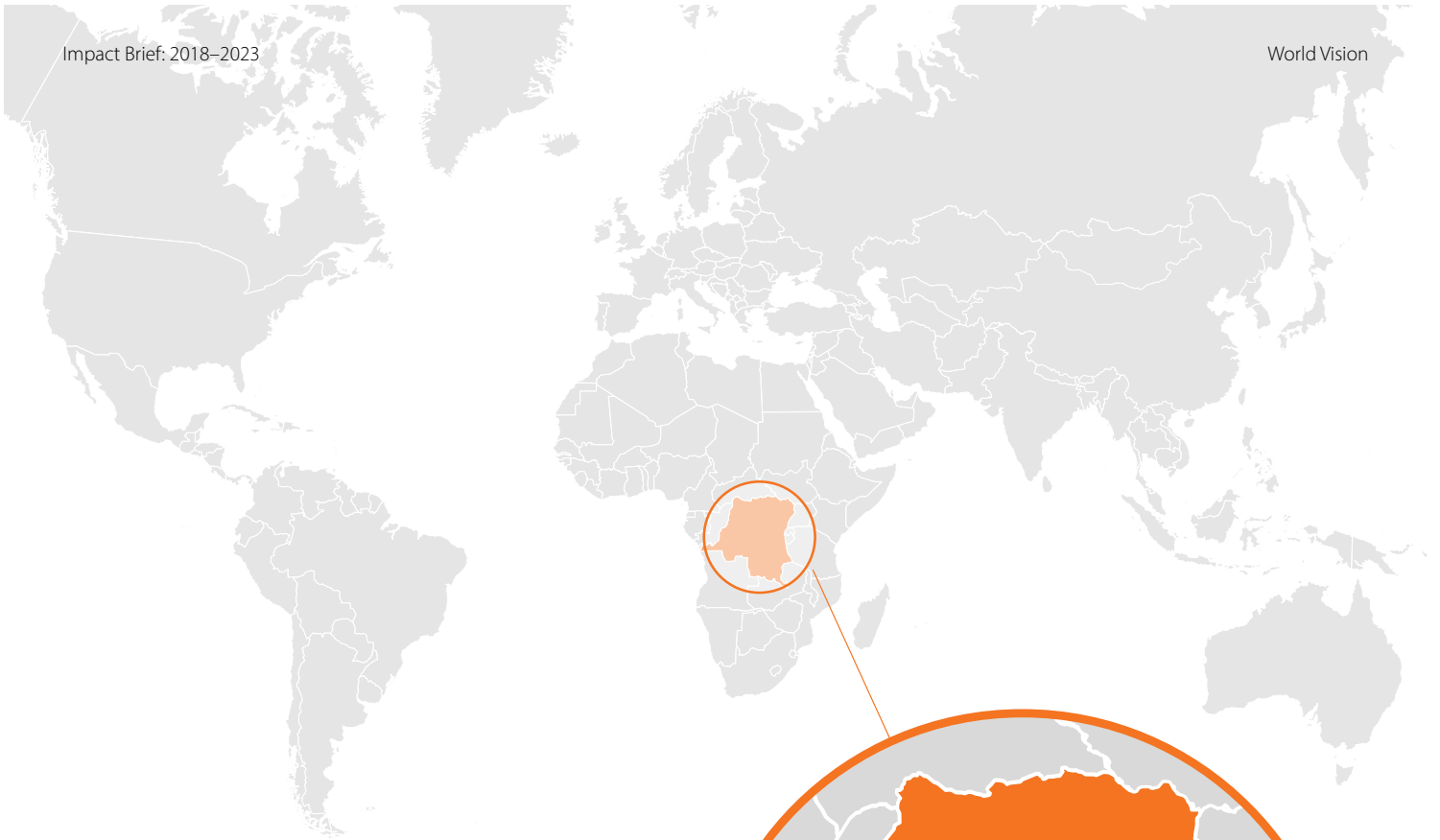




EMPOWERING CHILDREN AND COMMUNITIES TO LEARN IN TANGANYIKA (ECCOL)

Democratic Republic of Congo | Impact Brief
(2018–2023)



About this report

This brief summarises the main findings of the Final Evaluation of the Empowering Children and Communities to Learn in Tanganyika (ECCOL) project by World Vision Democratic Republic of Congo (2018-2023). The evaluation was conducted by Mayele Mazambi from CEFAD, a XantonnGroup Company, in 2023.

The Brief was prepared by Katie Chalk, ANCP Manager at World Vision Australia (WVA). For more information, please contact Kathryn Delahunty, WVA Country Impact Manager (kathryn.delahunty@worldvision.com.au), Stephen Milford, WVA ANCP Impact Advisor (stephen.milford@worldvision.com.au) or Katie Chalk (katie.chalk@worldvision.com.au).

ECCOL is supported by the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).

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Front cover photo: The ECCOL project supported better classrooms, locally relevant material and different teaching methods. As a result, children's reading ability more than doubled, from just 25.8% in 2018 to 56.8% in 2023.



EMPOWERING CHILDREN AND COMMUNITIES TO LEARN IN TANGANYIKA, DRC (ECCOL)

Supported by the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP)

Duration	5 years from 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2023
Budget (US\$):	US\$4,050,910
Estimated number of participants	48,331 participants including 39,284 children and 9,047 adults in 40 primary schools across 16 neighbourhoods



With ongoing disruption to schools opening, children in Tanganyika might easily have fallen behind in learning and social skills. Instead, improvements across 40 schools have strengthened their interest and achievement in education.

GLOBAL IMPORTANCE OF QUALITY EDUCATION

Every child's right to education has been recognised since the UN Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, underscored by the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and significantly boosted by global efforts under the Millennium Development Goals to bring universal primary education within reach. However, this right implies not only access but also quality of education, which remains

elusive across many contexts and cultures. In 2015, the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development highlighted globally the need for national policies to improve the quality of education. The fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4) of this Agenda aims to “ensure access for all, to quality education, on an equal footing, and promote lifelong learning opportunities” by 2030.

“Priority must be given first and foremost to spaces that serve as an effective setting for teaching and learning. This includes attention to setting appropriate objectives and relevant [educational] content.”¹

EDUCATION FOR THE CHILDREN OF DRC

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is a nation facing extreme challenges of civil conflict, instability and poverty: a ‘fragile context’ state. Persistent large-scale displacement of communities challenges recovery from the effects of war, deteriorates economic resilience, including of the state itself, and substantially impacts access to quality learning opportunities for children of all ages. DRC responded to the SDG4 call in 2015 with their ‘Sectoral Strategy for Education and Training, 2016-2025’ (SSEF) with three strategic axes: (i) Promote an equitable education system, at the service of growth and employment, (ii) Create the conditions for a quality education system, and (iii) Establish transparent and effective governance.²

Despite this, in 2018 a USAID study found 3.5 million children of primary school age were not enrolled in school. Of those who were, one in three did not finish Grade 6.³ In 2020, the Congolese Government decreed free primary education throughout the Republic. While in line with national and global commitments to education, the policy triggered an influx of new enrolments to an unprepared education system, placing extraordinary pressure on under-staffed and unsafe schools, both in terms of infrastructure and teacher supervision.

1 UNESCO, ‘Education for all: the quality requirement’, (Global Monitoring Report on Education for All, Paris, 2005), p.24.

2 MEINC et alii, Education and Training Sector Strategy 2016-2025 (December, 2015).

3 USAID, Early Grade Reading Assessment, DRC – 2018.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Empowering Children and Communities to Learn project aimed to improve access to, and completion of, quality primary education for both girls and boys in Tanganyika Province.

The project used a multifaceted approach which included training of teachers and school administrators, strengthening school-community relationships and accountability, engaging faith and community leaders to advocate for children's education, small-scale rehabilitation of school infrastructure and community dialogue on the needs and rights of girls. This, coupled with support

for caregivers to build financial resilience through savings groups, was intended to bring children to school and support their learning outcomes.

Throughout the project, World Vision centred actions on what was best for children (both girls and boys) and sought to empower communities and government to promote and provide a safe, inclusive and protective environment for all students, including those with a disability. Formative monitoring throughout the life of the project supported policy discussions on barriers and solutions to inclusive education in fragile contexts.

CHALLENGES AND RESPONSES

A major interruption to project planning was COVID-19 which considerably affected education globally.

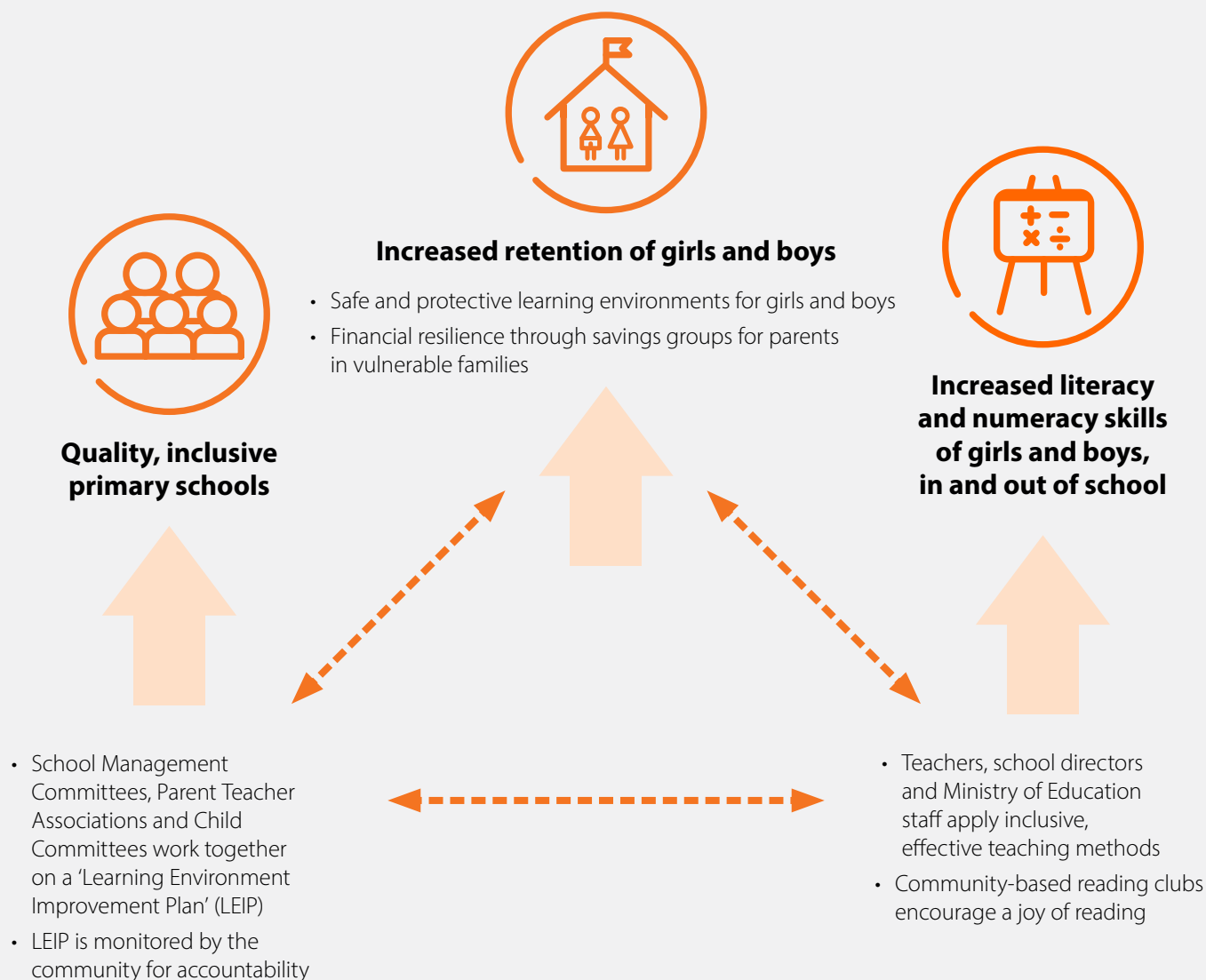
In DRC, lockdowns from April 2020 forced children to stay at home. As a result, some children never

returned back to school; this reality is reflected in project results on school retention. Progress was also challenged by family displacement for security reasons, and by untimely strikes by teachers which closed schools and considerably affected smooth running of project activities.



Savings for Transformation groups supported women's economic agency. With the additional money available, women often chose to invest in their children's education needs.

PROJECT APPROACH (THEORY OF CHANGE)



Goal: Increase completion of quality formal primary education benefiting 48,331 girls, boys, teachers, parents and community members in Tanganyika Province by 2023.

Outcome 1: Increase access to quality and inclusive primary education for girls and boys by 15%.

Outcome 2: Increase literacy and numeracy skills of primary school aged children by 30%.

Outcome 3: Increase retention of girls and boys in targeted schools.

Outcome 4: Enhanced evidenced-based decision making through functional knowledge management.

EVALUATION: PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

World Vision commissioned a final (summative) evaluation of the ECCOL project in its fifth year. The objective was to systematically and objectively assess the implementation of the project activities by identifying endline results through comparison analysis of various data sources. The evaluation identified the strengths and weaknesses that characterised the project's implementation and drove final results.

DATA SOURCES INCLUDED:

- Document review, mainly of project documents and baseline/midterm results, and also relevant literature review
- Student survey (Grade 3) of 419 students (48.7% female, 5.3% with disability), using the STAR (School-based Test About Reading) tool
- Community survey, tailored to older students (193, 49% female, 1% with disability), teachers (195, 39% female, no disability), and households (324, 54.3% female, 2% disability)
- 20 focus group discussions involving 152 people (51% female)
- Key informant interviews with 32 people: school principals, organisers of the EPST, Social Affairs and local authorities

RESULTS

Outcome	Description	Indicators	Baseline Value	Mid-line Value	End-line Value	Target Value
Global objective: To help boys and girls complete quality formal primary education in Tanganyika						
Outcome 1.	Increased access to quality and inclusive primary education for girls and boys by 15% in Kalemie by 2023	% of children currently enrolled in and attending a structured learning institution (age range 6 - 12)	76%	71.2%	91%	87.4%
Outcome 2.	Increase the reading and numeracy skills of school-aged children by 30%	% of children in Grade 3 who can read a Grade 3 level passage	25.2%	55%	56.8%	55.2%
		% of children in Grade 3 who can read a Grade 3 level passage and correctly answer at least of fact retrieval questions	8.5%	21.9%	39.5%	38.5%
		% of children in Grade 3 level who can calculate	4%	30.7%	31.51%	34%
Outcome 3.	Increase retention of girls and boys in targeted schools	Proportion of children who have dropped out of school	5%	9.32%	9.11%	-
		School retention rate	42%	54.7%	56.4%	57%
Outcome 4.	The capacity of vulnerable households and communities to reduce barriers to education and promote quality education is strengthened	% of households able to pay for their children's basic education	-	66.4%	73.4%	100%
		% of parents/guardians who are VSLA members	-	78.9%	81.5%	100%
		% of parents/guardians who have at least one IGA that provides them with income outside the scope	-	69.9%	72.2%	100%
		% of parents/guardians who have received a loan from VSLA	24%	89.6%	87.2%	100%

FINDINGS BY OUTCOME

OUTCOME 1:

Increase access to quality and inclusive primary education for girls and boys by 15% in Kalemie by 2023

Achieved in full: target exceeded

From baseline of 76%, the evaluation found 91% of children were enrolled at school. While this trend was partially due to free primary education, teachers and parents also noted improved economic capacity to support other schooling costs. Community-level promotion of inclusive rights-based education and benefits for girls of school attendance was effective – girls comprised 58.6% of attendees surveyed. Girls were appreciative of safer schools and hygiene initiatives including menstrual management.

OUTCOME 2:

Increase the reading and numeracy skills of school-aged children by 30%

Achieved in full: target exceeded

“We are relieved that our children no longer bring chairs to school because World Vision provided desks for them.”

– Community member in Lukuga

Reading ability has increased from 25.2% at baseline to 56.8% at endline. Deeper tests (reading with comprehension, varied maths skills) were more challenging for the students, but still came in well above baseline values.

Teachers endorsed this finding, explaining that a number of school improvements, and in their own understanding of how to engage students with contextual materials, had helped children with their learning and literacy. Tests on reading showed little difference between girls and boys, but a more substantial gap in maths ability. For all tests, children with disability were disadvantaged. However, the low numbers (22 total) makes quantitative conclusions less relevant than direct analysis of individual children’s learning needs.

OUTCOME 3:

Increase retention of girls and boys in targeted schools

Achieved: 98.4% of target

School retention faced challenges listed previously: civil unrest, COVID-19 and teachers’ strikes. Despite this, substantially more children were completing their enrolled year than at baseline. The evaluation found that school canteens (not a project input, but available in some target schools) increased retention, and the advent of free education also helped. The most effective project activities for increasing retention were infrastructure for better safety, equipment for better student comfort and WASH facilities for better hygiene, especially for girls.

OUTCOME 4:

The capacity of vulnerable households and communities to reduce barriers to education and promote quality education is strengthened

Achieved: 78.4% of target

“From the activities in the group, we easily coped with the schooling expenses of our children.”

– Member of the S4T group

The indicators for this outcome, analysed together, confirm the value of household economic empowerment. Savings for Transformation (S4T) groups set up with school parents have largely been successful, with more members joining than initially targeted. Of parents surveyed, 81.5% were in S4T groups, 73.4% were able to pay for children’s school needs and 72.2% had at least one income-generating activity (small business). Of households with more than one small business, all were members of savings groups. The evaluation also found decision making was being shared more equally between spouses, and household tensions affecting children had decreased. While reduction of gender-based violence was not specifically measured, some women in focus groups raised this as an outcome, unprompted.



RESULTS FOR GIRLS AND WOMEN

While both girls and boys benefited from school improvement, specific benefits for girls were noted as the reason for a higher proportion of girls than boys in enrolment and retention figures: for instance, the Girls' Clubs providing menstrual health advice and hygiene kits. Student committees were led by both boys and girls. Among adults, the men for gender equality approach led to greater support by men (including religious leaders, school officials and teachers, members of parents' committees, heads of state services and other local leaders) for women's rights, women's work and equal opportunities for girls. As mentioned above, women's economic power was greatly enhanced by membership in S4T groups, which in turn impacted gender disadvantage in households, allowing women to decide for themselves on many aspects of home and economic activities.

Our household survey included questions about women's decision making. As these were not asked in the baseline survey, they do not show change over time, but they do confirm relatively high scores on household equality indicators (decisions on household resource allocation taken jointly: 73.5%; women's right to control their fertility: 62.7%; women taking charge of their own income: 63%). On the other hand, only around 20% of people surveyed (less for women and for people with disability) thought women participated equally in community decisions. This indicates a challenge to be faced in future programming.



RESULTS FOR DISABILITY

The project placed particular emphasis on disability-inclusive education, and the feedback from both parents and teachers has been very positive. The training sessions provided to teachers, the equipping of schools with textbooks and the small-scale rehabilitation carried out in the various schools have all taken place with a view to disability inclusion, significantly contributing to reducing physical and social barriers that kept some children away from school. Teachers confirmed unanimously that they now give more consideration to students with disability. Most students also repeated this viewpoint towards their peers with disabilities.



RESULTS FOR SUSTAINABILITY

The likelihood of sustained results in this project is high in most areas of work. Teacher training has improved skills which will continue to be used for the benefit of newly enrolled children. S4T groups appear very strong, managed with confidence by women and men and with good evidence of revolving loans. This also helps to safeguard household economic stability. The evaluation noted two main sustainability threats: firstly, overall economic and social volatility which works against household-level resilience and can push further displacement; secondly, the continuation of Book Clubs as these are not part of the formal school structure and lack a clear owner moving forward.

Other structures supported by the project within the schools, in particular the Parents' Committee, the Management Committee, the children's governments and the girls' clubs are likely to continue because schools recognise both value and accountability in having active groups. All 25 heads of schools interviewed were willing to take up responsibility for their continuation.

CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation found satisfactory results across all outcomes. This gives weight to the project’s theory that this combination of improved learning environments, strengthened community interest in the benefits of education, and household economic capacity to prioritise education can result in more children at school with better learning outcomes.

The participatory approach, which involved local school authorities in the implementation of all activities, significantly contributed to the likelihood of their sustainability. However, small adjustments remain necessary with the local school authorities, the headteachers and the parents so that teachers are regularly retrained in the modules developed by the project and Book Clubs are integrated into ordinary school activities in each establishment.

With regard to the student retention rate, the dropout rate remains high due to frequent internal displacements. It is hoped that improved learning environments and the economic strength of households through sustained S4T activities will continue to help parents stabilise their children’s school attendance. The retention rate is among the most important indicators of success for this project, and results are promising.



While school retention and learning improved for both girls and boys, the change in attitudes to girls’ education was significant and lasting. Schools were safer and homes more supportive of girls staying at school longer.

LESSONS

WHAT WORKED?

Sustainability through partnership with local authorities

Interviews with Ministry of Education Heads confirm that the involvement of local authorities in the implementation of project actions guarantees acceptance and ownership of community planning. The project brought these heads together with community for certain activities such as training to improve teacher skills. Equipment given to their offices has also strengthened their accountability for monitoring lesson quality.

Small-scale women's economic empowerment supports gender equality outcomes

Interviews held with women members of S4T groups reveal that gender-based violence in the household can be significantly reduced and the enjoyment of rights improved when women know about their rights and are empowered to make decisions and earn income. Their contribution to household expenses is appreciated by the men who now consult their wives in certain household decisions.

Savings groups benefit from small business experience

For women already practicing economic activities, the S4T support was shown to have a better chance of success. By comparison, S4T support offered to women who were still trying to get their businesses off the ground was less effective.

Male engagement on gender equality has improved household relations

Some community members reported that households became more harmonious when men had taken up the ideas of positive masculinity. More open conversation between couples had led to children also sharing their ideas constructively. All of this created peace within the household and a favourable climate for children's education.

Savings groups can promote social cohesion

Integrating several ethnic groups into a single common interest group (S4T Group) is key to eliminating prejudice between ethnic groups and promoting social cohesion. The FGDs revealed that S4T members do not judge themselves through their origins but instead on the results of their shared work.

Book clubs bring out the best in children

The interview with teachers highlighted the hidden abilities within children deemed less gifted in school settings. These talents can be discovered if the children are stimulated through appropriate frameworks such as Book Clubs. Children who were shy before book club activities have become active in class. Their reading and writing skills have improved, prompting considerable interest in Book Clubs from other parents for their own children.

Book clubs help provide psychosocial support for children

The techniques used to improve children's reading and writing skills through Book Clubs are recreational, engaging children's interest and attention. The Book Clubs create a positive environment where students can play and sing together. The supervisor and students call each other "friends", prompting a strong connection that allows students to give the best of themselves.

LESSONS

WHAT COULD WORK BETTER?

Quality checks and feedback loops are important

The consultant's field observations, and some participant feedback, revealed that minor rehabilitation works could have been done better in terms of quality. Some works were partially completed, such as wooden windows being installed without glass or anti-theft. World Vision is encouraged to always follow up with contractors to ensure that quality standards are met.

More formal agreement is needed to communicate scope and intent

Establishing a negotiated contractual framework for collaboration with local partners is important. However, allowing each party to keep a copy of the agreement could also improve collaboration and communication between parties, while respecting responsibilities and respective commitments. No school visited has a copy of the contract signed with WV, and therefore they lack a frame of reference for the actions carried out in their respective schools, which leads them to hold higher expectations that were not approved by the project.



Improved teaching techniques have helped children to find what they enjoy in class, like Amani, pictured, who loves to draw.

RECOMMENDATIONS

WHAT'S NEXT?



1. **Organise official handover of project activities to the participants for greater commitment and ownership:** school authorities, heads of school establishments, parents of students, teachers.



2. **Consider collaboration protocols, signed and available to all stakeholders,** for clarity on planning and accountability across various groups and committees.



3. **Create synergies between S4T groups for the next phase of loan access with accredited operators;** include ongoing sessions aimed at strengthening men's commitment to support women and young people in wealth creation and innovation.



4. **Find ways to embed Book Club activities as a part of school life,** whether in schools or communities, to ensure their continuation for all children, regardless of their learning abilities.



5. **Continue to expand activities in other schools or areas of Tanganyika Province;** consider seeking compatible donor funding and taking on more than minor rehabilitation works.



Book Clubs made it fun to practice reading with games and songs. The evaluation found they brought out the best in children, not only in learning outcomes but also socially.

For more information, contact:

Kathryn Delahunty, Country Impact Manager,
World Vision Australia. kathryn.delahunty@worldvision.com.au

World Vision ANCP desk: ancp@worldvision.com.au



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THIS MEANS THE WORLD