

# Access to Literacy and Learning Project

Papua New Guinea



## About this report

This report summarises results of the evaluation of World Vision's Access to Literacy and Learning (ALL) project in Papua New Guinea. ALL was funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP). The evaluation was commissioned by World Vision PNG, conducted by independent consultancy Evaluativa (Daniela Rojas Chaves) and reviewed by World Vision PNG (Imelda Ochavillo, Clement Chipokolo) and World Vision Australia (Geoff Peterson, Katie Chalk).

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Even with free tuition, covering the cost of books, uniforms and transport for children to attend school can be under-prioritised by parents in Papua New Guinea.

## Context

**Access to quality education remains a persistent challenge in Papua New Guinea (PNG), resulting in high illiteracy rates, an undereducated workforce, and almost 40% of the population living below the extreme poverty line (USD 1.90 per day, World Bank).<sup>1</sup>**

Despite the government's 2012 Tuition Fee Free (TFF) policy, which aimed to eliminate the barrier of school fees, many challenges persist regarding the standard of education, number of teachers, adequate infrastructure, and access to learning resources. According to a 2016 World Bank report, more than a third (37%) of the country's eight million people are illiterate, especially those living in remote locations (87% of Papua New Guineans live in rural areas).<sup>2</sup> The reasons for such low levels of literacy range from poor school attendance (often due to topographical isolation and parental expectations to help at home or work), poor learning conditions (such as limited education materials), social barriers (such as restrictions on girls' education), and a lack of qualified teachers.

## Project overview

The Access to Literacy and Learning (ALL) project aimed to support the development of children's literacy skills in primary schools by equipping teachers and parents to give best possible support to children, improving learning conditions, and providing appropriate materials. The project worked with 7,460 people in Madang and Morobe provinces between July 2017 and June 2021. It adapted World Vision's *Unlock Literacy* model to improve teaching skills, promote safe learning environments and stimulate children's interest in learning, in and out of school. Project activities complemented the school retention focus of World Vision's *Together for Education* project (funded through the DFAT-PNG Partnership Fund) in Morobe, Madang and Central provinces, which targets improved literacy and numeracy rates for older school children. Schools were supported to complete School Learning Improvement Plans (SLIPs), a planning tool used to access provincial government funding and materials based on capacity. In addition, adapting the Positive Discipline curriculum for use in PNG was intended to enhance both

education and child protection outcomes locally, with a view to expansion across the PNG program.

Project highlights included:

- Engaging 7,460 parents and caregivers in education awareness activities
- Training 152 teachers on the government's Standard Based Curriculum (SBC) for primary-aged children
- Establishing after-school Reading Clubs (in conjunction with Together for Education) for children of all ages, including children not at school
- Producing 66 local, culturally relevant storybooks, written by teachers, volunteers and children at writers' workshops
- Distributing over 1,000 reading books to schools and Reading Clubs
- Supporting school management committees in 20 schools to develop and implement SLIPs.

<sup>1</sup> [https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.NAHC?locations=CO-PG&view=map&year\\_high\\_desc=true](https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.NAHC?locations=CO-PG&view=map&year_high_desc=true)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/png/overview>

## About the evaluation

This final evaluation adopted a mixed methods approach, using primary quantitative and qualitative data sources. These sources included surveys (with parents, teachers and head teachers); key informant interviews (KII) with Department of Education officials, Reading Club volunteers and the project management team; as well as an outcome mapping activity. Secondary sources, such as desk-based review of project reports, were also undertaken for clarification of report details.

This study was an end-of-project evaluation, with a focus on outcome-level analysis, making direct references and comparisons to the 2017 baseline data where appropriate. Where possible, the study also considered the project's impact: that is, community changes as a result of the outcomes measured. Information was gathered through:

- Parents' survey: 294 parents who had taken part in project activities (50% female/50% male)
- Teachers' survey: 64 teachers in schools with SLIPs (53% female/47% male)
- Head teachers' survey: 21 head teachers in schools with SLIPs (81% male, demonstrating gender bias in school management)
- KIIs with Department of Education officials (10), Reading Club volunteers (13), project staff (3)

An acknowledged limitation of the evaluation was the inability to access comparative records showing children's learning progress which was partly due to the remote locations. This meant that no conclusion could be made on whether children's learning had measurably improved as a result of the project.

## What is Unlock Literacy?

**Unlock Literacy (UL)** aims to increase literacy and numeracy skills for children in the early grades of primary school by improving teaching methods for classroom reading, as well as engaging students, families and communities in reading activities outside of school. This is done through reading clubs, camps, and by providing other opportunities for children to access basic reading experience, regardless of background or situation.

*Unlock Literacy* recognises that young readers possess a spectrum of different abilities. Assessing their progress ranges from foundational skills (concepts and letter identification) through to higher level skills (such as reading fluency and comprehension). Over time, the goal is for all children to be reading with comprehension by the end of primary school (Grade 3), with an emphasis on children developing at their own pace.

In contrast to traditional education projects that focus exclusively on teachers and schools, *Unlock Literacy* brings a holistic approach that works with teachers, parents, community members and government structures to create a culture of reading, so that children become lifelong learners and mature into adults ready to transfer this culture.



Finding teachers who can be effective in dual language learning is a challenge in the PNG context, with communities using local language but most textbooks only available in English.

## Findings by impact

- The majority of participants in the study believed that literacy had improved (for both girls and boys in primary school, Grades 3 to 6) as a result of the project, including teachers, head teachers and parents.
- Parents were asked to name any changes in their children as a result of project activities; 55% named at least one change, with the most common being “reading” (30% of respondents), “improved results” (20%) and “writing” (14%).
- The teacher survey used a five-tiered scale to rate students’ reading and writing skills: poor, satisfactory, average, good or very good. Between baseline and endline, the most common answer shifted from “satisfactory” upwards to “average”; with no teacher rating their students’ literacy skills as “poor” (4% had selected this bottom rating during the baseline).
- Most head teachers reported that enrolment rates had increased, although this wasn’t the case in some schools and regions. On average, the number of students in schools increased (18% in Madang and 9% in Morobe). Teachers also noted a small upward trend in out-of-school children re-enrolling, especially among girls.
- Parents were also more likely to provide “all necessary support” for their children to attend school, especially in Madang.

**“My children can now read fluently and are able to comprehend what they read... Reading has now become their habit. When they are at home, they read anything that has writing on it.”**

– Parent

*“The ANCP ALL project has helped very much in enhancing knowledge of primary school teachers, upgrading of knowledge and skills on SBC and Unlock Literacy [curriculums] to meet the [national education] standards. The ALL project also provided our schools with textbooks and supplementary readers which the district [Department of Education] and parents cannot afford. It’s a big relief that removed our burden. The books provided to schools also motivated or encourage children to continually and faithfully attend classes.”*

– Department of Education officer.

Indicators of improved learning		
Impact / outcome level	2017 Baseline	2021 Evaluation
Parents reporting at least one positive change in their child as a result of project activities	n/a	55%
<b>Teachers reporting average, good or very good reading writing skills in their students</b>		
Madang	39%	71%
Morobe	72%	84%
Overall	56%	78%
<b>Intermediate / supporting level</b>		
Teachers reporting project training met their main needs “to a great degree”	n/a	61%
<b>Teachers reporting availability of:</b>		
Text books	29%	82%
Reading books	12%	78%
Other classroom accessories	9%	60%
<b>Average number of students in schools</b>		
Madang	164	199 (18% increase)
Morobe	218	240 (9% increase)
<b>Parents providing “all necessary support” to children to attend school</b>		
Madang	44%	72%
Morobe	53%	61%



### Outcome 1: Increased parental/caregiver support and demand for basic education

#### Partially achieved

The program has been reasonably successful in increasing parental/caregiver support and demand for basic education. This is evidenced by the high number of parent survey respondents reporting that they value education more, particularly in qualitative answers, where parents described very positive changes in themselves as a result of their involvement with the project. However, there is no quantitative data available to support this statement.

Other positive findings related to this outcome are:

- More children are enrolled in primary schools than five years ago (according to teachers and head teachers)
- Parents were able and willing to provide more support for their children’s educational needs
- More parents reported having “enough support from spouse” to respond to their children’s educational needs.

However, while support increased in these instances, there were other areas where less support was provided. The evaluation is therefore not able to show a consistent increase across all areas of support.

### Outcome 2: Improve inclusive and age-appropriate teaching practices.

#### Achieved

Activities and interventions implemented under Outcome 2 have been largely successful in improving inclusive and age-appropriate teaching practices. This came out very strongly in surveys with teachers, head teachers and parents, as well as in KIIs with Reading Club Volunteers and the Project Management team. They all spoke at length about the changes they have seen in classrooms as a result of the project implementation. Teachers also gave clear examples of how their knowledge increased and teaching practices that have changed since participating in the project trainings.

**“The biggest impact of the project is the teachers’ training and the new methods and tools on how to assess students in the class, which helped teachers to better plan and improve students’ literacy skills as a result.”**

– Project Management team



Teachers reported they are using new ways to encourage children in their classrooms to give more time for learning according to their needs.

*“The Balanced Score Card I now use to assess my students learning progress helped me a lot to identify gaps in students learning, and also level of students learning abilities. This has helped me to prepare their lessons accordingly to improve their literacy. I personally have experienced great change in my lessons planning after receiving training from WV ALL project.”*  
– Teacher

Parents participating in the evaluation strongly believed that the project helped increase literacy rates among their primary level children, as well as fostering a genuine interest in reading in English. Parents felt this was a result of the implementation of the new techniques they had learnt through the project on how to support their children’s education, and the provision of teaching and reading materials to teachers and schools.

### Outcome 3: Increase support for schools from public and civil society institutions.

#### Partially achieved

The project has been successful at increasing support for schools from public and civil society institutions. This was achieved through partnerships, advocacy campaigns and the joint facilitation of capacity building training sessions, particularly with the National Department of Education (NDoE) and the Creative Self-Help Centre (CSHC).

The SLIP development support provided to schools has also resulted in solutions for school infrastructure challenges.

**“We had a primary school that needed a double classroom... When I visited in June 2020, I saw they built the classroom and they told me that our approach to SLIP really helped and that the training we provided was so useful.”**

– Project staff member

### **Making education a priority in remote Ramu**

*“Middle Ramu is the most remote district in Madang. Here they do mainly subsistence farming, they don't think too much about paid work, and so this was the hardest location for making education seem important. We chose schools and did baseline in March 2018 but when we went back in June, two schools were already closed. They were having trouble with administration, land tenure, etc. We kept talking to them when we went back about getting the schools open again. We didn't give up. A year later the [schools] did come back to life. One was relocated to a site that could be secured long-term, and both were able to stand up with parental support, connected to the demand we'd built for education as a right. Now the schools are running and doing fine, and to me this is one of the greatest achievements of the project.”*

– Reflection from project team member

## **Cross-cutting themes**

### **Gender**

The Project Management team reported making all possible efforts to encourage female participation in project activities to try to overcome perceptions of inequality around gender. However, cultural beliefs and the small pool of female teachers, combined with non-compulsory project participation, made obtaining an equal gender balance difficult.

Despite these challenges, the evaluation did show some positive results related to gender. Head teachers reported that one of the biggest changes they noticed after the project was the increase in girls' enrolment rates in primary schools. The Department of Education officials agreed with this, attributing the change to the project's education awareness campaigns.

### **Disability**

According to the Project Management team, the biggest challenge faced by the project was the inclusion of children with disabilities, who face prejudice both in the classroom and at home. The team reported that the social inclusion of people with disabilities is a new concept in the communities and that “there is still much work to do in educating people on understanding that a disability is not because your parents did something bad.”

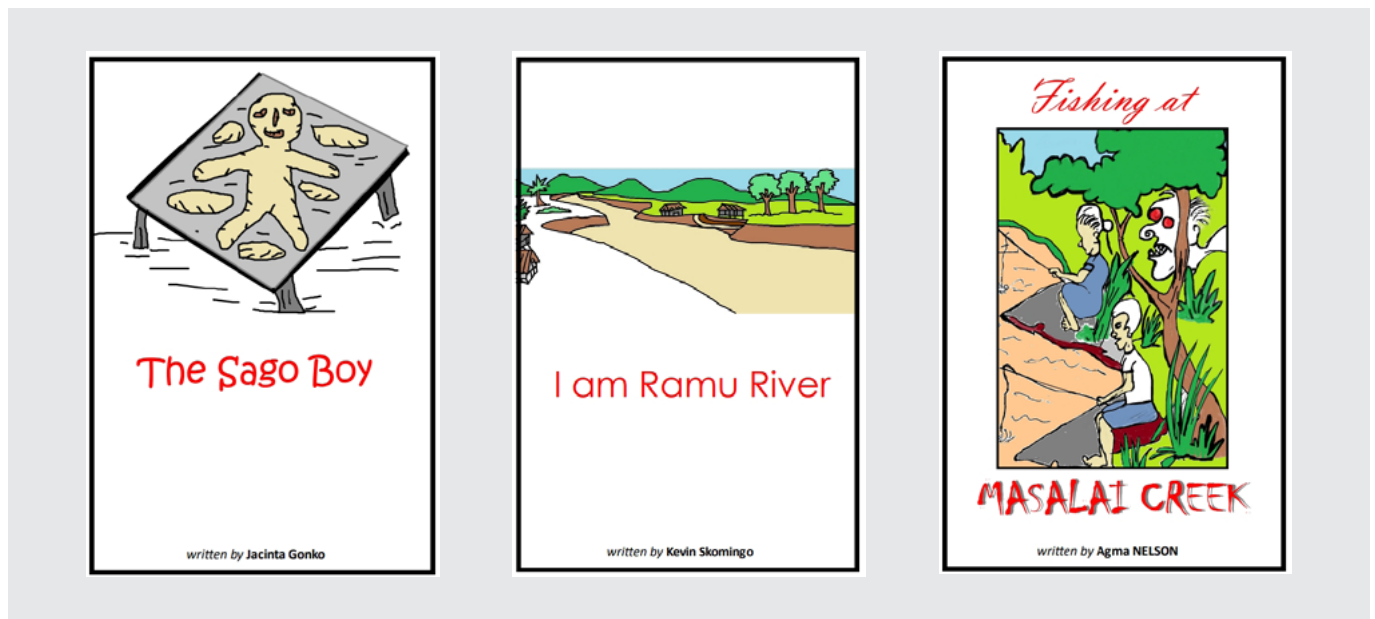
The project did not incorporate people with disabilities in the design of the project and therefore no strategy was developed to include them. However, the team developed partnerships and approaches that aimed to improve community attitudes to disability. For example:

- a) In partnership with the Creative Self-Help Centre (CSHC), awareness campaigns on disability inclusion were implemented, and primary age children received medical screening for hearing and visual impairments, with equipment provided for people who needed visual or hearing aids.
- b) In partnership with CSHC and the Fred Hollows Foundation, an integrated Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) centre was established in Madang. The CBR organised workshops with parents to explain that a disability service was now available, and trained communities and schools to recognise and respond to the needs of children with disabilities.
- c) A partnership with the Special Education School in Morobe resulted in a training session on roles and responsibilities, types of disabilities, the challenges faced when providing services for those living with disabilities (and their families), as well as possible referral pathways to address this issue. Two outreach clinics also provided hearing screening tests for students and led awareness sessions on people living with disabilities and their right to basic education.

### **Child Protection**

One expected change from the project, due to teacher training, was an increase in positive discipline at home and in school. In KIs, Project Management staff reported that during teacher training, child protection issues were raised, such as the need to have child protection policies in place, and how to discipline children in a way that is not physical. Although this topic was not in the teacher training manual, it is part of World Vision's program and was therefore included in the training.

When teachers were asked about incidents at their schools when a teacher might have verbally, physically, or emotionally hurt a child while disciplining them, the responses showed a slight improvement in Madang, but a significant shift backwards in Morobe.



Parents, teachers and youth volunteers published over 60 locally relevant picture books, like the ones pictured here, to read with the children at Reading Clubs.

### Promising Practice: Reading Clubs

To increase children's interest in reading and improve their literacy skills, the project implemented 28 Reading Clubs across both provinces and trained volunteers (mainly teachers) to run the sessions. Most of the clubs met once a week (some more frequently) with around 20 students attending each session. Parents whose children participated in the Reading Clubs reported that the activities helped their children become better readers, improving their English language skills and being more interested in education. Teachers and relevant community stakeholders noted that children were more eager readers, and that these community environments, which are less formal than traditional classrooms, seemed a good fit, both culturally and pedagogically.

Reading Club volunteers also reported that they were able to develop their own skills to help the students improve, for example, learning how to read stories to make them more interesting, and how to teach creative writing. Children learned different styles of reading, such as buddy reading, silent reading, and echo reading, and then used the style best suited to their learning abilities. Reading, speaking and writing English were the biggest improvements noted by the volunteers.

Despite the success of the Reading Clubs, only 12% of parents surveyed in Madang and 20% in Morobe reported that their children had participated in the clubs. The main reasons given for not participating were that they were not aware of them or that they were too far away for their children to attend.

**“The Reading Club setup was a challenging activity, the first of its kind. PNGers just didn’t have community-based education or kids’ activities at primary level. We discussed how we would carry this out, with students of different ages and also with children in community.**

**We also talked to schoolteachers to identify slow learners and students with reading challenges in particular. Once we had that list, we started to bring older and younger children together under a volunteer system.**

**Those students that the teachers nominated were easiest to track for outcomes, and we found that some went from the lowest in the class to actually topping it.”**

– Reflection from project team member



## Lessons and challenges



### Contextual hardship remains a barrier

Support for children's education has improved but is still barred to a degree by the realities and pressures of living in remote PNG. Factors making this difficult include gender barriers, low literacy among parents, education not perceived as a priority, and a lack of resources and infrastructure. There were improvements in child protection in schools during the course of the project, but the tension between education and child labour remains an issue to be addressed.



### Reading Clubs were a great success

There is an incipient interest in literacy and literature in the two provinces where the project was implemented. Parents requesting literacy training, children engaging in reading activities, and teachers guiding reading clubs are all strong indications of the potential for the approach to be sustainable, as long as conditions allow (e.g. meeting spaces are renovated and books supplied).



### Public engagement poses challenges in PNG

Unlock Literacy expects strong coordination and collaboration from local parties including schools and government. While schools met expectations in this regard, government capacity and coordination, given limited financial and staffing resources, can pose a challenge in PNG. This has led to a shortfall in meeting Outcome 3, as staff were not always able to engage with partners in the way they had hoped before the end of the project. However, when partnerships were developed, and project partners were brought on board early, the project was able to succeed.



### The Unlock Literacy model needs further adjustment in low-literacy settings

Initial approaches were not enough to overcome the barrier of low literacy in parents to support their children's education. Some adjustments were made in the course of the project, such as having shorter sessions (because of time availability), but it is likely that many more of these short sessions would be needed to ensure that the information shared is taken on board by parents.



The Access to Literacy and Learning project helped to change community attitudes that disadvantaged learning participation and outcomes for girls.

## When you commit to humanity amazing things can happen!

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