

Where in the world is RTI



INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

BIMONTHLY DECEMBER 2008/JANUARY 2009

Starting Up

Ugandan Ministries Undertake National HIV/AIDS Policies and Services

World Vision International (WVI), in partnership with RTI, is leading a five-year effort to improve the delivery of HIV-related programs in the Ugandan public sector workplace.

The public sector is Uganda's largest employer and is profoundly affected by the threat that HIV/AIDS poses particularly to young and middle-aged adults at the peak of productivity. It cripples productivity through absenteeism and the death of workers and their relatives, while increasing expenditures for health care and recruitment of new personnel.



SPEAR will assist Ugandan ministries to implement HIV/AIDS workplace policies and services throughout the country.

U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), is funding the project.

"SPEAR is a national project working with four ministries—Education, Internal Affairs, Local Government, and Public Service—to augment effective HIV/AIDS workplace policies," said Robert Ssengonzi, RTI project director. The first step is to analyze each ministry's HIV/AIDS policy

Through the project—Supporting Public Sector Workplaces to Expand Action and Responses against HIV/AIDS (SPEAR)—RTI is collaborating with public agencies to develop HIV/AIDS policies and provide HIV prevention, care, and treatment services to employees and their families. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), with support from the

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Liberia Uses Innovative Tools to Increase Children's Literacy

Children who learn to read in early grades are better equipped to escape poverty.

But teaching children to read isn't easy, and measuring progress can be complex and time-consuming. In Liberia, the government will use 15-minute tests to assess reading, along with teacher training and educational materials, to increase children's literacy.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID)/Liberia is working with the Government of Liberia to build the post-war education sector. The two-year Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) Plus: Liberia Program will evaluate student reading and provide interventions to improve student and teacher performance. RTI is leading the program through a task order of the USAID EdData II project.

The EGRA tests, developed by RTI and piloted in 14 countries, account for reading comprehension and fluency—



Teachers at selected schools in Liberia will use new diagnostic tools to assess children's reading performance in grades 2 and 3. [Photo: Medina Korda]

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Toward Quality Learning in South African Schools

At first glance, basic education in South Africa appears to be healthy. Student enrollment is high and the primary school completion rate is comparable to those in European countries.

Yet, students are not learning. Analysis of the data from standardized testing indicates that the average South African student, like her peers in most developing countries, would score in the bottom 3% of children tested in a developed country.

The learning achievement gap, like the socioeconomic gap, between communities in South Africa also remains wide, even 15 years after the end of apartheid. As children fall behind, the learning gap widens, and the effort necessary to make it up accumulates.

“If an intervention starts in grade 1, it will require only 30 minutes of effort a day to close the learning gap,” said Dr. Luis Crouch, RTI Vice President for Research. “But, if the intervention starts in grade 4, then you’ll be spending two hours a day trying to help the child catch up.” Sustained intervention in the foundational phase of a child’s education is, therefore, crucial to overcoming this historical divide.

Promoting Quality Learning

For more than a decade RTI has been working to help South African schools better serve their students. With funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), RTI has led back-to-back programs to improve classroom instruction and school management in some of South Africa’s lowest-performing schools. The ultimate goal of both programs has been to improve student learning, and the programs have delivered.

First, the District Development Support Program (DDSP, 1998–2003) led to a 24% gain over baseline in student



IEP trained primary school teachers to maximize time in the classroom for group and paired work by students. [Photo: Melinda Taylor]

performance across literacy and numeracy among third-graders in Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo and Northern Cape provinces. Then the Integrated Education Program (IEP, 2003–2009) led to an average 20% gain over baseline across literacy, numeracy, math, and science among third- and sixth-graders in the same provinces. Both projects well exceeded their targets of 13% and 8% gains, respectively.

“The success of DDSP and IEP came from an integrated approach to school improvement by training and supporting teachers as well as those who undergird them, including school principals, management teams, governing bodies, district officials, and the community,” said Melinda Taylor, RTI International education program director and former IEP Chief of Party (COP).

Quality Teaching

Although teacher qualifications and salaries have been rising in South Africa, this has not translated into improved student learning. Teachers continue to lack sufficient knowledge of the content they are supposed to be teaching and of instructional methods that challenge and engage the students. Consequently, the classroom is dominated by teacher “chalk and talk” while pupils carry out routine tasks that involve little writing or higher-order thinking. For example, by grade 6 when students should be doing multistep calculations, many are stuck on one- or two-digit calculations.

Under IEP, RTI worked through three local subcontractors—READ Educational Trust, Link Community Development, and The Molteno Project—to coordinate on-the-job teacher training in the four target provinces.

In order to maximize the impact of the training, IEP employed face-to-face training of master teachers who then cascade what they learned to their peers in school cluster workshops. Provincial and district Department of Education

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Students in a school in Limpopo Province conduct an experiment with batteries from an Integrated Education Program (IEP) science workbook. [Photo: Melinda Taylor]

Toward Quality Learning in South African Schools (continued)

(DoE) subject advisors facilitated IEP training and joined in visiting master and cascade teachers in their classrooms to review their lesson plans, observe classroom management, and make recommendations for how to better engage students and assess their progress.

“The master teacher training covered a wide range of topics within a limited timeframe,” said current IEP Technical Manager Saeeda Anis Prew. “School visits by IEP trainers to mentor, monitor, and give constructive feedback were, therefore, critical to help consolidate lessons from the training.”

In Limpopo Province, for example, prior to their participation in IEP, a majority of teachers did not know how to develop lesson plans, which affected the quality of their teaching as well as their ability to cover the curriculum. IEP trainers assisted individual teachers during classroom visits to develop time-on-task targets to help them keep pace with the requirements of the National Curriculum Statement (NCS). IEP training also emphasized more class time spent on student activities—reading, writing, discussing—and less on teacher talk. Following the intervention of IEP, the percentage of teachers in Limpopo who taught according to standards of the NCS increased from 14% to 40%.

Quality Management

A high-performing school requires effective management. IEP strengthened management in participating schools through residential training followed by on-site workshops for school management teams in curriculum management, coaching and mentoring, and teacher professional development, among other modules. School governing body members, which include both parents and teachers, were trained at cluster and school levels on school improvement planning and implementation.

“Principals, school management teams, and the governing body create the environment in which children learn



School management teams—including principals, heads of department, and teachers—in Eastern Cape Province receive guidance from IEP trainers on community relations. [Photo: Melinda Taylor]

and teachers teach,” Prew said. “So the management and governance training was important in order to create the basis on which all other improvements to help the schools would ride.”

All IEP training included modules or integration of content on HIV/AIDS prevention and awareness. An important legacy of IEP will be the establishment of policies and action plans through school-based Health Advisory Committees to create emotionally safe schools and communities for children orphaned or made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS. In several provinces, IEP partnered with the Department of Agriculture to create school gardens that supplement the nutritional needs of children at risk. IEP was also able to build relationships with the Department of Home Affairs and the South Africa Social Security Agency to get birth certificates issued for vulnerable and orphaned students and give them access to social welfare grants.



Two community members in KwaZulu-Natal Province tend a school garden used to supplement the school's feeding scheme. [Photo: Melinda Taylor]

Legacy of Quality

In executing IEP, RTI teamed up with the national DoE, four provincial DoEs, five universities, and 12 South African subcontractors.

“RTI relied heavily upon and built the capacity of these local partners as a strategy for sustaining the best practices of the program,” said Taylor.

An evaluation of the impact of IEP found some of these best practices to be the classroom- and school-level support to teachers and principals, and the introduction of tools to guide instruction and student work, such as student workbooks and common tests.

The South African DoE has institutionalized many of the lessons learned from IEP through its own work, in particular under the Quality Improvement, Development, Support and Upliftment Program (QIDS UP), which seeks to strengthen South Africa’s basic foundations of numeracy, writing, and reading.

Contact: Melinda Taylor, mtaylor@rti.org

Children's Literacy (continued)



EGRA assessors measure students' skills in naming letters, recognizing words, and reading and listening with comprehension. [Photo: Medina Korda]

the time and effort required to decode words. The tests simplify assessments: In about 15 minutes, they provide several timed oral evaluations of foundational skills such as naming letters, recognizing familiar words, and listening with comprehension.

"EGRA Plus is a comprehensive approach to improving student reading skills, with the first step being to identify and diagnose the problems," said Medina Korda, RTI education specialist and project coordinator. The effort will be rigorously conducted as an experiment to compare student performance in schools that received interventions with schools that did not.

Three groups of 180 randomly selected schools will focus on grades 2 and 3. One group will not receive interventions. In the second group, parents and teachers will be informed if their students did not perform at the desired level. RTI will examine whether the participants then take advantage of resources available within their contexts to improve teaching. For example, parents might help students more with their

homework. The third group will receive all of the interventions. Teacher training, frequent school-based support, resource materials, textbooks, and teaching kits will be added to information dissemination.

"EGRA Plus provides a unique reading intervention, and Liberia's Ministry of Education can use the results to remediate with evidence-based reading instruction," Korda said.

Contacts: Medina Korda, mkorda@rti.org;

Luis Crouch, lcrouch@rti.org

HIV/AIDS Policies and Services (continued)

environment, along with employees' knowledge, attitudes, and use of current HIV-related services.

Policy improvements will address issues such as nondiscrimination, gender equality, confidentiality, prevention and care, and maintenance of the employment relationship as long as infected employees are able to do so.

SPEAR will emphasize the actions needed to make the policies operational. For example, the project will collaborate with the ministries to develop work plans and allocate resources that support counseling and testing services at employment sites. SPEAR will also train ministry champions to conduct anti-stigma and discrimination campaigns.

"These efforts will combine prevention with a more supportive environment for infected workers, and help mitigate the labor drain in the formal workplace," Ssengonzi noted.

Contact: Robert Ssengonzi, rssengonzi@rti.org

Selected Publications

Brinkerhoff, D.W. (2008). "The State and International Development Management: Shifting Tides, Changing Boundaries, and Future Directions." *Public Administration Review*, 68(6): 985–1001.

Padian, Nancy S., Anne Buvé, Jennifer Balkus, David Serwadda, and Ward Cates, Jr. (2008). "Biomedical Interventions to Prevent HIV Infection: Evidence, Challenges, and Way Forward." *The Lancet*, 372(9638): 585–599.

Early Grade Reading Assessment Toolkit. (July 2008). Prepared for the World Bank Office of Human Development. Research Triangle Park, NC: RTI International.

Abstract and full document: <https://www.eddataglobal.org/documents/index.cfm?fuseaction=pubDetail&ID=121>

Where in the World Is RTI is a bimonthly publication of RTI's International Development Group (IDG). This publication is intended to inform clients and partner organizations about RTI's global activities and research areas. RTI is dedicated to improving the human condition in developing and emerging countries. RTI has worked for over 40 years in 140 countries around the world. We offer a broad range of policy support, applied research and analysis, and other technical expertise in strategic planning, institutional development, and training. Our expertise is multisectoral and spans the fields of education, health, environment and natural resources, governance, finance, and information and communication technology.

EDITORIAL STAFF

MARKETING DIRECTOR: Myles Elledge

EDITOR: Hiske Leegstra (hleegstra@rti.org)

COORDINATOR: Erin Newton

STAFF WRITERS: Peter Cvelich and Linda Rudisill

DESIGNER: Susan Redmond

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RTI International, P.O. Box 12194, 3040 Cornwallis Rd.,
Research Triangle Park, NC 27709-2194, USA.

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