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Renforcement de la Lecture Initiale pour Tous (RELIT)

Introduction

Renforcement de la Lecture Initiale pour Tous (RELIT) is Senegal's basic education reading improvement program supported by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). This program is the continuation of the USAID-funded *Lecture pour Tous* (All Children Reading) program (2016–2021), which achieved improved instruction and reading outcomes for children in Wolof, Seereer, and Pulaar in six regions: Diourbel, Fatick, Kaolack, Kaffrine, Louga and, Matam. The *Lecture pour Tous* approach was implemented by a Government-to-Government (G2G) activity in Saint Louis. These achievements are now being sustained in those regions through a G2G partnership with the *Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale* (MEN, National Ministry of Education) and a Cooperative Agreement with RTI International that will expand the program to additional regions—Tambacounda, Kédougou, and a small number of pilot schools in Dakar—and languages. Overall implementation is led by the MEN, under the leadership of the *Direction de l'Enseignement Élémentaire* (DEE, Department of Elementary Education), and its decentralized entities, namely the *Inspection d'Académies* (IA, regional education authorities) and the *Inspection de l'Éducation et de la Formation* (IEF, district education authorities). The RELIT implementing partners collaborate with the MEN to ensure that RELIT is one program delivered through two modalities, both aiming to improve the education system's capacity to implement its bilingual education policy, the *Modèle Harmonisé d'Enseignement Bilingue au Sénégal* (MOHEBS, Unified Framework for Bilingual Education in Senegal), and improve primary education achievement for all children.



Program Description

RELIT implementing partners—RTI International, Save the Children, and Associates in Research and Education for Development (ARED)—are working with the MEN to build on the lessons learned from launching national language (NL) literacy instruction under *Lecture pour Tous* to introduce instructional materials and methods for two new languages—Mandinka and Soninke. RELIT also supports a comprehensive, national curriculum for French as a second language (FSL) from kindergarten (KG) through second grade (G2) that builds on the foundations of literacy introduced to children through their national languages. The program will lay the groundwork for later expansion into the Casamance region (Ziguinchor, Sédhiou, and Kolda) by developing materials in a third language—Diola—and for implementing the bilingual approach through a preschool pilot and support to pre-service training institutions.



MINISTÈRE DE L'ÉDUCATION NATIONALE



All activities strengthen teaching and build the capacity of education institutions and partners to sustain reforms. Guided by the motto “*Le changement et innovations dans la continuité*,” RELIT intends to learn from and build on what has been achieved while also introducing change and innovation in the teaching of early reading. The changes align with government reforms—notably the MOHEBS, introduced in 2021 to articulate how a bilingual curriculum will strengthen student success, and the *Programme National de Lecture Scolaire à l’Elémentaire* (PNLS, National Elementary Reading Program), which specifies the role of strong early literacy in achieving educational outcomes.

Theory of Change

In addition to MOHEBS and PNLS, RELIT is guided by underlying national policy objectives such as the *Plan Sénégal Emergent*, which considers human capital development critical to national development through a strong civil society and rule of law, and USAID’s Country Development Cooperation Strategy.

For Senegalese children to fully realize their potential, they must have strong language and literacy skills that enable them to engage with civic and employment opportunities throughout Senegal and, potentially, the sub-region and internationally. French is the official language at school; it is the language of higher education and the official language of the Senegalese government. Success in school, including learning French as a second language, is supported by a strong foundation of social, emotional and academic skills. These skills are best developed by instruction in the language a child already understands. Similarly, children learn to read most effectively in a language they already

know and can then transfer the skill of reading to second and third languages as they gain oral proficiency in those languages.

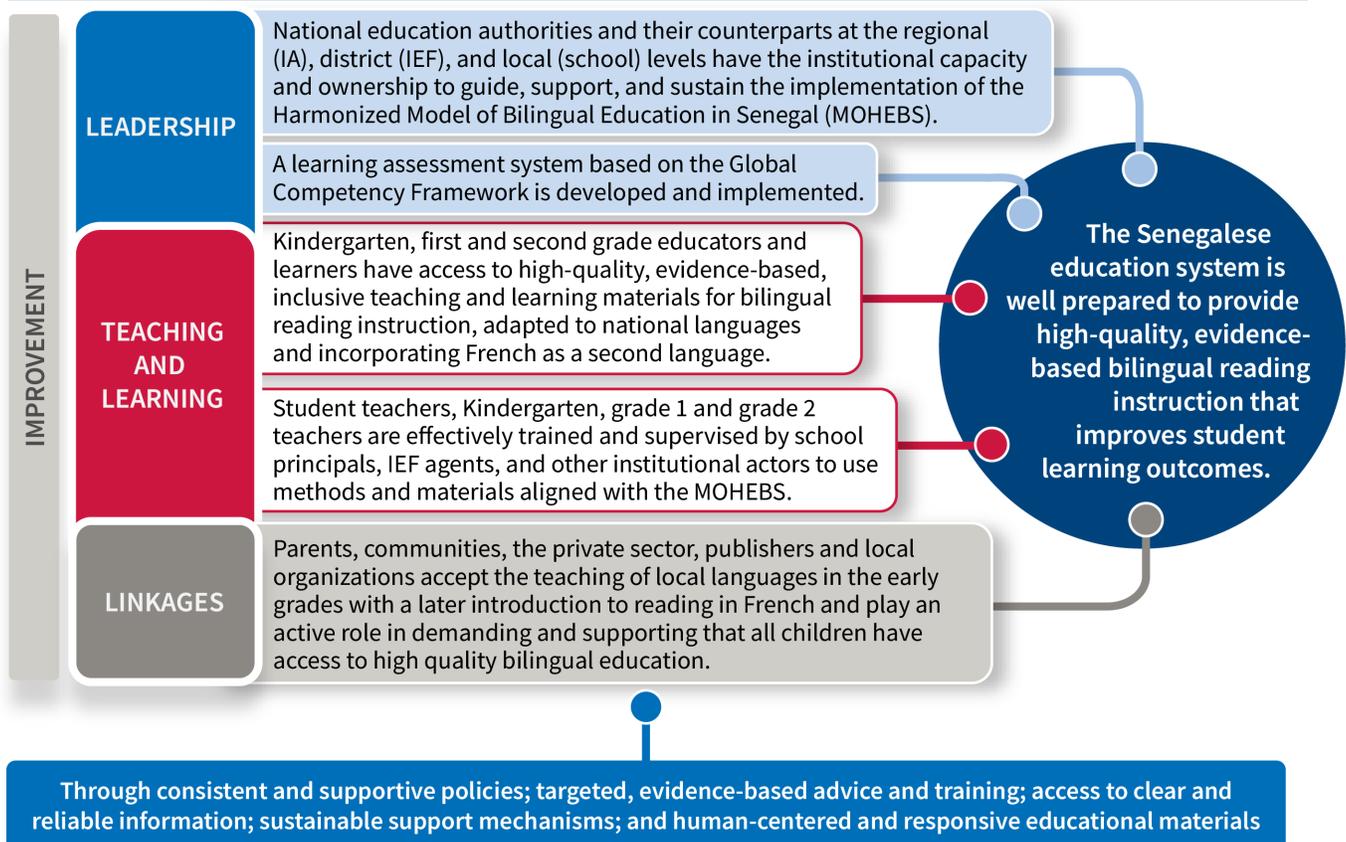
This conceptual framework for bilingual reading instruction reflects the rationale for Senegal’s bilingual model described by the MOHEBS framework. The near-term objective of RELIT is to ensure that the Government of Senegal is well prepared to deliver high-quality, evidence-based bilingual reading instruction to all children.

RELIT will strengthen the Senegalese education system through three main areas: (1) Leadership Capacity-Building (*Pilotage*) (2) Teaching and Learning (*Pédagogie*), and (3) Linkages (*Partenariats*) to continually improve implementation and provide evidence-based policy advice (**Exhibit 1**). The implementation approach across all areas will involve collaboration between government and implementing partners, broad-based communication to gain support of parents and communities, and a research and learning agenda that will provide rapid, ongoing feedback about what works, for whom, and in what circumstances.

All result areas actively address gender equality and social inclusion. RELIT, as part of its strategy for effective scale and sustainability, will also strengthen the capacity of select civil society institutions and community-based organizations as effective partners in bilingual education in the early grades.

RELIT’s theory of change can be expressed as “**if/then**” statements, which guide the program in implementing activities to address not just the outputs but the underlying root causes as well.

Exhibit 1: RELIT Theory of Change



“ If the capacity of national education authorities to support the implementation of the harmonized model of bilingual reading instruction in the early grades is strengthened; and **if** teachers and learners in the early grades from kindergarten to Grade 1 have access to high-quality inclusive learning methods and materials; and **if** parents, communities, and other stakeholders play an active role in demanding and supporting that all children have access to bilingual education, **then** Senegal's education sector will be well prepared to provide high-quality, evidence-based bilingual reading instruction that improves student learning outcomes. ”

Program Activities

The anticipated activities and outcomes in each thematic area are described in the following section.

Leadership Capacity-Building

Education Management

Strengthening education service delivery involves ensuring that MEN officials at central and regional levels fully understand and accept how their job performance affects the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom. RELIT's capacity building activities focus on core functions¹ of the education system that have the most impact on improving teaching and learning:

- **Having clear expectations for:** learning outcomes, the teaching needed to secure those outcomes, and the support teachers need to adopt improved teaching practice.
- **Communicating those expectations** throughout the education system and among its stakeholders.
- **Holding system actors accountable for** acting upon expectations by monitoring progress with respect to expectations.
- **Meeting expectations** by providing the inputs teachers and students need to succeed.

RELIT will help education officials identify students, teachers and schools that struggle to meet expectations, and then determine how to provide the support needed to overcome disadvantages.

This process started in Year 1 with a participatory capacity needs assessment at the IA and IEF levels. RELIT created technical teams consisting of MEN and project counterparts at national and regional levels who have co-designed and now implement the institutional capacity-building activities. The process enables institutional actors to take stock of how these core functions within the system are linked to better performance in teaching and learning at the classroom level and then reveal the gaps between system expectations and teaching and learning outcomes. Technical teams reviewed system documents, developed and tested self-assessment tools, and then applied them across all nine regions of RELIT to establish a baseline capacity needs assessment and a capacity-building plan.

This capacity-building plan will be carried out in Years 2–5, with periodic self-assessments to gauge whether core elements of the system are being successfully put in place.

Co-leadership and Technical Assistance

RTI and its implementing partners adopt an approach of co-leadership and co-construction in RELIT's implementation. Technical working groups—known as *Groupes Techniques Homologués* (GTH)—of counterparts consisting of the implementing partner and staff of central MEN directorates have been established for key components of RELIT: teaching and learning, institutional capacity, monitoring and evaluation, communication and community mobilization. These working groups plan, implement, and assess progress for all nine regions of Senegal. Additionally, in each region, implementing partner staff are paired with MEN counterparts to plan, implement, and assess progress locally. These paired structures not only facilitate co-leadership and co-construction of the program, but also allow RELIT to address emergent needs with targeted technical assistance. The response to the technical assistance needs can include mobilization of specialized expertise through staff or external human resources, redirection of program resources to support emergent needs, introduction of international best practices that can be sustained in the system, or work with other financial and technical partners to address program needs that are beyond the scope of either USAID modality.

Developing an Assessment Framework

RELIT will support USAID's ongoing technical assistance to the MEN and the *Institut National d'Etude et d'Action pour le Développement de l'Éducation* (INEADE), the Senegalese assessment and evaluation institute, to align Senegal's curricula and assessments with the Global Proficiency Framework. Building on the experience of Senegal's existing *Système National d'Évaluation des Rendements Scolaires* (National Student Assessment System) and the policy-linking process undergone by the INEADE with USAID support, RELIT will work with INEADE to analyze its capacity-building needs; identify the strengths and gaps in the system of student assessments; and develop a short, medium,

¹Source: Crouch, L. and DeStefano, J. (2017). Doing reform differently: Combining rigor and practicality in implementation and evaluation of system reforms. Washington, DC: RTI International.

and long-term plan to utilize the policy-linking framework to develop a system of assessments of student learning outcomes in the six local languages and FSL in support of the MOHEBS reform.

Teaching and Learning

Bilingual Education

Under *Lecture pour Tous* an essential and varied package of NL instructional materials was developed and distributed through the IAs and IEF and is still in use in the seven regions. Under the MOHEBS, the materials now need to be revised to address the inclusion of FSL alongside NL literacy development. RELIT

will ensure ongoing provision of teaching and learning materials in the seven regions where NL instruction began under *Lecture pour Tous* through a small reprint of books in Wolof, Seereer, and Pulaar for the 2022–2023 school year (SY). At the same time, RELIT is supporting the review and updating of materials based on lessons learned about how well teachers are able to adopt bilingual instruction, and ongoing review of how materials are being used. Information from teacher feedback and observations will shape material revisions in the first three languages and the development of materials for three new languages. The goal is to have a coherent, bilingual model implemented in schools using Serere, Wolof, Pular, Mandinka and Soninke as of SY 2023–24 for KG and G1 and SY 24-25 for G2.

In May 2022, RELIT observed teachers' current use of the NL and French materials to see what is used most—and used well—to identify current pedagogical bridging strategies between NLs and French and gathered teachers' feedback on the quality and relevance of the materials. The study obtained teacher input on other features that impact materials use (e.g., layout, level of detail, choice of icons, quantity of exercises). Teaching and learning materials experts reviewed existing textbooks, teacher's guides, and other classroom supports to see how they align to the bilingual orientation of MOHEBS. This feedback provided important context for development and revision of the materials.

National Language Materials Development

RELIT is developing materials for KG (or *grande section de maternelle*), first (G1, or *CI cours initiale*), and second grades (G2, or *CP cours préparatoire*) of elementary school through the collaborative efforts of RELIT's implementing partners, MEN officials, local resource organizations, Senegalese writers, illustrators, and teachers. RELIT is developing linguistically and culturally appropriate materials that use the best features of “structured pedagogy”² to support language and literacy development. The process of developing materials began in March 2022 with workshops to design the scopes and sequences of each language and begin developing lesson plans for language, literacy, communication, comprehension, and writing across the school day. Simultaneously RELIT is developing NL materials for preschool to support language development across the curriculum, with a specific emphasis on the “language” portion of the school day. French will be introduced orally, through playful learning methods, building on local language knowledge.

The full package of NL materials to be developed under RELIT is shown in **Exhibit 2** and includes teacher's guides, textbooks, and storybooks for grades KG–G2.

Exhibit 2. Materials to be developed for Mandinka, Soninke, Diola

| KG | G1 | G2 |
|---|--|--|
| 3 NLs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher guide • Big books • Core stories • Picture books | 3 NLs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher guide • Student textbook that incorporates decodable and leveled text | 3 NLs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher guide • Student textbook that incorporates leveled text • Additional leveled readers |

The emphasis during design is on the following.

- **Instructional effectiveness.** Early grade instructional materials will support teaching foundational literacy skills in a systematic and explicit manner, give learners individual access to text daily, and allow learners daily opportunities to practice decoding and comprehension.
- **Not overloading teachers.** RELIT will reduce the complexity of lesson management for teachers by integrating supporting materials into the teacher's guide and student textbooks.
- **Cost-efficiency.** RELIT will assist the MEN to analyze and make recommendations regarding a set of materials that can be procured and replenished at sustainable cost.

French as a Second Language Materials

RELIT will work with the MEN and technical working groups to finalize the pedagogical approach and teaching guidelines for the gradual introduction of FSL. For KG, this will involve

²Structured Pedagogy How-To Guide Series, developed by RTI under the Science of Teaching grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation: <https://scienceofteaching.site/home>

incorporating a lesson sequence for FSL into the teacher’s guide for the Language and Literacy block of the schedule and producing audio material for oral language development. For G1, French will be incorporated into the teacher’s guide, and wordless picture books will be developed along with audio material adapted for available devices. For G2, a bilingual guide will support content in French and the NL. A student manual containing leveled texts will serve as a classroom tool alongside digital pedagogical resources where possible (**Exhibit 3**). The development of the approach and materials will be done in collaboration with the MEN and will respect the stages of design, testing, validation, and scaling.

Exhibit 3. Materials for FSL

| KG | G1 | G2 |
|--|---|---|
| French: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incorporated into NL teacher guide Audio materials for oral language development | French: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher guide Student textbook — wordless picture book Audio materials for oral language development | French: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher guide Student textbook that incorporates decodable and leveled text Multimedia learning resources (where possible) |

RELIT will also support the identification of points of convergence between the NLs and French to inform strategies and tools for the transfer of skills from reading in the NL to reading in FSL. RELIT will also work with the MEN to develop specifications for publishers that describe the essential conditions to be met by NL and French reading materials so that in later years, publishers can be fully involved in the procurement process.

Supplementary Materials

RELIT will build on and expand Save the Children’s Senegal Children’s Book Initiative to find innovative ways to increase the supply of non-textbook reading materials in all targeted languages. RELIT will conduct a series of in-person and virtual training sessions for publishers to improve their capacity to produce high quality supplementary fiction and non-fiction reading materials. These trainings will be informed by a needs analysis conducted with local publishers of the Senegalese Publishing Association. After conducting a parental purchasing power study, RELIT will also strategize with local publishers on how to develop other low-cost children’s reading materials that caregivers would have the means to purchase, such as a low

cost children’s magazine. RELIT will collaborate with a variety of partners to ensure that the titles produced meet the needs of multiple stakeholders and to coordinate book purchasing consortiums to allow for larger print runs that can enable lower costs of titles as well as enough extra titles so that local publishers can sell them on the free market. By addressing supply and demand, RELIT will support the local Senegalese publishing sector to grow and sustain itself as an essential industry under the *Plan Sénégal Emergent*.

Preschool Pilot

RELIT will support the MEN in piloting a more integrated, holistic approach to KG, with the expected result of improved oral language development and preliteracy skills in the NL and FSL. With the introduction of MOHEBS, children’s experience in preschool must be aligned with the expected G1 curriculum. RELIT’s approach to preschool recognizes the importance of play in supporting the overall development because it allows children to learn through imitation, observation, experimentation and questioning. The preschool curriculum will also emphasize rituals—daily events repeated in the same manner throughout the year—and the creation of a print-rich environment to increase awareness of reading in daily life and certain preliteracy skills. RELIT will implement the approach to KG as a pilot in Kédougou and Tambacounda, with the possibility of extending it to certain G2G supported regions.

In the first year of implementation, agile methods will be used to observe the program and make changes as needed to content, pacing, and format of materials. This will inform revisions prior to the following year (SY2023–2024) when materials will be reintroduced and the preschool model evaluated to determine the extent to which the model better prepares children for G1.

Teacher Professional Development

High-quality reading instruction, even with the best materials, requires well-prepared teachers. The program will support IAs/IEFs in making teacher professional development (TPD) more impactful and accessible to all teachers on a regular basis. RTI and its consortium partners recognize that teachers need more than occasional training workshops to truly understand and adopt new teaching methods. Moreover, teachers should



Experience has shown that radio is one of the most effective communication channels for the wide dissemination of awareness messages. To successfully accompany the MEN in its communication campaign, RELIT is identifying ways to engage radio stations in programming that supports communications objectives. After developing a collaboration plan with radio stations, the technical working group will develop specific messaging related to MOHEBS and the use of NLs in schools. The messaging will be developed following consultations with communities.

never stop learning and improving their craft. As such, **TPD in RELIT is conceptualized as ongoing learning through a range of modalities including technology-enabled learning and communities of practice.** In-person cascade training will start with a small group of inspectors at the national level (national technical team) and continue at the IA level with the inspectors forming the regional technical teams. These teams will train the directors and teachers at the departmental level (IEF). In G2G-led regions, RELIT will help plan training through co-execution of a large training needs assessment activity and will advise the MEN on the most cost-effective scenarios to meet the case-by-case demands. TPD specialists will also participate in training delivery to support and observe trainings using a pre-defined quality control checklist based on global best practices. RELIT will also review the current TPD continuum—from pre-service to retirement—with the MEN's partner departments and will organize technical assistance activities to promote ways in which TPD can be considered a career-wide part of teaching service rather than individual events. RELIT will update the pre-service teacher training modules to address bilingual education and the updated curricular materials.

Partnerships

Community Mobilization

Success of MOHEBS will depend in part on community support for bilingual education. RELIT will identify potential barriers to adoption of bilingual education, such as negative attitudes, misconceptions or issues related to gender and inclusiveness. Regular community consultations will be conducted throughout the program to help communities understand and support RELIT. For example, during the institutional capacity self-assessment activity, local entities such as parent-teacher associations and local governments were engaged to understand the extent of their support. Also, during the process of language mapping, RELIT worked with communities to determine the appropriate language of instruction for each school, through community consultations and listening to children's natural language during recreation. The RELIT communications strategy

target both nationally and regionally relevant communications, using various messages and channels to address common perceptions identified through community consultation activities. The technical working group on communications and community mobilization has developed and will validate the national MOHEBS communications strategy, and RELIT communications will be fully aligned to this strategy.

Publisher Capacity-Building

In Year 1, an updated book supply chain study was conducted through field surveys and interviews. This study provided information about certain causes of inefficiency in the supply chain and recommendations for the strategic role that RELIT could play in improving market processes.

RELIT technical staff, and the MEN departments involved, will also review the training programs (modules) that have been delivered previously, to identify strengths and areas for improvement. The result of these analyses will inform the process of building publishers' capacity on local language instruction and the specifications for teaching and learning materials for bilingual education.

Partnerships Fund

A Partnership Fund will provide grants for technical support of strategic activities. Resource organizations will be sourced within Senegal with international support used sparingly when necessary. A consultative process will identify priority areas and seek partnership proposals. RELIT, in partnership with the MEN, will assess and fund the best ideas, while also building these organizations' capacity to serve as partners to the Ministry of Education in the future. Starting in SY2022–2023, RELIT will begin the grants program using a participatory process to identify and prioritize the needs at both national and community levels that can be addressed through grants: for example, accompanying schools and IAs to better respond to inclusive education, community mobilization activities that support a literate environment, or development of audio-visual supplementary materials in NLs.

Program Implementation Approach

Monitoring, Evaluation and Research

RELIT's monitoring, evaluation and research activities aim to strengthen and support each of the three components of the RELIT theory of change (see **Exhibit I**) and in so doing, help to bring about the desired objective. RELIT's learning agenda will explore application of the theory of change in a range of Senegalese contexts, while also contributing to the technical evidence base and identifying effective and cost-efficient means of delivering the MOHEBS program. RELIT aims to establish a culture of learning, emphasizing the role of data for improvement rather than strictly for evaluation and accountability.

RELIT's learning agenda includes studies into attitudes, practices, and motivation of critical education stakeholders to understand whether MOHEBS communication strategies influence their behaviors, and how that influence affects student outcomes. Additionally, a fundamental goal of program monitoring and data collection will be to determine whether learning to read using this NL-first approach will later result in equivalent or better performance in second language reading, than will immediate exposure to a (new) second language, with no prior experience with reading.

Additional areas of inquiry include:

- **Validity** of school/community-based language mapping results, and implications for policy and procedures relating to schools' language of instruction choice and teacher deployment.
- **Relative effectiveness** of various forms and dosages of support to teachers in delivering bilingual (NL+ FSL) early grade reading instruction.
- **Action-research experimentation** of a KG teaching model that integrates bilingual language and pre-reading with primary school readiness.
- **Understanding and addressing gender**, disability, and social inclusion challenges in elementary education.

Some of the learning agenda themes overlap with RELIT's performance and impact evaluation plan. The baseline evaluation studies will be designed to provide answers to critical questions about context and capacity gaps that exist at the outset of program activities in each region and at the national level. Midline evaluation exercises represent an opportunity for learning and will be designed to produce information for informed, data-driven decision-making.

Implementing Partners

RELIT's small, largely Senegal-based consortium allows it to provide flexible and timely support to the MEN, working together across partner offices and within the MEN.

- **RTI** ensures technical and operational integrity for maximum effectiveness and timely client reporting. RTI leads system capacity assessments, and technical assistance activities with the MEN. RTI will lead all TPD and coaching activities; provide technical oversight on all materials development; and lead RELIT monitoring, evaluation, research, learning, and adapting activities. RTI will introduce innovative technology for capacity development support.
- **Save the Children** will support design and piloting of the KG instructional model; lead RELIT communication efforts and communications support to MOHEBS (including social and behavior change communication); and lead publisher capacity-building, and production of supplemental reading materials, while ensuring gender-inclusive approaches across RELIT result areas.
- **ARED** will lead NL and FSL language analysis and materials revisions (Pulaar, Serer, Wolof), development (Diola, Mandinka, Soninke), scope and sequencing activities for KG through G2 and support TPD content development.



To implement the learning-by-doing approaches, the RTI consortium staff are paired with MEN staff as *"homologués"* or counterparts in technical working groups. The teams work together to plan and implement the approved work plan activities and ensure that deliverables are timely and relevant to emergent program needs. As per the request of the MEN, consortium partner staff work side-by-side with their counterparts virtually or at the MEN offices approximately 3 days per week. This allows for capacity-sharing and establishing the norms of "productive pairing" and co-constructed solutions.

To support implementation, RELIT has offices in Tambacounda and Kédougou, and embedded technical advisors in the other seven. The regional offices are composed of four staff: a professional development specialist who will coordinate the implementation of all capacity-building and training activities, a KG specialist, a monitoring and evaluation officer, and a finance officer. The two RELIT staff in the G2G regions are a professional development specialist and a monitoring, evaluation, and learning specialist. All regional staff are based at the IA and paired with counterparts of the IA to facilitate their integration into relevant structures and IEF to reduce costs.