

BOOK CHAIN

Incentivizing Actors in the Book Chain to Increase Availability of Quality Books for Children



The Results in Education for All Children (REACH) Trust Fund builds evidence on results-based financing in education, including by capturing operational lessons around its use. In the PRACTICE series, experts share their experience from working in the field to provide practical advice on how to apply results-based approaches to boost education outcomes. Reports in this series highlight key discussion points from REACH roundtables, backed by direct though anonymous quotes from participating experts to allow for frank discussion.

One of the most impactful and cost-effective ways to boost literacy is to ensure that children have adequate access to textbooks and other reading materials. Yet many education systems in developing countries fail to provide the textbooks and supplementary reading materials children need to learn to read. This has contributed to a learning crisis, with 53 percent of 10-year-olds in low- and middle-income countries unable to read or understand a simple story, according to the World Bank, which is seeking to cut the global rate of learning poverty by at least half by 2030. Challenges at various stages along the book delivery chain, such as a lack of books in local languages, inadequate mechanisms to forecast schools' book requirements, and challenges in procurement and distribution,

contribute to inadequacies in the availability and quality of books. Results-based financing can help address bottlenecks in the book delivery chain by strengthening incentives for stakeholders so they focus on results and ensuring that a country's book chain works effectively to improve children's reading skills.

The Results in Education for All Children (REACH) Trust Fund brought together REACH grantees to share their experiences working in different countries to improve the book supply chain. While some grantees focus on helping countries increase book supply, others seek to strengthen distribution or train teachers on how to use books in the classroom. In all cases, it was imperative to first identify the main bottlenecks in the book supply chain and to secure buy-in from government and other key players on the solutions that the grantees were proposing to address those bottlenecks. Grantees introduced creative, sustainable initiatives to boost book production, distribution, and access, using results-based financing to incentivize desired behavior. This note summarizes the main takeaways from the discussion.

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KEY POINTS

It is important to engage the government and other stakeholders early and secure trust and buy-in.

This will help with mapping key players in the book chain, their roles, and the constraints they face. Early dialogue with stakeholders will help increase understanding of what incentives might work with them, which will help with designing better results-based financing mechanisms. Another important way to secure official support is to align initiatives with national priorities and to understand the role of different government agencies.

World Education helped to design and pilot a tracking system in Cambodia to increase efficiency of the school textbook supply process. A key component involved setting up a national consultative group including senior education ministry officials. “They were involved in helping us map out the supply chain and the actual truth of what’s happening. They trusted us and they opened up.”

Collaboration and competition can facilitate book development, especially in countries that are seeking to expand local language content but don’t have a sufficient pool of professionals for the task. Bringing together writers, illustrators, publishers, and educators can generate synergies and foster longer-term working relationships. Awarding monetary or nonfinancial rewards such as recognition can provide additional incentive. It may be helpful to define content standards.

IREX helped to organize competitive book-creation camps to develop mother-tongue supplemental reading materials in Bangladesh. “When we worked with local actors to generate content, we were dealing with people at various capacity, creativity, skills levels. We found natural mentorships formed during the competition.”

Room to Read cohosted a workshop in South Africa that brought publishers, writers, illustrators, designers, and editors together to create 20 original storybooks in 12 hours. “We were surprised...how much great learning resulted from everyone working together.”

Incentivizing and building capacity of small publishers can be an effective way to increase the availability of books. Many publishers in developing countries tend to be small with limited capital. These publishers may benefit from activities aimed at strengthening their capacity or introducing them to new business models, such as pooled procurement, where orders are bundled to reduce the cost of printing, that can help boost profits. Smaller publishers may need flexibility in terms of getting paid under a results-based approach.

Partnering with small publishers, Room to Read paid them a share of their payment up front instead of post-completion, because some lacked capital to print books in advance. “We recommend building into a project more comprehensive business development for publishers [so] they know how to sustain their business, grow, and successfully provide books to the market for children.”

Open licensing offers an effective way to improve access to books. In this type of licensing, copyright holders make content available for sharing, remixing, or commercialization, which allows anyone to freely use the material. It may be necessary to educate publishers, distributors, and authors—who traditionally have made their profits from licensed books—on how open licensing can benefit them. Workshops can introduce publishers and writers to the advantages of this approach: It can help them expand their customer base and foster a love of reading among consumers—potentially resulting in more book purchases.

In South Africa, Room to Read put 120 books online as open source material. “We presented it as an experiment that [publishers] could try. Small publishers can get data on what titles are most popular, who are the readers. Open licensing can also serve as a marketing tool.”

Technology can provide cost-effective ways to strengthen the book chain but additional support may be required for successful adoption. Digital solutions such as online book portals offer ease of access to book catalogs for teachers and students. Use of cellphone-based applications to verify classroom book use can help provide reliable monitoring data quickly. Training and awareness-building are important

for developing trust in digital systems and ensuring correct use. It can be helpful to blend in traditional strategies (such as providing printed books) to increase awareness and bolster the uptake of innovative approaches (such as online book portals).

IREX worked on developing new local-language titles and uploading them on the Bangladesh government’s Teacher Portal. “Without doing face-to-face outreach and providing print material to communities and schools, we found very little awareness or interest in the teacher’s portal. Digital alone didn’t get people to use the books.”

World Vision International, Nepal, built an online platform to make reading materials available for school book corners. KITAB Bazar allows publishers to upload books, schools to order them, and local education officials to approve them. “Initially head teachers feared that mistakes in technology could affect the book-ordering process. However, training was an empowering process: Head teachers indicated they could confidently use smart phones for book ordering”

Tracking systems can help collect and analyze data on books at various stages of the book chain, and can assist in verifying results—a necessary prerequisite for using performance-based financing. One system, Track and Trace, can strengthen the book chain at the forecasting stage by reducing the time required for orders to reach district or central levels, as well as at the delivery stage by using real-time inventory and delivery data to ensure books reach schools on time. Technology solutions supporting Track and Trace, such as cellphone chatbots or voice messages, should be customized to reflect stakeholders’ familiarity with the technology.

Under World Education’s track and trace system in Cambodia, schools used a chatbot function to complete book orders by cellphone in two weeks, down from six months. Government officials tracked delivery to district offices, which recorded books received using the chatbot. As a sign of the project’s success, the Education Ministry said it will take over the system, with the state-owned distributor covering operational costs. “The ministry says they can’t go back.”



Community or other outside organizations can support monitoring by ensuring books reach schools and get into the hands of children. After identifying such organizations, focus groups can help flush out what motivates them to be part of the monitoring process. The use of nonmonetary rewards, such as recognition, can help ensure sustainability.

As part of Cambodia’s tracking system, a chatbot notified school support committees when books arrived. The committees used the system to record when books were unpacked and used in the classroom. “We did focus groups to ask what motivated [members] to be on the committee, and it came out they wanted to be involved. Instead of paying them, we gave out plaques.”

Once books reach schools, they need to be used effectively. Foremost, this requires that the right books reach the right destination at the right time, and that the books are distributed to children rather than stored. Teachers should know how to use the books and incorporate them into teaching, while students should be given opportunities to read them.

A REACH-funded project in Sierra Leone linked financial awards to teacher and head teacher attendance of training meetings and to the introduction of books into the classroom. After training and incentivizing teachers, the World Bank needed a way to measure and validate results. “We used photos of classrooms and...counted the number of books in the class and the number of children. We used photos to check randomly if books were being used.”

REACH RESOURCES ON THE BOOK CHAIN

REACH-FUNDED GRANTS ON THE BOOK CHAIN



BANGLADESH: Incentivizing Local Authors to Create Diverse Books

CAMBODIA: Enhancing Book Distribution Using Track and Trace

CAMBODIA: Promoting Development and Home Reading of Supplementary Texts

MOZAMBIQUE: Delivering the Right Books on Time to Hard-to-Reach Districts

NEPAL: Uniting Schools and Publishers to Bring Books into the Classroom

NIGER: Supporting Book Development, Production, and Distribution for Early Grade Reading

RWANDA: Developing Local Language Books for School Readiness

SIERRA LEONE: Putting Books (and Teachers) to Work for Better Reading

SOUTH AFRICA: National Public-Private Storybook Development Initiative

ZAMBIA: Evaluating Results-Based Textbook Delivery Systems

EVIDENCE NOTES ON THE BOOK CHAIN

SOUTH AFRICA: Results-Based Financing and the Book Supply Chain: Motivating Writers and Publishers to Create Quality Storybooks



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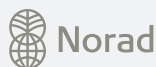
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