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Measurement and Research Support to Education Strategy Goal 1

Early Grade Reading and Math Assessments in 10 Countries: Dissemination and Utilization of Results–A Review

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Early Grade Reading and Math Assessments in 10 Countries: Dissemination and Utilization of Results–A Review

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Abbreviations

BESO	Basic Education System Overhaul (USAID project, Ethiopia)
CSO	civil society organization
DFID	UK Department for International Development
E3	USAID's Bureau for Economic Growth, Education, and Environment
EdData II	Education Data for Decision Making (project)
EGMA	Early Grade Mathematics Assessment
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
EGRP	Early Grade Reading Program, Egypt
FAO	United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization
GILO	Girls' Improved Learning Outcomes (USAID project, Egypt)
GIZ	German international aid organization
ICT	information and communication technology
IQPEP	Improving the Quality of Primary Education Program (Ethiopia)
LARS	Learning Assessment in Rwandan Schools (UNICEF program)
LQAS	lot quality assurance sampling
LTTP	Liberia Teacher Training Program
NALAP	National Literacy Acceleration Program (Ghana)
NESP	National Education Sector Plan (Kenya)
NGO	nongovernmental organization
PDIT	Programme Development and Implementation Team
PRIMR	Primary Math and Reading Initiative (USAID project, Kenya)
R&D	research and development
READ TA	Reading for Ethiopia's Achievement Developed Technical Assistance (USAID project)
RTI	RTI International (trade name of Research Triangle Institute)
SACMEQ	Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
SSME	Snapshot of School Management Effectiveness
STEP-UP	Strengthening Education Performance – Up (project, Zambia)
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Cultural, and Scientific Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
YEGRA	Yemen Early Grade Reading Approach

Early Grade Reading and Math Assessments in 10 Countries: Dissemination and Utilization of Results— A Review

August 2014

Background

The research documented in this report was carried out under the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID's) Education Data for Decision Making (EdData II) project, led by RTI International.

EdData II, which began in late 2004, provides survey expertise to help national and local governments as well as the donor community to assess their education status. Project advisors collaborate with USAID Missions and Bureaus, other donors, and host-country stakeholders to find innovative and cost-effective ways to gather and analyze education data. They can then jointly establish relevant benchmarks that help governments, teachers, and parents or guardians provide meaningful education for their children.

One task order under EdData II, called *Learning Outcomes Research and Assessment-Related Projects* (2009–2013), supported the conduct of early-grade basic skills assessments in 10 countries. The purpose of that task order was to "build on the measurement instruments developed and piloted under other EdData II task orders and to coordinate data, analysis, and reporting on learning outcomes with specific attention to early grade reading proficiency, early grade numeracy, and conditions of learning as indicated by school management effectiveness measures." The measurement instruments referred to were the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA), the Early Grade Math Assessment (EGMA), and the Snapshot of School Management Effectiveness (SSME). Experiences with the various assessments were documented in an EdData II publication, *Learning Outcomes Research and Assessment-Related Projects: Final Report,* dated October 2013.[1] That report summarized the experience in each of the 10 countries, describing the assessment purpose, the challenges encountered, and some of the initial in-country reactions to the assessment findings. It also provided links to country-level task order reports (see Bibliography), which summarized assessment findings and recommendations derived from them for improvements in educational policy and practice.

Current Review Objective

The final *Learning Outcomes* report covered initial country reactions to the assessments and their findings, but given the timing of the report, it was not in a position to track reactions beyond the main "policy dialogue" that followed the assessment in nearly all

[1] RTI International (2013); see Bibliography for full reference information.

cases. Nor had the budgets and schedules of the individual country efforts allowed for such long-term observations. Obtaining a broader sense of the *Learning Outcomes* task order's impact on information sharing (i.e., dissemination) and results utilization required new information from well after the policy dialogues. Collecting that information was the purpose of the current review. Specifically, its objective was to "review country experience with EGRA and, where implemented, EGMA and/or SSME in a variety of countries, with particular emphasis on the sharing and utilization of the results of these assessments for policy formulation and other decision making." The EdData II task order *Measurement and Research Support to Education Strategy Goal 1* served as the vehicle for this internal project investigation.

Review Methods

This review employed three research methods: (1) document analysis covering the original assessments and related documents[2] from all 10 participating countries; (2) interviews with key informants via the telephone or Internet—usually RTI staff, but sometimes other agency personnel (see ***Annex A***) who were involved in the assessments in the various countries and/or follow-up activities; and (3) in-depth field studies in three countries, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Zambia (see ***Annex B*** for selection criteria and ***Annex C*** for the three case study summaries). These field studies included visiting government offices and agencies involved in EGRA/EGMA/SSME dissemination and utilization activities, gathering additional written reports, and interviewing key personnel using semi-structured interview techniques. This final report was crafted by combining information gathered through all three techniques.

The *Learning Outcomes* Assessments

The *Learning Outcomes* assessments were classified into two categories depending on the timing of their start-up: Year 1 (2009–2010) and Year 2 (2011–2012).[3] Year 1 efforts consisted mainly of supplementing or collating existing *early reading assessments* in five countries, adding—where feasible—background information to help policy makers and practitioners understand assessment outcome determinants. Year 2 efforts included new assessments of reading and math proficiency plus a comprehensive survey of school, classroom, and learning background conditions captured by the SSME instruments in five countries. Assessment features in the 10 countries, sorted by year (1 or 2), were as shown in ***Table 1***.

Interestingly, most of the follow-up assessments and interventions found in the *Learning Outcomes* countries were for early grade reading and not for mathematics. The exception

[2] As an example, one country, Yemen, created its own EGRA website, which became a rich source of information.
[3] Two Year 1 countries started later: Yemen, in 2011; and Honduras, in 2012. There was also a Year 3 activity involving only one country, Ghana, which focused not on the EGRA/EGMA/SSME, but on piloting the use of the lot quality assurance sampling (LQAS) method in the education sector through a no-cost extension of the task order during 2013.

is Kenya, which conducted midterm and endline assessments in both under the PRIMR Initiative, and in addition administered the SSME at both time points (with the idea of assessing the determinants of the *changes* in early grade skills). The emphasis on reading rather than math likely can be attributed to USAID's 2011 Education Strategy policy to prioritize early grade reading. For other donors it may have to do with the stronger branding that accompanies the EGRA, a name that is now recognized throughout the developing world. Thus, readers will note that the majority of the report necessarily emphasizes the reading impacts of *Learning Outcomes* more than the influence on mathematics or aspects of school management.

Table 1. Characteristics of assessments in 10 countries

County	Activity	Instruments	Scope
Year 1 (2009–2010)			
• Ethiopia	Conduct EGRA and background survey	EGRA plus background survey	Large-scale assessment in six native languages in eight regions, covering 338 schools and 13,000+ grade 2 and 3 students
• Ghana	Implement formative evaluation of National Literacy Acceleration Program (NALAP)	EGRA-like instrument plus background inter-views and observations	Small-scale purposive samples in 3 native languages in 3 regions, covering 8 schools and 132 grade 2 students
• Honduras	Create video on best practices in reading instruction and EGRA administration	Video plus EGRA administrator manual and instructional presentations	Development of teacher training video and other presentation materials; workshop involving participants from 40 municipalities
• Mali	Compile and analyze data from early grade reading assessments carried out by others	EGRA	National-level analysis of survey results (drawing from assessments conducted by USAID and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation)
• Yemen	Conduct EGRA and survey of determinants	EGRA plus survey of determinants	Assessment in Arabic, covering 40 schools and 735 grade 2 and 3 students
Year 2 (2011–2012)			
• Dominican Republic	Carry out EGRA and EGMA plus SSME	EGRA/EGMA/SSME	Assessment in Spanish, covering 50 American Chamber of Commerce schools and 1,000 grade 1 and 2 students

County	Activity	Instruments	Scope
• Kenya	Carry out SSME to complement EGRA/EGMA funded by separate EdData II task order (Primary Math and Reading [PRIMR] Initiative)[4]	SSME (complementing EGRA/EGMA)	Assessment in English and Kiswahili in 3 regions, covering 230 schools and 4,385 grade 1 and 2 students
• Morocco	Conduct EGRA, EGMA, and SSME	EGRA/EGMA/SSME	Assessment in Modern Standard Arabic in 1 region, covering 40 schools and 772 grade 2 and 3 students
• Rwanda	Implement EGRA, EGMA, and SSME	EGRA/EGMA/SSME	National sample assessment in English and Kinyarwanda, covering 42 schools and 420 grade 3 and 5 students
• Zambia	Carry out EGRA, EGMA, and SSME	EGRA/EGMA/SSME	Assessment in Bemba in 4 Bemba-speaking provinces, covering 40 schools and 800 grade 2 and3 students

Results/Messages

The pupils' results on the assessments that were administered were, on average, weak to very weak in the seven countries for which EGRA (and sometimes EGMA and SSME) data were reported. For example, on the EGRA subtask that measured reading fluency, the averages by country spanned from 20% of students getting zero scores (grade 3 in a major metropolitan area) to 91% (in a rural area) in a relatively small country. Reading comprehension was found to be particularly weak in all cases, revealed by the more than 50% of test takers who obtained zero comprehension scores in most participating countries. Math scores were also quite weak, especially on subtraction questions; in many countries it took pupils more than 15 seconds on average to solve a single subtraction problem.

Assessments of school/classroom/teacher and student background variables revealed considerable convergence. For example, most country analyses revealed weak attention by teachers to the foundations of reading, as well as relatively little time to practice reading, ineffective and/or poorly distributed reading (and math) textbooks, weak student feedback mechanisms, weak support for reading at home and in the community (plus few books), and little emphasis on the teaching of reading skills in teacher training programs. Clearly there were numerous variations and divergences across countries, but these were outnumbered by convergences. The pattern of limitations listed above was apparent in the

[4] Although technically the *Learning Outcomes* task order funded only the SSME portion of the survey work in Kenya, because the three assessments were always administered, analyzed, and reported on together, this review also addresses all three.

case study countries covered in Annex C: In all three countries, better reading performance was related to having help and/or reading materials at home, and, similarly, to having textbooks and other books of sufficient numbers and quality in the classroom. Two of the three countries also found reading skills to be connected to time for reading in the classroom and to the teacher providing feedback to students on their performance.

Information Dissemination

Policy Dialogues

In all 10 countries, a draft assessment report was produced and distributed to senior education ministry officials who generally provided feedback that was incorporated into the ultimate version. Conclusions from these final reports were then discussed within high-level groups of educational policy makers and practitioners (from both government units and nongovernmental organizations [NGOs]) during "policy dialogues" in all but one of the 10 countries.[5] The mix of participants and topics discussed was different in every setting, depending on the scope of the assessment.

The policy dialogues had differing impacts. In many cases, especially for the Year 1 assessments, the focus of the dialogue was not so much on breaking new ground as it was on improving existing programs. For example, in Ghana, where the assessment was a formative evaluation of a national multilingual literacy program, the dialogue mainly centered on ways to improve the program's effectiveness. The dialogue in Honduras also concentrated on innovative uses of EGRA methods by teachers to assess students' reading skills and to identify those needing extra help. In Mali, a national EGRA workshop among civil society organizations (CSOs) was mainly about strategies for communicating—publicly and at the grassroots level—EGRA findings and the urgent need for improved reading skills in the country. Finally, in Yemen, where the dialogue was conducted via a videoconference due to the precarious security situation in the country, the dialogue was very positive and constructive, but not necessarily instrumental since plans to create an improved program for early reading instruction with USAID support were already under way before the dialogue was held.[6]

Policy dialogues in the Year 2 countries—Kenya, Morocco, Rwanda, and Zambia—generally covered a broader sweep of substantive and policy issues. For example, in Rwanda, the policy dialogue became the focal point for determining how to measure early reading skills. It turned out that the government official who had supported the use of EGRA had moved on, and the new group of officials felt more ownership of a

[5] In the Dominican Republic, the holding of a policy dialogue stalled due to lack of support from the government and sponsoring NGO (American Chamber of Commerce). In that case, the key government stakeholders distanced themselves from the assessment since the country's approach to literacy instruction (whole language) was considered antithetical to that inherent in EGRA (phonics-based).

[6] It is likely, however, that the dialogue results reinforced the Yemen government's decision to move forward on its reading instruction program.

UNICEF-developed paper-and-pencil reading test, Learning Assessment in Rwandan Schools (LARS).[7] Eventually there was a decision to proceed with a joint policy dialogue (EGRA and LARS); at that time, government policy makers came to realize that the two instruments were complementary (LARS measured reading comprehension skills, but could not identify what was impeding them, and EGRA evaluated the basic building blocks of literacy). In Morocco, the EGRA/EGMA/SSME findings resulted in a wide range of recommendations for improving policy and practice in reading and math instruction, which were well received by education ministry and regional educational "academy" leaders. USAID/Morocco, including the Mission director, also engaged in a 90-minute briefing during which follow-up ideas were discussed.[8] Policy dialogues and other dissemination efforts for Ethiopia (Year 1) and for Kenya and Zambia (Year 2, both case study countries), are described in ***Text Box 1.***

Text Box 1. Policy dialogues and other dissemination activities: Ethiopia, Kenya, and Zambia

First-hand information gathered from key informants in the field for this review led to deeper insights into what had occurred during the policy dialogues, as well as additional communications strategies in the three countries. Summaries follow.

Ethiopia

Dissemination of EGRA results started with a senior-level policy dialogue at the education ministry within months of the assessment (September 2010). The results showed disastrous levels of reading performance across the country, especially in rural areas, and immediately led to questions concerning what to do about it. In federated Ethiopia, most educational programming takes place at the regional level, but the national government can still address serious policy questions about how reading skill acquisition is being addressed. During the policy dialogue, stakeholders made a quick decision to significantly reform the national mother-tongue curriculum; this meant immediately canceling a massive procurement of primary school language textbooks (which had been proceeding under a World Bank-led project) since they were then viewed as not sufficiently focused on reading.

USAID took additional steps to disseminate the results more broadly, not through the media or via document dissemination, but by policy dialogues at successive levels of government. To aid this plan, researchers produced regional results summaries, presenting *woreda* (district)-level breakdowns that allowed local leaders, during regional policy dialogues, to discuss intra-regional patterns of student performance and decide on regional interventions.

In many districts, results dissemination was taken one step further—down to the school level—as a way to bring head teachers and teachers into the dialogue, raising their awareness about both the alarmingly weak assessment results and what the assessment showed were their likely causes. In some cases, managers and teachers received this new information defensively (one district conducted its own reading assessment in part to cover more schools but also in part to gauge the validity of the EGRA results). However, in most cases the response was "We've got to do something about this."

Kenya

The education ministry and USAID sponsored high-level policy dialogue meetings to formulate policy and programmatic responses to the EGRA/EGMA/SSME baseline assessments in mid-June 2012. The

[7] LARS was developed with the assistance of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to assess literacy and numeracy at the primary school level and was administered in Rwanda to a national sample in 2011.

[8] USAID follow-up did not materialize right away since basic education was not in the Mission's cooperative strategy at that time. By 2014, the prospect for follow-up had improved given its inclusion in the new strategy.

meetings primarily convened high-level education ministry officials (e.g., directors) and the education sector's Semi-Autonomous Government Agencies. More widespread dissemination followed the release of a report of the midterm EGRA/EGMA/SSME results that took place at the end of the first year of classroom interventions in EdData II Primary Math and Reading (PRIMR) Initiative treatment schools in late 2012. In this case, there was not only a national policy dialogue about the results, but also more localized dialogues at the regional level, bringing together officials from 4–6 counties to discuss the substantial improvements revealed by the midterm assessment. Many of these dialogues turned out to be even more interactive and engaging than the one at the national level.

Around the same time, some intergovernmental written communications—for example, a formal letter about improving early literacy—were circulated by one of the Permanent Secretaries. Statements and plans about improved early grade learning that appeared in the Sessional Paper No. 14 of 2012 and the National Education Sector Plan (NESP, 2013–2018), dated April 2014, have been more widespread and influential.

The government and its USAID counterpart for early grade learning—the PRIMR Initiative—opted to use government and agency channels to disseminate assessment results. However, at about the same time, a private regional organization, Uwezo—a citizen-led assessment group patterned after Pratham, an education-focused NGO in India—started conducting household surveys of reading and math skills. Uwezo's data also showed low performance levels, and they adeptly communicated those results broadly through mass media (mostly radio). This approach created a striking complementarity in which PRIMR and its Kenyan government partners led the professional community in the scientific assessment of early grade reading and math, and the creation and piloting of effective interventions for improving outcomes. Uwezo, through its public communications, helped to create a popular demand for such interventions and a readiness for change.

Zambia

Zambia's policy dialogue was held over a two-day period (November 21–22, 2011) and involved senior education ministry and specialized agency (e.g., examinations, curriculum, and communications) personnel, USAID officials, and the Family Health Trust (the NGO that carried out the field survey). Due to the shocking and sensitive nature of the study outcomes and to avoid finger pointing, an innovative approach—the use of role playing—was used to formulate assessment policy implications and recommendations. The participants did address the appallingly weak results constructively, but when the draft assessment report was shared and the hard facts were seen in print, the same group of stakeholders became reluctant to disseminate the findings. USAID respected the stakeholders' wishes and held off on widespread and public dissemination; instead, USAID discreetly put the word out to a limited number of government and agency stakeholders.

At about the same time, a surprising election victory by the Patriotic Front party led to the creation of a new government, which had run on a platform of educational reform. Within its first year in power, the new government administration created—together with its development agency partners—a new National Literacy Framework[9] and accompanying Primary Literacy Programme to improve early grade reading (incorporating a commitment in its manifesto to the use of local languages). By mid-2013, the government had shown its willingness to come to terms with the country's desperately low early grade reading results;

[9] The government and international donors were behind a host of programs, policies, and initiatives for reading improvement in Zambia. For reference later in this report, we list them all together here. First, DFID sponsored the **Zambia Primary Reading Programme** (1998–2005) to improve the reading and writing skills of learners in grades 1–7. In 2012 the government formed a **National Literacy Steering Committee,** through which a group of advisors support the education ministry's educational and literacy goals. One of its initial major tasks was to help formulate a guiding policy, the **National Literacy Framework.** The **Primary Literacy Programme** that evolved from the framework consists of a new curriculum focusing on reading skills development in six national languages in primary education. **"Let's Read Zambia"** is a government-led publicity and mobilization campaign launched in mid-January 2014 to build support for the new curriculum and to encourage joint public and private sector efforts to build a culture of reading. **STEP-Up Zambia** (2012–2016) and **Zambia Read to Succeed** (2013–2017) are USAID-funded interventions that both support the education ministry and respond to USAID/Washington's global Education Strategy.

it produced news releases, citing the EGRA findings on how few second and third graders could read.* Six months later, the government announced a national reading campaign, "Let's Read Zambia," which was also featured in newspaper articles in which, for example, the U.S. Embassy Chargé d'Affaires was quoted on the reasons for poor reading results (all coming from the SSME findings).**

It took a change in government to open the floodgates of EGRA results dissemination in Zambia, but once citizens and action groups were involved in the conversation, the government and USAID developed another dissemination strategy to help steer the broader discourse. This led to the launch of a 5-year USAID-funded project (starting in 2012), Strengthening Educational Performance – Up (STEP-Up) Zambia, which in part intends to "promote well-informed policies and decision making, as well as bolster community support."

*"Government Disappointed with Low Reading Levels in Early Learners," *Lusaka Times, July 10, 2013.*
** "Zambia: Let's Read Campaign Launched," *Times of Zambia, January 17, 2014.*

Additional Dissemination

Determining the dissemination reach of the assessment findings beyond the initial policy dialogue events was challenging, but some patterns are beginning to emerge. For example, in Honduras, the main *Learning Outcomes* product was a communication tool, a video about best practices in reading instruction and EGRA administration, which has experienced fairly widespread dissemination through two channels: (1) the video has been used as a training tool to help teachers in the application of EGRA in their own classrooms; and (2) the video has been used in meetings with teachers, principals, and other education authorities to open discussions about early reading. This use and dissemination has been mainly in the context of a USAID-supported project, *EduAcción*, which followed the *Learning Outcomes* effort. It is unclear whether the education ministry or teachers' colleges have used the video outside of the *EduAcción* project.

In Mali, USAID's EdData II *Learning Outcomes* project and the Hewlett Foundation also supported the production of a video about EGRA and the importance of reading, and helped the education ministry organize a national press conference on EGRA results. Moreover, as a consequence of the workshop with CSOs (see paragraph 2 above in this Policy Dialogues section), one of the major teachers' unions in Mali received a grant from the Hewlett Foundation to produce a supplement within its newsletter that shared EGRA results with teachers throughout the country.

In Yemen, electronic media were also used for information dissemination, this time in the form of an EGRA website (called yegra.site11.com). This website (in Arabic) for spreading information about the follow-up Yemen Early Grade Reading Approach (YEGRA) project—part of a large USAID-supported Community Livelihoods Program—is produced entirely by local YEGRA staff. It contains several lively videos describing EGRA findings and the new (YEGRA) seven-step approach, which is being used to improve reading skills. The videos also include interviews with the head of YEGRA, the Minister of Education, and some parents. They show teachers/classrooms in action and report on positive findings from the program's use of baseline and midterm EGRA data on student progress. It is not clear how extensively used the site is, but it was easily downloaded from the United States for this review.

Additional dissemination efforts are described in Text Box 1 above for Ethiopia, Kenya, and Zambia.

Summary of Information Dissemination

In all three case study countries, EGRA-related interventions have since been taken to national scale (for details, see next section). The question remains as to which came first: a national-scale intervention or widespread dissemination of findings? The answer may lie in a deeper understanding of the forces driving the intervention.

In Ethiopia, there was no national reading program prior to the assessment except for a decision to produce new textbooks (with World Bank project financing). The dramatic EGRA results created a strong incentive to "do something," opening space for new interventions, starting with cancelation of the procurement of the textbooks, which were then judged to be underemphasizing early reading skills. In addition, awareness-raising about low student reading skills and their causes *at all levels of government* preceded policy making and program design, much of which emerged at the regional and local levels.[10]

In Kenya, the EGRA, EGMA, and SSME administrations were embedded in a program (the PRIMR Initiative) that already envisioned a future national-level scale-up, which was mandated by a national strategic plan; thus, a decision to scale up preceded dissemination of the *Learning Outcomes*/PRIMR EGRA/EGMA/SSME findings. However, the nature and timing of the scale-up[11] were highly influenced by PRIMR's midterm (October 2012) and endline (October 2013) EGRA/EGMA/SSME results, which were widely communicated through government channels. Thus, the influence went in both directions—policy proceeding information and information leading to policy. A complementary communication channel, Uwezo, also influenced the speed and scope of the scale-up (by creating popular demand and readiness for change).

In Zambia, the scale-up was energized by a new governing coalition, which made improving educational quality (including reading) a top priority. The promotion of the National Literacy Framework via the "Let's Read Zambia" campaign involved the release of EGRA/EGMA/SSME results, but was not contingent upon them (although knowledge of the survey may have had a behind-the-scenes influence on the priority accorded to the new framework). The use of popular media to get the word out also was much more apparent here than in the other countries, suggesting, again, the use of assessment results as a way to *justify policy*. USAID programs that support social marketing have this same quality of building support for new (and potentially controversial) early grade reading and math policies and programs.

[10] USAID also subsequently funded the Reading for Ethiopia's Achievement Developed Technical Assistance (READ TA) Project (2012–2017), designed to help improve the learning outcomes of primary school students in reading and writing. It involves materials development and teacher professional development in five regions and seven different languages plus English.

[11] See information about the *Tusome* national program later in this report.

Use of EGRA Results in Policy and Practice

Influence on Practice

In 8 of the 10 *Learning Outcomes* countries (excepting the Dominican Republic and Mali), the research carried out for this review revealed evidence confirming the continuation of early grade reading and math activities beyond the initial assessment phase.[12] Not all of these follow-up programs were fully under way as of this writing—in three countries, major government- and/or donor-funded reading (and in some cases, math) intervention projects were in the final preparation stages—but budgetary support was virtually certain for all. Additionally, not all of these activities can be traced directly to the *Learning Outcomes* events as their original stimulus; i.e., some of them were already under way when the *Learning Outcomes* assessments were conducted, and some were moving on a parallel track. Nevertheless, even when programs were not propelled by the *Learning Outcomes* assessment results, EGRA/EGMA/SSME findings often boosted the growth and/or quality of these early grade reading and math activities in some way.

Text Box 2. Agency partners in Kenya

In Kenya, USAID's efforts to improve early grade reading and math skills through the EdData II PRIMR Initiative were eventually joined by the UK Department for International Development (DFID/Kenya), which was impressed by the project's experimental design and its solid midterm results. DFID's initial contribution was to extend the reading and math interventions to two rural counties (USAID PRIMR worked in urban/peri-urban areas) and to introduce the use of two regional languages. DFID also added a new stream of inquiry to test the cost effectiveness of different mixes of PRIMR components; and supported a joint study on the relative benefits of electronic tablets used by students, teachers, and district tutors to support reading. When the Kenyan government announced that it would launch a national reading program drawing upon USAID funds, DFID joined the initiative as a co-financer (of the *Tusome* program). While USAID and DFID were working together, regional NGO Uwezo was stirring up public interest in early grade reading through its annual household reading assessments and its radio programs on the results.

Most of the follow-up activities identified involved some kind of partnership with and financial support from an external agency. USAID was first among these; in fact, USAID supported interventions in all eight countries where there were follow-ups. This support is not so surprising, given that the portal to this review (the *Learning Outcomes* assessments) was USAID sponsored and is certainly a tribute to the Agency's tenacity and follow-through with this line of innovation. It is not just USAID, however, that is in this game: In 5 of the 10 countries, USAID has partnered with other agencies in supporting early reading and math work (see ***Text Box 2***).[13] In four of the countries, NGOs were actively engaged in early grade work as partners or on parallel courses, using

[12] This evidence was collected through telephone/Skype calls to RTI program managers and key informants in other agencies. In addition, information was gathered from country, project (EdData II; YEGRA) and agency (USAID) websites. Finally, for the three case studies, data were gathered though a field visit.

[13] The agencies that most often partnered with USAID in early grade skills promotion were DFID, GIZ, the World Bank, and UNICEF.

their own sources of funds to provide additional support, often reaching out to marginalized groups.

Joint action seems to be a frequent feature of early grade learning programs. One explanation lies in the fact that the cause is strongly promoted by the Global Partnership for Education, which has made the "dramatic increase in the number of children learning and demonstrating mastery of basic literacy and numeracy skills by grade 3" one of its Strategic Plan objectives. In addition, the World Bank, one of the early sponsors of EGRA development, has been advocating for the use of the instrument throughout the developing world over the past decade. Finally, in recent years many bilateral agencies have moved in the same direction. For example, at about the same time that USAID declared early grade reading to be its number one strategic priority for the education sector, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) announced it to be among the top three priorities on its global agenda.

Among the many kinds of EGRA/EGMA/SSME follow-ups implemented or planned in five or six of the eight countries with any follow-up activities, additional assessments were among the most popular. These assessments have been (or will be) of various sizes and shapes—from the use of EGRA by teachers in their classrooms (Honduras), to the use of the instrument in an experiment to track progress of an intervention (e.g., Ethiopia, Kenya, and Zambia), to the conduct of a full national assessment (Ghana, Kenya, and Zambia) as baselines for new national programs (see ***Text Box 3*** for information about Zambia's program). In Morocco, the new USAID Country Development Cooperative Strategy, which now includes a goal of improving early grade reading, specifies the standard USAID indicator for success, namely the proportion of students "reading and understanding grade level text." This implies a national EGRA or EGRA-like assessment to track progress on that indicator. For this research, the number of *Learning Outcomes* countries that had conducted (2) or expected to conduct (3–5) a national-level EGRA totaled at least five, and potentially as many as seven. This rate of scaling up early grade reading assessments to the national level was probably not anticipated by the EdData II *Learning Outcomes* managers or by USAID.

Text Box 3. Zambia revs it up

Zambia's initial EGRA/EGMA/SSME results were so devastating that education managers were at first hesitant to deal with them publicly. When a regime change brought in a new set of policy makers with an education reform agenda (including early reading in local languages), a new Primary Literacy Programme was conceived. With USAID's help (i.e., financing for four interrelated projects), the Primary Literacy Programme team revised the grade 1 syllabus within one year. It is on track to roll out an entirely new reading curriculum (plus learning materials) for grades 2–4 over the next 3 years in six local languages, which will be used in the nation's conventional and community schools.

Explaining the high scale-up rate is complex, but it is clear that in most cases, the initial EGRA (and for Year 2, EGMA and SSME), constrained by budget and thus in most cases done only in a few regions and/or in one or two languages, yielded results so startling that quickly moving ahead with solutions became a mandate in many countries (see example

of Ethiopia in ***Text Box 4***). In some cases, a step in this direction involved expanding the assessment baseline to include additional languages—as in Kenya, where the only local language originally assessed was Kiswahili; and in Zambia, where the assessment was limited to Bemba. Another explanation, related to the small scale of the initial assessments, addressed the need to implement a national-level baseline in preparation for a national-level intervention to improve reading (and in Kenya, math) skills (relevant in the *Learning Outcomes* countries of Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Zambia, and perhaps Morocco in the near future).

Text Box 4. Ethiopia quickly fashions a solution

When the disastrous EGRA results were first presented within a senior-level policy dialogue, decision makers immediately began to discuss what to do about them, and quickly decided to reform the national language learning curriculum. This approach meant abruptly canceling a massive procurement of primary school language textbooks (under way within a World Bank-led project) since they were suddenly viewed as not sufficiently focused on reading skills.

A scale-up of this magnitude is a rare event in countries that have used the EGRA, EGMA, or SSME. Previously, such a scale-up had been done in only a few countries, among them Egypt and Liberia.[14] The fact that more than half of this cohort of countries (i.e., 5 to 7 of the 10 *Learning Outcomes* countries) were moving from subnational pilot assessments to national-level assessments is impressive. The reasons behind the extensive scale-up are not readily apparent, but a confluence of factors may have contributed. These factors include the following: (1) a compelling first round of results, (2) the growing attention to reading instruction in native languages, (3) a supportive political environment (perhaps the result of the hand-picking of the *Learning Outcomes* countries), and (4) the readiness of USAID (and partner agencies) to keep financial resources flowing (see last section of this report for a deeper discussion of this topic).

Beyond additional assessments, follow-ups to the *Learning Outcomes* EGRA, EGMA, and SSME results have included a variety of **changes in educational programs and practices** (usually in the form of interventions designed to improve reading instruction). In six of the countries where follow-ups were undertaken, improved teacher education was the first intervention carried out, which primarily involved changes to in-service training and mentoring, with some attention to pre-service education. The emphasis in this area has been to improve teacher awareness and skills for establishing pupils' reading and math basics. In reading, intervention activities have included instructing teachers in how to teach letter and letter-sound recognition, phonemic awareness, word decoding, and reading fluency. In some cases, the instruction has been organized as a cascade system, starting with a training of trainers. In other settings, it has involved creating a corps of expert teachers or coaches who are called upon to mentor others.

[14] National-level assessments in Egypt took place under separate EdData II task orders in March 2013 and April 2014. In Liberia, EdData II funded an experimental intervention and baseline, midterm, and endline assessments under the EGRA Plus: Liberia task order, and similar periodic assessments continue via the USAID Liberia Teacher Training Program (LTTP). See Bibliography for citations.

The next type of intervention being carried out or planned (in five countries) is **curricular revision and related learning materials development and provision.** In federated countries like Ethiopia, this has meant creating curricular guidelines (i.e., a syllabus) at the national level and then supporting regions in the detailed design of their own materials and textbooks (in regional languages). The curricular redesigns have emphasized the steps for language/math skills acquisition and not (as before) language and math as academic subjects. In cases like Kenya and Zambia, the curriculum design has involved intensive field trials of new, updated instructional systems and learning materials, including the design of supplementary readers in the relevant languages to entice and sustain the reading habit. This venture also has a logistical feature—systems for creating and distributing books and materials at the needed 1:1 textbook-to-pupil ratio.

Interventions implemented or planned as follow-ups to EGRA/EGMA/SSME assessments by four or fewer of the *Learning Outcomes* countries included the following:

- strengthening community/home support for improved reading and math skills acquisition (four countries);
- improving systems of teacher supervision and support and creating reading rooms in school or libraries (including mobile ones) (three countries did both); and
- using information and communication technology (ICT) (e.g., electronic tablets) in reading and math learning (two countries).

Collectively, these interventions cover most, if not all, of the recommended approaches found in the country-specific *Learning Outcomes* final reports analyzing EGRA/EGMA/SSME findings (see Bibliography).

Influence on Policy

In this review, *policy* in government settings is distinguished from *practice* in that the former is generally longer term and consists of a set of coherent decisions, often supported by special legislation or government decrees.[15] Typically, policies are what are used to institutionalize practices. In contrast, practices are generally shorter term and have no legal weight. For purposes of this review, it was difficult to determine the extent to which *policies* were changed in the various countries in response to EGRA/EGMA/SSME results. This was a challenge, in part, because the informants generally were either spokespersons for projects, or agency experts who were mainly cognizant of the development of interventions (i.e., practices). Timing also was an issue: Most of the *Learning Outcomes* follow-ups are still too recent to have been institutionalized through national policies. In this review, government informants were the main sources of information on relevant policy reforms during field studies in the

[15] The definitions used here were influenced by an interactive academic blog post at http://www.researchgate.net/post/What_is_the_difference_in_meaning_of_the_terms_policy_planning_and_strategy

case study countries. Therefore, this section highlights mainly policy reforms in those three countries.

Policy Reform in Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, policy adjustment at the national level was one early approach to "doing something" in response to the *Learning Outcomes* assessment results. It is not clear how greatly the EGRA results influenced the raft of new and relevant policy changes that emerged, but these results at least had some connection to all of the policy changes. In the policy area concerning instructional approaches to early grade reading, the EGRA policy dialogue seems to have been the driving force. The immediate decision to cancel the impending textbook procurement was accompanied by a decision to strengthen the country's system for teaching reading in local languages by revising (with USAID's support) the mother tongue curriculum for grades 1–8. The revisions, which had been partly completed at the time of this research, involve the creation of a new, general national syllabus, drawing from EGRA findings and lessons learned, followed by adaptations to a set of regions and their seven main languages (which could eventually increase to 20).[16]

In addition, the education ministry is working to change teacher training policy. For pre-service, the ministry has taken steps to upgrade primary teacher preparation from a certificate program to a diploma-level program (including new modules on the teaching of reading). For in-service, a continuous professional development program was instituted with interventions at the zonal, *woreda*, and school level, which emphasize mother-tongue instruction through a set of teacher training modules. This program was evaluated after about one year and deemed to be less than satisfactory. As a result, as of this writing, the education ministry was revising the in-service training again, this time bringing in specialists in mother-tongue reading instruction and implementing approaches aligned with the new language learning syllabi (assisted by USAID's READ TA project).

Related to the reforms in formal teacher training and accreditation are changes in teacher management policy. A new policy on teacher licensing is being implemented wherein all teachers must submit to examinations as part of a path to relicensing (to be managed at the regional level). Salary increases will be connected to teachers' progress on the relicensing steps, and new teacher-support positions will be created, such as mentor teachers (who will be expected to help fellow teachers improve their teaching skills in areas such as reading). Also, going forward, a prerequisite for head teacher positions will be five years' experience as a classroom teacher. Moreover, the basis of the head teacher position will shift from administration to instructional coaching. Individuals recruited for these positions will be trained for the modified role and given commensurate salary increases.

[16] Over 40 languages are in use in Ethiopia, and at least 20 are expected to become languages of instruction in the first 3–4 years of the mother-tongue program.

Policy Reform in Kenya

Kenya's most recent government aspirations concerning early grade reading and math appear in the NESP 2013–2018, published in 2014. The NESP lists *education quality* as third among its six main priorities. Within education quality, the NESP specifies the "Early Reading and Mathematics Quality Improvement Programme" among a list of seven subpriorities. The policy framework upon which this subpriority was built is the education ministry's Sessional Paper No. 14 of 2012, which emphasizes improving basic literacy and numeracy of children and calls for reforms that will "improve the quality of education and training so that Kenya's measurable learning outcomes in literacy, numeracy, scientific, and communication skills are in the upper quartile on international standardized tests" (NESP, p. 70).

The NESP cited the "government-commissioned" PRIMR Initiative as having influenced its goals for early reading and math skills improvement and having undertaken "research on how to improve reading and mathematics outcomes" (NESP, p. 69). Ultimately, the NESP goal formulated for this subpriority is "to ensure that all pupils read and do basic mathematics by the end of Grade 2" (NESP, p. 70).

The NESP is more of a statement of intentions than a pronouncement of policies. It does, however, touch upon a number of policy areas that will need attention in support of its plans, including (1) establishing systems for data collection on early grade reading and early grade math; (2) instituting programs for educating teachers about both pupil assessments and best practices in reading and math instruction; (3) making appropriate adjustments to the early grade curriculum; (4) establishing provisions for procuring early grade reading and early grade math instructional materials; and (5) enforcing (and clarifying) language-of-instruction policies for grades 1 and 2.

Because of its experience with PRIMR (both the package of assessments and the related interventions), USAID was invited by the education ministry to support it in the design and implementation of an appropriate *nationwide* early grade reading program called *Tusome*.[17] USAID's procurement document for that effort (which will launch in late August 2014) included a requirement that the contractor focus on "improvement of the policy environment that promotes reading skills" by undertaking a policy analysis early in the project and designing an intervention package to address identified policy gaps. Its tentative list of policies that need to be addressed include those mentioned in the NESP, as well as policies concerning the time that local tutors need in order to support improved reading, ways of working within the government's devolution framework (which grants counties new powers in education programming), and the role of universities/research institutes and teacher training colleges in promoting improved early reading skills.

[17] Kenya is also gearing up for a national-level math skills development program, which is expected to be supported financially by a new grant from the Global Partnership for Education and is likely to incorporate learning–teaching strategies developed under PRIMR.

Many Kenyan informants noted the long time needed to change policies, especially in areas with well-entrenched interest groups that benefit from the status quo. On most policy issues related to early grade reading and early grade math, the USAID-supported reform programs have not been operating long enough to have had a substantial impact (i.e., PRIMR began in 2011 and the *Learning Outcomes*-assisted assessments took place in 2012). However, an important point to note is that PRIMR and related undertakings have prepared the "policy environment" for substantial policy change in the near future, as the country prepares for national-level scale-up of both early grade reading and math programs.

Policy Reform in Zambia

In Zambia, for decades, the national literacy curriculum has been a crucial arena for reform. In 1996, Zambia adopted a policy of introducing reading skills to children in "familiar languages." This policy was vigorously pursued between 1999 and 2005, with substantial help from DFID.[18] Although it was found to be effective in grade 1, the program eventually withered since it included only one year of local language learning and used a wealth of materials that could not be sustained once British aid ended in 2005.

Among the recommendations derived from the 2011 *Learning Outcomes* EGRA/EGMA/SSME results was a review of policies on early grade language curricular design and language of instruction. As noted above, it took a change in government administration that same year for these reforms to be considered seriously in 2012 by the new National Literacy Steering Committee. The language curriculum adopted by the education ministry, called the Primary Literacy Programme, includes reading skills development in six national languages over the first four years of primary education.[19] This program and a policy to introduce instruction in oral English (not reading and writing) in grade 2 constituted the language-of-instruction policy. An assessment policy also has been formulated, with the government opting to assess reading (and math) at the end of grades 1 and 4 (using a modified EGRA for grade 4). With support from USAID, the ministry also decided to create a permanent early grade reading assessment at the Examinations Bureau of Zambia. Policies related to other features of the early grade reading program have not been clarified or were not discovered by this reviewer.

[18] DFID's Primary Reading Programme made use of the Breakthrough to Literacy Programme curriculum and materials promulgated by the South African organization Molteno Institute for Language and Literacy.

[19] The new government also pursued a program of curricular change in numeracy, but this was not based on the EGMA and thus took a different channel of program development and relied on a different set of development agencies (e.g., Japan International Cooperation Agency instead of USAID). USAID had originally supported both literacy and numeracy in Zambia (in fact, the project that became known as Zambia Read to Succeed had originally covered them both), but with the shift in USAID's global Education Strategy, USAID/Zambia opted to concentrate on reading.

Summary of Influence on Policy and Practice

The findings from this research showed that three countries—Ethiopia, Kenya, and Zambia—committed themselves to a set of reforms in early reading (and math) instruction, which include the following:

- New curricula have been or are being developed and language-of-instruction issues clarified (the use of national and/or local languages);
- New textbooks and other learning materials have been called for;
- Teacher training strategies have been established and assessment processes clarified.

Much of this strategizing is being done within the context of development assistance programs (mainly USAID, but also DFID, Global Partnership for Education, and World Bank), and the extent to which the programs are fully "owned" by the government (and thus subject to firm national policy) is not entirely apparent. Time is an issue: These innovations are at most three years old, with many programs still in research and development (R&D) mode. Moving from R&D to policy is often a complex process.

Kenya has perhaps moved furthest toward institutionalizing its program by setting time-bound reading and math goals in its sector plan and calling for specific reforms, thus opening policy space and creating a receptive environment. In Ethiopia, recent policy changes have been made to teacher qualifications, licensing, and in-service education, and a new "mentor teacher" position also was created. All of these modifications provide openings for improved early reading but leave open questions as to whether they will be used to achieve it. In Zambia, the new government has moved ahead with its National Literacy Steering Committee, which has advanced the new Primary Literacy Programme using six native languages. It is not clear, however, whether the Steering Committee will be able to "make" policy or if that will require ministerial or parliamentary action (a question for all three countries).[20]

Analysis of the Utilization of Assessment Results

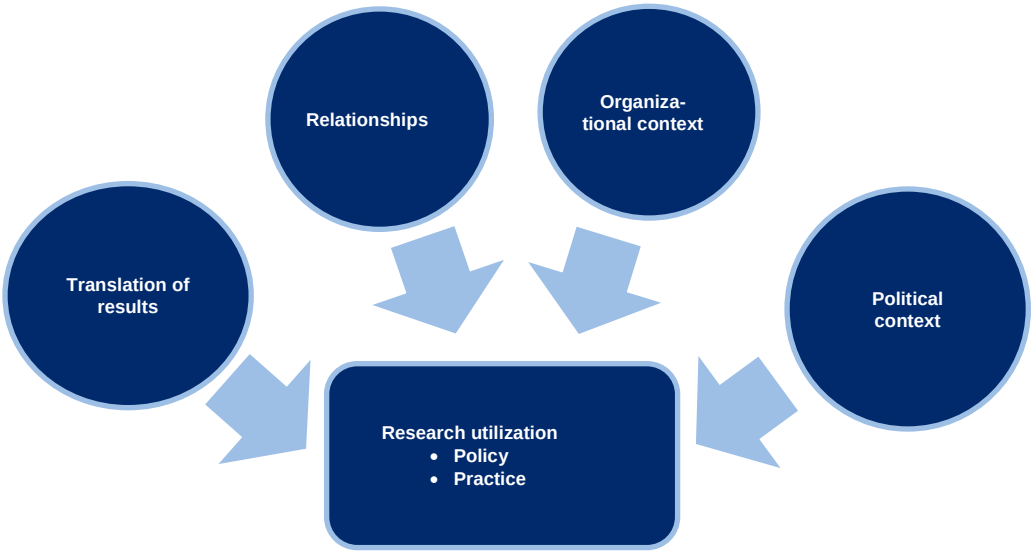
This review has traced the trajectory of the *Learning Outcomes* assessments and related follow-up activity from the assessments themselves, to policy dialogue, to preliminary model building, and to scale-up at the national or subnational level. Despite very different assessment starting points in the participating countries and varying national contexts, this review revealed a surprisingly high rate of countries moving from initial assessments to scaled-up interventions. Throughout the process, the original and successor assessment

[20] Egypt is a non-*Learning Outcomes* country in which the institutionalization of a government-operated early grade reading program (EGRP) is quite advanced. Examples of *policies* there are as follows: (1) a regulation that the time devoted to reading in primary schools classrooms is 25 minutes a day; (2) a requirement that new teachers master a Professional Academy of Teachers module on early grade reading in order to obtain or retain certification; and (3) a requirement that the content of reading textbooks be aligned with EGRP strategies (Nielsen, 2013).

results have been widely, and often effectively, communicated, with follow-up programs designed and implemented. In some cases, the causal chain showed direct and sequential links between assessment outcomes, policy and program discussions (dialogues), and action planning/implementation. In others, the connections were less direct—for example, as in the case of an intervention program already being conceived before the assessment results were in, with the results then used to justify the program or to contribute design features. This review considered either pathway—direct or indirect—to be a successful case of dissemination and utilization of early grade assessment results.

The last section of this review presents an analysis of explanations for the effective utilization of early grade assessment results, as shown in ***Figure 1.*** This model was, adapted from a conceptual framework created by researchers at the William T. Grant Foundation (Tseng, 2012). The focal points of this analysis are the three case study countries (Ethiopia, Kenya, and Zambia); however, other countries are brought in as appropriate.

Figure 1. Framework for explaining the impact of *Learning Outcomes* EGRA/EGMA/SSME results on policy and practice



Each element of the model depicted in Figure 1 is explained briefly below.

- **Translation of results:** the way in which the results are presented and translated to/by decision makers.
- **Relationships:** the relationship (feelings of trust) between the assessment professionals and assessment users, including the way intermediaries are used and "champions" are involved.
- **Organizational context:** the organizational setting in which the exchange or assessment results takes place, including the professional capacity of the actors,

the culture of the institutions and/or their programs, and the structure of the organizations involved.

- **Political context:** the values and ideologies of the leading actors and the power relationships that are in place.

Table 2 shows how each of the three case studies are positioned on the first two model dimensions, "translation of results" and "relationships." ***Table 3*** shows the positions on organizational context and ***Table 4*** for political context. Following the tables is a brief summary of case study country positions on each of the model dimensions.

Table 2. Case study countries' positions on translation of results and relationships

Dimension	Ethiopia	Kenya	Zambia
Translation of results	*Learning Outcomes* country report conveyed results in an objective yet powerful manner, often having high shock value ("proportion students having zero scores"), and begging for response; policy dialogues at central and decentralized levels led to quick action	*Learning Outcomes* country report conveyed results in an objective yet powerful manner, often having high shock value ("proportion of students having zero scores"), and begging for response; policy dialogue was quickly followed by experimentation yielding early positive results. Earlier national/regional assessments (e.g., those completed by the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality [SACMEQ]) also showed declining results, lending credibility to the EGRA/EGMA/SSME results and increasing the sense of urgency for action, converging with the high priority given to improved basic skills by USAID, DFID, the World Bank, UNICEF, Global Partnership for Education, and others.	*Learning Outcomes* country report conveyed results in an objective yet powerful manner, often having high shock value ("proportion of students having zero scores"), and begging for response; policy dialogue created recommendations through role play; after change in government, results received media coverage. Earlier national/regional assessments (SACMEQ) also showed declining results, lending credibility to the EGRA/EGMA/SSME results and increasing the sense of urgency for action, converging with the high priority given to improved basic skills by USAID, DFID, the World Bank, UNICEF, Global Partnership for Education, and others.
Relationships	Over 10+ years (1995–2007), USAID provided support for transforming/ modernizing Ethiopian basic education through the Basic Education System Overhaul (BESO) project, which established the Agency as a trusted and reliable partner; overlapping in	Long history of USAID support to primary education, including an early small-scale EGRA and intervention that created a strong, trusting connection with the education ministry. The ministry and USAID	Long-serving and well-connected USAID Education Program Manager brought EGRA to Zambia and oversaw the launch of 4 interconnected projects in support of new literacy program, thereby contributing to the

Dimension	Ethiopia	Kenya	Zambia
	2002 was a successful Alternative Basic Education Program, which focused on access in remote areas. In 2009, USAID shifted support to quality improvement through its Improving the Quality of Primary Education Program (IQPEP), which further strengthened the Agency's bond with the education ministry and set the stage for EGRA and receptivity to the early reading reform agenda.	Mission have convergence of interests in improving math and reading scores. USAID's contractor for PRIMR includes prominent local analysts on its team and the head of the Kenya National Examinations Council to manage assessment logistics.	Mission's trusted position in this field. Contractor for EGRA intervention included in its staff key local personnel involved in an earlier reading improvement program.

Table 3. Case study countries' positions on organizational context

Dimension	Ethiopia	Kenya	Zambia
Capacity	Ethiopian government offices at the central and regional levels are capable of moving quickly. One district already had an intervention in place within 3 months of receiving the news about its children's performance on the EGRA. This pragmatic approach to problem solving can get things moving quickly but sometimes lacks a strategic focus and/or grounding in theory and research, which is something that the *Learning Outcomes* EGRA brought to the table.	USAID's approach to this venture (through PRIMR) is to work cooperatively with skilled Kenyan professionals (language and reading specialists, researchers, assessment specialists, curriculum developers, instructional coaches and tutors) with the intention of further strengthening local capacity, which is said to have promoted national ownership of the program.	The main government agency to respond to the assessment results was the Kenya Institute for Curriculum Development; its director is experienced and savvy about reading instruction via local languages, having worked on the previous curriculum that followed the South African Breakthrough to Literacy model. A domestic source of relevant expertise is the University of Zambia, where currently 5 doctoral students are focused on early literacy, a domestic source for theoretical and practical expertise in this field (one of the doctoral students is currently the Deputy Director of the USAID Zambia Read to Succeed project).

Dimension	Ethiopia	Kenya	Zambia
Culture	Ethiopians are proud of living in one of the few countries in Africa that was never colonized, and that pride compels them to compare themselves favorably with neighboring countries on development indicators such as those in health and education. Their quick response to the EGRA results could be seen as a way to get a jump start on their neighbors who were also found to have weak reading scores. A similar logic holds for the regions in Ethiopia, which tend to compete on indices of progress and development, including those in the field of education.	A change in Constitution (2010) and in government (2013) ushered in an era of evidence-based decision making. This created receptive soil for the planting of early grade reforms and innovations that were based on solid cognitive science and adapted to the Kenyan conditions through a rigorous, randomized controlled group experiment.	Zambia had a history of advocating for and using local languages in early grade literacy starting in 1976—a little more than a decade after independence—and many national leaders were committed to the idea, including those in the political party that won the 2011 election.
Structure	Ethiopia's federal system—in which education services (like other services) are mainly managed/delivered by the provincial government—has led to a relatively well-developed state apparatus at local levels. This allows regions to take matters into their own hands through their own policies, plans, and financing. Combined with the competitiveness mentioned above, this can get local interventions moving quite quickly.	One Kenyan response to the EGRA results was the creation of a Programme Development and Implementation Team (PDIT), which is credited with building a coordinated government response to the EGRA/EGMA/SSME outcomes. Because of government's coordinating efforts and the credibility and conviviality of the PRIMR project, strong bonds have grown among agency partners, e.g., USAID and DFID in co-financing PRIMR activities, which significantly broadened PRIMR's scope. Also notable are links between PRIMR and local NGOs, such as Uwezo and Aga Khan Foundation.	Under the reformist government of 2011, there was a move to coordinate the strategy for early grade reading under a national literacy framework, which brought government, NGOs, and development agencies together.

Table 4. Case study countries' positions on political context

Dimension	Ethiopia	Kenya	Zambia
Political context	There is strong political support for the use of regional languages as part of how regions are exerting their identity and authority. In terms of *Learning Outcomes,* the legitimacy of regional education authorities in	The launch of a new Kenyan Constitution in 2010 required some restructuring in the delivery of education (more decentralization), and a change in government in early 2013 set the stage for a	With a surprising electoral victory in 2011, the Patriotic Front, which had campaigned on a platform to reform education (including reading in mother tongue), took

Dimension	Ethiopia	Kenya	Zambia
	part hinged on their being able to demonstrate that they could respond to the poor results—in particular, helping students learn to read well in the regional language.	new era of educational reform.	seriously the EGRA/EGMA/SSME outcome messages and the suggested follow-ups.

Translation of Results

In these three cases, the assessment messages were generally conveyed in an objective yet powerful manner. One outcome indicator was particularly striking: the proportion of test takers having zero scores on the various test items (e.g., for fluency: the proportion unable to read a single word correctly from a simple reading passage). Such proportions were often higher than 50%, and were thus easy to communicate to others—e.g., "Our children are not reading," which begs for a response, "What can we do about it?!" The policy dialogues that were held at the national and (sometimes) subnational levels generally provided a good format for answering this question, or in other words translating research into action. In Ethiopia, those attending the EGRA policy dialogue quickly fashioned a solution that involved revising the reading curriculum and creating new textbooks. In Kenya, those involved in the policy dialogue translated assessment results into crucial changes in the intervention strategy; further efforts after the successful midterm and endline assessments contributed to the decision to proceed with scaling up the reading program to the national level. The fact that in only 1 of 10 countries were the *Learning Outcomes* results negatively received, despite the often appalling messages, suggests that the EdData II team's formula for translating results (through its reporting format and policy dialogues) was fruitful.

Relationships

For research utilization, the essence of building relationships is creating trust—specifically among the producers/sponsors of the research and policy and decision makers. Often such trust is built up over time—as in Kenya, where USAID developed a strong, trusting relationship with the education ministry during the decade before the EGRA/EGMA/SSME baseline, including through its support for a small-scale EGRA and intervention in 2007 that showed promise and built credibility. Organizations like USAID and its contractors can also build up trust by relying on recognized local "intermediaries." Examples include when USAID's contractor in Kenya brought prominent local data analysts into its research team and relied on the head of the Kenya National Examinations Council to manage assessment logistics. In Ethiopia, USAID also had developed a trusting relationship with the education ministry through its almost two decades of support to basic education (1995–2014), which in 2009 shifted to support for quality improvement, making it a trusted and credible source of ideas and instruments for innovation in early grade reading instruction. In Zambia, consistent leadership of the education program at the USAID Mission in Lusaka

built a sense of trust, as did the USAID contractor for the STEP-Up early grade reading intervention, by recruiting staff with knowledge derived from their participation in the earlier DFID-supported Primary Reading Programme. However, a counterexample can be found in Rwanda: There the education ministry official who had championed the use of the EGRA and EGMA was transferred, and it took some time for a sense of trust and credibility regarding the EGRA/EGMA/SSME results and approaches to be reestablished in the education ministry.

Organizational Context

For purposes of this research, "organizational context" was conceived of as a cluster of enabling conditions within the organizations that received the *Learning Outcomes* research findings (mainly the education ministry). Aspects of context that were investigated were *organizational capacity, organizational culture,* and *organizational structure*.

Capacity

In all three case studies, national and (in the case of Ethiopia) subnational education offices were found to possess the basic organizational capacity for implementing quality improvement programs. In Ethiopia, national and regional officers were decisive and fast moving. In Kenya, skilled professionals were found throughout education ministry departments and the sector's semi-autonomous organizations. In Zambia, expertise existed from the previous DFID early grade reading program from which the education ministry could draw upon. Basic capacity was sufficiently strong to support the adoption of an EGRA follow-up. However, in all case studies, specific individual and organizational capacity in the technical/innovative features of an EGRA/EGMA/SSME administration and/or a reading or math intervention required additional technical assistance, which was provided by a USAID contractor.

Culture

An ethnographic study of the implementing organizations in *Learning Outcomes* countries was beyond the scope of this review, but the three cases did reveal facilitating conditions for research utilization that are cultural in nature. For example, in Ethiopia, one of the driving forces appeared to be a pride in the country's never having been colonized, which has driven leaders to compare their country favorably with its neighbors. Likewise, within the country, regional pride and interregional competitiveness seem to be partly what drives regions to press forward. In Kenya's government, a relatively new "culture of decision making" has emerged, which is more *evidence-based* than in the past—a change that has made it receptive to the scientific rigor of EGRA/EGMA/SSME and the PRIMR intervention's experimental design (i.e., using a randomized controlled trial). In Zambia, going back nearly to the foundation of the independent republic, there is a history of support for the position that local languages should be used in early-grade literacy. This ideal appeared in the 2011 manifesto of the current ruling political party.

Structure

The organizational structure of an education ministry can also shape the pace and extent of its research utilization, a factor that appeared in the three case studies in different ways. Making a difference in Ethiopia was the decentralization of government services, providing a relatively well-developed government apparatus at the local levels for making and implementing decisions. Combined with the interregional competitiveness mentioned above, this feature set the stage for expeditious local program design and implementation. In Kenya, one response to the EGRA/EGMA/SSME results was the creation of a Programme Development and Implementation Team (PDIT), which is credited with building a coordinated government response to the assessment outcomes. Similarly, in Zambia, a structural and policy change—in the form of the National Literacy Framework—established the institutional foundation for a coordinated government, NGO, and partner agency response to the country's reading crisis.

Political Context

The broader political context in the country can also create enabling conditions for reading reform. Such appears to have been the case in two case study countries, Kenya and Zambia. In Kenya, the launch of a new Constitution in 2010, which required some restructuring in the delivery of education (e.g., more decentralization), and a change in government in early 2013, both set the stage for a new era of evidence-based educational reform. In Zambia, the electoral victory of the Patriotic Front put an education reform-minded government in power that positioned itself as the party to overcome the disastrous record of declining student reading scores that took place under the previous government. On the other hand, in one of the non-case-study *Learning Outcomes* countries, Mali, a 2012 coup d'etat closed down the civilian government and the USAID Mission, resulting in the suspension (at least for a time) of the *Learning Outcomes* policy dialogue session and any follow-up planning.

Summary and Conclusions

During 2009–2012, the seed of early grade assessment was planted with the help of the EdData II *Learning Outcomes* task order in 10 countries. The results of these assessments were subject to intense scrutiny by national—and sometimes regional—authorities who, through policy dialogues, translated them into insights, concerns, recommendations, and occasionally action plans (including additional dissemination events). In 8 of the 10 cases, the seed found ground receptive and fertile enough to sprout early grade reading and (sometimes) math *interventions*, usually with the financial and technical support of USAID and other agencies. In five—or, in all likelihood, six—countries, these interventions are being or will be scaled up to the national or near-national level, a testimony to the follow-through and tenacity of the national governments and USAID. Reasons for this success rate are not entirely clear, but in the countries moving to a national scale-up, there was a confluence of poor and compelling first-round results, a

precedent for reading instruction in local languages, a supportive political environment (partly the result of the hand-picking of the *Learning Outcomes* countries), and the readiness of USAID (and partner agencies) to keep financial resources flowing for this type of remediation.

Influence on Practice

Frequent types of follow-up to the original *Learning Outcomes* assessments were additional or follow-up assessments, which have taken place or will take place in five or six of the *Learning Outcomes* countries. Changes in early-grade *practice* (interventions) were found to cover (in the order of frequency) the following topics: (1) implementing some form of improved or focused *teacher training* (in seven countries); (2) carrying out *curricular and learning materials reform/revision* (in five countries); (3) *strengthening home and community support* (in four countries); (4) creating *reading rooms or mobile libraries* (in three countries), and (4) using ICT in early grade reading/math instruction (in two countries). Collectively, these interventions cover most, if not all, of the recommended approaches found in the individual final country reports of EGRA/EGMA/SSME findings.

Influence on Policy

Assessment results also had an influence on policy in the *Learning Outcomes* countries, but these were not as apparent as the impacts on practice—partly a consequence of less access to information on policy changes during this review. Policy changes were more apparent in the three case study countries where national scale-ups were under way, because of access to policy makers and government stakeholders during the field visits. This data collection revealed important policy changes with respect to curriculum and learning materials in all three countries (i.e., putting more emphasis on teaching pupils basic skills and the use of local languages). There were also cases of new teacher education and assessment policies. However, relatively few policies of a regulatory or legal nature were found, a likely reflection of the innovations' relative short life span to date, and the long and complicated processes for changing policies in country. The slow progress in making formal policy changes needed to *institutionalize* early-grade reading and math programs in the countries suggests that government ownership of them may not yet be full.

Reasons for Effective Utilization of Assessment Results

This review did an in-depth analysis of reasons for effective utilization of assessment results in the three case study countries where interventions are being scaled up at the national level: Ethiopia, Kenya, and Zambia. This analysis was framed by the use of a conceptual model which included as lines of influence (1) translation of results; (2) relationships; (3) organizational context; and (4) political context. Information on these dimensions for the three is presented in Tables 2–4 (above). Following are conclusions regarding sharing, publicizing, and using the *Learning Outcomes* assessment

findings and their spin-offs that could be considered by stakeholders undertaking early grade skills assessments and interventions in other settings.

1. **Appropriate dissemination of distressing evidence.** The translation of dire assessment results by researchers into language that was both objective and powerful often jolted the hearers into an immediate response and created a readiness to seek solutions.
2. **Policy dialogue sessions.** The policy dialogues that were set up served as another opportunity for government stakeholders to translate the results into insights, explanations, and recommendations, and in some cases into action plans. The more layers of policy dialogues (in a bureaucratic sense), the more engaged the local problem solvers became in finding solutions (see Ethiopia).
3. **Long-term USAID inputs.** A sustained presence of USAID in educational improvement efforts in the country (especially in Ethiopia and Kenya) helped to create a sense of trust among the governments, which facilitated government buy-in to both the EGRA/EGMA/SSME results and any newly proposed programs.
4. **Local expertise.** Local experts and specialists mediated between the USAID-supported programs and the government, and took central roles as researchers and program developers in the assessments and related interventions, lending credibility to these efforts.
5. **Ministry capacity.** Education ministry officials in the three case study countries were competent and already had some degree of experience with bilingual reading programs (supported by USAID in Ethiopia, USAID and Hewlett Foundation in Kenya, and DFID in Zambia), led by "champions" in the field in Kenya and Zambia (the latter since the change in government).
6. **Willingness to innovate.** Cultural norms conducive to taking up innovative ideas in education were important facilitative factors in the three countries—competitiveness in Ethiopia; a relatively new culture of evidence-based decision making in Kenya; and a history of support for teaching reading beginning with local languages in Zambia, significant enough to appear in the new ruling party's manifesto.
7. **Compatible government structures.** Integrative structures in ministries of education facilitated a relatively harmonized engagement with EGRA/EGMA/SSME outcomes and related innovations/interventions—for example, the PDIT in Kenya and the National Literacy Framework in Zambia.
8. **National political context.** National politics matter. The adoption of a new Constitution or installation of a new government can open new space for reform and/or new beginnings, as was the case in Kenya and Zambia. Change agents looking to introduce early grade assessments and interventions to a new country would do well to consider whether the politics are right for such a reform effort, or at least be aware of (1) the risks if a country's political context is shaky (as in fragile states); and (2) the possibility that political change along the way can open new doors, as in the case of Zambia.

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Annexes