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IMPROVING LITERACY FOR CHILDREN THROUGH THE SUPPORT OF COMMUNITY NETWORKS (ULLN)



Executive summary

November, 2022

IMPROVING LITERACY FOR CHILDREN THROUGH THE SUPPORT OF COMMUNITY NETWORKS (ULLN)¹

Executive summary

INTRODUCTION

Children's literacy in Honduras

Honduras experiences high illiteracy rates and marked inequalities in education between urban and rural regions, with rates of household poverty increasing significantly over the last decade, from 60% of households in 2010 to 74% in 2021 (National Institute of Statistics, 2021). According to UNESCO's Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report (2015), Honduras has an average illiteracy rate of 11.51%. Although Honduras established the National Plan for Literacy, 2014-2017, trends show it would take 20 years to reduce illiteracy rates to below 5%. In 2018 the literacy rate for both male and female adults (15 year old and above) was 87% (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020).

What is ULLN?

The research project Improving Literacy for Children Through the Support of Community Networks (also known as Unlock Literacy Network Learning, **ULLN**), is a research project funded by the International Development Research Center (IDRC) and the Knowledge Innovation and Exchange project of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE-KIX). The main objective of the research is to explore how community actors (including teachers, directors and officials of the Ministry of Education, parents (caregivers in general), community leaders and local organizations) work in partnership to implement the community-based literacy activities of the Unlock Literacy model (UL) to enable children to participate in and benefit from these literacy strengthening activities in Honduras, especially the most vulnerable girls and boys.

1. This document is based on the following ULLN project reports: 1) Improving child literacy through community networks: Results of the first phase (FOSDEH; OISE; UG; 2021) and the 2) Research design of the Unlocking Literacy Learning Network (ULLN)(FOSDEH; OISE; UG; 2021).

What is the UL Model?

The Unlock Literacy (**UL**) model is an innovative evidence-based World Vision initiative to strengthen the literacy development of children in the early grades (grades 1-3). It aims to improve teaching and learning methods inside and outside the classroom by involving community networks (schools, parents, caregivers, community leaders and local organizations) as active collaborators supporting children's literacy learning. The UL model focuses on four main components: 1) Reading Assessment, 2) Teacher training, 3) Community Action and 4) Teaching and learning materials. Each component focuses on five key literacy skills: 1) letter knowledge, 2) phonetic awareness, 3) reading fluency, 4) vocabulary, and 5) reading comprehension. The central element of the Community Action component is the implementation of community-based, play-based reading camps.

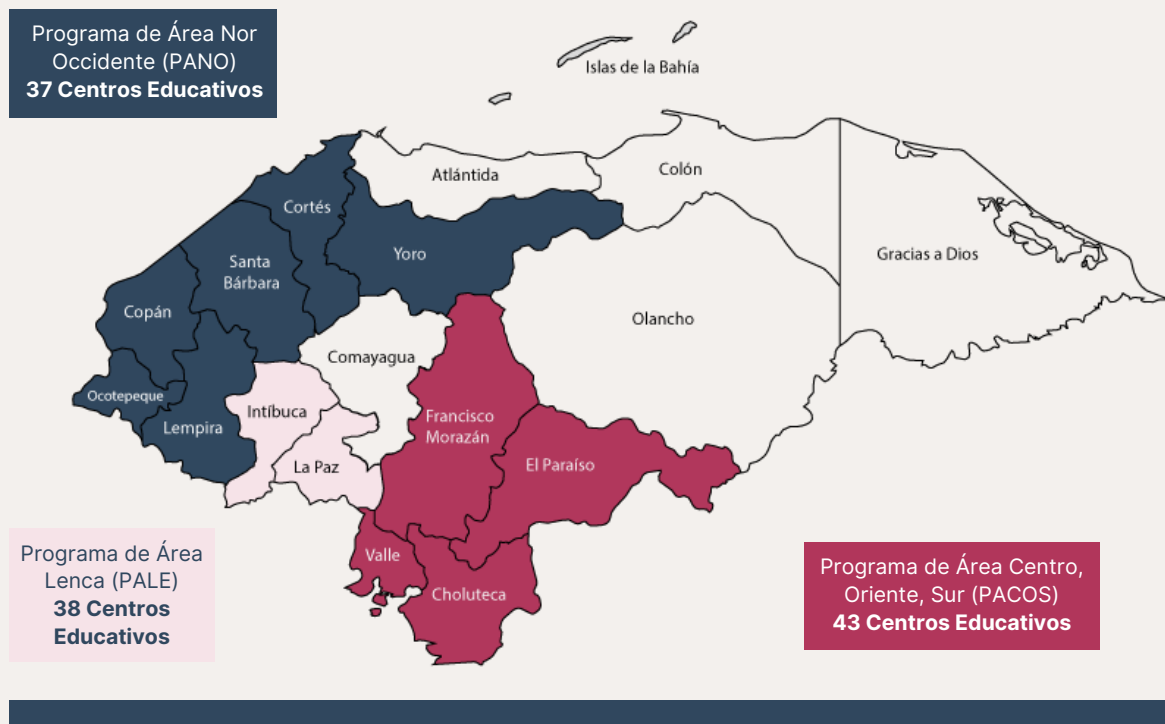
What are reading camps?

The reading camps, as part of the Community Action component of the UL model, are conducted in communities by reading camp facilitators who are volunteers. Reading camp facilitators lead girls and boys in the early grades to participate in fun, creative, play-based literacy activities to promote reading while supporting children to develop their literacy skills such as letter knowledge, phonetic awareness, reading fluency, vocabulary knowledge, and reading comprehension. During each reading camp session, community volunteers promote children's reading skills through play, within print-rich environments. In Honduras, UL reading camps are conducted each year over 21 sessions.

Context of the communities in this study

World Vision Honduras (WVH) began implementing the UL model in 2021 (having been delayed by one year due to Covid-19) and aims to reach approximately 120 communities, and their respective schools, in 5 departments of the country. For this study, 10 communities from three regions where WVH implements the UL model were selected: 4 communities in the Center-East-South Integrated Program (PICOS) region, 3 communities in the North-West Integrated Program (PINO) region, and 3 communities in the Lenca Integrated Program (PILE) region. Of the 10 communities, 7 are classified as rural and 3 are considered urban-fragile (2 communities in PICOS and one in PINO).

Figure 1. World Vision Honduras Regional Divisions within Honduras



Data collection

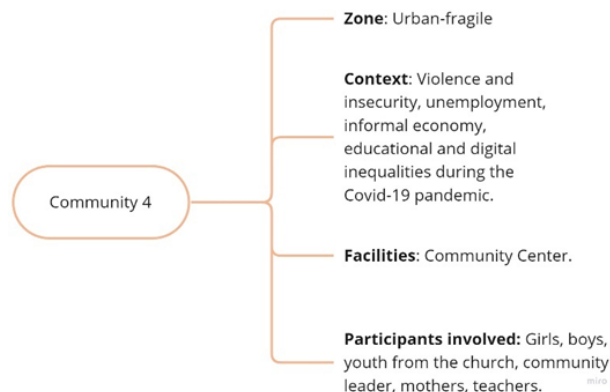
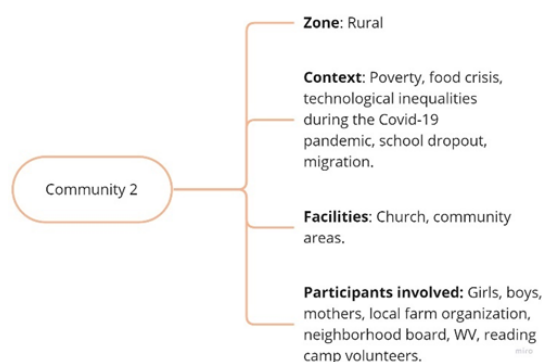
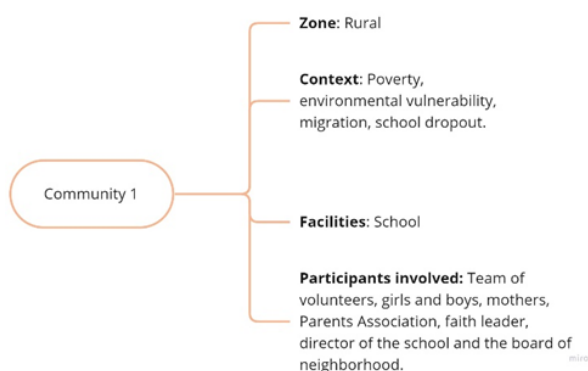
Data collection was conducted in two phases as detailed in the table below.

- Phase 1 data collection was conducted in mid-2021 in nine (9) communities (4 in the PICOS region, 3 in the PINO region and 2 on the PILE region).
- Phase 1 data collection was conducted in mid-2022 in 10 communities.

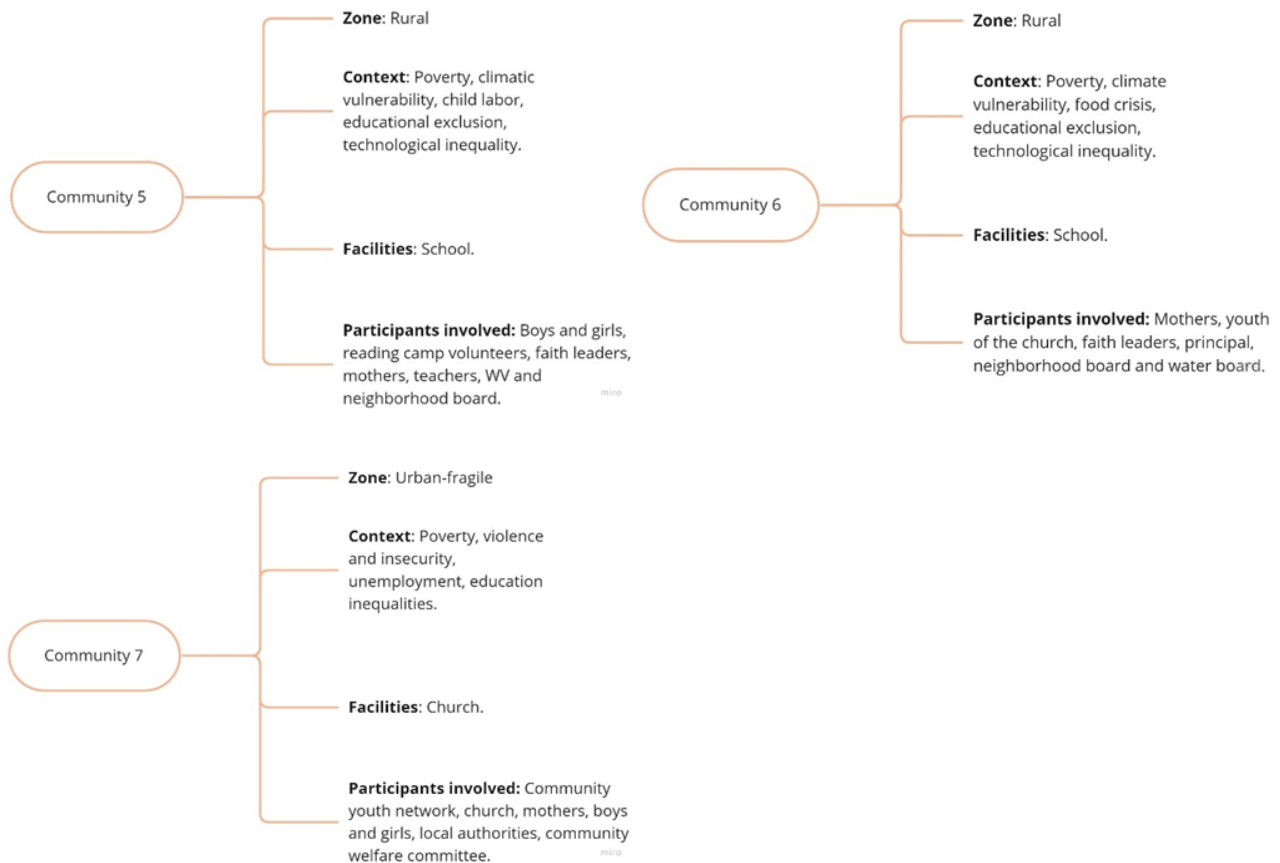
Type of instrument	Data collected		Total
	Phase 1	Phase 2	
Reading Camp Observations	9	10	19
Focus Group Discussion (FGD)	38	41	79
Key Informants Interviews (KII)	93	26	119
Total	140	77	217

Description of cases

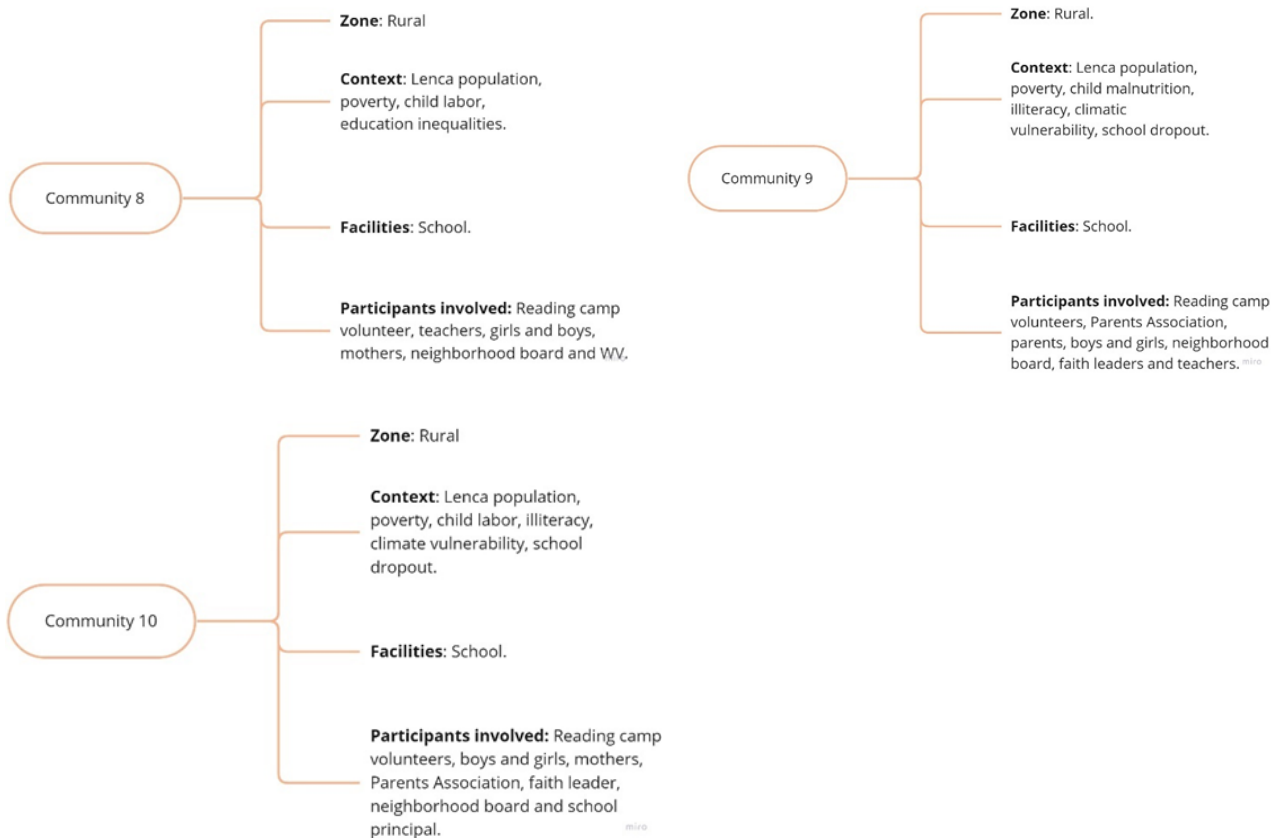
Center-East-South Integrated Program (PICOS)



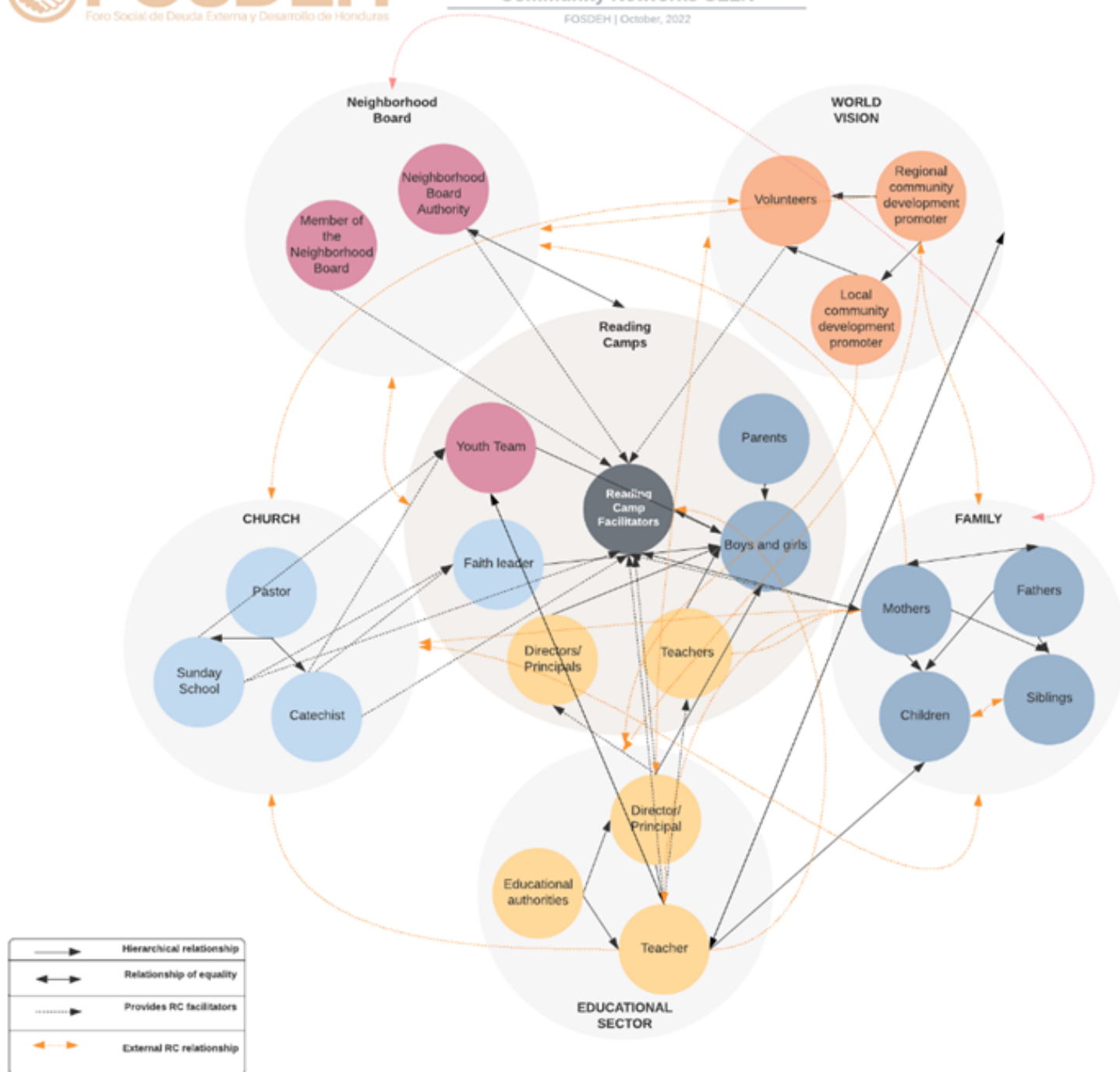
North-West Integrated Program (PINO)



Lenca Integrated Program (PILE)



ULLN community networks



Factors Enabling or hindering Reading Camps

The following key factors were identified through this study. Some factors hinder the effectiveness of reading camps and need to be addressed so that their negative effects can be reduced or overcome. Some factors enable reading camps to be effective and thus need to continue to be fostered and strengthened.

1. Covid-19 pandemic



The parents did not want to allow their children to attend, but we took our safety measures. Everyone wearing masks, we used gel. No one was infected, we were cautious.

Reading Camp Facilitators, Community 5, May 9, 2022

2. Child labour restricts the opportunity to participate in reading camps



Sometimes we do not attend because we work

Children, Community 9, September 9, 2021

3. Access to the facilities where the reading camps are held



At least in my case, something that could prevent me from going is the river, because when the river rises you cannot cross it, that is risking my life and that of my daughters.

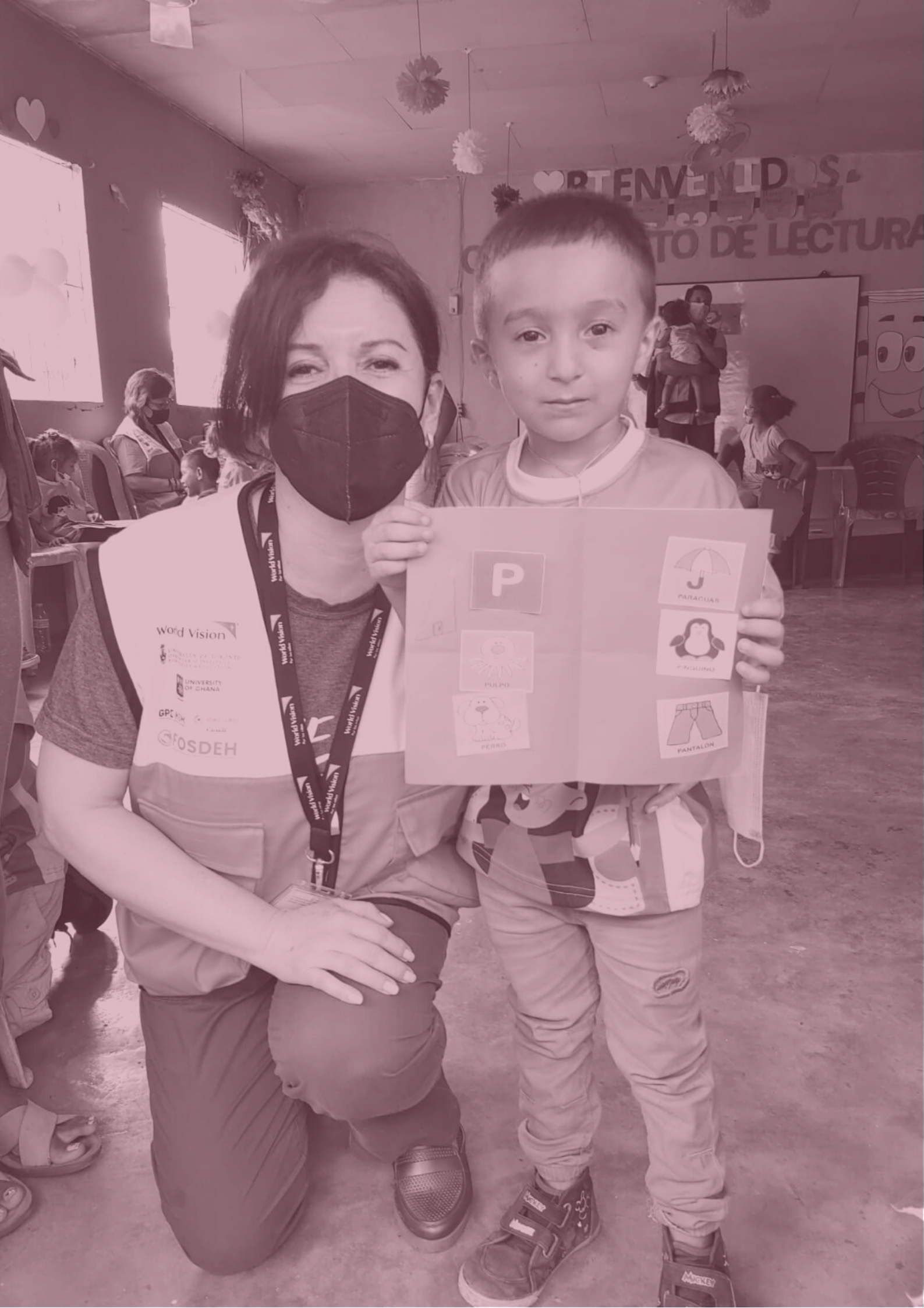
Association of Parents, Community 2, September 16, 2021

4. Violence and insecurity in the communities



We have to be careful...because of the invisible borders that I think you have heard about, if I am going to carry out an activity like the one we did the day you came, I have to be careful about what kind of people I am going to invite, I am not going to expose a boy from a community with a rival gang, for example, that kind of thing is taken into account.

World Vision Local, Community 4, August 27, 2021



BIENVENIDOS
CENTRO DE LECTURA

world vision
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
UNIVERSITY OF GHANA
GPC
FOSDEH

P	J PARAGUAS
PULPO	PINGUINO
PERRO	PANTALÓN

5. Educational level in the environment of the reading camps



Since there are quite a few parents who can't read or write, they can't help children.

Reading Camp Facilitators, Community 9, September 9, 2021

6. Learning difficulties and educational lags among children



My daughter has not learned to read because during the pandemic, they had to do homework on their phone, and she had no phone, so my daughter lost two years of classes.

Mother, Community 5, May 9, 2022

7. Caregiver support



They let me know, I am waiting to send my child, to have her ready and to come and drop her off, and to bring her back because that is my commitment as a mother. As long as she likes it, I support her [...] If it is camp time, we don't go out because we don't like them to be absent.

Mother, Community 2, May 6, 2022

8. Community women's leadership



My mom is the one who reads stories, I feel happy. They help us by teaching us games like soccer, and to write, pray, and sing.

Children, Community 10, May 17, 2022

9. Involvement of young people



There is a commitment on the part of the youth network, because at the beginning, as a teacher, [name] she was more involved, so to speak; but when she saw that she was not going to be able to do it alone, because we have many activities and commitments, she got the youth network involved; and the kids have responded well, thank God; because if one day one can't come here, another one comes

Mother of a family, Community 7, May 12, 2022

10. Involvement of local churches and faith leaders



The guys also, because their work is valuable, because look, some of them work and they give their time for this, and that is very good, because they do it from the bottom of their hearts for the sake of service, to serve the community, they are active young people in the church.

Faith Leader, Community 7, May 27, 2022

11. Educational stakeholders supporting reading camp activities



[teacher's name] who has helped us develop all this. She [teacher] guides us and helps us. Let's say I can't do something, she explains to me so I can understand her and when there are trips or outings, she is there to take care of us.

Reading Camp Facilitators, Community 7, September 14, 2021

12. Partnership between World Vision Honduras and the education and municipal authorities



The Education District Offices are always involved, they always know what we are doing. If we are talking about teachers, they have to know what they are doing, indirectly, I think it could be like a support, they also tell them -look, we are going to have this workshop- so to speak, to train teachers for the implementation of the reading camp in the community.

World Vision Local, Comunidad 4, 27 agosto, 2021

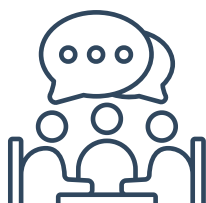
13. Commitment of reading camp volunteers (facilitators)



In order for this to work, the person who is presenting it has to be motivated. I heard of a person who was late because she had to walk a long distance, so that is the only thing that can be done if you are motivated. You understand, so it is a project that was received with open arms, I don't feel it as an imposition, but as a motivation.

Faith Leader, Community 1, May 7, 2022

14. Cohesion among the team of reading camp volunteers (facilitators)



At the end, we ended up celebrating the birthdays of the colleagues, it became a tight group, and I believe that all of that was because we are thinking about the wellbeing of the children.

Teachers, Community 3, May 21, 2022

15. Previous volunteer experience



The youth networks are community structures, we as World Vision have only shown them how they can organize these structures themselves, they are community structures, the youth networks and the Welfare Committees, they belong to the community, we just taught them how to organize themselves.

World Vision Local, Community 7, September 21, 2021

16. Access to reading materials



[books] are always available if they want to come and read, it's called the Reading Corner

Reading Camp Facilitators, Community 4, May 27, 2022

17. Wide age range among the children participating in the reading camps



We not only follow what the manual says, but we try to adapt it, because if you noticed, not all children are the same age, there are different ages, so we know the challenge, we adapt to the child, to be able to explain in ways not as they appear in the booklet, but to adapt it to them, to the little one, to the older one.

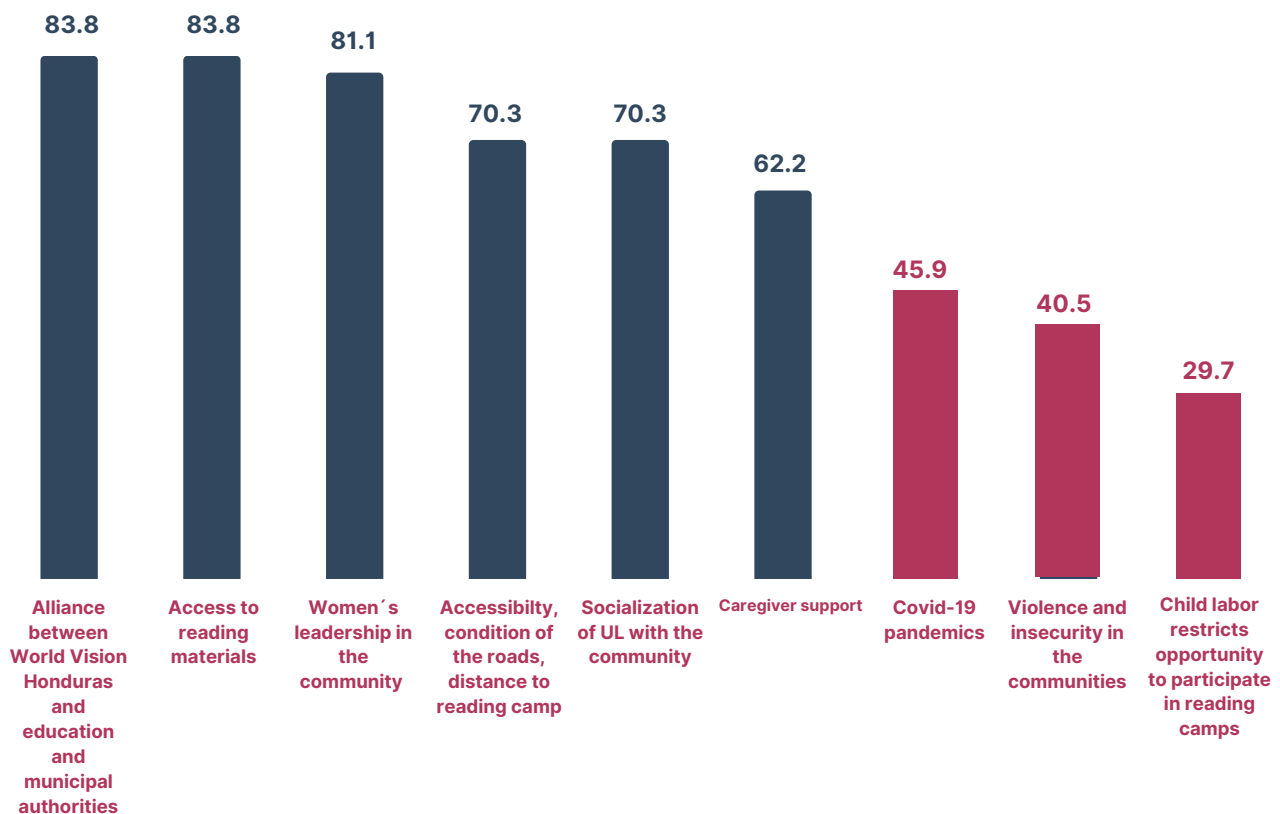
Reading Camp Facilitators, Community 1, May 7, 2022



Validating these factors with community members

In september 2022, FOSDEH conducted a validation activity of the preliminary Phase 2 results with 37 community actors from territories where UL reading camps are implemented. The community members assigned a degree of importance (from 0 to 10 being most important) to each of the key factors affecting reading camps. The results of that activity are detailed in the Table below, with blue indicating the most important factors for the participants, and orange indicating the less important ones.

Graphic 1: Validation exercise of enabling or hindering factors



GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION (GESI)

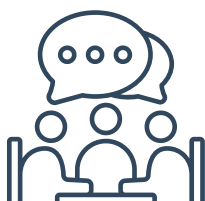
When exploring gender dimensions of volunteer reading camp facilitators, the following sex-disaggregated data shows how the percentage of women who were reading camp facilitators increased from 85% (55 of the 65 facilitators) in Phase 1 to 95% (43 of the 45 facilitators) in Phase 2 (the percentage of male reading camp facilitators decreased from 15% (10) in Phase 1 to 5% (2) in Phase 2). This reflects how communities are adapting the reading camp model to suit their community, and is likely due to the predominance of traditional gender roles in Honduras, especially in rural areas, whereby women are thought to be more suited to care for children than men..

Community	Number of Reading Camp Facilitators disaggregated by sex					
	Phase 1			Phase 2		
	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total
1	2	0	2	5	0	5
2	4	0	3	6	0	6
3	7	3	10	4	0	4
4	6	1	7	2	1	3
5	8	1	9	4	0	4
6	4	1	5	3	0	3
7	5	1	6	4	0	4
8	9	0	9	5	0	5
9	10	3	9	5	1	6
10				5	0	5
Total	55	10	65	43	2	45

Number of girls and boys who participate in reading camps

During the reading camp observations conducted in Phase 1, there were slightly more girls than boys participating overall. (Of the 185 children registered in 9 community reading camps, 56% were girls (103) and 44% were boys (82)). One year later, there was a gender balance in the overall percentage of girls and boys attending the reading camps in 10 communities (girls accounted for 48% (104) of attendees, while boys accounted for 52% (112).) This table also shows changes in percentages of girls and boys in each community over the two phases and indicates a significant decrease in girls participation such as in Community 7. Generally speaking, girls commonly have less free time to participate in reading camps than boys due to their household responsibilities which increase as they get older, especially for girls living in rural areas. While boys generally have more free time than girls, some boys in rural areas do agricultural work to support the family.

Community	Number of children attending reading camps					
	Phase 1			Phase 2		
	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total
1	2	6	8	9	8	17
2	11	4	15	12	10	22
3	10	12	22	10	15	25
4	7	6	13	11	9	20
5	11	7	18	8	6	14
6	14	9	23	15	9	24
7	15	9	24	7	5	12
8	23	9	32	13	14	27
9	10	20	30	8	19	27
10				11	17	28
Total	103	82	185	104	112	216



Once, we even heard of a girl who got up to make tortillas, and before leaving, she prepares breakfast for those who were going to work, for the whole family.

Teacher, Community 9, May 18, 2022



We can say that children, you know, since this is a rural area, parents work in the fields, in agriculture, sometimes they have no one to help them, they see a big child that they can use for work, so they prefer to have him work rather than send him to school.

Teachers, Community 9, September 8, 2021

Vulnerable children

One of UL's goals is to reach the most vulnerable girls and boys, including out-of-school children. During reading camp observations, there was a significant decrease in the overall number of out-of-school children participating in reading camps from 33 in 2021 to 4 in 2022. This behavior may be related to the rise of schools supporting reading camps in Phase 2, since teachers and school directors are inclined to encourage their students to attend reading camps and out-of-school children are harder to reach.

Community	Number of children attending reading camps who do not attend school					
	Phase 1			Phase 2		
	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total
1	0	0	0	1	1	2
2	0	0	0	0	0	0
3	0	1	1	0	0	0
4		-	-	0	0	0
5	5	5	10	0	0	0
6	1	0	1	1	1	2
7	5	5	10	0	0	0
8	0	0	0	0	0	0
9	5	6	11	0	0	0
10				0	0	0
Total	16	17	33	2	2	4



No, all the children are here in school [...] In other words, we are no longer doing it as we did last time (last year), that we included children who were not in school, more vulnerable children.

Reading Camp Facilitators, Community 5, May 9, 2022



Participants' Perceptions of the benefits of Reading Camps

1. Children attending reading camps experience feelings of joy, motivation and become less of shy.



Joyful; (in) every story we learn new things; I feel good; content, happy; reading, writing, painting, making friends and being happy.

Children, Community 3, May 21, 2022

2. Children improve their literacy skills



In their case, they have learned to know the letters, maybe before they didn't know what letters were, so through the camp they learn to know letters, numbers, and they already know what a story is like.

Mother, Community 10, May 17, 2022

3. Reading camps enable the promotion of values among children



It's fun and they let us do things. They teach us about respect, love, teamwork, care, stories.

Children, Community 4, May 27, 2022

4. Reading camps are a space for interaction, integration, coexistence and communication skills among children



Before, they didn't socialize with each other, it was like they had become closed and distant, now there is more camaraderie. In one session, I even asked them the names of their classmates, and they started mentioning them, they even gave each other nice nicknames, like, one boy's name was Antony, and now they call him Tony. So now we see that companionship and it is something good that will help them in life.

Reading Camp Facilitators, Community 4, May 27, 2022

5. Reading camps enable volunteer reading camp facilitators to development their knowledge, capabilities, and interpersonal skills



From what I do or what I live, they will try to do the same, so I put myself as a leader and I am able to lead them, with my colleagues we are able to lead them, to give them a good example. And it is a very nice experience that you have with the children, because you learn more from them and they learn from me clearly. It is something that has really changed me, my attitude, my way of being, and there are still things that I lack, but I am trying to change them.

Reading Camp Facilitators, Community 7, September 14, 2021

6. Reading camps enable parents to support children's learning and raise awareness of the importance of education



I just organize myself better to help her, like now, I was telling her that I have been up since 5:30 am, because we have had to take the child to kindergarten, bring him back at 9:30 am, and return to get him ready to go to the camp, and I had to have lunch ready. On the days that [name] tells me that she is going to bring them, I have to get up earlier to get things organized.

Mother, Community 7, May 12, 2022

7. UL reading camp activities complement what children learn in school



It would be important to continue, and to implement them in all schools, it would be very important. It would be a great help, because there are children in sixth grade who cannot read, a first grader may read better. So, if all teachers implemented this reading comprehension, it would be very important.

Reading Camp Facilitators, Community 1, May 07, 2022

8. Community-based reading camps enable the strengthening community cohesion



In other words, all the parents of the 25 children are here, teachers, mothers who are facilitators, the members of the Neighborhood Board, they give their approval, everything is okay, they lend their stamps/seals to support the program. The Catholic Church also, in other words, everyone in this community is working: churches, boards, society, everyone.

Mothers, Community 9, May 18, 2022

9. Reading camps can serve as a preventive strategy against violence and insecurity



Most of the children in the community are used to hopping from street to street, playing outside all day long, going home for lunch, dinner, and then going out to the street again, and the reading camps really help the children learn, improve their reading comprehension, even their values are strengthened here.

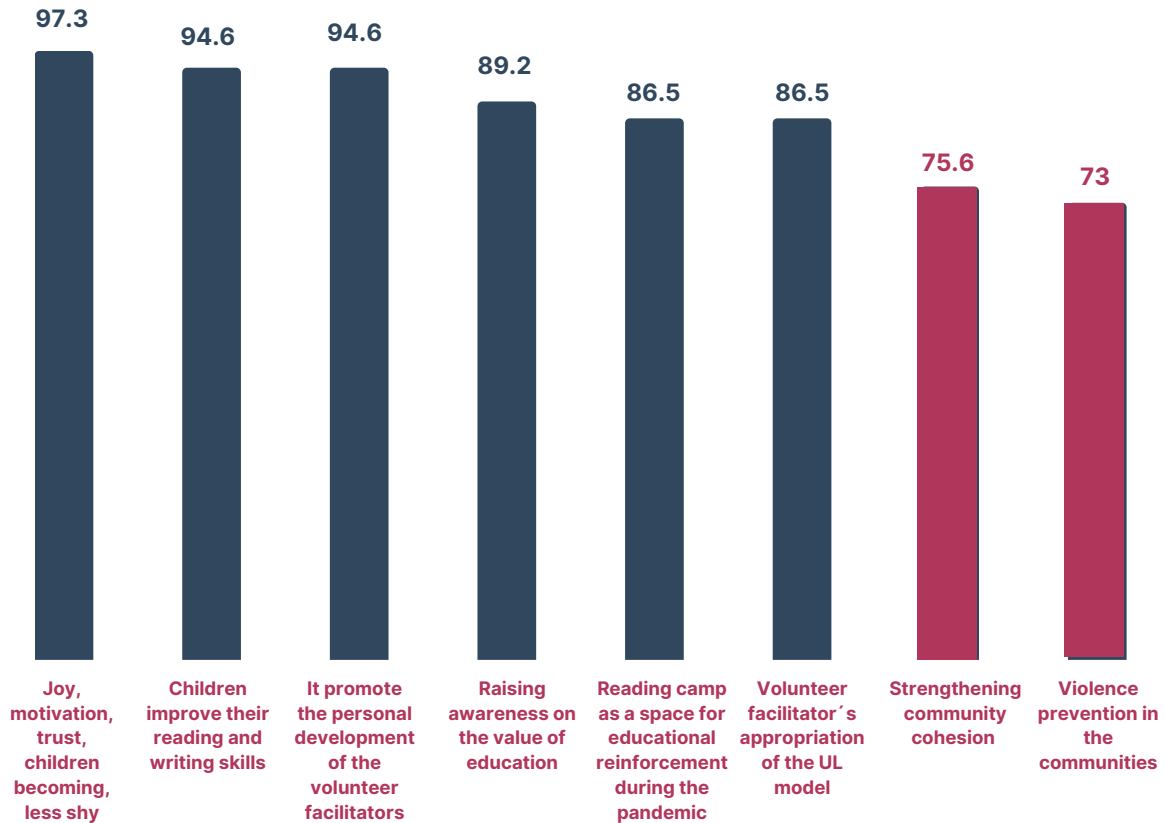
Teacher, Community 4, August 19, 2021



Validating these perceived benefits with community members

As noted above, during the validation activity, 37 community members assigned a degree of importance (from 0 to 10 being most important) to each of the perceived benefits attributed to reading camps in this study. The results of that activity are detailed in the Table below with blue indicating the most important benefits and orange indicating the least voted benefits.

Graphic 2. Validation exercise of perceived benefits with community members



CONCLUSIONS

The results of this research show that the innovative experience of the UL model in Honduras has deep local roots as communities adapt the UL model to suit their context over the first 2 years of its implementation. This research highlights key factors hindering the effectiveness of reading camps and need to be addressed so that their negative effects can be reduced or overcome as well as key factors enabling reading camps to be effective and thus need to continue to be fostered and strengthened. This evidence can be used to strengthen the effectiveness of community networks to support children's literacy development, especially for the most vulnerable children.

Other territories of the country can benefit from the contents and lessons learned from this model. The education crisis that the country's education system is going through portrays the UL model with an ideal opportunity to strengthen, through community involvement, reading and writing skills among the children of the country, especially those who were forced to drop out of school during the last years due to the Covid-19 pandemics. The close relationships between World Vision Honduras and the country's authorities can imply an institutional and political infrastructure of vital importance so that the learning and experiences of the UL model can be expanded, not only by opening more reading camps, but also through the construction and incidence in educational policies.

Finally, it is essential to unite all the efforts of the international community to take advantage of evidence-based experiences and learning to improve the learning processes among children provided by projects such as ULLN. In this sense, initiatives such as the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) represent an ideal opportunity to allow actors involved in education, governmental and non-governmental, not only to dialogue about the current global challenges on education, but to contribute to the solutions that can be proposed around issues such as access for all children of the development countries to a quality education (UN, 2022).



