



Promoting Scaling for Impact

A discussion paper and insights from the *'Improving Literacy of Children Through Support from Community Networks'* research project.

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World Vision Canada has prepared this paper at the request of IDRC.

The research project *Improving Literacy of Children Through Support from Community Networks* is also known as ***Unlock Literacy Learning Networks (ULLN)***



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ABBREVIATIONS

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| CACG | Community Action Core Group |
| CECI | Compartiendo Experiencias Educativas Comunitarias e Innovadoras |
| CIES | Comparative and International Education Societies |
| DFID | Department for International Development |
| FGD | Focus Group Discussion |
| FOSDEH | Foro Social para la Deuda Externa y Desarrollo de Honduras |
| DFID | Department for International Development (UK) |
| DTST | District Teacher Support Team (Ghana) |
| DGP | Developing country partners |
| EGRA | Early Grades Reading Assessment |
| GESI | Gender Equality and Social Inclusion |
| GES | Ghana Education Services |
| GPE | Global Partnership for Education |
| IDRC | International Development Research Centre |
| KII | Key Informant Interview |
| KIX | Knowledge and Innovation Exchange |
| KMET | Knowledge Management, Exchange, and Translation |
| LAC | Latin America and Caribbean |
| MINED | Ministry of Education (Nicaragua) |
| MoE | Ministry of Education |
| MEQA | Measuring Evidence of Quality Achieved |
| NaCCA | National Council for Curriculum Assessment (Ghana) |
| NTC | National Teacher Council |
| OISE | Ontario Institute for Studies in Education |
| PTA | Parent Teacher Association |
| ROSIE | Research on Scaling the Impacts of Innovations in Education |
| RLP | Regional Learning Partners |
| SECAPPH | Secretary of Culture, Arts and Heritage of the Peoples of Honduras |
| SEDUC | Secretary of Education (Honduras) |
| SOEL | School of Education and Leadership |
| SLD | Specific Learning Difficulties |
| SMC | School Management Committee |
| TPD | Teacher Professional Development |
| UGhana | University of Ghana |
| UL | Unlock Literacy |
| ULLN | Unlock Literacy Literary Network |
| WV | World Vision |
| WVC | World Vision Canada |
| WVG | World Vision Ghana |
| WVH | World Vision Honduras |
| WVN | World Vision Nicaragua |

Introduction

Project general objective.

The research project, *Improving Literacy for Children Through the Support from Community Networks*¹, explored how community-based actors (teachers, community leaders, volunteers, parents, administrators, etc.) work together, adapt, and interact with the formal education sector to implement and support community literacy activities (mainly reading camps) to improve girls' and boys' reading fluency within distinct local learning systems/ contexts in Ghana, Honduras, and Nicaragua². The research provides evidence on factors that enable and hinder collaborative stakeholder networks to/from advancing quality, sustainable, scalable, effective gender-responsive and inclusive education programming for early-grade students (grades 1-3) to improve children's literacy levels within vulnerable populations.

The main research question was the following: **How can community actors and networks in Ghana, Honduras, and Nicaragua, each with distinct contexts, be enabled and strengthened to develop and use their own adaptive systems when implementing World Vision's Unlock Literacy program at scale to improve the literacy outcomes of girls and boys, including those who are marginalized?**

For detailed information on the research methodology and key findings, please see the reports for [Honduras](#), [Nicaragua](#), [Ghana](#), and the [cross-country analysis](#).

Overview of the Unlock Literacy Model

The Unlock Literacy (UL) model is a play-based learning approach designed to guide schools, parents, and communities to support their children's literacy development better. It consists of 4 components which i) focuses on in-school early-grade literacy learning, i.e., Reading Assessment, Teacher Training, ii) focuses on enabling parents and community members to support young children's participation in literacy activities outside of schools, i.e., Community Action, and iii) supplying both in and out-of-school literacy activities by providing Reading Materials.

The current UULN research focused on the Community Action component of the UL model, particularly the Reading Camps.

Purpose of this discussion paper

One of the research objectives was to mobilize knowledge to support the potential scale-up of World Vision's Unlock Literacy (UL) project model's community action component, specifically community-led reading camps. UL complements and supports the Ministries of Education's efforts to improve the literacy learning of girls and boys, particularly those socially disadvantaged. A fundamental element of the UL program is the partnerships that WV establishes and supports with networks of government systems, schools, families, and communities to enable a wide range of community actors to provide early school-age children (grades 1 to 3) with supportive literacy environments in and outside of school to sustain reading improvements.

¹ The research project is also known as *Unlock Literacy Learning Networks (UULN)*

² Implementing partners included World Vision Canada (as the overall Project Lead), WV Ghana, WV Honduras, and WV Nicaragua. The research partners included the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UofT) as the Research Lead, the Foro Social para la Deuda Externa y Desarrollo de Honduras (FOSDEH) for Honduras and Nicaragua, and the School of Education and Leadership (SOEL) at University of Ghana (UGhana)

The purpose of this discussion paper is to examine how the research project, "Improving Literacy of Children Through Support from Community Networks (ULLN)," has contributed to generating knowledge on key factors to consider by stakeholders, particularly the ministries of education when scaling up Unlock Literacy's Reading Camps. Based on the findings, the paper will highlight what has been done to promote the scalability of Unlock Literacy's community action approach and provide examples of promising initial signs of uptake by stakeholders, including the government, to improve literacy levels for girls and boys within vulnerable populations.

Scaling for Impact: Key concepts

Key definitions were explored and identified to guide the conceptual framework of this research. Detailed analysis can also be found in all the research reports provided above. The following key concepts were identified,

- **"Adapting"** - to "adapt" is to "change (something) so that it functions better or is better suited for a purpose³." The research explored how the reading camps are adapted in diverse, vulnerable communities across the three countries.
- **"Scaling for impact"** and "optimal scaling" - a process whereby a range of approaches may be used to expand and deepen the impact of effective education innovations that can improve girls' and boys' learning - focusing on the most vulnerable. For this research, this means identifying and understanding what is working well (factors that enable effective reading camps) and what are the challenges (factors that limit or hinder the effectiveness of reading camps) at different stages of implementation (as seen in each country's case) so that effective processes and practices can be supported to continue and the challenges can be addressed so that they are mitigated, reduced, or eliminated.

Given that reading camps/clubs are rarely completely divorced from the formal school system, as typically there are linkages between the schools and reading camps, *scaling for impact* also includes actively promoting the involvement, endorsement, and active support of key UL principles and practices by the MoE government authorities (national, regional, or municipal level) to ensure a higher degree of success and sustainability. There have been intentional efforts by the three countries to use the research findings to help achieve an improved balance of the appropriate relationship and support between the schools and reading camps. As a result, the research noted that the scaling process is a complex and time-consuming process involving different stages of implementation. The involvement of key stakeholders, including beneficiaries, is crucial in determining the final stages of scaling an innovation, with implementers providing support and guidance on adapting the innovation. This process aims to result in key beneficiaries ultimately taking over full ownership of the innovation in whatever form they deem appropriate.

Knowledge Generation: Intersecting 'Adapting' and 'Scaling for Impact'

Each country in the research was at a different stage of implementation of UL reading camps, which provides a valuable opportunity to compare these stages and their implications for scaling. For instance, In Honduras, due to the long-term lockdown from Covid-19, reading camps were introduced in 2021 – the same year that Phase 1 data was being collected for this research. On the other hand, WV Nicaragua began implementing Unlock Literacy in 2019 but had to suspend reading camp activities to avoid spreading Covid-19 to children, volunteers, and mothers in 2020. WV Ghana began implementing its UL program in

³ <https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/adapt>

2017 by piloting it in a select number of vulnerable communities. Hence, compared to Nicaragua and Honduras, the reading camps were well-established and had been running for several years. Thus, Ghana has a significantly longer experience conducting reading camps compared to the other two countries.

These experiences proved that to 'scale for impact,' various adaptations of the Unlock Literacy reading camp model are evident in the research findings across the three countries. In addition to adapting the language used in reading camps to suit the local context, the number of children participating in a reading camp session also varied, contributing to the required adaptations.

In Ghana, the reading camps observed had an average of 52 children, while there was an average of 22 children in Honduras and 16 in Nicaragua. The locations of reading camps also illustrate forms of adaptation as reading camps are conducted in open spaces (for example, roughly half the reading camps observed in Ghana were conducted under the shade of trees), inside schools (for example, 7 of the 10 reading camps observed in this study in Honduras were conducted outside school hours within schools), or in church spaces, community spaces, or within reading camp facilitators' home. (In Nicaragua, 4 of the 10 reading clubs observed in this study are held in Catholic and Protestant church spaces, 2 in community centers and 4 in spaces set up in the homes of the reading club facilitators.) While reading camp facilitators in Ghana were women and men in equal numbers, reading camp facilitators (known as reading club facilitators in Nicaragua) are predominantly women. While reading camps are designed for school-age children for grades 1-3, underage and overage children attend reading camps in all three countries in this study. Adaptations to local context are also evident in the types of community members who directly or indirectly support reading camps through community networks. While parents, teachers, school directors, and faith leaders were all identified by research participants as supporting reading camps across all three countries, other community members were identified that were specific to that country (such as the Traditional Authority in Ghana and Neighbourhood Boards in Honduras and Nicaragua).

[Influencing scaling reading camps for impact](#)

World Vision takes a long-term, multi-faceted development approach when working in countries. After securing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the government, WV develops a long-term strategy for the support it provides to selected communities and then implements different types of programs such as, among others, Community Engagement, Education, Livelihoods, Nutrition, Violence Prevention, etc. This long-term, multi-faceted approach means that WV can develop a trusting relationship with not only government decision-makers but also with individuals and groups of individuals nationally, regionally, and at the most local level, the community.

The ULLN research project had a solid knowledge mobilization plan of action. Many activities required a high dose of relational, iterative, and context-sensitive processes of moving knowledge to action. ULLN researchers, in collaboration with WV partners, used findings from these studies to conduct a series of knowledge mobilization activities with stakeholders at all levels in each country, from the communities to the MoE, to inform their policies and actions. Research findings from the three studies were shared with NGO partners conducting literacy programming and the academic community through the Comparative, International and Development Education Centre at OISE, among others. WV also uses these findings to inform its current and future UL programming.

The project enhanced the knowledge of some critical stakeholders in data collection, adaptive systems, learning networks, and literacy programming. Using the findings from the individual country research

reports, the 'scaling for impact' process for the reading camps occurred in two ways: internally and externally.

Internally, the ULLN project strengthened the capacities of WV's Education program staff, including community development facilitators and area program managers, for implementing the UL model. This has allowed for greater coverage and expansion in the population served, particularly in Honduras and Nicaragua. UL in Ghana is more mature, and the project helped consolidate the progress achieved over the years.

Externally, regarding community-level stakeholders/actors, the project results helped improve the delivery of the UL model, particularly the reading camps. Reflections on findings have contributed to strengthening what is happening and addressing issues as they arise in collaboration with their stakeholder counterparts, who are directly and indirectly involved in reading camps at all levels (locally, regionally, and nationally).

From the educational sector and government level, the outstanding role that educational actors have played in supporting communities in the teaching processes promoted by the reading camps is also important. The support of the authorities, directors and teachers is essential and valuable for the didactic orientation. These community networks are a bridge and guarantors that literacy programs last over time and adapt to changes because they know the reality and prevailing context. Thus, the project worked closely with government authorities.

In Honduras, the project coordinated with two secretariats (the Secretariat of Education – SEDUC, and the Secretariat of Arts, Culture and People's Patrimony - SECAPPH). With central and local SEDUC authorities, the project developed a communication strategy that will hopefully expand the coverage and implementation of the UL model. This strategy includes a community action component aimed at parents to raise awareness about the importance of reading and the implementation of reading camps. With SECAPPH, the project is working on actions to strengthen reading and writing through didactic strategies for the creation of stories and narratives that promote creativity, as well as the articulation of art and culture in childhood.

In Ghana, the project engaged with the National Council for Curriculum Assessment (NaCCA) with ongoing discussions on including some UL model aspects during the upcoming national curriculum review. Findings from the research led to an active dialogue with the Colleges of Education and a group of 5 public universities to influence the scaling-up process for teacher professional development. The colleges and universities reflected on the need to adjust their current curriculum slightly to align better with the school curriculum. The colleges also agreed to collate stories annually from their students for communities to use in material creation for the UL model (stories for book banks). Additionally, the Ghana team was invited by the Complementary Education Agency (CEA), the unit under the MoE responsible for all out-of-school education programs, to make inputs into the agency's new guidelines and curriculum. Research findings were also shared with the Ghana Education Service (GES), including policy changes recommended by different stakeholders. The Director General promised to discuss them with the Minister of Education to consider some of these policy changes.

In Nicaragua, the teachers and principals interact at the community level and support reading camps. This same support is also true at the Municipal and National level. Still, the socio-political situation makes pushing for formal policy changes, reform, or adjustment in practices or behaviour more challenging.

Promising Signs of Uptake by Stakeholders and Governments: Scaling for Impact of Reading Camps

While there are certainly challenges associated with measuring the long-term impact of knowledge mobilization efforts on government policies and practices, there are also some promising signs of progress in potential knowledge uptake because of our knowledge mobilization activities.

In Ghana, meetings have been held with government agencies to share research findings, explore areas of collaboration, and propose policy changes, such as a language policy for instruction in schools at the basic level.

As part of a public lecture by the St. Teresa's College of Education to mark International Mother Language Day on the theme "Multilingual education- a necessity to transform education in a multilingual world," the ULLN research was cited as part of researchers backing the need for a multilingual approach to education, through the use of the mother tongue as the first approach to helping children in their initial literacy journey before moving them to acquire a second language. In a previous meeting with the Director General of the Ghana Education Service, after presenting the research findings, he applauded the research findings. He was grateful to the partners who made this possible. He requested the final research report, which he said would guide him in planning. He also promised to take up some of the findings and recommendations raised by the research, especially the language policy.

A space was also open with the Universities managing the Colleges of Education, namely, the University of Science and Technology, Cape Coast University, University of Education Winneba, University of Ghana, and University of Development Studies. Based on the discussions, they are starting to internally discuss how best to align with the school curriculum. Most colleges also suggested that the UL model should be integrated and cascaded to the colleges, especially the print-rich concept, to help children learn.

At the community level, the sharing and discussing findings have renewed community commitment and support for the UL project model, including promoting ownership of the reading clubs. This was seen when some religious bodies pledged their support to the reading club, through the provision of space and some incentives for the facilitators, during the community-level dissemination.

Finally, Ghana will also actively participate next September in the 3rd International Conference on Education Research for Development in Africa ([ICERDA](#)) at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana.



In Honduras, as part of the mobilization of knowledge, the key findings of ULLN research have been socialized with local, national, and international actors, and the gender and social inclusion assessment with educational authorities, learning networks, local government authorities, WV Honduras leaders, and the FOSDEH team.

Based on the research finding and discussions, WV Honduras has coordinated with state secretaries to promote the scaling of the model. With all the knowledge mobilization activities, WV Honduras has had early results to scale up the model, such as alliances with government authorities (Secretary of Education SEDUC, and Secretary of Culture, Arts, & Patrimony SECAPPH) and academia such as the Francisco Morazán National Pedagogical University. As a result, WV Honduras, in coordination with the Secretary of Education (SEDUC) and the Secretary of Cultures, the Arts and Heritage of the Peoples of Honduras (SECAPPH), launched the CECI (*Compartiendo Experiencias Educativas Comunitarias e Innovadoras*) campaign to strengthen literacy through didactic strategies for the local development of children literature/reading materials.



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In addition, in part because of the ULLN research and subsequent discussions with other countries, World Vision has partnered with the University of Monterrey (Mexico) to launch a digital course on *Comprehensive Reading Competence* that is expected to be offered to 800 teachers and administrators from Latin America and the Caribbean (El Salvador, Honduras, Peru, Ecuador, the Dominican Republic and Bolivia).

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|  <p>Diplomado Lectura_AgendaBienve</p> |  <p>Diplomado en competencial integral</p> |
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In Nicaragua, five knowledge mobilization events were aimed at community volunteers, reading promoters, and faith leaders. Research findings were shared, focusing on the enabling and hindering factors in implementing the UL model, discussing challenges, and highlighting their contribution to improving children's reading skills. The events led to the development of improvement plans that community members agreed to implement.

Training sessions were also provided to community volunteers in using the MEQA monitoring tool, with further follow-up training to coach them on how best to use the data generated by the process and overall research to inform better programming and improve the quality of reading camps, including improving access to reading materials and better reading animation techniques for community promoters and schoolteachers.

Community members were trained and participated in applying the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) test. Participants collected information about the reading levels of girls and boys, learned about the situation, and became more engaged in finding solutions. This training and the subsequent data collection gave the community volunteers leadership, participation, and a sense of empowerment that contributes to the sustainability of the actions.

Further Research Recommendations: Implications for *scaling for impact*.

The study highlighted several key factors that need to be considered to understand the implications of scaling reading camps across the three countries. First, decision-makers need to identify who is in the best position to identify the benefits and challenges of the innovation within a particular context, as scaling requires decision-makers to understand and consider both the benefits and challenges of the innovation.

Second, qualitative and quantitative evidence needs to be collected, validated, and disseminated to help inform decision-makers at different levels of the system. Third, decision-makers need to use this evidence to decide what processes and practices related to reading camps should be scaled up and how they should be scaled up.

Fourth, decision-makers need to define the process of identifying what aspects of the innovation will be scaled up, such as what "optimal scaling" looks like and in what ways it will happen. Fifth, "scaling for impact" requires direct and indirect costs, so decision-makers must determine which costs can be covered, by whom, and how. Finally, questions related to "scaling for impact" should be asked at what implementation stage to begin to get a sense of what "optimal scaling" may look like.

We recognize that different stakeholders (such as beneficiaries at different levels, project implementers, funders, and researchers) will likely answer these questions differently. As IDRC notes (2020), "considering different perspectives and setting out a process to determine optimal scale that stakeholders endorse is key to successfully scaling impact." (p. 3). An illustration below highlights the differing levels of implementer support needed at each of the three stages of scaling: From planting the seed (introducing and establishing an innovation such as reading camps), nurturing the seed to sprout roots and grow (providing ongoing support in many forms), and no longer tending to the tree as it supports itself (which represents supporting the transition from an implementer-supported innovation to one that is fully taken up by the local stakeholders, in the ways and manner they see fit).

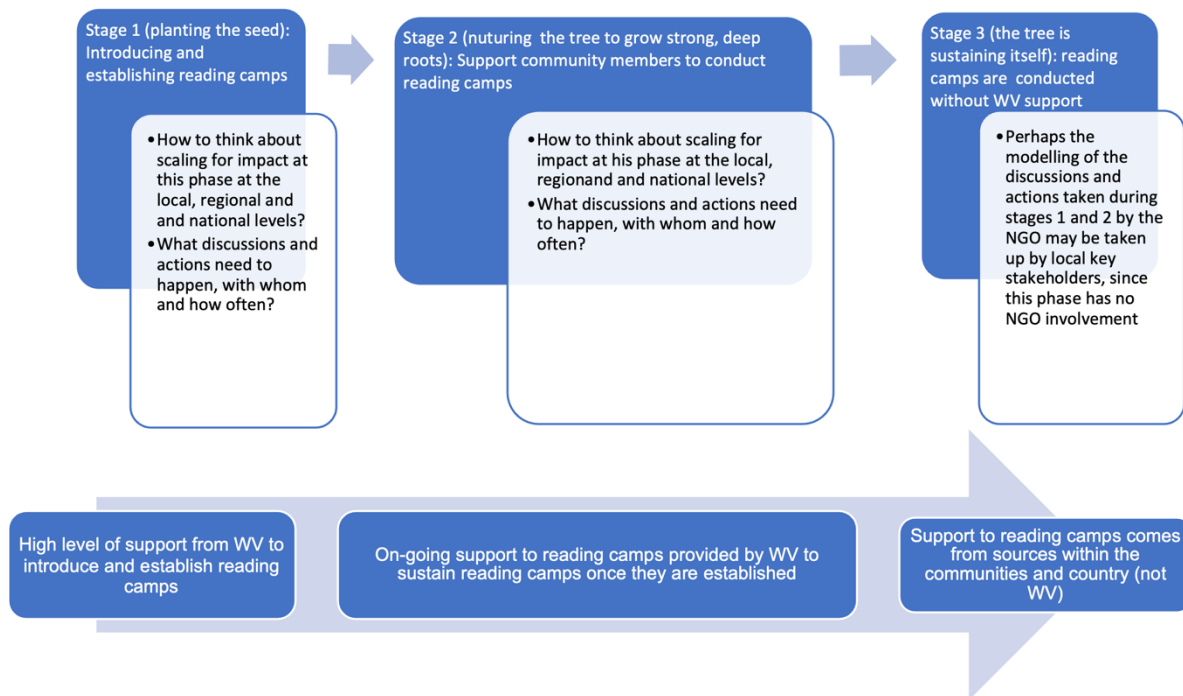


Figure 1: Implications of scaling at different stages of implementation