

World Vision International – Cambodia Office

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Total Reading Approach for Children (TRAC+) Project

(Prepared: 9 March, 2016)

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Duration: ~33 months (January 2015 – September 30, 2017)

Budget: ~ \$3 million

Target No. schools: 140 public primary schools

Target No. children: ~20,000 (9,500 girls)

Location: 13 districts in 5 provinces

Project goal: Improve early grade literacy outcomes for children in gr. 1-3 through a remedial approach.

Project outcomes: (1) Schools with TRAC interventions report better reading achievement than comparable schools that do not use TRAC; (2) MoEYS and local government demonstrate support for, and capacity in, key TRAC+ components; (3) Project activities are effectively monitored.

Project history: The Total Reading Approach for Children Project (TRAC) was an innovative pilot project in Cambodia, implemented in eight rural, semi-urban, and urban primary schools in three provinces over a 2-year period (2013-14). TRAC applied an integrated approach to improve early grade reading outcomes among grade 1 and 2 students. Project components include: School leadership training, reading benchmarks, literacy coaches, parental engagement, peer tutoring, reading toolkit, and mLearning. The original TRAC pilot was funded under Round One of the All Children Reading Grand Challenge for Development (see this website for more details -- <http://allchildrenreading.org/>)

Monitoring/Results Framework: The monitoring framework of TRAC+ is a quasi-experimental design (using a much smaller number of comparison schools than intervention schools). TRAC+ administers the EGRA in both sets of schools on an annual basis to track change from baseline to endline, following the same cohort of children. Another way the project measures students' improvement in reading scores is by comparing their performance across the interval assessments that are part of the continuous assessment system – looking for a reduction in children who score poorly on the interval tests.

TRAC+ also employs a range of process-focused assessment tools to monitor the effectiveness of program inputs that include the use of toolkit, attitudinal and behavioural changes among teachers, parents, and students, as well as assessment of the competence of teachers with administering benchmark tests, and the knowledge and performance of literacy coaches

DETAILS ON PROJECT COMPONENTS:

- 1. Reading Benchmarks:* In 2011, 2012, and 2013 respectively, the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport (MoEYS) developed a new national curriculum and textbooks for Gr. 1-3, returning to a more phonics-based approach to reading instruction for these early grades. As part of the original TRAC initiative, a formal formative assessment system called “reading benchmarks” was developed under the pilot. Grade level reading curricula was divided into intervals, with each interval measuring tasks and skills the students should have mastered by that point. There are 8 interval tests for Gr. 1 students and 9 intervals for Gr. 2 students (Gr. 3 benchmarks are still under development). Assessing students periodically like this allows teachers and literacy coaches to identify which students are struggling and the areas in which they struggle on a regular basis rather than just at the end of a term. This allows teachers to provide students with the targeted learning support needed to master reading skills.
- 2. Literacy Coaches:* The job of a Literacy Coach is to provide pedagogical support to teachers; for this, the LCs are provided with a small monthly stipend. The LCs work closely with teachers in administering the benchmark assessments and in implementing the various and multiple Rapid Response System interventions. LCs also act as the liaison between schools and parents. LCs received on-going support from project staff during the year through regular monthly meetings with project staff to enhance their technical capacity.
- 3. Rapid Response System:* Literacy coaches implement the project’s Rapid Response System after using the benchmark assessments to identify struggling students. This Rapid Response System includes parental engagement, peer tutoring, a reading toolkit with learning activities, and an mLearning mobile application that includes 31 units which are aligned with the MoEYS textbooks and benchmarks assessments.
- 4. School management & leadership training:* As strong school management is important to the success of project interventions, TRAC+ provides annual leadership training to school directors and deputy directors using a modified version of the School Management and Leadership curriculum developed under the USAID-funded, World Education-implemented Improved Basic Education in Cambodia project (2009–2014).
- 5. Peer Tutoring:* Peer tutors are students in gr. 4-6 with strong reading skills and who volunteer to ‘buddy up’ with children in gr. 1-3. Peer tutors receive a half-day of orientation during which they learn about how to form tutoring groups, how to use reading toolkits and tablets to improve reading skills, identifying appropriate and convenient places to meet for tutoring sessions (e.g., school library, free classroom). In addition to the orientation, peer tutors also have a monthly meeting to reflect on their implementation and also to learn and practice further on the use of the learning materials.
- 6. Parental engagement:* The main focus of the initial half-day parent engagement meeting is to introduce the goal and interventions of TRAC+ and discuss ways that parents can and should be involved in promoting learning, and especially reading, for their children. To encourage parents to borrow materials from the library, staff have parents in small groups practice using some of the study games contained in the reading toolkits. Parents also learn the procedures for borrowing

reading games and materials so that they feel more comfortable visiting and using library resources.

7. *Reading toolkits*: The Reading Toolkit is a metal box containing 21 different learning games. The majority of these materials are simple games students can play to practice and improve specific skills and content in the textbooks. The games focus on only one skill or content area at a time. The major challenge with the toolkit materials is their (prohibitive) cost and the (limited) likelihood of them being implemented with the degree of support and supervision necessary to ensure students are learning from them and not simply playing.
8. *mLearning*: An app called *Aan Khmer* (“read Khmer”) was developed under the original TRAC project. *Anh Khmer* is a game-based Khmer early grade reading support software aligned with the revised grade 1 Khmer language textbook and deployed on tablet devices (see figure below):



Aan Khmer is an app that aims to promote Khmer alphabetic principle, vocabulary, and fluency among early learners. Its content is aligned with the grade 1 Khmer language textbook, but may also be appropriate for learners before that stage, as well as at the beginning of grade 2. The app contains 31 units, each made up of three main components: (1) learn—new content (mostly letters and combinations of letters) is presented to the child; (2) practice—the child is presented with three different activities to practice the new content; (3) short story—where the new content is applied within connected text and presented as a read-along to the child with audio support. Individual user accounts allow children to continue engagement with the app based on where they left off last time and track their progress towards completing the units.