

Forward

Dear readers,

I warmly welcome you to the very first quarterly newsletter of the Rwanda Education Board (REB).

In November 2011, REB was formed when a number of Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) institutions were merged as REB departments. With increased efficiency, coordinated management, and collaboration, REB has the mandate of fast tracking education development in Rwanda.

To do so, the Curricula and Materials Production and Distribution Department (CMPDD) develops and distributes relevant curricula, and the Teacher Development and Management (TDM) department provides teacher professional development to ensure effective delivery of that curricula. The ICT in Education and Open Distance Learning (ICT&ODeL) department enriches teaching and learning

with the innovative use of ICTs and implements e-learning systems. To ensure deliverance of quality education, the Education Quality and Standards (EQS) department monitors and evaluates schools, and to assess educational outcomes, the Examinations and Accreditations Department (E&AD) prepares, administers, and marks national exams as well as issues national certificates of promotion. Finally, the Higher Education Student Loan Department (HESLD) opens opportunities for university education through managing student loan recovery, repayment, and welfare.

With this newsletter, we hope to keep education stakeholders informed of REB's activities and important developments in education.

This quarter, we are highlighting Rwanda Reads, an initiative encouraging a culture of reading in Rwanda. The initiative,

launched in July 2012, has already seen great achievements in supporting children's development of reading



Dr. John Rutayisire

skills as well as ensuring that all Rwandans have access to quality, engaging reading materials. Here at REB, we're proud of what we've achieved so far, and we're looking forward to achieving even more together.

We hope you enjoy this newsletter.

Sincerely,

Dr. John RUTAYISIRE,
REB Director General

Building a Culture of Reading

REB launches the Rwanda Reads Initiative



A reader today is a leader tomorrow.

This is the belief propelling the Rwanda Education Board (REB)'s Rwanda Reads Initiative forward. Launched in July 2012, the initiative aims to build a strong culture of reading across the country while improving literacy skills and increasing the number and accessibility of quality reading materials.

The initiative joined REB with nearly two dozen public and

private partners to coordinate existing efforts and to unite in launching larger projects made possible by such a partnership. The partners include USAID, DFID, UNICEF, religious education associations, publishers associations, and NGOs such as the Imbutu Foundation, the Education Development Center (EDC), Save the Children, Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO), the British Council, and the Wellspring Foundation.

Rwanda Reads has already attracted national and international acclaim. In September 2012, Rwanda was selected to present the initiative at the International Literacy Day event co-hosted by USAID, the Global Partnership for

Education, and the Brookings Institute in Washington, DC. In March 2013, a REB and Rwanda development partner delegation traveled to New Orleans, USA to present Rwanda Reads at the Comparative and International Education Society annual conference.

Dr. Joyce Musabe, head of REB's curriculum department and chair of the Rwanda Reads Initiative, presented at the events. "I think Rwanda was chosen to present at International Literacy Day because of its commitment and dedication to literacy," she says. "At all levels of government, from sector education officers to the highest levels, everyone is aware and is invested in this project."

Reading for Quality Education

Efforts to promote early grade reading ensure that from the youngest age, children become life-long readers.



Reading is essential for further learning. The Rwanda Reads Initiative recognizes that if children leave primary school with a strong foundation of literacy skills, they will be ready for a lifetime of reading and learning. This is why REB aims to significantly improve children's literacy in Kinyarwanda and English through policy and curriculum support.

Setting specific goals

REB has already accomplished a major feat towards improving early grade reading skills. In May 2012, a standards committee comprised of REB specialists, higher education institutions, and development partners established draft National Reading Standards for Primary 3 and 5 in Kinyarwanda and English. For each grade level, the standards establish the minimal expectations for fluency, measured by the number of correct words per minute a student is able to read, and comprehension, which is the extent to which students are able to understand a grade-level

text. The standards communicate REB's expectations for student performance to teachers, parents, and other stakeholders, and they provide everyone concerned with a clear reference point against which to measure whether or not students are performing at grade level.

According to Dr. Musabe, establishing national reading standards is a huge step forward for improving early literacy in Rwanda. "Standards communicate where we want to go, what we want children's literacy to look like, and they help teachers assess if they're being effective in equipping students with these skills," she

says. As efforts to promote a reading culture and to improve the teaching of reading positively impact student learning outcomes, we can move reading standards higher and higher.

Preparing students to meet literacy targets

REB is working to prepare students to reach these reading standards with support from the USAID-funded Literacy, Language, and Learning (L3) Initiative, which is implemented by the Education Development Center (EDC). In 2013, REB and the L3 Initiative are implementing a new comprehensive reading support program in 90 primary schools. The program, in its experimental stage, will be finalized following teacher feedback and student testing results. By 2015, all public primary schools will benefit from the program.



By engaging students with stories and supporting teaching and learning with the innovative use of technology, the program



aims to enhance literacy skills both in Kinyarwanda and English. Teachers begin lessons by reading stories to children that contain the target language objective of the week, such as new vocabulary, grammar, letter-sound combinations, and awareness of the alphabet and individual sounds in words. Students also have their own readers which they read together with their teacher and then take home to read with their families.

“Reading stories to children at the beginning of the lesson not only allows children to encounter new language in a meaningful context, but it also engages them in the lesson and encourages them to read for pleasure,” says Norma Evans, L3 Technical Director.

The program also includes Interactive Audio Instruction (IAI) lessons, which are audio recordings featuring “audio teachers” and “audio children” who guide the teacher and children in the classroom through an interactive lesson.

Broadcasted in classrooms using Nokia phones and portable speakers, lessons use songs, games, chants, and audio stories to reinforce the teaching of targeted language aspects. IAI lessons model effective teaching practices for teachers as well as provide clear English pronunciation and allow all students to equally access quality learning experiences.

Leaders of tomorrow

While the Rwanda Reads Initiative is still young, already great efforts have been undertaken to promote literacy. National reading standards communicate the achievement goals for primary school children, and with the support of a comprehensive reading program, REB is confident that students can meet those goals. By investing in the readers of today, Rwanda Reads supports the leaders of tomorrow.

HIGHLIGHT: Expanding Access to Education



Reading support programs can only impact students when they are able to attend and remain in school. The innovative, award-winning Nine Year Basic Education (9YBE) program, which established six years of primary and three years of secondary education as free and compulsory, aims to ensure that all children have access to basic education and thus, that all children will have the opportunity to build the foundational skills they need

to become lifelong readers and learners.

9YBE has made dramatic gains towards this end.

Primary enrollment rates have substantially increased, reaching 96% net enrollment in 2011. Repetition and dropout rates have reduced, and the primary education completion rate reached 79% in 2010. Since 2001, the net enrollment rate for lower secondary has more than quadrupled. In addition, the 2012 target for the transition rate from primary to lower secondary was surpassed in 2010 at 94%.

In order to achieve such impressive results, the Rwandan government used fast-tracking strategies to ensure speedy implementation without

compromising quality. For this, Rwanda was awarded the 2012 Commonwealth Award for Education Good Practice.

“The success of 9YBE means that thousands more children are enrolled in school and have the opportunity to learn to read and to build on those foundational skills,” says REB’s head of the examinations department Emmanuel Muvunyi, who received the Commonwealth award with REB and MINEDUC officials on behalf of the Government of Rwanda. “Thus, enrolling and retaining more children in school, we can certainly expect to see improved literacy levels among these individuals, hence contributing to the goals of the Rwanda Reads Initiative.”

The Power of Story

Publishers are writing more and better stories for children; teachers are discovering their story-writing talents; and communities are gaining access to quality reading materials for the first time.

The Rwanda Reads Initiative has generated a lot of enthusiasm for reading amongst young and old alike who see reading as the key to success. This is a good first step, but the reality in classrooms, homes, and communities presents a significant barrier to reading. Schoolchildren often take turns bringing even text books home, and school libraries in general contain few storybooks, especially in rural areas. Communities, interested in reading, lament that the only reading materials at their disposal are Bibles or instructional guides from trainings.



What sense is there in promoting a reading culture if there’s nothing to read?

The answer is that there isn’t. If children and adults are to enjoy reading, they need recreational reading materials that are interesting, engaging, and appropriate for their reading levels.

The Rwanda Education Board (REB) sees this need as an opportunity. REB has already begun by working to explore the potential and enhance the capacity of local and regional publishers, to unlock the story-writing talents of primary school teachers, and to mobilize the most isolated of communities to manage their own libraries. As these efforts become more widespread, there will be a significant increase in the number and quality of reading materials as well as increased opportunities for all Rwandans, urban and rural, to access them.

Publishers writing more and better

REB provides all primary schools with an approved list of recreational reading materials that schools use to order books. In 2011, while the list had over a dozen titles in Kinyarwanda for older students, primary grades one to three didn't have a single Kinyarwanda title.

To address this problem and to add more and better quality books to the list, REB released a public tender in April 2012 calling on publishers to submit children's stories in both English and Kinyarwanda. To ensure quality, the L3 Initiative provided criteria for good children's stories and gave technical specifications classifying storybooks into 21 reading levels, which begin at the earliest level of literacy development and gradually increase in difficulty and complexity.

L3 Technical Director Norma Evans says that it is essential for children to read books at their own level. "If children are given books that are beyond their reading level, they can't read them. They quickly become discouraged and this translates into a negative perception of their reading abilities and of reading in general," Evans emphasized. "Giving children books that match their reading levels allows all children to be successful readers and to develop confidence in their reading abilities."



After submissions were received, the L3 Initiative trained evaluators on the qualities of good children's stories and the specifications for each reading level. The evaluation resulted in over 900 additional storybooks being added to REB's approved list. Of the 900, over 200 are in Kinyarwanda, which is 15 times more than before the tender. So far, schools have already ordered over 500,000 books from the updated list.

"Now that we have more books, I think schools will have a wide choice," says Augustin Gatera, director of languages and humanities at REB's curriculum department. "Hopefully they will begin equipping libraries and resource centers. Children will be having more books to read."



Teachers becoming authors

Publishers aren't the only ones writing more stories for children. Primary school teachers are also

learning the art of story-writing through Writer's Workshops that are being hosted at primary schools and Teacher Training Colleges across the country. REB, in partnership with the L3 Initiative, developed a toolkit for hosting such workshops, and Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) volunteers conducted the first in Nyamata, Bugesera in April. To date, four such workshops have been held.

Timothy Niringiyima was one of the 30 teachers who participated in the first three-day workshop, which led the teachers through the stages of the writing process to complete their own children's stories. Timothy's story *Kamana and the Big Dog* was among the first twenty-five stories that were professionally edited, illustrated, and published.

"I was very happy when I saw this book," Timothy remarks. "I think that the children will be enjoying this story." These stories will be made available in classrooms and in community mobile libraries nationwide.

Workshops aim to not only guide teachers in writing stories but also to help them understand the importance of stories in teaching children how to read. "Children need constant exposure to written content to learn to read," L3 Technical Director Norma Evans says. "Stories show students that reading is meaningful, that it has a purpose, and it gets students interested in reading."

Timothy is eager to share the message. In the coming months,

he'll do a training for student-teachers preparing to teach in primary schools. "I will tell them that I wrote a story in order to encourage them to write their own stories," he says. "I saw that the story is very necessary in the classroom."



Communities accessing libraries

The Rwanda Reads Initiative isn't only for children in school. The initiative recognizes the value of reading for everyone and the connection between community involvement and student achievement.

In December, REB in partnership with the L3 Initiative launched the Community Mobile Library

Project, which will establish at least 80 community libraries across the country by 2016. Each library will be shared by a number of neighboring rural communities and will contain 1,200 storybooks, anthologies, novels, and traditional Rwandan stories in Kinyarwanda and English. The aim is for parents, teachers, older siblings, and others in the community to borrow books along with children to model and encourage the habit of reading.

"The idea about literacy is not A, B, C, D," says Dr. John Rutayisire, REB Director General. "It is about the value of reading, and this is what the mobile libraries promote."



To date, eight communities have received library collections. Cyuru in Gicumbi, Musange

in Nyamagabe, and Juru in Bugesera are the first three communities to officially open the libraries, which are managed by a committee of community volunteers. In Gicumbi, within the first month of opening over 200 people came to borrow books, and even more came to read at the library. Bosco Nshimiyimana, leader of the library committee, says, "When you read, you open the mind."

Quality reading materials

While classroom libraries were nearly devoid of recreational reading materials, they will soon be well-stocked with new materials from local and regional publishers and even stories written by teachers themselves. While communities, passionate about reading, found themselves only with Bibles to read, communities across the country will soon have access to libraries containing quality English and Kinyarwanda reading materials for all ages, abilities, and interests.

MULTIMEDIA

For more information about the power of story and Rwandan Writers' Workshops please visit:

<http://13.edc.org/media/video/writers-workshop>

HIGHLIGHT: National Examination Markers Contribute to Agaciro Development Fund

The Agaciro Development Fund, uniquely funded by Rwandans themselves, allows Rwandans to invest in and have ownership of their country's development. In December 2012, National Examinations Markers made great sacrifices to join other Rwandans across the country in contributing to this fund. They proudly presented a check of over 27 Million Rwf, demonstrating

the high value they place on Rwanda's development needs. "The ceremony in which we received their check marks the climax of REB achievements in 2012," says REB Director General Dr. John Rutayisire. REB applauds their efforts and welcomes this positive development in awareness and attitudes towards having an active role in Rwanda's development.



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