



## ARU Read Together Project – Improving Literacy in Northern Uganda

Interim Report, April 2024



### Introducing African Revival:

Our vision is **an Africa where every child has equal access to quality education**, as we believe education is the key to overcoming poverty. Since 2005, we have worked with primary and nursery schools in Uganda, Zambia, and South Sudan. We don't just provide infrastructure; we empower whole communities – pupils, teachers, and parents – to transform schools into thriving learning environments that build better futures. The end goal is simple: to improve equal access to quality education.

### Overview of Project:

<b>In Country Office</b>	Uganda
<b>Project Name</b>	ARU Read Together Project
<b>Project Location</b>	Various community and primary schools in Amuru, Nwoya, Kitgum, Lamwo & Koboko Districts, Northern Uganda.
<b>Project Goal and Outcomes</b>	<p><b>Project Goal:</b> Promote a love of books and reading for improved literacy in primary school children.</p> <p><b>Outcome 1:</b> Story books and wheelable libraries distributed.</p> <p><b>Outcome 2:</b> Reading workshop delivered at each school.</p> <p><b>Outcome 3:</b> Manual and training provided to teachers, to help them establish lending libraries.</p>
<b>Target Population</b>	Pupils at 20 primary schools (approx. 8,000 children)
<b>Life of Project</b>	One year
<b>Project Budget</b>	<b>£11,723</b>
<b>Funding sources</b>	Big Give Christmas Challenge '23, Clive Richards Foundation, British & Foreign Schools Society (BFSS), Hinchley Wood School.
<b>Contact Person in Uganda</b>	Name: Vincent Komakech – Country Manager Email: <a href="mailto:vincent.komakech@africanrevival.org">vincent.komakech@africanrevival.org</a>

**Background:**

Books provide knowledge, joy, inspiration and are windows into other worlds. Books impart power (Book Aid International, 2022); by improving literacy, creating opportunities, unlocking new ideas and perspectives, inspiring confidence, and providing hope through escapism.

In the rural nursery and primary schools where we work, many children have never seen a book before, let alone held or read one. Even if you can't read well, picture books provide many benefits and ignite a curiosity about reading. Equal access to education means equal access to books and reading, which provides a strong foundation across the whole curriculum. Improved education contributes to rural development, as education has a causal and direct impact on numerous social markers such as sanitation, health, mortality, and nutrition.

African Revival has been distributing reading books in English and local languages since 2005. In 2020, we strengthened our commitment to providing schools with scholastic materials through a partnership with Book Aid International. Each year, we receive multiple shipments and distribute over 6,000 books to some of the most remote rural community schools in Uganda and Zambia. In early 2023, we received our first shipment of 2,000 books to Maridi, South Sudan and, once established, we hope to extend the Read Together Project to more schools in the regions where we work.

**The Challenge:**

Despite having a formal agreement with headteachers when books are distributed - to make them available for children and establish libraries and reading clubs - regular monitoring visits often flag that books have been locked away, to protect them or because teachers are unsure of how to use them to support lessons. They are often in pristine condition, having not been taken out of the box, or they have been stored in locked boxes or storage rooms, where they have been nibbled by termites or rats. There are usually no appropriate storage facilities for books to be on display and readily accessible.

As many children have not seen books before, they don't know how to handle them correctly – how to hold them the right way round and how to turn the pages. We feel it's not enough to just distribute books to these remote rural schools – more support is needed to maximise their impact and help both pupils and teachers get the most out of this valuable educational resource.

**The Solution:**

The Read Together project aims to support distribution of reading books, by providing Read Together libraries on wheels, which will ensure books are stored correctly on shelves and easy to access but can also be locked away at the end of the school day for security. The Read Together library is a storage trunk made of steel, to repel rats and termites, with large wheels so it can be moved between classrooms or outside into the school grounds. The two halves open on a hinge (like a book!) to reveal bookshelves to display more than 200 volumes of fiction, non-fiction or reference books.





### **Project Outputs:**

Each ARU Read Together beneficiary school received 110 books from Book Aid International and a wheelable library to store them in. They also enjoyed a one-day Read Together workshop - training teachers how to set up a simple lending library and how to read aloud to children, showing pupils how to use and handle books, reading them a story in a fun and animated way to bring the characters to life and guiding fun book-themed activities, such as asking pupils to draw their favourite character or talk about their favourite parts of the story. Children (and parents) were encouraged to read aloud to other pupils, to develop confidence in reading. ARU Country Manager, Vincent Komakech, ran the workshops, with assistance from AR staff members: ARU Finance & Admin Manager, Monica Aguti Pinkett; Step Up Project Officer, Kenneth Onekalit (a qualified teacher, passionate about reading); Mega Phonics Project Officer, Amos Ojok and AR driver Tonny Oyat. Baseline data on book use was collected using simple questionnaires.

The schools that have benefited from the first ten ARU Read Together workshops are: Lujoro Primary School & Nursery, Palwong Primary School & Nursery, Labongogali Primary School & Nursery, Pagak Primary School & Nursery, Juba Road Primary School & Nursery, Agole Primary School, Lalak Primary School, Nyakaliso Community Primary School, Barifa Community Primary School and Kitgum Demonstration Primary School. At each school, the headteacher (or representative) and other teachers, including one designated as a librarian to be responsible for the new books and library, were briefed and asked to sign an agreement to acknowledge receipt of materials. They were shown the Read Together manual, which explains how to properly use the library and books. Below is a brief summary of the workshops at each school:

#### **Agole Primary School, Amuru District – 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2024**

Vincent, Monica and Tonny arrived early and were greeted by the deputy headteacher, who then handed over to the designated librarian, Thomas. The school was busy at the start of term and the headteacher was involved in a P6 parents' meeting, but he spared some minutes to meet us too. We took Thomas through the manual and library record books. He confirmed the school



currently has a book store, but no lending library system. We asked for as many pupils as possible to be mobilised to join the reading workshop - Agole is the largest school in the district (around 2,000 pupils enrolled), so it was not possible for all to attend. 75 pupils attended (15 each from P3-P7 classes) after their lunch break and we sat outside, under the tree shade. After introducing ourselves, we demonstrated how to arrange the books in the wheelable library and talked about the importance of reading. We read them 'The Camping Trip' by Shareen Wilkinson & Marcus Wilkinson, which had been chosen because we thought they would relate well to the story. We showed the children the cover - the picture, authors and title. The title was easy for them to read but the authors had unfamiliar names, which were trickier. We read the story, showing the pictures, and pupils were enthusiastic to participate and answer questions, e.g. they were asked if they knew what a fox was and how they might handle a trapped animal. They could remember most parts of the story afterwards and were able to re-tell it in chorus. A few children promised to write their own stories and share with their





teachers, to pass on to us. One boy then read his friends 'The Snail and the Whale' by Julia Donaldson - he was confident reading but had some difficulty with the font. The children learned new words and culture e.g. *sea, whale, trip, trapped, crash*, not killing the trapped fox etc. 22 pupils answered the baseline survey questions. They were confident but did not understand all of the questions. We reminded the attendees that the library should be used frequently and pupils should be free to borrow books - to learn many new words, people and places. Thomas the librarian agreed, asking the children to look after the books carefully. One P5 child was thankful to Hinchley Wood School for donating the wheelable library to them. Before departing, we briefed the headteacher on how the workshop went and he was very appreciative.

#### Kitgum Demonstration Primary School – 27<sup>th</sup> February

Rain delayed the start of the workshop, which was due to take place under the shade of trees. Meanwhile, we went through the manual with the headteacher, deputy and teacher responsible for the books. The school has reading time in their timetable, but it is not well enforced. Many pupils read books at breaktime, however, these are revision exercises on taught subjects, not story books for recreation. 13x P3-P6 pupils were selected to attend the workshop. We first showed them how to use a book correctly - noting the title, author, publisher, how to open a book, and use a bookmark to continue reading later from the same place. The children were interested as 'The Camping Trip' was read to them and followed the story keenly. We asked a volunteer to come and read 'My Granny is a Queen' by Madeleine Cook & Rebecca Ashdown, and we were surprised how Norland, a P5 girl, was able to read it confidently, including unfamiliar words. Another girl narrated her own story titled 'On My Way Back Home'. We noted girls were more confident and willing to participate than boys.



#### Lalak Primary School, Lamwo District – 28<sup>th</sup> February

We arrived and met the headteacher and other teachers, who were very positive, received the books and library and went through the manual. The headteacher and designated librarian were very impressed with the wheelable library and how it can also be locked when not in use. The librarian promised to register and keep good records of the books. The entire school attended the workshop! We welcomed the pupils, picked a book and asked them to read the title. They were quiet and started murmuring, and we realised we needed an ice breaker. We asked if anyone could share a story of their own and a girl shot her hand up and stood up to tell us a short folk story in the local language, entitled 'Wisdom is Better than Power' (the story of the hare and the monster). After explaining the importance of reading and writing for learning and fun, AR staff member, Amos Ojok read the attendees 'The Camping Trip'. After the story, pupils were asked to identify key words, e.g. *camping, fox, hissed, trapped, crept* and *trip*. They had challenges reading in English but we know this school is supportive of reading, as on a previous visit, we were presented with stories written by two senior girls and inspired by books AR had previously donated to the school. Five girls and five boys were asked the baseline survey questions.





Comprehension was difficult, but we managed by translating. Some pupils who were not confident to speak in front of the whole school, told good individual stories. One P7 pupil told us he doesn't know English, so he didn't want to speak/read in front of everyone.

#### Lujuro Primary & Nursery School, Amuru District – 7<sup>th</sup> March

We made a brief stopover at the Amuru DEO's office. The DEO, Joyce Lanyero, was busy, however, the Inspector of Schools in Charge of Sports appreciated the books, library and support we are offering to the district. On arrival at the school, we met the headteacher and available teaching staff. The designated librarian was unfortunately not present on that day, but AR's Project Officer has arranged to meet him separately to recap on the manual and demonstrate another story time session. The headteacher was busy with other guests and activities at the start of the new school term, so his deputy was briefed on record keeping, the manual and arranged for over 300 younger pupils from K1-P3 classes to gather under the shade of a tree. The workshop coincided with World Book Day at this school and helped us to explain the value of books and reading. We chose one of the phonics books entitled 'Dogs That Help' by Helen Dineen to read them. We showed them the pictures and read with translation by the deputy headteacher. The children enjoyed the pictures, which taught them about how dogs can be helpful beyond security or hunting. Afterwards, we asked them to re-tell the story. Most were shy, but one girl stood up to tell us a short folk story. We read another book - 'Find and Spot at Nursery' by Eric Hill, and the children were able to identify things in the pictures - they spotted dogs, bags, a football, toy cars, gumboots, jumpers, the Sun, etc. I asked some willing children to come to read the book and a few of them continued spotting the different pictures. Children were encouraged to start borrowing books from the new library and shown how to use them. Collecting baseline questionnaire responses was a challenge here due to lack of comprehension, even after translation from English.



Right: ARU Country Manager, Vincent Komakech and Finance & Admin Manager, Monica Aguti Pinkett, helping a child read to his friends.

#### Palwong Primary & Nursery School, Amuru District – 27<sup>th</sup> March

Unfortunately, the designated librarian was not present at school, so the deputy headteacher and Step Up nursery teachers greeted us, were taken through the manual and signed our agreement. The librarian was met the following week, where we needed to clarify that the books and library were for the use of the whole school, not just the nursery section. The deputy head reported that each class has their own 'library time'; morning breaktime for lower primary and after lessons for upper primary. In total, 337 pupils attended the Read Together workshop; all enrolled nursery pupils x63, P1 x120 pupils, P2 x134, P3 x10 and P4 x10 pupils. We started by singing some local songs to get the children's attention and then read them the book 'Find and Spot at Nursery'. The children asked a lot of questions in their local language and were able to re-tell parts of the story afterwards and a few tried to read in English and translate into the local language. Some other children told local folk stories to the rest of the group (e.g. 'The Cat and Rat', which tells the story of a rat stealing the cat's food, resulting in the cat trying to catch the rat to this day). Five boys and five girls were randomly selected to answer the baseline questionnaire.



### Juba Road Primary & Nursery School, Amuru District – 28<sup>th</sup> March

We arrived during mid-morning breaktime to meet the nursery and lower primary school teachers. The designated librarian reported late but the training will be followed up with her separately. The headteacher excused himself to attend to an urgent matter at the sub-county headquarters but delegated his deputy to be present. Around 160 children from K1-P4, with five teachers, gathered under tree shade for the workshop. Kenneth Onekalit, AR Project Officer, read 'Moon and Stars', published by DK. He introduced the story and engaged the pupils to read the book title and look at the pictures, explaining some of the new words page by page. We asked the children if any of them could re-tell the story and one boy in P4 was able to recount the whole story accurately. We explained how to use the books; washing hands before use, how to open the pages, borrowing etc. The school confirmed the library will be kept in the nursery section, as it contains mainly books for younger children at the moment, but is open for all pupils in the school to use. Children struggled to comprehend the baseline questionnaire, but with explanation many were honest to say they did read school books, but not story books. One child said she would like to borrow a story book to read and we referred her to the librarian. Most of the pupils said they had not had a story time at school before.

### Barifa Community Primary School, Koboko District – 3<sup>rd</sup> April

The Koboko DEO, Drago Mulai, accompanied us to distribute the books in both Barifa and Nyakaliso schools. At Barifa, which has a very strong headteacher, who we know regularly uses books previously donated to the school by AR, 87 pupils from P4-P6 attended the workshop and carried along the school's other books with them. The deputy headteacher signed the agreement and was very grateful to AR for all the items. The DEO explained (in the local language) the importance of



of reading and asked for some volunteers to read from 'The Snail and the Whale' by Julia Donaldson. He explained how a whale is a rare large animal that looks like a fish but is in fact a mammal that lives in big water bodies, whereas a snail is common locally. We also read 'The Camping Trip', showing the children the pictures relating to familiar things like Scouts and Guides. One of the pupils wanted to pass their thanks to Hinchley Wood School, who had funded their Read Together library.

### Nyakaliso Community Primary School, Koboko District – 3<sup>rd</sup> April

At Nyakaliso, we arrived at lunch break and around 300 pupils were gathered under the trees. Again, the DEO explained the importance of reading to the attendees and asked for volunteers to read from some of the books. We read them 'The Bat Book', by Charlotte Milner, detailing body parts and the life cycle of bats. The children were fascinated by the large pictures and the book put a smile on their faces, though most of the words had to be translated to the local language. ARU Country Manager, Vincent Komakech said: *"I personally hadn't read the book before, but in a short while learnt a lot about bats."*

Headteachers of both Barifa and Nyakaliso schools were very appreciative of the donations and promised to use the books for the benefit of the pupils and school.





### Labongogali Primary & Nursery School – 21<sup>st</sup> March 2024

Kenneth Onekalit delivered the workshop here to over 500 pupils; nursery x67, P1 x180, P2 x157, and P3 x145 pupils, who sat under tree shade on a clear day. We read them ‘Moon and Stars’, about going to sleep and what takes place during the night. Abdul, a P3 pupil, tried to re-read the same book, however he had challenges with some new words like *nocturnal*. Other children told folk stories in the local language. The children enjoyed the workshop, which lasted about 45 minutes. Mr. Opiro David, the designated librarian was taken through the manual, record books and how to wheel the library around. David and the other teachers appreciated the donation of the books and library to support their reading programme.



### Pagak Primary & Nursery School – 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2024



Over 300 pupils attended the workshop, presented by Kenneth; nursery x57, P1 x167, P2 x127, P3 x10, and P4 x10 were in attendance. The deputy headteacher, librarian - Paska Aryema Oloya, a P1 teacher and the nursery teachers were present. We sat under the shade of a mango tree shade after morning breaktime and read ‘Moon and Stars’. Thereafter, Odoch, a P4 pupil was able reread the same book. The majority of pupils here are more confident in expressing themselves in the local language rather than in English, naming nocturnal animals

and birds easily. Another P1 girl narrated a folk story about three children who went bathing at the stream, one girl put her dress on a palm tree as she bathed and the palm tree grew up with her dress on it! They then sang a song to convince the tree to give back the dress, but the tree refused. The pupil showed a strong memory in re-telling the story for a girl of her age. After the workshop, we took the librarian through the manual, the record books and arranged the books in the library.

### DEAR Day Celebration – 15<sup>th</sup> March

As part of Uganda’s ‘Drop Everything And Read’ Day (similar to World Book Day) celebrations and in partnership with local organization, READ For Life - based in Gulu, AR’s Step Up Project Officer, Kenneth, read to children at three of our project schools in Amuru District; Te-Kibur, Pagak and Palwong Primary Schools. He said the children loved the stories read to them - books entitled ‘The Beautiful Warthog’ and ‘The Shouting Giraffe on the Plane’. Kenneth said: *“At Pagak Primary School, the P5 class wouldn’t allow me to leave after reading the two books, demanding for more stories to be read. I had to negotiate to go to another class.”* Kenneth is a qualified teacher and passionate about reading – he reads to a different class whenever he visits his project schools and now when they see him arriving, a crowd of children gathers, all of them asking for him to come and read to their class. We know Kenneth will be a great asset to our Read Together project, as he passes on his own passion for books and reading.

**Project Outcomes and Impacts:**

More than 4,000 primary school pupils have so far benefited from new books, wheelable libraries and ARU Read Together workshops, with thousands more now able to enjoy the same books in years to come. The total number of direct beneficiaries will rise to around 8,000 pupils by the end of the project, with many more schools receiving hundreds of donated Book Aid International books outside of the Read Together project. Teachers have been shown how to establish lending libraries, how to read books animatedly and build on their content in lessons, to promote a continued love of reading in pupils. The Read Together libraries on wheels will make books more accessible and ensure they can be shared amongst all classes easily. We expect regular reading to improve overall literacy over time and hope to extend the Read Together project to include all future shipments of books we receive from Book Aid International – with scope to link activities to World Book Day. In Zambia, where we are replicating this project at another 19 rural schools, pupils at a school that already had access to an established library, reading club and reading classes, were more literate and able to read simple books in English, which supports our aim to increase academic attainment in all subjects through improved literacy, and instil a life-long love of reading to inspire children to stay in education. The Read Together libraries were made locally, to support a small business.

**Budget Summary:** Working within original project budget above – full budget available on request.

**Challenges:**

- In the remote, rural schools where we work, most pupils have difficulty reading in English and literacy rates are low, which makes them less confident. We always request basic/picture books from Book Aid International, although these are often designed for very young nursery or lower primary age children. It is important for us to stress during Read Together workshops that you do not have to be able to understand all of the words to enjoy and benefit from reading a book.
- We planned to measure impact using baseline and endline questionnaires from at least 10 pupils at each school. The questions asked about access to, level and enjoyment of reading and were allocated a score, which we planned to use to show improvements by the end of the year. AR staff reported that many children did not understand some of the questions or were suspected of not answering honestly. The children all wanted to ‘do well’ in the questionnaire and therefore answered to try and obtain a high score or give answers they thought we wanted to hear. This means that baseline scores are already high and probably not correct, which will not allow us to show an increase at the end of the project. Instead, we will measure impact using observations, testimonials and record numbers of books delivered and read by pupils over the year (using library records).

**Monitoring & Evaluation:**

We will support beneficiary schools to set up their own libraries and reading clubs and monitor them regularly. We have been collecting testimonials from pupils, parents and teachers and will continue to do this up until the end of the project. We hope baseline and endline questionnaires will show an increase in the number of children who are reading regularly. We will collect data on enrolment, book





lending and reading sessions at project schools. Findings will be shared with headteachers, district education officials, stakeholders and other NGOs.

**The beneficiary schools and children thank you for your support and are loving their new books and libraries!**

