



**ARZ Read Together Project – Improving Literacy in Kalomo and Zimba Districts, Southern Zambia - 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>	Zambia
<b>Project Name</b>	ARZ Read Together Project
<b>Project Location</b>	Various community and primary schools in Kalomo & Zimba Districts, Southern Zambia.
<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>£15,887</b>
<b>Funding sources</b>	Big Give Christmas Challenge '23, The Allen Trust, Mirianog Trust, Mageni Trust, Hasluck Charitable Trust
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**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 all 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 ARZ Read Together beneficiary school received 146 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. ARZ Country Manager, Godwin Kamangala, who is a retired headteacher, ran the workshops, with assistance from AR's Construction Co-ordinator (and finder of remote schools!), Dave Sangweni. Baseline data on book use was collected using simple questionnaires.

The first seven ARZ Read Together workshops took place at: Kalundu, RR, Nantale, Nazilongo, Siamoono Primary Schools and Simusunge Community School. Kansumo Primary School has already received 146 books and has a full Read Together workshop scheduled for 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2024. 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.

### **Summary of Workshops:**

#### **Kalundu Primary School, Southern District – 28<sup>th</sup> February 2024 (morning)**

The headteacher was not available to attend, but the deputy head had selected the new school librarian, mobilised other teachers and signed our receipt agreement. Around 115 older (grade 5-7) pupils, plus three teachers, gathered in a classroom for the workshop. We introduced the importance of reading and then read a selected book ('The Snail and the Whale', by Julia Donaldson). It was quite difficult for pupils to understand the story, which was in English and contained many unfamiliar things, such as a whale and a jetty. A teacher translated and explained in the local language throughout the story. Pupils struggled to read books themselves afterwards, but we emphasised that books can be enjoyed even if you can't understand everything, by looking at the pictures and reading a few easier words. At the end of the session, children were provided with pencils and paper and asked to draw their favourite character from the story they had heard.



#### **RR Primary School, Southern District – 28<sup>th</sup> February (afternoon)**

We arrived after 1pm and met the headteacher and other teachers, including the designated librarian. Approximately 90 grade 8 and 9 pupils attended the workshop and story time session. Again, a teacher had to interpret for the pupils throughout, however, the pupils here could read slightly better than at Kalundu, because they were older. We used the same books, but they could not read 'The Santa Surprise' – it was too difficult for them. We learnt from this experience and reconsidered the choice of books to be used for subsequent workshops. Later, we asked the pupils to draw their favourite



character and collected baseline questionnaire responses from 10 pupils. Our observation is that pupils need a lot more support to improve reading and writing.

#### Nantale Primary School, Southern District – 29<sup>th</sup> February

We were greeted by the female headteacher, who sat in on our training for a few minutes. She was engaged with visitors from the DEBS Office, who were monitoring another programme, so she handed over to some other teachers for the rest of the workshop. Just over 100 senior grade pupils attended the workshop. Pupils here seemed more active than the previous two schools and had better reading skills. They were able to provide long answers to some of the questions in the questionnaire, though mostly in broken English. During the story time session, we read ‘The Snail and the Whale’, after which two of the pupils, a boy and a girl, volunteered to read the same story again. The girl was more fluent. No pupils raised their hands when we asked if any had read even one book in the last month. Afterwards, children drew their favourite character from the story.

#### Nazilongo Primary School, Southern District – 5<sup>th</sup> March

We were welcomed by a senior teacher (as the headteacher was unwell and the deputy head was not present as we arrived), who did a good job of mobilising some other teachers. All were trained using the manual. This school already has a room designated as library, with adequate books and a serving female librarian, who received the books and library and signed our agreement. She was already familiar with many of the procedures in the Read Together manual. The teacher explained that the school has reading clubs and pupils are already encouraged to attend these and make use of the library. Around 120 pupils attended the workshop and story time session (‘The Snail and the Whale’ was read again). They were able to understand English, so little interpreting was required. Instead of the teacher interpreting, he asked some of the more able pupils to interpret for less able pupils. Even the pupils who read to their friends (they read a simpler book; ‘Moon and Stars’, published by DK) demonstrated a level of fluency. Pupils did a drawing activity afterwards, and we randomly selected 10 pupils to answer the baseline questionnaire. The deputy headteacher joined us at the end of the workshop, to thank African Revival for the donation and other developments completed at the school in the past.

#### Siamoono Primary School, Zimba District – 21<sup>st</sup> March

At this school, we received a thunderous welcome; the school was ready and eagerly awaiting our arrival. Six teachers attended, including the headteacher (one of them had been designated as the new librarian). After talking through the manual and signing the agreement, we went to meet the workshop participants; over 250 pupils from grades 1, 2, 5, 6 and 7, who were gathered outside, under a tree (grades 3 and 4 usually report for school in the afternoon). We discussed why reading is important, the benefits of pupils borrowing books and joining reading clubs. We asked the pupils how many loved to read. A number of them raised their hands, so we asked if there were any who had read a book within the past one or two months. Again, some of them raised their hands. We asked for volunteers to narrate the stories they had read to their friends.





One boy had read a story in Tonga, while a girl had read a book on pregnancy. It was evident from the way they narrated their stories that they had truly read the books. We read them a story from the book 'My School Unicorn' by Willow Evans - about Evie, who loves to read bedtime stories with her father. This was chosen in place of 'The Snail and the Whale', which had proved a challenge for pupils to understand and read in many of the other schools. Afterwards, we asked for volunteers to read to their friends from the same book. Two quite capable and fluent volunteers did really well. Afterwards, volunteers re-told the stories they had heard to their friends, to check their understanding. We then distributed books to as many pupils as possible – we gave them time to read to one another or just flip the pages. They were visibly curious and excited to handle the books.

#### Simusunge Primary School, Southern District - 10th April

We were met by the headteacher, his deputy (the designated librarian) and two other teachers. Prefects mobilised about 350 pupils from grades 1, 2, 5, 6 and 7 to gather under a big tree (grades 3 and 4 were reporting later, in the afternoon). After being introduced, we discussed with the attending pupils and teachers the importance of reading. The headteacher interpreted in the local language as most pupils' standard of English was low. The headteacher told us the school did not have any reading clubs, so we emphasised the importance of this. Pupils and teachers said they did have story time sessions in class, but we emphasised the need for pupils to find time during breaks to read with fellow pupils, or borrow books to read with their siblings at home. We asked how many children had read books since the school had re-opened in February – many raised their hands. We asked some to come to the front to tell their friends how many books they had read. On average each child had read more than one book. Two of the pupils narrated their stories to the audience – one about a little monkey that outwitted its friends (in English) and a Tonga story about a girl who had been raised to learn good house chores. Afterwards, we read them the story of Evie in 'My School Unicorn'. We showed them the book and asked them to read the title and the author. Two of the pupils were able to read the title correctly, though they could not name the author. Two pupils volunteered to read aloud - Suwilanji and Venisyas, both in grade 6. One of them struggled a little, so we gave her the simpler 'Moon and Stars', which she read better. Finally, three pupils volunteered to re-tell the Unicorn story to their friends, without looking at the book– it was a good try. Along with the librarian, we distributed all the books to the pupils and asked them to try and read or look at the pictures in groups or alone.

#### **Project Outcomes and Impacts:**

More than 2,400 primary school pupils have so far benefited from new books, wheelable libraries and ARZ Read Together workshops, with thousands more 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 set up 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. Pupils at Nazilongo Primary School, which already has 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. 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 the words to enjoy and benefit from reading a book.
- The cost to procure wheelable libraries is high in Zambia, due to higher costs of materials and rates of inflation and is liable to change suddenly due to fluctuating exchange rates. We have mitigated this risk by procuring another 12 libraries now – to be collected in batches of four on completion. This will bring the total number of Read Together libraries/workshops provided in southern Zambia to 19 by the end of this year.
- 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 answers 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 baseline 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!**

