

## Digital learning materials contribute to better education outcomes for school children in rural Iringa Region

Camfed's technology-supported learning helps Form 1 students navigate the difficult transition from primary school to secondary school where instruction abruptly changes from Swahili to English. In this case study they describe the pilot project funded by HDIF.

HDIF Case Study  
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Students celebrate receiving their e-readers

## Introduction

Camfed Tanzania's pioneering collaboration with Worldreader, Kiva and the Government of Tanzania aimed to extend rural girls' access to education and to help young women to successfully navigate the difficult transition between school and adulthood. The organisation's English literacy e-reader project brought together the well-established community-led structures of the Camfed model with the innovative use of e-readers to address the change of language of instruction for students transitioning from primary to secondary school.

Through funding from HDIF, the pilot project was implemented in 25 rural partner schools in Iringa Region. 4,500 male and female students were reached directly with technology and support to improve learning outcomes while 25 teachers benefited from access to technology and training. Girls and young women particularly benefited from the project: 500 vulnerable girls were reached with financial support to stay in school and 50 young rural women were trained as learner guides.

## The innovation opportunity

In mainland primary schools in Tanzania, children learn all subjects in Kiswahili; when they move on to secondary school the language of instruction shifts abruptly to English. While students have learned English as a second language in primary school, some children find it difficult to listen, read and write in English, and this has an inevitably negative impact on their performance. The transition from primary to secondary school is also one of the points at which girls in Tanzania are likely to attend less or drop out of school altogether.

To manage this transition, Form 1 students are taken through a six-week government-led English orientation at the beginning of the academic year to focus on learning English before having to learn the rest of their subjects in English. However this orientation is often severely hampered by a lack of learning resources for students or teacher training.

Camfed carried out a study in five schools in Iringa to better understand some of the challenges students faced as part of their transition. They found that students were worried about attending school because they were unable to understand announcements or directions from teachers and prefects. Sometimes students failed to answer questions in class because they could not construct sentences in English, though they knew the Swahili. They felt unable to ask questions or seek clarification because they could not ask in English, and often failed tests simply because they didn't understand the language or had spelling mistakes in their answers.

## The innovation

To help address these challenges, Camfed collaborated with Worldreader and other stakeholders to develop an appropriate curriculum and to digitise learning materials to be used on the e-readers. Through Worldreader's technology, Form 1 and Form 2 students could access tailored learning resources for mathematics, English and biology alongside supplementary reading materials, which helped to foster their enjoyment of reading and speaking in English.

Camfed recognised the challenges related to introducing a new technology in an environment where digital literacy levels of key stakeholders are low. English teachers and 'learner guides'

were trained in the use and maintenance of the e-readers through Camfed's cascade training model. Camfed selected members of their alumnae network to train as Guides and provided them with access to small interest-free business start-up loans through Kiva in recognition of their contribution.

Camfed also worked closely with national and district education structures to embed the use of e-readers into the Government-run English orientation programme for new Form 1 students. This involved adapting the six-week orientation programme to incorporate a series of activities that introduced students to the e-readers gradually, particularly through interactive elements of the programme, and working through a digitised version of the standard learning materials.

Students with access to the e-readers were exposed to a wider variety of resources than were previously available in the rural schools which were targeted by the project. For example, the e-readers provided a dictionary function that allowed students to look up translations of English words in Swahili.

*"The English course programme, Learner Guides and teachers helped us a lot... The course was of great help as we got an opportunity to read English stories before we started studying core subjects which helped to build our ability to understand the English language,"*

**Form 1 student, Mgama Secondary School**

### **The breakthrough**

Camfed's findings on student's experiences of the transition were combined with information from their previous experience of, and research into, learning challenges for marginalised students at secondary school. These combined insights informed the adaptation of Camfed's existing resources and the Learner Guide training programme to support remedial literacy and the introduction of e-readers in schools.

Throughout the project Camfed prioritised ongoing engagement with key government departments, the private sector, donors and NGO organisations in the education and innovation space to establish synergies, share learning, and support the sustainability and scalability of the initiative. In early 2016, Camfed organised a meeting with current and former public servants and key education stakeholders to review project priorities and ensure that they are in line with the national education structures.

To galvanise community support and excitement for the project, Camfed held an official launch ahead of the beginning of implementation in schools, on 16th January 2016. The guest of honour was Bernard Makali, Deputy Permanent Secretary for the President's Office Regional Administration and Local government (PO-RALG). During the launch e-reader sets were handed over to each school, with 1250 devices distributed in total.

The programme received a boost in January 2017, when the Commissioner for Education recognised the need for Form 1 students to spend more time on orientation and learning English before moving on to learning other subjects, and so increased the English Language orientation at the beginning of the school year from six to eight weeks. This extension offered students in the English Literacy programme more exposure to the e-readers and provided them with a better basis on which to build their English literacy and language skills over the rest of the school year.

During a review meeting held in January 2017, English Teachers and Learner Guides identified that the programme would benefit from students spending more time with the e-readers, and that more trained Learner Guides would be necessary to help deliver this. English teachers and schools subsequently worked up an action plan to find and train more Learner Guides from the CAMA network.

English Teachers and Learner Guides also arranged extra training to help build the capacity of the new Form 2 teachers, who hadn't previously been trained in using the e-readers. This was a community and teacher-led activity that was arranged by the school administration and conducted by English Teachers, Teacher Mentors and Learner Guides.

In May 2017, Learner Guides across the 25 project schools formed 60 permanent study groups to support students outside lesson time to do their homework, answer any questions students might have been unable to ask in class and also encourage peer-to-peer discussions on a variety of different topics not always covered in school time. 150 girls and 100 boys attended the study groups which met twice a week and were divided by ability, to ensure students were able to learn at the level most comfortable for them, and also location so it was easy for students to meet outside of school.

## Learning

**Working in close collaboration with teachers, Tanzanian education authorities, and community-based learner guides, Kiva and Worldreader enabled Camfed to gain strong traction in its activities in Tanzania.** Being collaborative included adopting strategies for leveraging and contributing to a broader commons of resource, action and knowledge. This included, for example, publishing all educational materials under a Creative Commons licence by default, thereby enabling a much wider audience to access and benefit from them.

**The technology was carefully introduced within a well-established community infrastructure,** with training and capacity building in its use led by experienced and committed stakeholders. This allowed Camfed to gain further funding and recognition.

**Working within the existing school system strengthened government schools** and ensured that the project had both input from and exposure to relevant government departments.

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