FastTrack+ Endline Report

NOVEMBER 2024–OCTOBER 2025

AREAi
Ad for Rural Education Access Initiative

PAWA
Pamoja na Watoto Tunaweza


STING LIKE A BEE
BK
STATE TEAM

MVP Prototype/ Program Title	FastTrack+
Implementation Period	November 2024 – October 2025
Implementing Partners	PAWA - Pamoja na Watoto Foundation
Reporting Period	Q3 2025
Geographic Coverage	Eastern DRC- North Kivu Province- Goma-Mugunga and Nyiragongo
Languages of Implementation	French and Swahili

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ABOUT AREAi

Founded in 2014, Aid for Rural Education Access Initiative (AREAi) works with and in under-resourced schools and marginalized communities, providing technical and infrastructural support to scale learning outcomes and drive tangibleacademic achievement for poor and vulnerable children and youth from low-income families. Our vision is to work collaboratively with local stakeholders and governmental agencies to secure equal educational access and high-quality learning opportunities for children in hard-to-reach and rural communities.

Over the last few years, we have designed, coordinated, and scaled a series of mass literacy, entrepreneurship development and economic empowerment programs to transform the employability, livelihood and lifelong learning opportunities of over 76,000 beneciaries in 13 states across Nigeria.

Some of our past partners and sponsors include the United Kingdom Foreign Commonwealth Development Office, Malala Fund, the Coca-Cola Foundation, Bill and Melinda Gate Foundation, Facebook, Teach for Nigeria, MTN Foundation, One Young World London, Queens Commonwealth Trust, Theirworld, NCFRMI, UNESCO, Unleash and many others.

Website: www.areai4africa.org/

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview of the MVP Prototype

FastTrack+ is an offline technology-enabled accelerated foundational skills development program designed for out-of-school refugee children aged 5-14 years in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Implemented by AREAi in partnership with PAWA Foundation from November 2024 to October 2025, the program targeted 1,000 learners across four learning centers in Mugunga and Nyirangongo communities in North Kivu Province. The intervention combines three proven methodologies: Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) for competency-based grouping, Mavis Talking Book and Pen for offline digital learning, and mother tongue-based literacy using Swahili as a bridge to French. The program was adapted from English to French and Swahili, incorporating culturally relevant content to address the urgent educational needs of displaced children affected by ongoing conflict.

Key Achievements and Milestones

The program successfully adapted and localized curriculum materials, developing 10 numeracy modules organized into 21 chapters across two books and 10 literacy modules in 16 chapters. A total of 252 talking book and pen kits were distributed across 84 learning clusters. Despite contextual challenges requiring program restructuring from planned IDP camps to host communities, the team recruited and trained 84 facilitators (49 male, 35 female) through a two-stage training approach using master trainers. The program maintained strong attendance rates exceeding 80% throughout implementation, delivering 150 hours of instruction over 12 weeks through an intensified model of five days per week at 2.5 hours daily, compensating for the shortened timeframe from the originally planned 24 weeks.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Headline Results (FLN Learning Outcomes, Reach, Innovations Piloted)

Of 1,725 children initially assessed, 1,037 completed both baseline and endline evaluations, representing the core cohort for impact measurement. In literacy, dramatic improvements were achieved: children at beginner level dropped from 65.28% to 5.59%, while those achieving word-level reading increased from 9.74% to 47.44%. Numeracy outcomes showed similar gains, with beginner-level learners decreasing from 60.66% to 11.50%, and two-digit numeracy skills rising from 16.01% to 47.80%. Community-based facilitators consistently outperformed school-based facilitators, particularly in advanced literacy skills. The bilingual Mavis Talking Book and Pen innovation proved highly effective, with learners describing it as a “personal tutor” that sustained motivation and enabled personalized learning in low-resource settings without electricity or internet connectivity.

Main Challenges and Lessons Learned

The FastTrack+ implementation revealed transformative lessons about supporting refugee learners through innovative pedagogical approaches. AREAi’s bilingual methodology proved revolutionary for displaced children from multilingual backgrounds, with the dual-language Swahili-French model enabling translanguaging that deepened comprehension and retention. This approach transcended traditional language barriers by allowing children to leverage their mother tongue as a cognitive bridge to formal literacy, creating inclusive pathways for learners previously excluded by monolingual instruction. The bilingual strategy proved particularly powerful for community-based facilitators, who achieved significantly superior outcomes in advanced literacy skills compared to school-based counterparts.

The child-centered, tech-enabled text-to-speech innovation fundamentally transformed learning engagement in crisis contexts. The offline Mavis Talking Book and Pen addressed critical infrastructure limitations while providing personalized, interactive learning experiences that traditional approaches cannot deliver in refugee settings. Children's enthusiastic adoption of the technology as their "personal tutor" demonstrated how culturally responsive, accessible edtech can sustain motivation and enable self-directed learning even among displaced populations facing trauma and instability. The technology's multilingual audio capabilities proved essential for bridging communication gaps among children from diverse backgrounds while maintaining educational continuity without requiring electricity or internet connectivity.

However, implementation challenges underscored the complexity of technology integration in fragile contexts. Contextual disruptions from camp closures required complete program restructuring, while technical challenges revealed that effective adaptation demands expert-led linguistic and cultural redesign rather than simple translation. The durability concerns with devices in harsh conditions and the need for ongoing technical support highlighted the importance of building resilient, locally sustainable technology ecosystems for refugee education.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is undergoing a major humanitarian crisis that is severely impacting education and human rights. For more than 25 years, a protracted crisis, particularly in the eastern provinces, has forced millions to flee in search of safety. Today, 1 in 20 Congolese are displaced, with nearly 7 million internally displaced persons (IDPs)—the majority fleeing ongoing violence and conflict (UNHCR, 2024). The escalation of conflict in North and South Kivu in late 2024 and early 2025 has deepened this crisis. Vast areas have fallen under the control of de facto authorities, leading to the closure of dozens of displacement sites and the abrupt, unprepared departure of nearly 900,000 people, mostly in North Kivu (OCHA, 2025). Early assessments indicate that local families are now hosting 80% of the newly displaced, though population movements remain ongoing. This sudden evacuation of displacement sites has also placed enormous strain on host communities, many of whom lack the resources to accommodate newly arrived families.

The impact on education has been devastating. In 2024, 540 schools closed in North Kivu alone, stripping children of vital learning opportunities (Save the Children, 2024). By 2025, conflict had forced more than 2,500 schools and learning spaces in North and South Kivu—including those in displacement camps—to shut down. This left nearly 795,000 children without access to education, up from 465,000 in December 2024 (UNICEF, 2025). Schools have been destroyed, repurposed as shelters, or abandoned due to insecurity. Even in areas such as Goma, where schools reopened in February 2025, attendance remained low as parents feared ongoing violence and did not have the resources to prioritise education.

Against this backdrop, the need for safe, accessible, and adaptable education solutions has never been greater. Children in Conflict-affected areas are at high risk of permanent school dropout, with their foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) needs largely unmet. FastTrack+ was introduced in the DRC to help address this crisis by restoring learning opportunities for displaced children through localized curriculum, innovative edtech tools, and community-based delivery models.

FASTTRACK+

FastTrack+ is an offline technology-enabled and self-assisted accelerated foundational skills development program designed to enable out-of-school refugee children to acquire functional literacy and numeracy skills which are vital, indispensable skills needed for virtually any further education and to lead an empowered, self-determined life.
Leveraging 3 proven methodologies:

• **Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL):** Pioneered by education NGO Pratham, is an approach to accelerate learning and ensure that children gain foundational reading and mathematics skills. The TaRL approach works by assessing children one-on-one using a simple oral reading and numeracy assessment tool, grouping children based on learning level rather than age or grade for a period and focusing on foundational skills development.

• **Mavis Talking Book and Pen:** An offline digital pen with audio capabilities, and a book with unique dot patterns and learner-friendly graphics to aid understanding and comprehension.

• **Mother tongue-based literacy acquisition model:** A dual-language approach which involves facilitators using mother tongue (Swahili) as a bridge to learn French.


The Talking Book
Apprendre le
Français en Swahili

OBJECTIVES OF FASTTRACK+ MVP PROTOTYPE

FastTrack+ was designed to address this urgent need with a localized, innovative, and evidence-based approach. Specifically, it sought to:

• **Develop and adapt FLN curriculum** through a localized, research-informed curriculum tailored in French and Swahili, ensuring cultural and linguistic relevance for displaced learners.

• **Introduce accessible edtech solutions,** which is our digital offline talking book and pen, to enrich learning in low-resource and displacement-affected settings.

• **Promote Knowledge and Practice uptake of Fasttrack+** by equipping external school teachers , community-based facilitators, and local actors with the knowledge and skills to deliver engaging and effective Fasttrack+ learning sessions within their communities.

• **Build partnerships** with community-based organizations and refugee camp leadership structures to deploy FastTrack+ for children in displaced and refugee communities to ensure ownership, reach, and sustainability.

• **Generate evidence of the effectiveness of FastTrack+** to inform scale-up in other low-resourced, fragile, and conflict-affected environments and contexts.

TARGET POPULATION

1,000 learners comprising of out-of-school and internally displaced and refugee children aged 5–14 years, in refugee camps and conflict-affected settlements in Goma- DRC.

TIMELINE AND PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation followed a phased approach:
Dec 2024 – Apr 2025: Review and adaptation of the FastTrack+ curriculum.
Dec 2024 – Mar 2025: Engagement of community-based organizations and refugee camp leadership.
Apr – Jun 2025: Learner enrollment, baseline assessments, and clustering by learning level.
May – Jun 2025: Recruitment, training, and assignment of facilitators.
Jul – Sep 2025: Deployment of FastTrack+ sessions across refugee camps and administration of endline assessments.

4. RESEARCH & CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Our existing FastTrack curriculum in the English language was carefully adapted and contextualized to align with the education realities and linguistic needs of displaced and out-of-school children in the DRC. The process combined alignment with national standards, integration of local context, and the use of our innovative offline digital talking book and pen to strengthen foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) learning.

Curriculum Design and Alignment with DRC FLN Framework

The adaptation process began with a comprehensive review of the government-approved FLN curriculum framework. Existing FastTrack+ content was mapped against this framework to ensure consistency with national priorities and grade-level expectations. Visuals, stories, and examples were redesigned to reflect local culture, daily experiences, and familiar settings in the DRC, making learning more relevant and engaging for refugee and internally displaced learners.

Development of Offline Talking Book & Pen (French and Swahili)

To enhance accessibility, the curriculum content was integrated into our offline digital Talking Book & Pen, combining both French and Swahili. This ensured that children in low-resource or connectivity-challenged environments could still access interactive, digital learning support.

This required:

- Translating the curriculum into the two target languages.
- Recording all content with native speakers to capture authentic accents and language use.
- Editing the recordings for clarity, accuracy, and pacing.
- Encoding the audio content into smart pens and corresponding printed books, enabling children to tap text or images and hear the correct pronunciation or explanation instantly.

4. Research & Curriculum Development

Pre-testing and Validation with Stakeholders

The curriculum design, review, and audio translation process was led by local teachers, school administrators, and seasoned language and FLN experts to ensure technical accuracy and cultural relevance. After the initial development, 10 prototype copies of the Talking Book & Pen were produced and pre-tested with:

- School administrators
- Local teachers
- Community facilitators
- Learners

The pre-test confirmed the accuracy of translation, appropriateness of language, and contextual fit of both the curriculum content and the digital tools. Feedback from these sessions informed final adjustments before wider rollout.

Outputs

Curriculum modules developed:

Numeracy- 10 modules developed and organised into 21 Chapters in 2 books- A and B

- Numbers 1- 5, 6- 10
- Counting 11-20, 21-40, 41-100
- Number Zero
- Shapes
- Fractions ½ and ¼
- Addition

4. Research & Curriculum Development

- Subtraction
- Place value- Hundreds, Tens and unit
- Multiplication
- Division

Literacy- 10 modules developed and organized into 16 Chapters in 1 book

- Greetings
- Introduction of persons
- Letters of the Alphabets
- Phonics and Building words
- Articles and Pronouns
- Preposition and connectors
- Action Verbs
- Simple Sentence and Simple questions
- Vocabulary Building
- Comprehension passage with questions

Number of digital devices distributed:

A total of 252 talking book and pen Kit distributed across 84 learning clusters (3 kits per cluster). Each kit contains;

- 1 Talking Pen
- 1 Literacy Book
- At least 1 Numeracy Book

5. IMPLEMENTATION OVERVIEW

5.1 Community Mobilisation and Recruitment

Community Engagement & Mobilisation

Community engagement and mobilisation were led by our implementing partner organization (IPO) in DRC. Facilitators were recruited through outreach in schools and via community leaders. in order to reach the targeted 1,000 beneficiaries, the number was distributed across four learning centers in two communities:

- *Mugunga*: Ecole Uhamisho le Héros and Complexe Scolaire Safina Kivu
- *Nyirangongo:* Collège Saint Junior and Complexe Scolaire Tumaini

Children were enrolled using a multi-level model:

- Facilitators recommended 12–21 learners from their communities within the criteria of our target beneficiaries
- These children were screened to ensure they are IDPs and out of School, with preference given to those within the 5–15 age range who demonstrated low or no foundational literacy and numeracy proficiency.
- Parents, guardians, and community leaders/stakeholders were also sensitized on the program and its benefits to ensure community buy-in.

Facilitators Recruited and Engaged

A total of 95 facilitators were initially recruited, targeting both community-based and external facilitators. Selection criteria emphasized literacy, teaching ability, and inclusion of at-risk youth living in refugee camps or host communities. Following the training phase, 13 facilitators were screened out due to absenteeism, conflicting schedules, or distance from assigned learning centers. Ultimately, 84 facilitators (49 male and 35 female) were retained. Their qualifications ranged from diplomas to bachelor's degrees across diverse fields of expertise.

5. Implementation Overview

Beneficiaries Recruited and Engaged

For the FastTrack+ implementation in the Democratic Republic of Congo, a total of 1,725 children aged 5–15 years were recruited and assessed at baseline across Mugunga and Nyirangongo communities in Goma. This included 941 girls and 784 boys. However, only 1,037 children consistently participated from baseline through endline. The gap of 688 learners reflects dropouts, irregular attendance, or unavailability at endline assessment.

5. Implementation Overview

5.2 Training of Facilitators

Training Conducted

The training was structured in two stages to ensure efficiency and address language barriers:

A. Master Training (4 days) – Delivered directly by the AREAi team to 5 master trainers. This approach reduced interpretation delays, as the sessions were conducted in English and allowed the AREAi team to focus on intensive content delivery.

B. Facilitators' Workshop (4 days) – Led primarily by the master trainers, with the AREAi team providing supervision and technical guidance. This ensured that facilitators received training in their local language- French and Swahili, while also allowing for contextual clarification and stronger peer-to-peer learning.

Across both stages, the following training modules were covered:

- **Program Orientation:** Overview of AREAi and the FastTrack+ program.
- **Learning Framework:** FastTrack+ literacy and numeracy levels.
- **Digital Tools:** User guide on the MAVIS Talking Book and Pen.
- **Numeracy Instruction:** Number recognition (beginner, 1-digit, 2-digit), basic operations (addition, subtraction, multiplication, division), and engaging Teaching-at-the-Right-Level (TaRL) activities.
- **Literacy Instruction:** Alphabet recognition, word formation, comprehension activities (word, paragraph, story levels), and all-level activities.
- **Assessment & Delivery:** Conducting placement assessments, preparing for the baseline, and facilitating learner progression.
- **Practical Sessions:** Breakout practice with assessment tools.
- **Closing:** TOR, distribution of TLMs, and closing remarks.


TABLEAU DE DECOMPOSITION DES NOMBRES
1000 100 10 1
2000 200 20 2
3000 300 30 3
4000 400 40 4
6000 50
7000 700
8000 800 80
9000 900 90 9


50
90
6 800


Mavis Pen™


1.0 Les Salutation
Quand on rencontre des gens
Quand on prend congé de quelqu'un

5. Implementation Overview

Duration & Delivery Method

In total, the training process lasted 8 days (4-day master training + 4-day facilitators' workshop), coordinated by implementing partner PAWA in DRC. On the ninth day, facilitators jointly conducted the baseline assessment with children to apply their learning.

Skills Gained

The dual training approach ensured facilitators:

- Gained full understanding of FastTrack+ methodology and curriculum.
- Built competence to deliver foundational literacy and numeracy instruction.
- Acquired digital skills for integrating the Talking Book and Pen into lessons.
- Learned to assess and guide learners from beginner to advanced levels over the 12-week cycle.

Assessment of Facilitators

A post-training test assessed knowledge retention:

- 70% of facilitators scored above average, and were assigned to higher-level clusters (advanced literacy and numeracy).
- 30% scored at or slightly below average, and were assigned to beginner-level clusters (letter/number recognition and early reading).

5.3 Learning Sessions

Planned vs. Conducted Sessions

FastTrack+ is a 6-month, low-cost remedial learning program designed to close learning gaps and build foundational literacy and numeracy competencies among out-of-school refugee children. In DRC, 1,037 children were enrolled across four learning centres in two communities (Mugunga and Nyirangongo). The original plan was to deliver sessions four days per week (two literacy, two numeracy; 2 hours daily). However, implementation of the prototype required intensive adaptation to context, language, curriculum, and materials. These processes were time-consuming, which shortened the program to 12 weeks (3 months) instead of the planned 30 weeks.

5. Implementation Overview

To maximize learning within the reduced timeframe, the model was adjusted to five days per week (2.5 hours daily), alternating between literacy- and numeracy-focused sessions.

Duration and Frequency

Planned: 24 weeks; 4 days/week; 2 hours/day totalling 192 hours of instruction.
Conducted: 12 weeks; 5 days/week; 2.5 hours/day totalling 150 hours of instruction.

Attendance Rates

Attendance remained consistently strong, with over 80% of enrolled learners attending regularly. Children were eager to participate due to the play-based and engaging methods used in FastTrack+, which made learning sessions enjoyable.

Integration of the Mavis Talking Book and Pen

Each 2.5-hour learning session combined three approaches: Teaching-at-the-Right-Level (TaRL), contextualized curriculum activities, and use of the MAVIS Talking Book and Pen. This ensured that learners not only received group instruction but also personalized reinforcement through technology in both French and Swahili using the session structure below:

Session Structure

- 40 minutes – TaRL activities and bilingual instruction with the whole class.
- 20 minutes – Small-group TaRL activities within the same learning level.
- 60 minutes – Learner engagement with the MAVIS Talking Book and Pen, guided by the facilitator.
- 20 minutes – Whole-class revision and consolidation of concepts taught.
- 10 minutes – Attendance and data recording.

6. MONITORING & EVALUATION

6.1 Baseline Assessment

Methodology:

To assess the literacy and numeracy levels of all children enrolled in the FastTrack+ program, a standardized ASER (Annual Status of Education Report) tool was used at baseline. This tool provided a simple, oral, and child-friendly assessment of learners' ability to recognize letters and words, read and comprehend short passages and stories, identify numbers, and perform basic arithmetic operations such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. In addition to the ASER tool, facilitators relied on observation checklists during placement and classroom sessions to monitor learner engagement, psychosocial well-being, and progression.

The assessment took into account the unique psychosocial and contextual realities of refugee and internally displaced children. Facilitators were trained to create safe and inclusive learning spaces that balanced academic rigor with the wellbeing of learners, recognizing that many of the children were coping with conflict, displacement, and instability. Alongside the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills, facilitators qualitatively monitored other skills such as confidence, participation, and self-expression, which are essential for children's overall development and empowerment.

In total, 1,725 children between the ages of 5 and 15 years were assessed across Mugunga and Nyirangongo IDP camps in eastern DRC, comprising 941 girls and 784 boys through the duration of the implementation. The assessment was conducted at intervals to cover up for attrition. All assessment materials were localized to reflect the cultural and linguistic context of the children, thereby enhancing comprehension and ease of administration.

Key Findings

Table 1: Literacy and Numeracy Performance of Learners at baseline

Baseline Performance for Literacy				
Beginner *(can't identify letters)*	**Letter** *(Can identify letters but can't blend them into a word)*	**Word** *(Can blend sounds into words)*	**Paragraph** *(Can read short sentences)*	**Story** *(Can read, comprehend, and answer questions)*
64.46%	**16.70%**	**10.43%**	**5.22%**	**3.19%**
Baseline Performance for Numeracy				
Beginner *(Cannot identify single diti numbers)*	**One-digit** *(Can identify 1-10)*	**Two-digits** *(Can identify between 10-99)*	**Subtraction** *(Can solve only addition/subtraction questions)*	**Division** *(Can solve division problems)*
46.49%	21.91%	17.74%	11.83%	2.03%

6. Monitoring & Evaluation

Baseline Performance – Literacy

At baseline, the majority of children were at the very early stages of literacy. Specifically: 64.46% of children were at the beginner level, unable to identify letters or read words. Only 16.70% could read simple letters, while 10.43% progressed to word reading. A smaller proportion, 5.22%, could read a paragraph, and just 3.19% were able to read a full story.
This indicates that most children entered the program with very limited literacy skills, with less than 9% ablility to read beyond the word level.

Baseline Performance – Numeracy

Numeracy results show a similar pattern of low foundational skills as 46.49% of children were at the beginner level, unable to recognize or work with numbers. 21.91% demonstrated ability with one-digit operations, while 17.74% managed two-digit operations. A smaller group, 11.83%, could perform subtraction, and only 2.03% reached the division level.

This distribution shows that almost half of the children had not acquired even the most basic numeracy skills, with only about 14% demonstrating capacity for operations beyond two-digit numbers.

Together, these findings highlight a very low starting point in both literacy and numeracy, underscoring the need for FastTrack+ foundational support to move children from beginner levels towards functional reading and problem-solving skills.

6. Monitoring & Evaluation

6.2 Endline Assessment

At baseline, a total of 1,725 children were assessed. However, only 1,037 children were consistently present through to the endline. This means that 688 children dropped out or were not available at endline, resulting in an attrition rate of approximately 39.9%. To ensure comparability and accuracy, the data analysis and results presented in this report are therefore restricted to the 1,037 children who were assessed at both baseline and endline.

The endline assessment was conducted using the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) standardized tool, which allows for one-on-one evaluation of children's foundational literacy and numeracy competencies. This approach ensured that learners' skills were measured consistently and reliably across both baseline and endline phases. The sample consisted of children across diverse age groups and learning levels, reflecting the demographics of the participating communities. By controlling for attrition and using a standardized, child-focused assessment tool, the findings provide a robust and credible measure of the program's impact on children's literacy and numeracy outcomes.

Comparative results (baseline vs. endline):

•Literacy outcomes

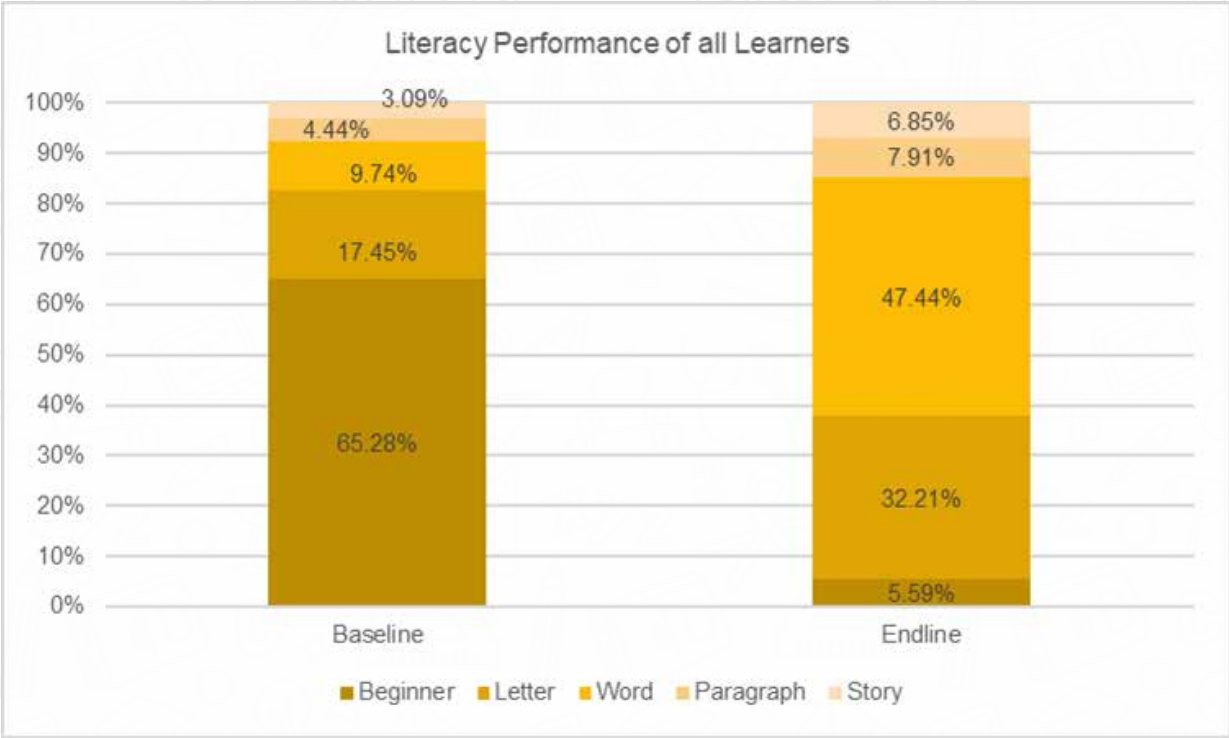

Figure 1: Literacy performance of all Learners

Table 2: Literacy Learning Gains (Baseline - Endline)

	Literacy Learning Gains (Baseline → Endline)				
Literacy learning levels	**Beginner** (can't identify letters)	**Letter** (Can identify letters but can't blend them into a word)	**Word** (Can blend sounds into words)	Para **graph** (Can read short sentences)	**Story** (Can read, comprehend and answer questions)
Baseline Performance	65.28%	17.45%	9.74%	4.44%	3..09%
Endline Performance	5.59%	32.21%	47.44%	7.91%	6.85%
% Point Change (Improvement)	-59.69% (Sharp reduction)	+14.76%	+37.70%	+3.47%	+3.76%

6. Monitoring & Evaluation

The literacy assessment results demonstrate that the program significantly improved children's reading competencies across all levels.

At baseline, nearly two-thirds of learners (65.28%) were at the Beginner stage, reflecting very limited ability to recognize or engage with written text. By endline, this proportion had reduced drastically to 5.59%, showing that the majority of learners transitioned into higher literacy levels. In the Letter recognition category, children improved from 17.45% at baseline to 32.21% at endline, a gain of nearly 15 percentage points, demonstrating stronger foundational reading skills.

The most substantial progress was recorded in the Word reading category, which rose sharply from 9.74% at baseline to 47.44% at endline. This indicates that almost half of the learners acquired the ability to decode and read words independently. In Paragraph reading, performance grew modestly from 4.44% - 7.91%, while in Story reading, learners increased from 3.09% - 6.85%, reflecting gradual progress into higher-order literacy competencies that require comprehension and fluency.

Over all, the program proved highly effective in reducing the number of learners at the beginner stage and significantly expanding the proportion of children able to read at the word level. While progress at advanced levels (Paragraph and Story reading) was more modest, the foundation built provides a strong platform for continued literacy growth in the future.

- **Numeracy outcomes**

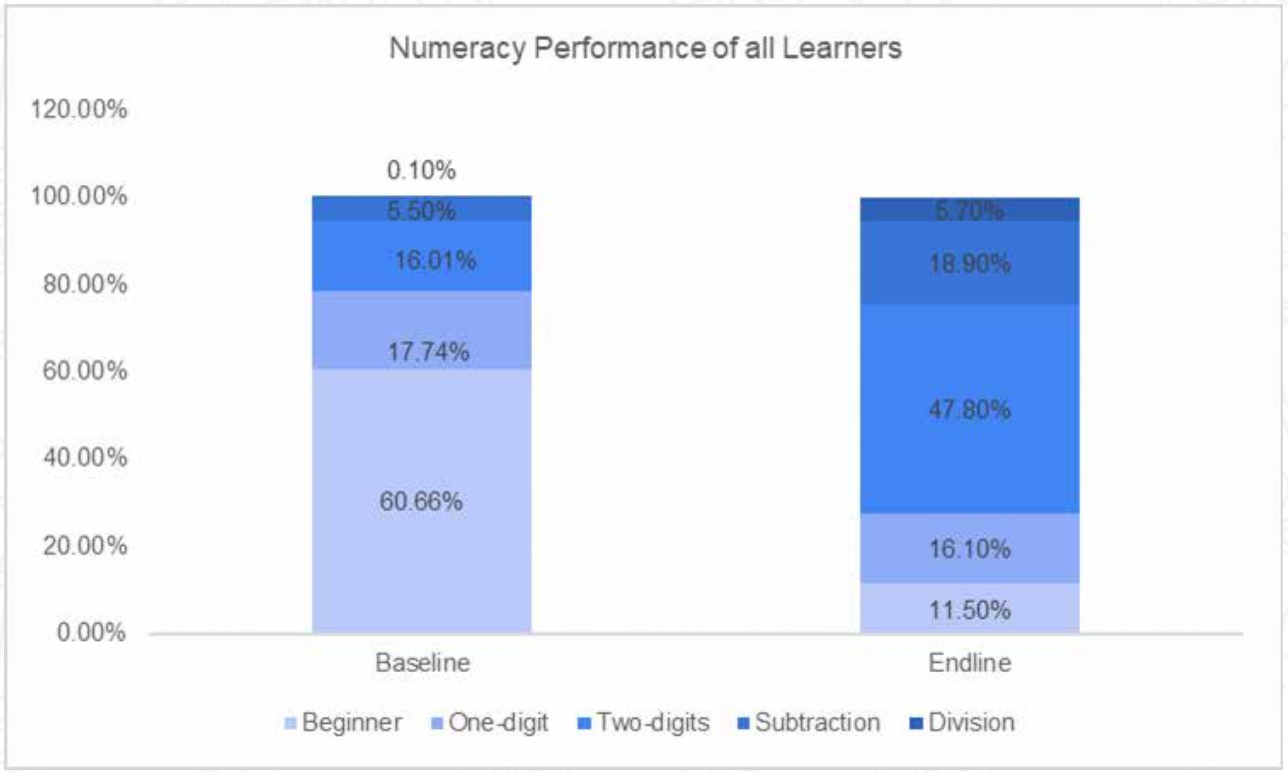

Figure 2: Numeracy performance of all Learners

Table 3: Numeracy Learning Gains (Baseline — Endline)

	Numeracy Learning Gains *(Baseline → Endline)*				
Numeracy learning levels	**Beginner** *(Cannot identify single-digit numbers)*	**One-digit** *(Can identify 1-10)*	**Two-digits** *(Can identify between 10-99)*	**Subtraction** *(Can solve only addition /subtraction questions)*	**Division** *(Can solve division problems)*
Baseline Performance	60.66%	17.74%	16.01%	5.50%	0.10%
Endline Performance	11.50%	16.10%	47.80%	18.90%	5.70%
% Point Change (Improvement)	−49.16%	−1.64%	+31.79%	+13.40%	+5.60%

6. Monitoring & Evaluation

The overall assessment results show that the program had a significant positive impact on children's numeracy competencies from baseline to endline.

At baseline, the majority of children (60.66%) were at the Beginner level, reflecting very limited numeracy skills. By endline, this proportion had reduced sharply to 11.50%, indicating that most learners successfully transitioned out of the lowest competency band.

In the One-digit category, there was only a slight decline (17.74% — 16.10%), suggesting that many children moved beyond this level into more advanced categories by the end of the program. The most remarkable progress was seen in the Two-digits category, where the proportion of learners increased substantially from 16.01% at baseline to 47.80% at endline. This demonstrates strong program success in helping children build more complex numeracy skills. In Subtraction, learners improved from 5.50% — 18.90%, showing growing ability to handle applied numeracy operations. While division remained the weakest area, the proportion of learners demonstrating this skill increased from a negligible 0.10% at baseline to 5.70% at endline, reflecting an encouraging upward shift.

FastTrack+ effectively reduced the proportion of children at the beginner stage and facilitated significant learning progress, particularly in Two-digit numeracy and Subtraction. While foundational gains are evident, continued emphasis on higher-order skills such as Division will be important to sustain and deepen the impact.

Community based facilitators vs school based facilitators learners improvement

Table 4: Comparative Gains in Literacy outcomes (Baseline — Endline) by Facilitator Group

Literacy Level	School-Based Facilitators (SBFs)	Community-Based Facilitators (CBFs)	Comparative Observation
Beginner	-54.44 (61.48 → 7.04)	-78.41 (78.85 → 0.44)	Both reduced beginners, but CBFs had sharper decline.
Letter	+13.58 (18.27 → 31.85)	+18.94 (14.54 → 33.48)	Gains stronger under CBFs.
Word	+35.43 (10.62 → 46.05)	+45.81 (6.61 → 52.42)	Both groups improved, with CBFs ahead.
Paragraph	+1.11 (5.68 → 6.79)	+11.89 (0.00 → 11.89)	CBFs had more pronounced gains.
Story	+4.32 (3.95 → 8.27)	+33.48 (0.00 → 33.48)	CBF learners far outperformed in advanced literacy.

6. Monitoring & Evaluation

The literacy assessment results highlight notable differences in the progress of children taught by School-Based Facilitators (SBFs) and Community-Based Facilitators (CBFs).

At baseline, a larger share of learners under CBFs (78.85%) were at the Beginner level compared to those with SBFs (61.48%), indicating weaker starting competencies. By endline, however, only 0.44% of CBF learners remained at the Beginner level, compared to 7.04% in the SBF group. This demonstrates that CBFs achieved a sharper reduction in the proportion of children with no literacy skills.
In the Letter recognition category, both groups improved, but CBF learners gained more ground:

- SBFs: 18.27% — 31.85% (+13.58 points)
- CBFs: 14.54% — 33.48% (+18.94 points)

In Word reading, progress was substantial for both groups, with stronger outcomes under CBFs:
- SBFs: 10.62% — 46.05% (+35.43 points)
- CBFs: 6.61% — 52.42% (+45.81 points)

For Paragraph reading, SBF learners showed modest gains (+1.11 points), while CBF learners advanced more significantly (0.00% — 11.89%). The most striking difference was in Story reading. While SBF learners rose slightly from 3.95% — 8.27% (+4.32 points), CBF learners made a dramatic leap from 0.00% — 33.48% (+33.48 points).

Although both facilitator groups contributed to literacy gains, CBFs achieved stronger progress overall, particularly in moving learners beyond the beginner stage and into higher-order literacy skills such as paragraph and story reading.

Table 5: Comparative Gains in Literacy outcomes (Baseline → Endline) by Facilitator Group

Numeracy Level	School-Based Facilitators (SBFs)	Community-Based Facilitators (CBFs)	Key Insight
Beginner	-45.43 (↓)	-74.01 (↓)	CBFs achieved a sharper decline in beginners.
One-digit	-3.83 (↓)	+22.03 (↑)	CBFs showed strong gains, while SBFs slightly declined.
Two-digits	+30.50 (↑)	+40.97 (↑)	Both improved, with CBFs leading.
Subtraction	+11.85 (↑)	+9.25 (↑)	Gains were stronger under SBFs.
Division	+6.92 (↑)	+1.76 (↑)	SBFs outperformed CBFs in this complex skill.

6. Monitoring & Evaluation

The assessment results show notable differences in the learning achievements of children taught by school-based facilitators (SBFs) compared to those taught by community-based facilitators (CBFs) across baseline and endline evaluations.

At baseline, a higher proportion of children under CBFs (74.45%) were at the Beginner level compared to those under SBFs (56.79%), indicating lower starting numeracy competencies among the CBF group. However, by endline, only 0.44% of children with CBFs remained at Beginner level, compared to 11.36% in the SBF group. This suggests that CBF-led children demonstrated a stronger transition out of the lowest performance band.

In the One-digit category, children taught by SBFs recorded a marginal increase from 19.51% at baseline to 15.68% at endline, showing limited gains. In contrast, children with CBFs showed a sharper increase, moving from 11.45% at baseline to 33.48% at endline.
For Two-digit numeracy, both groups improved considerably, but gains were higher among CBF learners. Children with SBFs moved from 17.28% at baseline to 47.78% at endline, while those with CBFs improved from 11.45% to 52.42%.

In Subtraction, the SBF group grew from 6.30% to 18.15%, whereas the CBF group improved from 2.64% to 11.89%. Although both showed progress, SBF learners demonstrated slightly stronger outcomes in this domain.

In Division, which was the weakest area overall, both groups recorded progress but at different magnitudes. Children with SBFs improved from 0.12% at baseline to 7.04% at endline, while those with CBFs moved from 0.00% to 1.76%. Here, SBF learners outperformed their CBF counterparts.

In summary, children taught by CBFs made the greatest gains in reducing the proportion of beginners and advancing in One-digit and Two-digit numeracy, suggesting stronger overall transitions into higher competency levels. Conversely, children taught by SBFs performed better in Subtraction and Division, reflecting relatively stronger mastery of more complex numeracy operations.

6. Monitoring & Evaluation

6.3 Process Monitoring

The implementation of FastTrack+ in the DRC was closely monitored through regular field visits, observation checklists, and weekly reports submitted by facilitators. Monitoring activities focused on tracking learner attendance, session delivery, and the use of instructional methodologies such as Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL), Mavis Talking Book and Pen, and mother tongue-based literacy strategies. Data from these monitoring exercises informed timely adjustments to session schedules and teaching approaches, ensuring that learning remained relevant and responsive to the needs of children across both Mugunga and Nyirangongo camps.

Fidelity of Implementation

Despite contextual adjustments, the program remained faithful to the FastTrack+ model. The core objectives of accelerating foundational literacy and numeracy acquisition were achieved through competency-based grouping of learners, structured learning sessions, and the integration of digital and mother tongue-based instruction. Adaptations, such as increasing the number of contact days from four to five per week and extending daily learning time to 2 hours 30 minutes, were made to compensate for the shortened implementation period. These adjustments strengthened fidelity by maintaining the intensity and rigor of the FastTrack+ approach, while tailoring it to the realities of the DRC context.

Even though the fragile security situation in parts of eastern DRC occasionally disrupted attendance, while the psychosocial realities of displacement affected children's concentration and consistency in learning, adaptive measures including increased learning days, localized facilitation strategies, and strengthened community engagement ensured continuity of program delivery.

7. KEY OUTCOMES & IMPACT

Percentage of Learners Showing Measurable Improvement in Literacy/Numeracy

The comparative analysis between baseline and endline (restricted to the 1,037 children consistently assessed) shows clear measurable improvement in both literacy and numeracy. Importantly, improvement is measured holistically, acknowledging not only children who reached full reading, writing, or arithmetic proficiency, but also those who progressed from lower to higher competency levels.
In literacy, the proportion of children at the beginner level reduced markedly (64.46% at baseline vs. 5.59% at endline, a much lower proportions), with more children moving into higher levels such as word, paragraph, and story reading.

In numeracy, the share of children at the beginner level (60.66% at baseline) dropped significantly to 11.50% at endline. At the same time, more learners demonstrated abilities in two-digit operations, subtraction, and division, reflecting progression into higher-level numeracy skills.

This shows that while the program's ultimate aim is to ensure all children can read, write, and perform basic arithmetic, the report also recognizes and values incremental growth across the learning continuum. Even where learners did not yet reach full proficiency, their movement from one competency level to the next represents meaningful and measurable learning progress.


FastTrack +
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ACCÉLÉRÉ


REAi


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TABLEAU DES NOMBRES

7. Key Outcomes & Impact

Facilitators Demonstrating Improved Teaching Skills – Community-Based vs. School-Based Facilitators

Program observations and outcome data suggest that both community-based and school-based facilitators enhanced their teaching skills during the program.

- Community-based facilitators showed adaptability and strong rapport with learners, especially in using interactive tools like the Talking Book and Pen, which helped overcome language and engagement barriers.
- School-based facilitators demonstrated improvement in structured lesson delivery and integration of numeracy and literacy tasks into classroom routines.

Together, these improvements contributed significantly to the observed learner progress, with community facilitators excelling in learner engagement and contextual relevance, while school-based facilitators strengthened formal instruction quality.

Uptake of Digital Talking Book and Pen

The digital Talking Book and Pen recorded strong uptake among learners, particularly at the lower levels of learning. Learners engaged actively with the tool during sessions, often showing enthusiasm to practice beyond scheduled learning times. This uptake demonstrates both accessibility and acceptability of the digital tool in the learning environment.

Effectiveness of Talking Book & Pen in Local Context

The tool proved effective in supporting foundational learning within the local context. It provided:

- Language-appropriate support, especially for children struggling at beginner level as it was contextualised to Swahili (local language) and French.

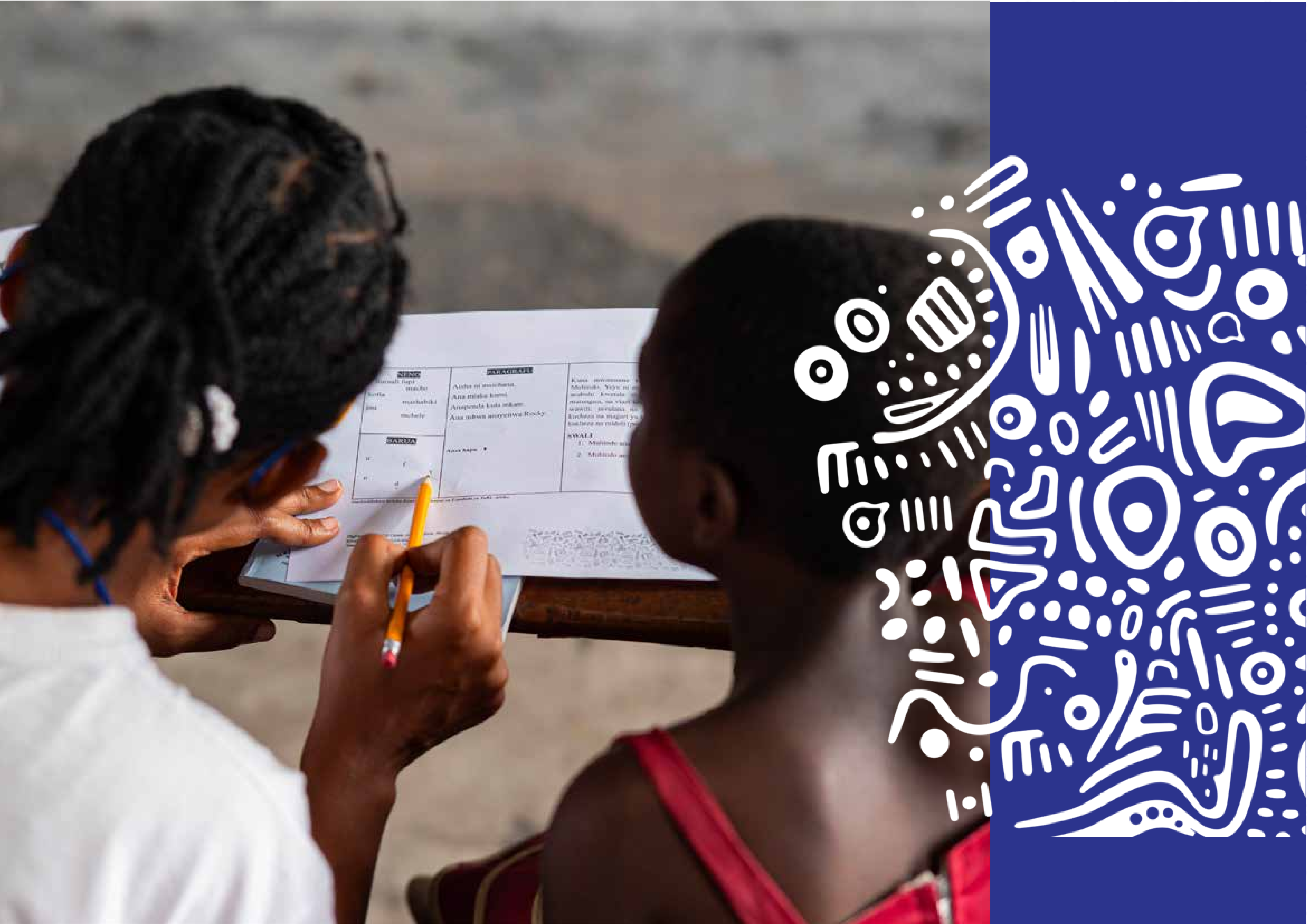
7. Key Outcomes & Impact

- The book and pen served as a consistent reinforcement of literacy and numeracy content, aligning with the ASER assessment domains as well as the national curriculum for foundational learning in DRC.
- Increased learner motivation and participation, particularly in community-based learning sessions. The Talking Book and Pen complemented facilitator-led instruction and enhanced children's exposure to practice opportunities outside traditional teaching.

Community/Parental Engagement Outcomes

Parental and community involvement played a significant role in sustaining learner participation. Evidence shows:

- Parents became more aware of their children's literacy and numeracy levels, partly due to one-on-one assessment feedback and facilitator engagement.
- Community-based sessions created opportunities for collective responsibility, strengthening support for attendance and learning continuity.
- Engagement around the Talking Book and Pen encouraged parents to view education as more interactive and relevant, increasing buy-in for program activities.



SUCCESS STORIES: FEEDBACK FROM LEARNERS AND FACILITATORS

FACILITATOR FEEDBACK:
Name: BONANE SALOMON
Location: Complexe Scolaire Tumaini

Comment: My name is Salomon, a teacher for more than 20 years at the TUMAINI school in NYIRAGONGO, an area affected by the crisis. I have seen many children drop out of school or come to school without knowing how to read or write properly. Despite the challenges, I never gave up hope.

One day, I had taken a training from PAWA on the Fastrack+ accelerated approach through numeracy and literacy. Thanks to this new method, I supervise a small group of learners at the beginner level in my class. At the beginning of the program, most of my children couldn't read or do simple addition. In two and a half months, thanks to playful exercises, stories told with passion and adapted methodologies, the majority of them can now identify letter and numbers.

LEARNER'S FEEDBACK:
Name: BANTU DUNIA EUGENE
Age: 10 years old
Location: SAFINA KIVU

Comment: My name is Eugène, I'm 10 years old. My father is a police officer, but when the crisis came, he had to flee for safety, and our lives turned upside down. My family was separated, and we children were left to fend for ourselves. We are 11 brothers and sisters.
To help my mother, I started doing a small business in the neighbourhood. School? That wasn't even a dream for me. I had never set foot in a classroom. I couldn't read, write, or even count properly.
Then one day, friends from the neighbourhood told me about a special program called Fast Track Plus. They explained it was a chance to learn the basics quickly, even for someone like me who had never been to school. Thanks to them, I joined the program. Today, I can read, write my name, solve calculations, and, most importantly, I can dream about my future. For the first time, I believe I can become someone tomorrow. Fast Track + gave me a second chance at life, and I am determined to make the most of it.

Success Stories: Feedback from learners and Facilitators

Name: NASHAGALE MUNGWERE
Age: 13 years Old
Location: SAFINA KIVU

Comment: I am a 13-year-old girl, born into a family of four children. I lost my father when I was young and now live with my paternal uncle.

Since I was little, I have always dreamed of going to school wearing a uniform, holding a notebook in my hands, and sitting in a classroom like the other children. But for me, that dream felt impossible. Because we had no money, I had never been able to attend school. Every day, I watched other kids walk off to class while I stayed behind to do household chores. Sometimes, I wondered if I would ever learn to read or even write my own name.

One day, I heard about the Fast Track+ program, and to my surprise, I was chosen to join. That was the happiest moment of my life!

Now, I can read, I can write, and for the first time, I believe in my future. Fast Track+ has not only given me the gift of education but also the courage to dream bigger than I ever thought possible.


USA


Apprendre le
ançais en Swahili
TAP ICI

8. CHALLENGES & MITIGATION

Technical & Usability Challenges

The challenges we faced with content adaptation particularly around language, culture, relevance, and cognitive levels in DRC was peculiar but eye-opening. After learning profiling, it was established that the learners face complex barriers that span language, culture, and cognitive levels which then requires careful attention in the design of educational content that was to be realigned using the content structure from the FastTrack materials we use in Nigeria.

Many of the learners accessed during the baseline demonstrated unexpected levels of variation in terms of literacy competencies and educational gaps, and in actual fact, a large proportion of them have limited reading or digital literacy skills, requiring content to be structured for various baseline abilities, with pictorial, symbolic, or audio supports, gradual scaffolding, and teacher mediation.

Based on the on-the-ground realities of the refugee learners, multilingual needs are urgent, as many camps host individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds, and content in official or host languages is often incomprehensible; this points to our focus on Congolese Swahili and French as promising. This is an advantage and not a challenge as it enables us to balance the content design with learning requirements as situated within the ideological tenets of our programming on the significance of translanguaging.

IPO Recruitment Challenge

Attracting and engaging the right local implementing partner organization (IPO) was challenging, as AREAi had never worked in the DRC before. After a rigorous screening process, we partnered with a grassroots-led NGO, PAWA, which had direct community connections and a proven track record in our thematic area. PAWA signed a contractual agreement with AREAi and served as the community engagement and implementing partner for FastTrack+.

8. Challenges & Mitigation

The synergistic collaboration is further aided by the prior relationship AREAi CEO shares with the PAWA CEO, who met as Chevening Scholars in the United Kingdom. While our search for an IPO is merit-based, we are keen on leveraging existing personal and professional relationships to enhance ease of expansion across our countries of interest.

Contextual Challenge

The ongoing conflict, displacement, and sudden relocation of internally displaced persons (IDPs) into host communities necessitated a change in the planned implementation sites. Originally, community mobilization and preparatory work had begun in IDP camps. However, when these sites were closed and populations were relocated to host communities, the project had to be restructured. This shift delayed the project start time and required re-engagement with new community stakeholders.

We adapted quickly by establishing partnerships with host community leaders and local organizations through our local implementing partner PAWA to re-initiate mobilization in the new locations. The team revised timelines, adjusted learning cluster sites, and engaged both host families and displaced families to ensure continuity of the intervention. This flexibility allowed the project to maintain momentum despite contextual disruptions.

Logistics Challenges

The facilitators' training coincided with heightened insecurity in Eastern DRC due to M23 rebel activities, which disrupted travel routes. There were no direct flights or visa approvals from the DRC Embassy for travel from Nigeria to Eastern DRC. To mitigate this, the team rerouted through Rwanda (visa-free for Africans) and entered DRC by road through border towns, securing visas on arrival in the rebel-controlled zone. While this ensured the training took place, it significantly increased transportation and accommodation costs due to security risks, inflated hotel prices, and feeding expenses. PAWA played a key role in ensuring safe transit and lodging for the team despite the volatile environment.

8. Challenges & Mitigation

Training Challenge

Facilitator training faced significant hurdles due to language barriers. The AREAi team had limited proficiency in the DRC's national languages (French and Swahili), while facilitators spoke multiple mother tongues. To address this, we recruited five Master Trainers proficient in French, Swahili, and English. These Master Trainers received intensive preparation from AREAi, after which they led the facilitator training sessions. The AREAi team provided supervision and technical guidance.

This approach improved communication, boosted facilitator confidence, and enabled meaningful engagement with the content. However, it also underscored the importance of investing in localized training structures from the outset.

Infrastructure Challenges

By design, FastTrack+ learning sessions are meant to take place both indoors and outdoors to accommodate play-based methods and the realities of IDP camp settings where permanent classrooms are scarce. However due to the relocation of IDPs to host communities and deployment period coinciding with the rainy season, outdoor learning became impractical. To prevent interruptions, AREAi had to rent classrooms in existing schools for after-school hours.

As a result, funds originally earmarked for teaching materials (e.g., whiteboards) were redirected to cover rental costs. While this adaptation ensured continuity of learning, it also highlighted the need for flexible budgeting in fragile contexts.


AREAI

9. LESSONS LEARNT

A. Curriculum adaptation insights

Adapting the FastTrack+ curriculum to the DRC context highlighted the central importance of language and cultural relevance in driving learning outcomes. While FastTrack+ provides a strong instructional foundation, its successful implementation required expert-led translation and contextual redesign. Language specialists played a critical role in ensuring that materials were not only accurately translated into French and Swahili, but also culturally attuned—integrating familiar names, local contexts, and relatable examples to make the content more meaningful for learners.

This adaptation went beyond direct translation; it demanded pedagogical alignment across multiple languages, enabling facilitators to confidently deliver sessions and learners to engage without the barrier of unfamiliar language. The bilingual model of instruction, using Mavis Talking Books and Pens, further supported comprehension and retention by allowing children to hear lessons in both their mother tongue and the national language. When combined with the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach, this ensured that children could progress based on their understanding rather than age or grade, creating a learning environment that was inclusive, engaging, and responsive to their realities.

Ultimately, the DRC experience reaffirmed that curriculum adaptation is not simply translation—it is a deliberate process of linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical tailoring, best achieved through collaboration with language experts and local educators from the outset.

B. Effectiveness of digital learning tools

With FastTrack+, 4 themes stood out in the effectiveness of the digital tool (Mavis talking pen) as obtained from teachers feedback and program observations - applicability for a low-resource setting, improved language support, effective teacher Enablement and greater learner engagement and learning motivation.

9. Lessons Learnt

The use of the Mavis Talking Pen as part of the intervention proved to be highly effective within the camps, particularly because it worked offline and without electricity—an essential feature in leveraging digital learning tools within low-resource environments. It enabled the possibility of a personalised learning experience for these children, who are not only able to follow instructions but could learn independently and more importantly, collaboratively within their clusters. Based the pen now has multilingual audio options, including Swahili and French, the content became more accessible and inclusive for the learners without multilinguistic competencies, while also bridging communication gaps among children from diverse backgrounds. As observed, the learners engaged enthusiastically with the pen, often describing it as a "personal tutor," and its novelty helped sustain their motivation while reducing classroom disruptions. Teachers, too, found it valuable, especially in typical overcrowded classrooms or learning spaces within refugee camps, as it complemented their work and enabled them to assign individualized practice without the burden of constant one-on-one supervision.

The results of the Mavis Talking Pen's DRC pilot program suggested possible improvements for further integration. At the end, teachers intoned the need for more localized content—stories rooted in familiar cultural settings, examples drawn from everyday camp life, and problem-solving exercises that reflected real challenges learners face. This, they argued, would bolster understanding and provide a stronger sense of identity and belonging which is paramount for children dealing with displacement. Another of the issues was the interaction of the children with the pen: the self-directed nature of the pen and audio prompts encouraged some children to explore more while others needed more help to bridge the audio and written text gaps. This showed the need for more professionally guided practice rather than complete self-direction. Lastly, much focus was needed to harness the enthusiasm the pen created, to the real teaching practices needed to use the pen as a reinforcing or expanding learning tool. Together, these lessons underscore that effectiveness in such fragile contexts depends as much on cultural relevance, guided instruction, and educator preparedness as on the technology itself.

Ensuring the sustainability of the Mavis Talking Pen within fragile contexts such as refugee camps requires a deliberate balance of financial, institutional, and pedagogical considerations. Central is the cost of ownership, which in this case, includes enabling long-term viability by ensuring lowering the cost per learner. In addition, there is need to build local capacity for coupling, routine care, troubleshooting, and maintenance.

9. Lessons Learnt

With local content development, it is important to drive partnership with teachers, language experts, and community leaders to co-create and continuously update materials. This does not only guarantees cultural resonance but also allows the illustrative materials, used alongside the pen, reflect the evolving realities of displaced populations. Sustainability also hinges on institutional integration. Aligning the talking pen/ book's use with national curricula and refugee education strategies, particularly those guided by UNHCR and host-country ministries will ensure that the intervention is not a parallel system, but rather a complementary resource embedded in formal education pathways.

Lastly, resilience on practice is crucial, as sustainability assumes the integration of various approaches. For instance, if we can combine the Talking books and Pen with peer tutoring, community facilitator-led instruction, scaffolded exercises and use of printed materials are able to maintain educational continuity when devices are not functioning or are in short supply.

C. Best practices in facilitator training

In the deployment of FastTrack+, we discovered that due to the language barrier and difficulties in understanding both the national and varying mother tongues, the training was not as effective as it could have been. To address this, we engaged Master Trainers with strong command of the national languages spoken across both countries. They were equipped through intensive preparation and then took on the role of training the remaining facilitators. While this approach significantly improved communication, boosted facilitator confidence, and ensured that participants could engage more meaningfully with the content, it also highlighted the importance of investing in localized training structures from the outset. Relying heavily on AREAi team created a degree of dependency and underscored the need for a wider pool of multilingual facilitators to strengthen resilience, ensure continuity, and enable smoother scale-up in similar multilingual contexts.

However, since several members of the programme team of our implementing partner, Pawa, speak multiple languages—particularly English, Swahili and French—this proved to be a valuable asset in bridging communication gaps and ensuring smoother delivery of training and support. Their multilingual capacity allowed them to interpret, clarify, and contextualize content for both facilitators and learners, thereby reducing misunderstandings and improving overall participation.

9. Lessons Learnt

At the same time, the reliance on this internal capacity also revealed the need for more structured language support mechanisms. While Pawa's team filled a critical gap, building a formal system for translation, content adaptation, and localized delivery would help reduce over-dependence on individuals and ensure that language inclusivity is consistently embedded in the program's design as it scales.

D. Beneficiary engagement strategies

For a program to succeed, beneficiary engagement must be intentional and continuous. In deploying our MVP prototype, FastTrack+, we learned that working through trusted local structures is critical. Partnering with an established community-based organization (PAWA)—already familiar to the target population and with a strong track record in education—helped build trust quickly. Community leaders, parents, and guardians were also actively engaged during the mobilization phase through town hall meetings and group discussions. This two-way process allowed us to gather insights on community preferences and needs, while at the same time sensitizing stakeholders to the goals and benefits of the program.

Another key lesson was the importance of contextualized facilitation. By engaging teachers and literate at-risk youth from within the host communities as facilitators, learners were supported by individuals who not only understood the local dynamics but could also build stronger rapport with the children. To reinforce this, we provided facilitators with teaching and learning materials, while ensuring that learners received writing materials and supplies to actively participate in sessions.

Accessibility and safety also proved essential for sustained engagement. Locating four learning centers within the communities—two in Mugunga and two in Nyirangongo—ensured that children did not need to travel long distances, minimizing risks and maximizing attendance.

Finally, the EdTech component—the Talking Books and Pens—was a game changer. This innovation not only enriched learning through bilingual reinforcement but also kept children consistently motivated and eager to attend. Learners associated each session with excitement and discovery, which significantly reduced absenteeism and dropout.

9. Lessons Learnt

Key Insight: Beneficiary engagement is strengthened when local trust networks, safe and accessible learning spaces, and engaging technology are combined. These elements worked together to create a supportive ecosystem where learners felt safe, motivated, and connected throughout the program.


PAWA

10. RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS: PATHWAYS TO STRENGTHENING FOUNDATIONAL LEARNING

A. Curriculum Refinement

Building on the field observations and implementation lessons from FastTrack+, the next phase of our scaling plan envisions a holistic approach that places learners, teachers, and communities at the center of our innovative approach to foundational skills development. First, we seek to focus on curriculum refinement. Over the next months, we will be working to refine our culturally resonant, contextually relevant materials to reflect the lived experiences, languages, and aspirations of children in refugee settings. By embedding familiar stories, everyday problem-solving exercises, and scaffolded learning pathways, we can nurture curiosity, agency, and a sense of belonging, ensuring that children not only acquire literacy and numeracy skills but also connect meaningfully with what they are learning which can be vital for immediate reintegration into the formal learning system or significant for their entrepreneurial aspirations. Central to this curriculum development efforts is conducting system-wide research on bilingual and translanguaging models to ensure inclusivity for diverse refugee backgrounds, supporting both foundational literacy and numeracy in mother tongues and local languages. This would aid our post-WISE experience for deepening expansion plans.

B. Technology Enhancement

With some limitations witnessed with our text-to-speech technology, it is glaring that there is a need for technology enhancement, but one that must be in alignment with our human-centered pedagogy. Fir` stly, our translation and encoding process for FastTrack+ established the need for our pens to be upgraded for better audio quality, multi-language support, and variability enablement. This ensures that they are more adaptable and interactive, offering multilingual content and enabling facilitators to track progress and provide tailored guidance per learner.However, while considering all these improvements, it is also key for us to take note of the ethical use of these digital tools, data privacy, and continuous iterative testing opportunities to address common technical challenges such as accent, dialect, and learning disabilities.

10. Recommendations and Next Steps: Pathways to Strengthening Foundational Learning

We are keen on introducing other tools within our implementation process that harnesses AI to personalize learning, track progress, and offer interactive feedback and thereby increasing student engagement and comprehension, which is critical in resource-constrained environments like refugee camps. These include tools built with or on AI/ML and natural language processing and are usable on basic feature phones or common media platforms like Whatsapp and Telegram. This incorporation does not only strengthened teacher support to drive outcomes, but also extend impact to learning contexts with minimal infrastructure while expanding the technology's usability for facilitators and learners. By combining resilience in design with pedagogical sophistication, these new tools can complement the creativity, empathy, and guidance that only teachers can provide.

C. Teacher Training

Beyond technical competence, it is desirous for our facilitators to be equipped in fostering inclusive and emotionally responsive learning spaces. A key way to enhance Teacher training for foundational learning remains to combine peer learning, coaching, and communities of practice which ensures that teachers can translate digital innovation into meaningful, measurable learning outcomes. When facilitators are confident, supported, and attuned to learners' needs, technology becomes a bridge rather than a barrier, amplifying human connection and learning impact. To this end, AREAi is expanding the scope of its FOUNDAMENTA program to support teachers, within or outside the scope of FastTrack/FastTrack+, with hands-on training in evidence-based approaches that enables them to deliver foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) outcomes at scale.

As a system-wide initiative aimed at facilitating knowledge development on innovative pedagogical practices for effective instructional delivery, this will also be augmented with technological tools that allows them to iteratively measure and report proficiencies through with an AI-enabled platform with intuitive features to monitor and manage intervention programs at scale.

10. Recommendations and Next Steps: Pathways to Strengthening Foundational Learning

We are developing “FastTest” using learning engineering methodology to deploy across all current and future sites, an end-to-end intelligent assessment tool to establish literacy and numeracy levels across a program lifecycle, enabling tailored interventions. They will also be supported with Afara.AI, another Whatsapp-enabled, AI-powered multilingual platform that will help them plan, deliver, and reflect on foundational learning instruction, offering tailored recommendations for daily instruction, and continuous support rooted in pedagogical best practices. This is geared at providing adequate pedagogical support and deepening localisation of the facilitation process regardless of the context. Subsequently, all our facilitators would also be trained to use these digital tools for real-time formative assessment and personalized instruction, thus providing the agency and opportunity for them to adapt curriculum to local realities.It is our belief that when our facilitators, who are at the centre of our learning design, are confident, supported, and attuned to learners’ needs, technology becomes a bridge rather than a barrier, amplifying technology becomes a bridge rather than a barrier, amplifying human connection and learning impact.

D. Multi-Regional Expansion and Content Adaptation

As FastTrack moves from its pilot deployment in the DRC refugee camps toward broader regional impact, our organisational focus on the next phase is to balance partner-led scalability and contextual adaptation with government adoption to ensure that FastTrack+ can deliver significant foundational learning gains within and for its targeted audience. From the foundation this pilot laid, our plan over the next 5 years is to leverage organisational partnerships to progressively mainstream FastTrack across East Africa, particularly in DRC, Tanzania, Uganda, and Rwanda, where established refugee operations and strong humanitarian ecosystems allow us to integrate FastTrack with existing livelihood and education programs for greater sustainability.

As we have realised, Scaling across East Africa requires a nuanced understanding of local educational landscapes, languages, and cultural norms. With the foundational structure of our literacy and numeracy intervention can remain consistent, we will leverage cultural, contextual and communal insights to ensure that the literacy learning materials themselves are adapted to local realities covering ideological narratives, practice activities, and illustrations that mirror the daily lives and cultural backgrounds of our learners.

10. Recommendations and Next Steps: Pathways to Strengthening Foundational Learning

When children can recognize their own world within the lessons, they are more likely to stay engaged, grasp concepts more deeply, and retain knowledge over time. Achieving this requires close collaboration with teachers, language experts, and community representatives to co-develop resources that are authentic, inclusive, and culturally grounded. While we have successfully achieved this within the DRC context, we also need to drive the same for the rest of the countries of focus within the region.

It is noteworthy that we require strategic partnerships for scale and our plan is to establish and build strong alliances with local youth-led NGOs, government ministries, and local education stakeholders to ensure we garner legitimacy, drive resource alignment, and coordinate effective responsiveness to refugee learning needs where it matters. As our experience in DRC demonstrates, these partnerships ensure we can embedding FastTrack within both formal and informal learning pathways, addressing policy and operational hurdles, and ensuring consistency with national standards and refugee education frameworks. Like our work with PAWA, partnering with similar organizations that already have a presence in refugee camps with running learning spaces can further speed up adoption, while also making use of their established systems, networks, and expertise to extend the program's reach and impact.

More importantly, we are committed to building strong structures for continuous capacity building as expansion will only be effective if it is anchored in strong facilitator technical competence, efficient local leadership, and reliable technology support in every new setting we seek to expand to. One key aspect of this process is to strengthened the effective deployment of blended approaches within our methodology, where digital tools are complemented by peer-to-peer learning, guided teaching, and print-based resources as this is especially important for maintaining learning momentum in the typical environments we are scaling into.

A critical insight from DRC is the need to anchor our scale plans in robust monitoring, research, and evaluation that allow us to capture insights across every phase of program design and deployment, measure learning outcomes intermittently to guide continuous improvement of both the technical, technological and pedagogical components of our intervention.

10. Recommendations and Next Steps: Pathways to Strengthening Foundational Learning

In lieu of this reality, we are institutionalising a monthly generation and synthesis of evidence for the efficacy of the FastTrack methodology as it pertains to its use by diverse groups of children in different contexts. With the comparative data obtained, we seek to build a robust and replicable evidence base that helps us Not only do we need to know periodically what works, for whom, in which circumstances, and how, to better iterative the varying mechanisms underpinning the intervention's effects towards maximising outcomes.

E. Policy/Advocacy Recommendations For Government & Donors

1. Teachers

For donors and governments committed to advancing foundational literacy and numeracy outcomes, it is crucial to strengthen teacher capacity and establish robust support systems that prioritize effective reading and arithmetic instruction. Evidence underscores the need to focus on both pre-service and in-service teacher training that centers on evidence-based reading methods, including phonics, comprehension, and fluency development. Such training ensures teachers are well-prepared to deliver instruction proven to elevate student literacy. Moving beyond one-off workshops that is common within government FLN initiatives, we recommend that implement sustained mentoring, peer support, and continuous professional learning opportunities such as coaching. These ongoing supports reinforce teachers' skills in real classroom contexts and foster a culture of collaborative growth and reflection. Special attention should also be given to rural and under-resourced areas and refugee contexts, where posting teachers is often challenging; incentives and structured support are essential to sustain teacher motivation and ensure consistent quality of FLN instruction.

2. Technology and Innovation

As interventions like FastTrack continues to demonstrate, Technology and innovation play a transformative role in advancing foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN), but to maximize their potential, donors and governments must embed these tools within policies that prioritize equity and access that includes marginalised populations such as internally displaced or refugee learners. This approach ensures that technological benefits reach all learners, especially those in under-resourced or remote areas.

10. Recommendations and Next Steps: Pathways to Strengthening Foundational Learning

It is imperative to encourage the adoption of digital or hybrid educational technologies while simultaneously safeguarding critical concerns such as data privacy, affordability, and infrastructure gaps including electricity, internet connectivity, and device availability.

To achieve sustainable impact, government must provide adequate logistical and technical support for pilot projects followed by systematic scale-up cycles and integration. In instances where innovations are initially tested on a small scale to ensure local relevance and effectiveness, only proven and successful ones must be embedded into national policies and curricula to drive widespread, Special attention must be paid to designing digital technologies that do not exacerbate existing inequities and well supported by digital public infrastructure within schools and communities.

This includes providing multilingual content, offline functionality, and intuitive user interfaces that accommodate diverse learning contexts and capabilities.

3. Policy, Research and Development

To achieve improved foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN), donors and governments must broaden policies beyond classroom instruction to incorporate vital non-classroom supports. Foundational literacy develops not only through schooling but also through factors such as health, nutrition, early childhood care, language exposure, and psychosocial support. These elements are especially critical for children living in crisis situations or remote, hard-to-reach areas. Policies should explicitly integrate these offerings into conventional and alternative learning systems to create an enabling environment for learning. More importantly as mirrored from our pedagogical approach, promoting mother tongue or first language instruction is a powerful strategy within multilingual communities to enhance comprehension and reduce barriers to learning. Such language-sensitive policies help ensure that literacy efforts are culturally responsive and accessible. This is currently not the case in many African countries and this must be addressed to close learning gaps.

10. Recommendations and Next Steps: Pathways to Strengthening Foundational Learning

Most importantly, robust support for research, innovation, and knowledge sharing is essential for to policy design and implementation as far as FLN is concerned. Donors and governments should fund comparative, context-sensitive research to identify what literacy interventions work best in diverse, under-resourced settings. Establishing international and regional platforms or communities of practice enables continuous sharing of methodologies, lessons learned, and adaptations.

Additionally, evaluating cost-effectiveness empowers governments to prioritize investments that maximize educational impact per dollar spent in resource-constrained environments.

11. Annexes

11. Annexes

1A. All Monitoring & Evaluation tools in English, Swahili and French where applicable

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/15ZTJEYXxwky5wHAV6G23961oPkONh7gs?usp=drive_link

- Facilitators training assessment tool
- Learning session monitoring tool
- Facilitators monthly review tool
- Beneficiaries enrolment tool
- Learning level Assessment tool
- Learners assessment data sheet
- Attendance and progressional sheet

B. Program and impementation materials in English translated to French and Swahili where applicable

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1RzXiurhCx4R_rmJliBGmRAZvIxsoX3qY?usp=drive_link

- Teaching and learning schedule
- Operational training Guide
- Facilitators Activity guide
- Literacy Curriculum for French as applicable in DRC and content for Talking Book
- Numeracy curriculum in French and English

C. FastTrack+ Instructional aid/tools in English and French

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/10TLIrB8vv-C5KArwRaZveAkSN55Uk7E_?usp=drive_link

2. Recording of Video Modules of facilitators guide to deploy FastTrack+ in French

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1oRNGZCOYQZLdUMNRRcLSC-jxyDOZ386X?usp=drive_link

3. Pictorial and Video Excerpts of implementation in the DRC.

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1biMLSnyz6bLOt0QYr0A1FkXoZ7JxoSVS?usp=sharing

FastTrack+ in Pictures


PAWA
FastTrack +
Education sans limite


TABLEAU DES NOMBRES


1.0 Les Salutation
Quand on rencontre des gens
Quand on prend congé de quelqu'un
D'autres Salutat


PAWA


6 800


LITTERATIE
Nous avons 26 lettres

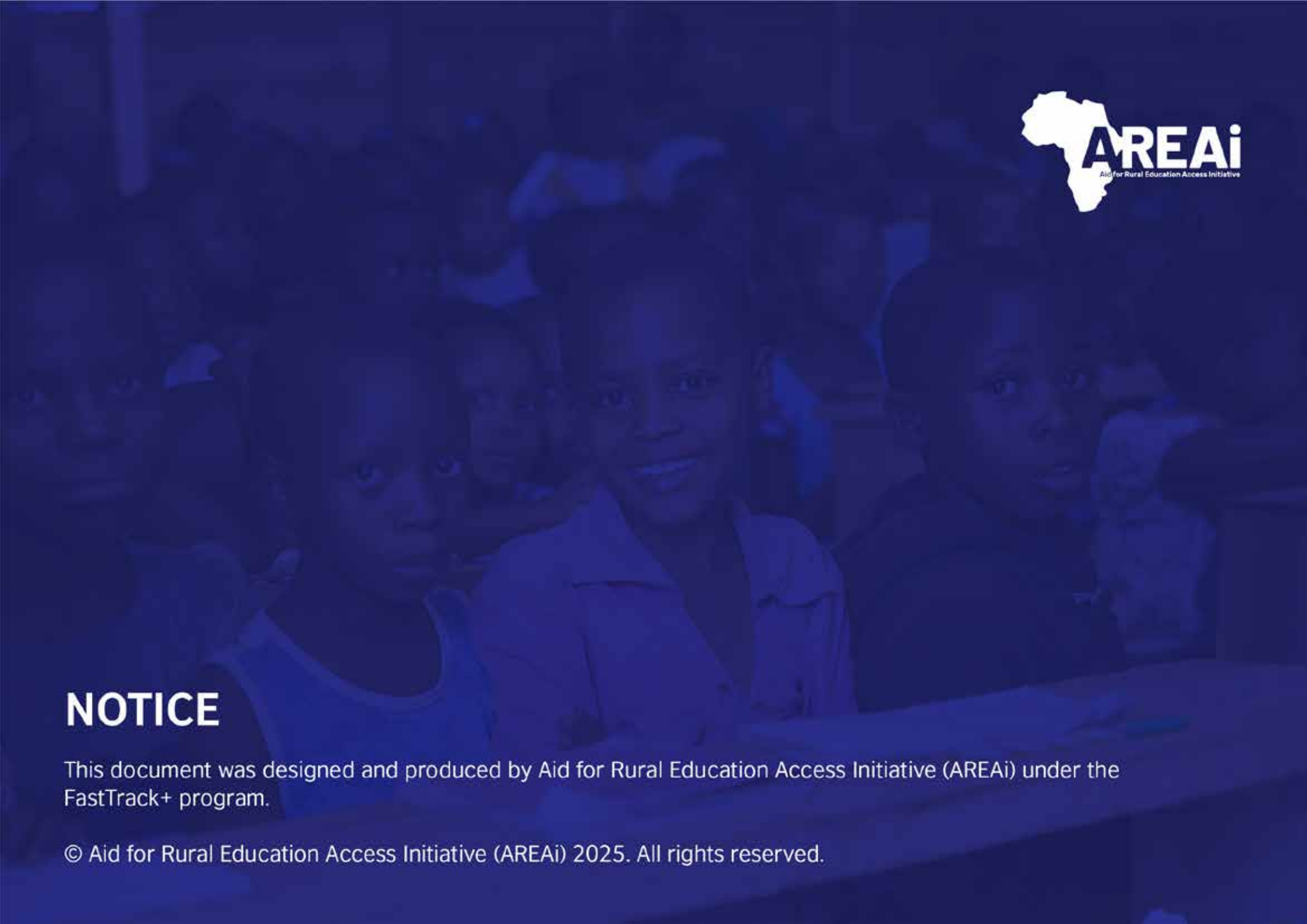

Apprendre le
Français en Swahili


Aroma of Life
FAMILY ACADEMY


République Démocratique du Congo
PAWA
FastTrack +
Education sans limite
AREAi
APPRENTISSAGE ACCÉLÉRÉ


PAWA
FastTrack +
Education sans limite
AREAi
APPRENTISSAGE ACCÉLÉRÉ


AREAi
PAWA
ART



NOTICE

This document was designed and produced by Aid for Rural Education Access Initiative (AREAi) under the FastTrack+ program.