My Story: Maasa

“Mmmm-aaaaa-sssss-aaaa,” says the girl, looking up at her teacher for approval.

“That’s correct, Maasa is your name,” says the teacher. “Now, how many sounds did you hear in your name?” Maasa puts three fingers in the air, pauses, then adds a fourth. “Yes!” encourages the teacher. “There are four separate sounds.”

Until recently, it was unlikely that a Malian first-grader like Maasa would have received such explicit instruction. Most Malian teachers tried to teach literacy by reading aloud and having students chant back the words in unison. The curriculum introduced the alphabet only in second grade. These methods were not getting results.

Maasa and her teacher are now supported by Road to Reading, a program that provides teachers with reading materials; a structured, research-based plan for teaching reading; and a daily Interactive Radio Instruction program to follow in class. New standards and training help teachers use the most effective techniques for literacy instruction. Road to Reading is supported by the United States Agency for International Development.

The effort is changing the way reading is taught, and demand for this kind of learning appears strong. During a recent teachers’ strike, a group of Maasa’s peers gathered and marched to their teacher’s door. “We want our radio program!” they told their startled instructor. “Please come to school.” She did, and the students got their lesson.

Impact

EDC’s holistic literacy programs help countries get students reading and writing.

- Ghana. Over three years, the number of children achieving national benchmarks for grade one literacy increased eightfold; the percentage of parents reading to children at home went from 42 to 70. EDC helped develop reading materials in 11 languages and train over 8,000 early primary teachers in literacy instruction.

- Indonesia. Grade three students supported by an EDC program performed consistently better in language than those not receiving support, scoring 10 percentage points higher on average.
EDC blends the explicit teaching of basic skills with chances for authentic reading and writing.

Approach

EDC’s holistic programs help countries get children reading, writing, and ready for more learning and for productive engagement with society.

Based on the latest research, EDC’s programs blend the explicit teaching of basic skills with opportunities to engage in authentic reading and writing, placing emphasis on the development of students’ oral skills and on community support for reading and writing.

To create a sustainable framework, EDC’s programs help countries develop national literacy standards as well as reliable instruments to measure progress against the standards. They help governments train teachers and principals, then provide them with essential ongoing support, often using technology to extend more and more effective assistance than would otherwise be feasible. The programs facilitate the production of the local, age-appropriate reading material crucial to developing independent literacy.

Basing all of these efforts on extensive, ongoing collaboration with governments and other stakeholders results in effective, comprehensive literacy programs customized to the context and sustainable for future generations.

Impact

- **Zambia.** Children in community schools supported by EDC did so well that the government adopted the program in formal schools. First-grade literacy scores were twice as high in participating schools as in non-participating schools.

- **Mali.** EDC helped Mali develop national reading and writing standards that now guide literacy instruction, plus classroom kits that help teachers achieve the standards. The program has trained staff in over 6,800 schools, out of an expected 10,000.

- **Philippines.** EDC helped create the Whole School Reading Program, including courses to improve teachers’ English literacy skills and instructional skills.