

SUPPORTING EARLY LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

ESTABLISHING A SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS APPROVAL COMMITTEE

In order for Rwandan pre-primary and lower primary pupils to learn to read, and develop habits of reading, **they need access to a variety of age-appropriate books.** Textbooks alone are not enough. This principle is enshrined in the new Learning and Teaching Materials Policy, which highlights the importance of **supplementary reading materials.** However, there is not yet any structure designed specifically for reviewing the supplementary learning materials that are appropriate for each level of schooling.

A distinct **Supplementary Materials Approval Committee** would ensure that reading and other learning materials are efficiently reviewed.

Save the Children proposes the formation of a distinct REB **Supplementary Materials Approval Committee**, separate from the current Textbook Approval Committee.

THE EVIDENCE FOR SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

Rwandan schools need to ensure that all Rwandan children learn how to read. The way that teachers teach reading is very important in reaching this goal. But children's fluency in reading can only be developed through daily exposure and regular access to **a variety of kinds of high-quality age-appropriate reading materials.** In the early years, this means ensuring that schools have high-quality collections of fiction and non-fiction children's books published in children's mother tongue.

In May 2015, the Rwanda Children's Book Initiative (RCBI), a DFID-supported IfE project, conducted an evaluation to measure the impact of providing supplementary reading materials in schools. Findings demonstrated that:

- Of the P2 and P3 classrooms observed, a significantly higher percentage of lessons included reading activities **when books were present in the classroom.**
- Children with classroom book collections also had greater access to reading materials and, as a result, **read more frequently both in school and at home.**
- **Students with classroom book collections had higher average reading and writing skill scores** than control school students as measured by a standardized reading assessment.

The researcher concluded that the presence of **ample non-textbook reading materials** is an essential factor in **supporting children's development of reading and writing skills.**

WHY DO WE NEED A SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS APPROVAL COMMITTEE?

Although there has been a significant increase in the number of approved Kinyarwanda children's books available for school purchasing, there is general acknowledgement that these numbers are still insufficient to support the implementation of school-based recreational reading programs. **More books need to be developed**—which means that REB will need to engage in an ongoing process of supplementary book review.

Currently, REB evaluates the quality of these supplementary books through the same structure that is used for evaluating textbooks—the Textbook Approval Committee (TAC). But **the two kinds of materials are not the same**. Reviewing supplementary reading materials requires different specialized knowledge, as detailed in Box 1.

REB needs a system that will allow for efficient review and approval of non-textbook publishing outputs. **Creating a distinct Supplementary Materials Approval Committee will allow for this**. This committee, **separate from the Textbook Approval Committee**, would focus on ensuring that non-textbook materials are appropriate for supplementary learning purposes, and are reviewed in a timely manner. This Committee's narrower mandate would also make it possible to re-review books after revisions have been made, ensuring the highest-quality standards for the final products.

Box 1: The process of reviewing children's books in Rwanda

To ensure the appropriateness of each storybook, an exhaustive list of criteria is used to evaluate each submission. As outlined in the quality standards criteria scoring sheet, all books are assessed on the basis of cultural relevance, age appropriateness, and the extent to which technical specifications are met. Since 2012, this process includes distinct technical specifications for 21 reading levels—from beginning, to early emergent, to emergent, to autonomous reader. This thorough evaluation process is essential to ensuring quality; however, the technical nature of the evaluation requires assessors to have specialized knowledge of children's literature and language. With few primary and pre-primary Kinyarwanda specialists within REB-CPMD, the TAC faces limitations in its ability to review and input on the ever-increasing number of children's books being developed.

HOW WILL IT WORK IN PRACTICE?

We recommend that a Supplementary Materials Approval Committee be established with a specific remit to ensure quality of approved materials as well as to ensure a streamlined, efficient evaluation process. This will support Rwanda's emergent publishing industry by providing **timely feedback and approval**. Such a system of regular feedback will encourage publishers to continuously develop new books throughout the course of the year, as well as ensure that the highest quality reading materials are continuously being availed to schools and children. In order to achieve this, the Supplementary Approval Committee should **meet on a quarterly basis**. If possible, developing partners and stakeholders such as Save the Children could sit on this committee and ensure that books have been reviewed thoroughly prior to the commencement of the formal evaluation. **Save the Children is also willing to support this process by offering Committee members an induction to this work.**