

REPORT FROM AID-INDIA, TAMILNADU

OCTOBER 2008 – MARCH 2009

Introduction

Last academic year (08-09), the Read India campaign was active in 10 districts in Tamilnadu. In April-May 2008, the summer camp was initiated in 15 districts of Tamilnadu. Post this, in June 2008, the Read India programs began in a total of 13 districts. In October 2008, we scaled up the campaign to include 2 more districts. So this academic year (April 08 to Mar 09), the Read India programs ran in 15 districts – out of which 7 districts were supported by The Childrens' Investment Funds Foundation (CIFF) and 8 districts were supported by PUSA and Hewlett. In March, Community campaign started in 2 districts.

Scale: Summary

Districts	Blocks	Schools/Villages	Children
8	93	6357	635490
2	21	2000	30594

Read India Campaign in Schools (Oct 08 to Mar 09)

Calendar of Activities in this academic year

Month	Activity
July – September 08	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Schools selected in all districts• Materials & training given• Baseline Evaluation• 1-hr classes in schools
October 08	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 3 more districts added – Namakkal, Theni, Pudukkottai• Classes continue• Monitoring of classes
November 08	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ASER 2008 survey training and coordination
December 08	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Volunteer training in community learning centres• Joint review mission of Read India States
January 09	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read India JRM report & meeting
February 09	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Classes continue in all schools• Focus shifts to reaching the last child (lagging children)
March 09	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ASER State Report Release• Community campaign begins in 2 districts• Final evaluation done in schools

Special Events and Highlights

Award for schoolteachers and volunteers

On 25th October 2008, in Tiruvannamalai district, 36 primary schoolteachers and 18 volunteers who made a positive impact on Tamil Reading abilities of children were felicitated with the "Eureka Education Award". The District Chief Education officer and block level officials participated in the function. Teachers said that this was an important initiative to recognize their work and asked for



"Art, Arattai, Aarpattam" - Story Telling Competition

To celebrate Children's Day, we organised an event called "Art, Arattai, Aarpattam" for our village libraries in partnership with another non-profit organization called Nalandaway. 20,000 children from village libraries across Tamil Nadu participated in this event.

Story telling and story writing competitions were held at different levels. Starting at the village, children moved up the block, district, and zonal levels to reach the state level competition. Education Govt officials, Local Panchayat leaders, teachers, headmasters and the community were involved in this event everywhere. The state level competition was held at Chennai in January and the best story tellers were awarded prizes and certificates.

Recognition from the Govt:

Although we had no formal agreement or support from the Govt. at the State level, we managed to cultivate a good rapport with all District level officials, block officers, HMs and teachers, who are willing to do the Read India program. Some instances of recognition, acceptance and ownership of the Reading Campaign:

In almost every block, AEEOs (Block level) have given permissions in all districts for our reading program

The categorization mechanism that we use to evaluate reading skills has now been introduced by the Govt. for Class 5

Following our example of starting story card libraries, the Govt. launched a library in every school program and has printed 40 of our story cards and distributed them to all primary schools

The Govt. in many districts has requested our team to conduct trainings for PTA teachers and DIET (Teacher training) students

Based on observation of our programs in some schools, the Pondichery Govt. is now asking us to implement the reading and math programs in their schools.

Mr. Devarajan, Elementary Education director visited our program in Cuddalore district and was surprised and pleased to see the improvements children had made. He called a meeting of district and block officials and discussed our efforts at that meeting.

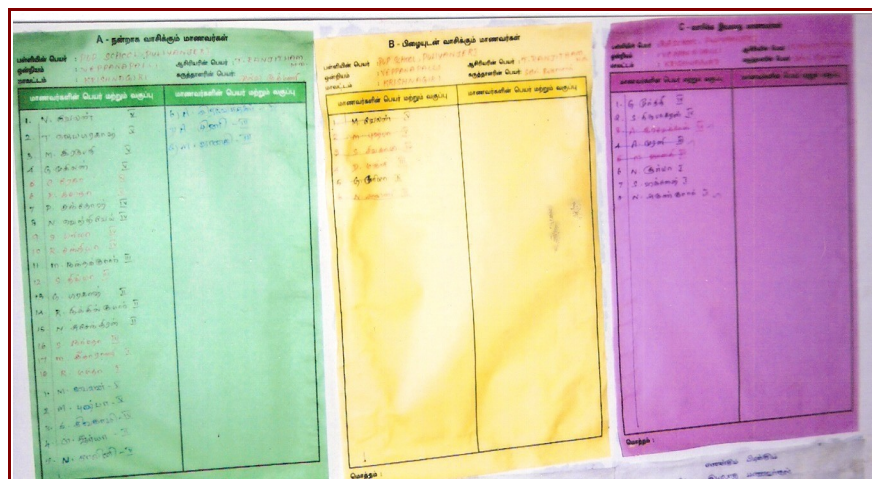
Important Feedback from Monitoring and Program Corrections

The program continuously get inputs from monitoring and field response and the team tweaks the program design based on this input. Many times, such response leads to changes in the materials or training or shifts in program focus.

Some important feedback and changes made:

1. Focus on one activity in a quarter for a group: Earlier, we introduced one activity a month for each reading level – none, letter, word, and paragraph. The problem in this was that every month, training had to be done for our block coordinators (BRPs) as well as for teachers. Also new materials had to be dispatched to all blocks each month. We found that a lot of time was spent in logistics and training effectiveness could not be checked or corrected. Hence we moved to a simple 1-activity for 3 months model this year.

2. Focus on Lagging Children: One of the key aspects of our program has been the focus on children who are lagging behind. But this year we were focusing so much on integrating our program with the ABL ladder that we suddenly realized that our usual focus on lagging children was severely diluted. Teachers were using our materials and conducting classes, but they were doing these as part of the entire class and much less focused on children who were lagging behind. To create a sense of urgency and focus, we have now come up with a set of traffic signal sheets – red, amber and green.


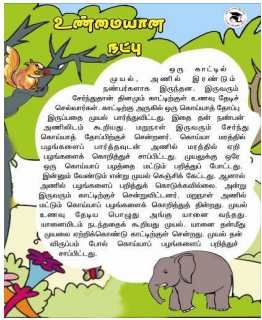


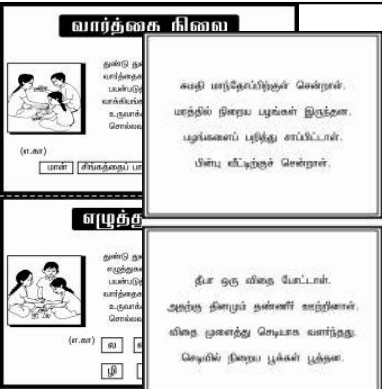
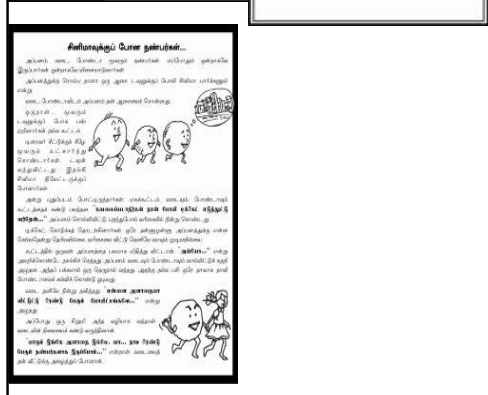
On the green sheet the teacher writes the names of children who are reading well. On the red sheet are names of children who cannot read and the amber sheet has the children who read with mistakes. The teacher (and our BRP) has to ensure that all children have moved into the green sheet. On every visit the BRP will ask the teacher about each child in the red and amber sheets and whether some of them have moved into the green sheet. This re-directs the teacher's attention to the children lagging behind. We found that this small change has helped us to focus on making accelerated improvements in reading levels a lot more.

High Strength Schools: Based on feedback from our field team we found that there are significant variations in school uptake based on school strength. Most of the primary schools in the state are small schools – with less than 60 children. With 2 teachers, these schools have 30 children/teacher and they are able to do most of our activities quite effectively with the children. But there are a small number of schools (about 5%) with much more than 150 children (several even with 400-500 children). In these schools the student-teacher ratio is invariably between than 45-65 or even greater. In these schools, the teacher finds is very difficult to run our classes (often they also do not run ABL efficiently either). Just providing materials and training here is not enough; these schools need additional teachers or at least supporters. To

address this gap, we got a part-time “reading and math” volunteer to take remedial classes for each school. This volunteer came in everyday and conducted the reading and math classes for the children who are lagging behind for 1 hour daily.

Materials given and Feedback from the field

Image	Materials	Purpose	Usage Feedback	Problems/ Modifications
	<p>"I Can Read" Certificate</p>	<p>An incentive for children to start reading and a tool for teachers to see the changes in children within a short time. Believing that all children will get these certificates increases the confidence in teachers and children that the goal is attainable. It focuses on the time-bound nature of the remedial classes and gives a sense of change and improvements made.</p>	<p>Teachers felt that this was a very good way to encourage children to start reading. Some children, who had not yet got certificates, replied confidently, when asked about it, that they would get it certainly by next month.</p>	<p>Some teachers gave the certificates to children individually, instead of appreciating them in front of the whole class. This defeated the purpose of using it as a tool to motivate others to want to get it as well. This was because they did not really understand its purpose. BRPs have now started talking to teachers on the use of these certificates.</p>
	<p>Story Poster</p>	<p>Material for Reading readiness - to make children want to learn to read.</p>	<p>Teachers liked the story posters because it elicited participation of all children. Teachers said that after they read the story, they would ask a good reader to read aloud in the same way. Soon, many children who could not even read letters also started raising their hands to come up and read the story.</p>	<p>Initially we had planned for the posters to be pasted on the wall. However, because ABL had painted blackboards on all the walls, teachers were not able to stick them on the wall. So we packaged the poster in a plastic sheet that could be hung at a child-appropriate height. Based on feedback to make the text simpler, we also simplified the words and reduced the length of the sentences in the story poster.</p>

		<p>missing in the ABL system, many children stagnate and learn very few letters by the end of the year. This per-child material is given to every child in Std 1-2 who cannot read words.</p> <p>Std 3-5: In Tamil, words that appear in sentences (with the tense) are much longer than just the 2-3 letter stand-alone words that children are used to reading. Given to every child who is at 'nothing', 'letter' and 'word' level, this material introduces longer words that appear in sentences, thus preparing children to move to 'paragraph' level</p>	<p>that appear in sentences increases their confidence to start reading paragraphs.</p>	
	<p>Teachers' Manual</p>	<p>A 2-page pamphlet explaining the word and letter level activity that the teacher needs to conduct.</p>	<p>None so far</p>	<p>We have noticed that a bulky manual never really gets used at the field level, and hence decided to give short notes on what exactly needs to be conducted in the immediate time frame.</p>
	<p>Class Level Assessment Material</p>	<p>Story, paragraph, word and letter sheets are provided to the teacher to conduct fortnightly assessments and move children into a different group if their reading levels have changed. These are used not as formal evaluation tools, but for a teacher level assessment in the classroom, so that changes can be spotted and children can work on the next level of activities. This assessment</p>	<p>Teachers said that children enjoyed this kind of 'activity-based-evaluation' where they were eager to get tested, without fear or diffidence.</p>	<p>We need to regularly give more material for these assessments so that random testing becomes a habit and practice for children and teachers.</p>

		is conducted like an event where each child moves from the 'story stall' to the 'para stall' to the 'word stall' and so on, trying to read the different materials offered to them at each.		
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Evaluation – Interim Results

We are in the process of consolidating our final evaluation results of the reading program in schools. Given below are the preliminary results from 4 districts.

INITIAL - 4 DISTRICTS							FINAL - 4 DISTRICTS						
Class	Nothin g	Lette r	Wor d	Par a	Stor y	Total	Clas s	Nothin g	Lette r	Wor d	Par a	Stor y	Total
1	77.0	20.7	1.8	0.3	0.1	100.0	1	39.6	40.4	18.6	1.4	0.0	100.0
2	23.7	36.8	33.1	5.5	0.9	100.0	2	11.1	24.8	48.8	13.1	2.2	100.0
3	8.4	20.3	39.5	23.9	7.8	100.0	3	3.9	13.7	32.6	34.7	15.0	100.0
4	4.4	10.4	30.2	33.1	21.9	100.0	4	1.3	5.3	19.6	33.1	40.7	100.0
5	2.4	4.8	19.1	33.8	39.9	100.0	5	0.7	2.9	11.3	23.4	61.7	100.0

The data is being checked and validated for the rest of the districts. Once we have the data consolidated for all districts, we will be able to plan our strategy for next year.