



Story Powered Schools: A South African Reading Revolution

Annual Report

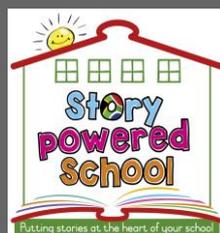
2017-18 year: 1 October 2017 to 30 September 2018

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Contract/Agreement Number: AID-674-F-16-00008
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1. ACTIVITY OVERVIEW/SUMMARY

Activity Name:	Story Powered Schools: A South African Reading Revolution
Activity Start Date and End Date:	Start date: 2 September 2016 End date: 1 September 2019
Name of Prime Implementing Partner:	Nal'ibali Trust
[Contract/Agreement] Number:	AID-674-F-16-00004
Names of Subcontractors/Subawardees:	N/A
Major Counterpart Organizations	N/A
Geographic Coverage (cities and or countries)	The Programme is implemented in South Africa in two provinces which are Eastern Cape (EC) and Kwazulu Natal (KZN). In the EC the project is implemented in Maluti, Mt Ayliff, Bizana and Lusikisiki districts. In KZN the project is implemented in Ilembe and Umgungundlovu districts.
Reporting Period:	1 October 2017 - 30 September 2018

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AU	AFRICAN UNION
COR	CONTRACTS OFFICER REPRESENTATIVE
DBE	DEPARTMENT OF BASIC EDUCATION
DEAR	DROP EVERYTHING AND READ
DQA	DATA QUALITY ASSURANCE
EC	EASTERN CAPE
ECD	EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT
HOD	HEAD OF DEPARTMENT
IT	INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES
KRA	KEY RESULTS AREA
KZN	KWAZULU-NATAL
LM	LITERACY MENTOR
M&E	MONITORING AND EVALUATION
MEL	MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING
MOU	MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING
NDBE	NATIONAL DEPARTMENT OF BASIC EDUCATION
NGO	NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATION
NORC	NORC is not an abbreviation. It is an independent research institution based at the University of Chicago, U.S.A.
ODK	OPEN DATA KIT
PM	PROJECT MANAGER
PSC	PROVINCIAL SUPPORT COORDINATOR
PRAESA	PROJECT FOR THE RESEARCH OF ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA
R&I	RESEARCH & INNOVATION
RCT	RANDOMISED CONTROLLED TRIAL
RSP	REDUCED SUPPORT PLAN
SPS	STORY POWERED SCHOOL
SS	STORY SPARKER
USAID	UNITED STATES AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
WRAD	WORLD READ ALOUD DAY

1.1 Introduction

This annual report will cover reporting periods five to eight (milestones 14 to 25), as guided by the project milestone plan and standard indicators. This covers the time frame from 1 October 2017 to 30 September 2018. It will cover activities, summary of key results, activity implementation progress, integration of cross cutting issues with USAID priorities, stakeholder participation and involvement, management and administrative issues, lessons learned, partnership management, financial management, challenges, success stories, and remaining activities before the end of the project.

1.2 Activity Description

Nal'ibali, the national reading-for-enjoyment campaign, has partnered with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to grow a culture of reading in two provinces: the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. The project, titled: 'Story Powered Schools (SPS): A South African Reading Revolution', focuses on nurturing a love of reading, in mother tongue and English, to spark children's potential and unlock their capacity to learn.

The campaign is based on a significant body of research that reinforces the link between reading for pleasure and improved education outcomes, and identifies the necessary conditions to support children's literacy development.¹ The degree to which children acquire language skills, and become motivated, habitual readers, is a strong predictor of future academic success, educational attainment, employment and income.² This is sorely needed in South Africa, where the majority of children are not reading well. 78% of Grade 4 learners cannot read for meaning in their mother tongue - they are unable to locate explicit information or reproduce information from a text.³

The SPS project seeks to grow a culture of reading in 720 rural schools over three years (240 schools per year) in the Eastern Cape (EC) and KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) provinces. This is achieved through the following activities at each school:

- **"Big Five" training**, for 5 educators
- **Community training**, for 10 community volunteers;
- Providing **5 hanging libraries** (once-off) and **15 editions/year of the bilingual Nal'ibali reading supplement** (for duration of project);
- Supporting schools to **register reading clubs**;
- **Weekly school visits** from Story Sparkers;
- Coordinating and supporting **events, campaigns and competitions**, which also engage the broader school community.
- Applying monitoring and evaluation processes across the project.

Through these, we expect each school to:

- Support its Story Sparker;
- Establish at least three **reading clubs**, which may be run by Nal'ibali mentors (Story Sparkers), teachers and/or community volunteers;
- Actively implement what it has learned in training – for example, by consistently observing the mandatory "Drop Everything and Read" (DEAR) **reading period**, and using classroom time to give children meaningful, personally satisfying opportunities to read, write, hear and tell stories;
- Organise and participate in **competitions**, including an annual **reading club showcase**, to motivate children and teachers;

¹ For example, Krashen, S. (2004). The power of reading: insights from the research. Libraries Unlimited: Westport; Evans, M.D.R. et al. (2010) Family scholarly culture and educational success: books and schooling in 27 nations. Research in Social Stratification and Mobility 28: 171-197; United Kingdom Department of Education (2012). Research evidence for reading for pleasure (available from www.gov.uk).

² NEEDU (2013). NEEDU reading study 2013: the state of reading in Grade 5 in selected rural primary schools. National Education Evaluation and Development Unit. Available at https://nicspaul.files.wordpress.com/2014/12/needu-reading-study-2013_28oct14.pdf.

³ Howie, S.J. et al (2017). PIRLS Literacy 2016: South African highlights. Pretoria: Centre for Evaluation and Assessment.

- Participate in **national Nal'ibali flagship events**, including World Read Aloud Day and the Story Bosso storytelling competition;
- Engage **parents and the community** around the importance of reading.

Ultimately, we expect to see the following outcomes:

- Print-rich environments - schools create the conditions that support children as readers;
- Children are more **motivated** to read;
- Children spend **more time reading, writing and sharing stories**;
- Children **take books and supplements home**, increasing availability of reading materials in the home;
- Children's reading, writing & storytelling **skills improve**;
- Teacher attitudes and actions support reading for enjoyment;
- **Parents and communities are involved** in reading activities and supporting reading culture at schools;
- Schools **take their own actions** to support literacy development.

The project is also part of a randomised controlled trial (RCT), which has been commissioned separately by USAID and is being conducted by NORC. The RCT is an impact evaluation, to assess the causal impact of the SPS programme on reading outcomes of primary school children. Two waves of baseline assessments and surveys were conducted in February/March 2017 and 2018 (see findings in Annexure 11: C). The first round of endline assessments and surveys took place in September/October 2018, and preliminary findings will be shared in 2019. Qualitative research at a sample of 20 schools is also being conducted in October/November 2018. A second endline wave will be conducted in September/October 2019, with the final evaluation complete in 2020. In addition to reading skills, the evaluation will examine teachers' attitudes towards reading, own reading behaviour and classroom practices; children's attitudes towards reading and reading behaviour; and access to and use of reading materials in schools and homes.

1.3 Summary of results to date

A table summarizing results to date for all project standard indicators is on the next page.

Table 1: PMP Indicator progress - USAID Standard Indicators and Project Custom Indicators

Strategic objective: Spark, sustain and embed a culture of reading in 720 South African primary schools over 3 years

Standard Indicator	Data Source	LOP (3yrs) Target	Baseline data		FY 2018		Quarterly Status – FY 2018				Annual Performance Achieved to Date (in %)	On Target Y/N	Comment(s)
			Year	Value	Annual Cumulative Planned target	Annual Cumulative Actual	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4			
3.2.1-Z03: Number of schools participating in the Story Powered Schools program	School registration form	720	2017	240	240	240	240	0	0	0	100%	Y	All the selected schools signed on and have participated in the programme.
3.2.1-Z04: Number of Reading Clubs registered	Reading Club Registration form	2 160	2017	732	720	680	0	0	566 ⁴	114	94%	N	680 reading clubs from 2018 schools registered this year. Another 122 reading clubs from 2017 schools also registered, for a total of 802 new reading clubs registered in 2018.
ES.1-10: Number of primary or secondary textbooks and other teaching and learning materials (TLM) provided with USG assistance	Material Inventory, Distribution Records	108 000 books	2017	36 575 books	36 000 books	36 000 books	0	0	36 000	0	100%	Y	In addition to 36 000 books, 1 304 441 copies of the Nal’ibali bilingual reading supplement were distributed during the reporting period. Each supplement has 3 stories per copy (3 913 323 stories distributed).
ES.1-13: Number of parent teacher associations (PTAs) or	Training Attendance	720 schools	2017	207 schools	240 schools	221 schools	0	0	221	0	92%	N	Nal’ibali reached 2360 people at 221 schools via community training.

community governance structures engaged in primary or secondary education supported with USG assistance	Register												
ES.1-5: Number of learners reached in reading programs at the primary level with USG assistance	Reading Club Registration form, Re-registration report	32 400	2017	18 394 ⁵	10800	16882	0	0	138 79	2692	151%	Y	The target of 10 800 is based on an anticipated 15 children per reading club. Many reading clubs are larger. 89 546 learners attend the 240 schools that are participating in the SPS pilot. Those who are not in reading clubs are reached indirectly.
ES.1-5a: Number of males	<i>Reading Club Registration form</i>	N/A	2017	8 711		7678			632 3				Unknown Sex 137
ES.1-5b: Number of females	<i>Reading Club Registration form</i>	N/A	2017	9 568		9067			743 6				

⁴ 532 reading clubs had registered at the time of the reading club milestone submission on 26 June 2018. An additional 34 clubs registered before the end of June, bringing the Q3 total to 566.

⁵ In our 2017 annual report, we reported 19 569 children in reading clubs. This was based on an independent data analysis report conducted by an economist, using multiple data sources to conduct analysis outside of Nal'ibali's database. Since that time, we have made further efforts to clean our data and consolidate it in one central database. Our current master list includes 18 394 children in SPS reading clubs registered in 2017.

ES.1-6: Number of primary or secondary school educators who complete professional development activities with USG assistance	Training attendance Register	3600	2017	702	1200	849	0	689	160	0	71%	N	Nal'ibali trained educators from a total of 849 primary or secondary school educators. This is due to the following challenges: some schools have a small number of teachers and principals were reluctant to send 5 teachers, there were transport issues due to long distances and trainings were affected by other DBE competing agendas. Please refer to page 19 of this report for detailed feedback on challenges and recommendations.
ES.1-6a: Number of males	Training attendance Register	N/A	2017	39	N/A		0	40	11	0			
ES.1-6b: Number of females	Training attendance Register	N/A	2017	645	N/A		0	649	149	0			

Table 1: Summary of USAID standard indicators and custom indicators

2. ACTIVITY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS

Implementation for the time period covered in this report ran from October 2017 to September 2018. However, the project implementation is also aligned to the school calendar cycle, which is January to December 2018.

This section on activity implementation progress will cover the standard indicators signed and agreed with the USG. A table summarising Standard Indicators and Project Custom Indicators is included in the previous section (1.3. Summary of Results).

Further narrative about implementation of all project milestones, including those that are not directly aligned to the standard indicators, is included in the section below (2.2 Implementation Status).

2.1 Progress narrative

This section discusses project progress in more detail, in relation to the key indicators above.

2.1.1. Indicator 3.2.1-Z03: Number of schools participating in the Story Powered Schools program

This is a custom indicator for the SPS project.

School selection

In late 2017, the project identified a second cohort of 240 schools for Year 2 of implementation. The schools were located in the same two provinces (KZN and EC), 120 schools per province, in a combination of new and existing districts.

Parameters: Our selection process was guided by the requirements of the randomised controlled trial (RCT) outlined in section 2.1. We needed to identify 240 schools in which to work, and the external evaluation team needed 192 treatment and 192 control schools in their sample for 2018.⁶ As such, we had to identify 384 prospective schools for the research team to randomise into treatment and control groups, and an additional 48 schools in which to work.

Integration of learning from 2017: We decided to group these into clusters of four schools. Each cluster would be supported by one Story Sparker. This was based on lessons from our 2017 school selection. In 2017, we grouped schools in clusters of 10, with two Story Sparkers per cluster (1 Story Sparker per 5 schools). We changed to clusters of four for two reasons. Firstly, we identified that Story Sparkers need one day per week to meet with one another and their Literacy Mentors, and set aside Friday as an administration day, to review plans, submit data, etc. Secondly, we saw that clusters of 10 were too geographically dispersed and were difficult for Story Sparkers to reach using public transportation.

Process: In 2017, the RCT research team clustered the schools, and many were difficult for Story Sparkers to reach, due to remote geography, rivers and lack of transport routes. This year, we sought to work more closely with the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to reduce these challenges. In some districts, district education officials identified and clustered schools, which were verified by the evaluation team to ensure the clusters were far enough apart to avoid contamination between treatment and control schools. This helped ensure the schools were close enough for a Story Sparker to support their four assigned schools, taking travel logistics into account. In other districts, education officials were slower to respond to our request, and the evaluation team created the clusters themselves, using government school databases

⁶The RCT treatment and control groups are spread over two years of implementation – i.e., they include schools in both the 2017 and 2018 intakes. The data is also being disaggregated by language in the analysis, as per USAID guidelines – as such, a large-enough sample is required in each language (isiXhosa and isiZulu). In Cohort 1, the researchers had 87 treatment and 87 control schools in their sample. Based on power calculations, an additional 192 treatment and 192 control schools, split evenly across the two provinces/languages, were required for 2018.

and mapping tools. In some instances, clusters were scattered and difficult to reach, and we had to hire a few part-time Story Sparkers to make sure we could serve every selected school.

Selection: Ultimately, we selected schools in the following areas:

- In KwaZulu-Natal, we avoided Ugu and Uthukela districts, where 2017 implementation took place, in order to avoid contamination of control schools. We moved into completely new districts, Ilembe (96 schools) and uMgungundlovu (24 schools). Ilembe was identified because it was large enough to provide 96 treatment and 96 control schools for the RCT randomisation, and it was within reasonable driving distance of the SPS project office. The remaining 24 schools in KZN were selected in uMgungundlovu district, as per request of the provincial education department. No control group was required in this district. The project team also believed it would be a useful learning experience to try implement the SPS model in more urban, less isolated and rural areas, to understand how response to the programme differs in different contexts.
- In the Eastern Cape, we identified two new districts: Lusikisiki (44 schools) and Mt Ayliff (28 schools). We also selected additional schools in Bizana (24 schools) and Maluti (24 schools), where 2017 implementation took place. We returned to Bizana and Maluti because Lusikisiki and Mt Ayliff were not large enough on their own to yield the required number of schools for the randomised controlled trial. The project team also judged that it was prudent to continue working in these districts, for reasons of logistics, cost-saving and support to implementation.

Introduction to schools: After school selection, briefing sessions were conducted in October 2017. The purpose of the briefings was to introduce the programme; to share how it will be rolled out; and most importantly, to get buy-in and support from treatment school principals. The sessions were facilitated by SPS staff in all six districts where 2018 schools were selected. The selection of schools was successful, in that all 240 schools selected were recruited to join the 2018 programme. All school principals and some heads of department (HoDs) were invited to attend the briefing sessions. For support and emphasis and to also demonstrate collaboration and acceptance of the programme, district DBE officials also attended the briefing sessions; this added significant value. During the deliberation and presentations, the DBE officials emphasized how the programme is linked to the curriculum and that it is not a standalone program.

As it was envisaged, the two processes outlined above prepared a fertile ground for the SPS team to implement the 2018 programme. Challenges encountered and lessons learned, relating to the inclusion of small schools and competing programmes, are discussed in section 6 below.

2.1.2. Indicator 3.2.1-Z04: number of reading clubs registered

This is a custom indicator for the SPS project. A reading club is a safe, informal space where children have fun and meaningful opportunities to engage with books and stories. Reading clubs are a key part of the SPS project strategy to influence the culture of reading for enjoyment at schools. Story Sparkers, Big Five educators and community members supported the process of reading club registration.

The project target was to register 720 reading clubs at 2018 schools (3 per school at 240 schools). At the time of the reading club milestone submission in June, 532 reading clubs had registered (74% of target). An additional 148 clubs registered between July and October. As of 30 October 2018, we had registered 680 reading clubs at our 2018 schools (94% of the target).

The Eastern Cape registered a total of 352 reading clubs (98% of target), while KwaZulu-Natal registered a total of 328 reading clubs (91% of target). Mount Ayliff in the Eastern Cape is the only district that managed to reach the set target, recording an overachievement of 115%. Next runner ups were Bizana district at 111% and Umgungundlovu at 106%. The remaining three districts' achievement ranges from 83% to 92% (Lusikisiki 83%, Maluti 92% and Ilembe 87%).

We also registered an additional 122 new reading clubs at 2017 project schools, for a total of 802 reading clubs. This is further discussed in section 4.2 (sustainability mechanisms).

Registration figures per district for 2018 schools are shown in the table below.

Number of Reading Clubs Registered for 2018 Cohort

District	Registered reading clubs (2018 cohort)			Schools with registered reading clubs		
	Target	Actual	% achievement	Target	Actual	% achievement
Bizana	72	80	111%	24	24	100%
Lusikisiki	132	109	83%	44	42	95%
Maluti	72	66	92%	24	24	100%
Mt Ayliff	84	97	115%	28	28	100%
EC total	360	352	98%	120	118	98%
Ilembe	288	252	87%	96	90	94%
Umgungundlovu	72	76	106%	24	24	100
KZN total	360	328	91%	120	114	95%
2018 Project total	720	680	94%	240	232	97%
2017 comparison	720	732	101%	240	200	83%

Table 2: Number of Reading Clubs registered for Cohort 2018

Although we fell just short of our target, we are very pleased with performance overall. In particular, more schools have successfully registered reading clubs this year than last year: in 2017, 40 schools (17%) did not register reading clubs, while this year only eight schools (3%) have not registered reading clubs.

A brief analysis of reading club trends shows the following:

- **Reading club size:** Just over half of reading clubs (51%) have between 21 and 30 children. Another 240 clubs (35%) have 20 or fewer. Only 94 clubs (14%) have more than 30 children, and only 8 clubs (1%) have more than 50. This is positive, in that reading clubs should not be too large for children to have a nurturing relationship with the club leader and receive one-on-one attention. See chart 1 below.

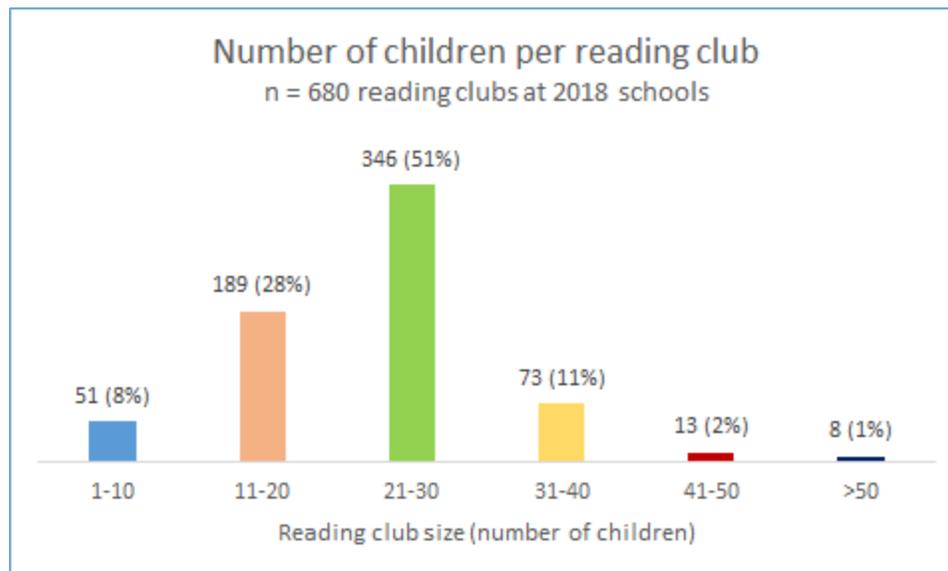


Chart 1: Average number of children participating in the RC

- **Number of volunteers:** Volunteers are adults who support the reading club leaders in running the clubs. Just over half of reading clubs (349 / 51%) do not have any volunteers. 144 clubs (22%) have one or two volunteers, and 161 clubs (24%) have three to five volunteers. Four outliers report 11 or 12 volunteers - an outlier we should investigate. Six clubs have 50 children or more per adult.
- **Who runs reading clubs?** The 680 registered reading clubs are run by 519 different individuals. 433 reading clubs (64%) are run by 393 individual educators; some educators run more than one club. 254 reading clubs (37%) are run by 48 different Story Sparkers.
- **When do reading clubs meet?** The vast majority of reading clubs (507 / 75%) meet during the school day. Another 107 (16%) meet after school and 50 (7%) meet before school. A few (14 / 2%) meet on weekends.
- **Where do reading clubs meet?** 3 in 5 reading clubs (401 / 59%) meet in school classrooms. 129 (19%) use school libraries and 116 (17%) meet elsewhere in the school. A few (20) report that they meet at homes; the majority of these are to be Story Sparkers' own reading clubs. See chart 2 below.

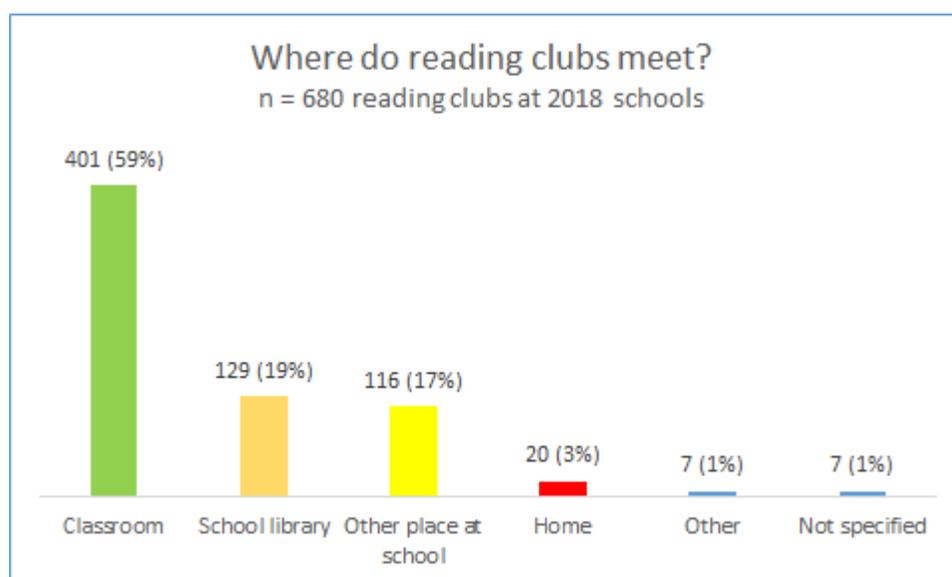


Chart 2: Spaces where reading clubs meet

- **How often do reading clubs meet?** Once a week is most popular: 349 clubs (51%) meet weekly. Another third (212 / 31%) meet 2-3 times a week and 73 (11%) meet every day. This means that 93% of reading clubs are meeting once a week or more often. This is a positive outcome, in that Nal’ibali seeks to promote formation of a regular reading habit at schools. See chart 3 below.

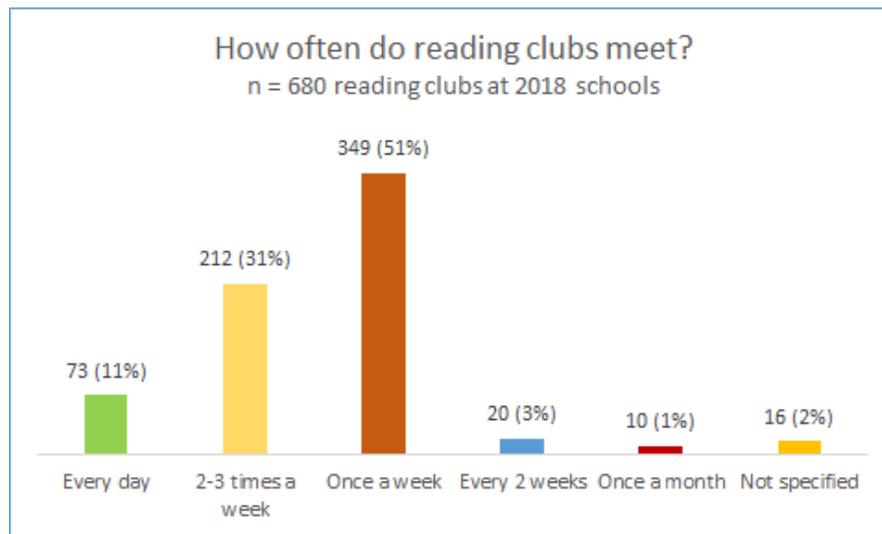


Chart 3: Times that reading clubs meet

2.1.3. Indicator ES.1-10: Number of primary or secondary textbooks and other teaching and learning materials (TLM) provided with USG assistance

In the SPS project, this USG standard indicator and established targets refer to the number of children’s books distributed to schools. The project also distributes bilingual newspaper reading supplements. Both are discussed in this section.

To support the project objectives, children need high-quality, high-interest and age-appropriate materials in their mother tongue. Nal’ibali distributes two main types of reading materials: children’s books and Nal’ibali bilingual reading supplements.

- **Books (target 36 000 books distributed):** During the reporting period, the project distributed 1 200 hanging libraries stocked with 36 000 high-quality picture books. Each school received five hanging libraries – one per grade for Grades R-4 – stocked with 30 books per library (150 books per school). Titles were carefully selected by our content partner, PRAESA (Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa), to include an age-appropriate and exciting mix of picture books, in isiXhosa or isiZulu (depending on the province) and English.

The books are meant to be used by children during class, the drop everything and read (DEAR) periods, and at reading clubs. Nal’ibali also encourages schools to let children borrow books to take home and provides checkout sheets to model how this can be tracked.

- **Supplements:** Though not reported against a target, the Nal’ibali bilingual reading-for-enjoyment supplement is also a significant part of the project. The supplement is a 16-page, full-colour resource for teachers, reading club leaders and children. Each edition includes 3 bilingual stories (2 can be cut and folded to make a small book), activity suggestions for teachers and reading club leaders, motivational messaging and information about reading, interviews and news from the Nal’ibali network, and games and activities for children. It is published every two weeks during the school term (15 times per year). The supplement also features “Story Stars” - these are individuals in the Nal’ibali network who are showcased in order to share inspiring stories of everyday heroes.

Nal'ibali distributed 1 304 441 supplements (Editions 130 to 145) to Story Powered Schools during the reporting period.⁷ Supplements were distributed both to Cohort 2 (2018) schools and to Cohort 1 (2017) schools, to help 2017 schools sustain the culture of reading after weekly Story Sparker visits had ceased. A breakdown by language and cohort is shown in the table below.

Supplements Distribution Table

Cohort	# of editions distributed	# of isiXhosa supplements	# of isiZulu supplements	# of Sesotho supplements	Total supplements distributed
Cohort 1 (2017 schools)	16 editions (Oct '17 - Sep '18)	359 455	490 231	43 860	893 546
Cohort 2 (2018 schools)	9 editions (Apr '18 - Sep '18) ⁸	187 425	223 470	0	410 895
All schools		546 880 (42% of total)	713 701 (55% of total)	43 860 (3% of total)	1 304 441 copies (3 913 323 stories)
2017 comparison (2017 schools)	11 editions (Jan '17 - Sep '17)	254 540	345 855	30 800	631 195 copies (1 893 585 stories)

Table 3: Number of supplements distributed in schools

In the first year of implementation (October 2016 to September 2017), Nal'ibali distributed a total of 632 745 supplements (11 issues). Thus, supplement distribution more than doubled (a 106% increase) in the 2017-2018 annual reporting period.

⁷ Both project cohorts (2017 and 2018 schools) receive supplements: 2017 schools continued to receive the supplement throughout the 2018 school year, and 2018 schools began receiving supplements in April.

⁸ In 2017, supplements were distributed to Cohort 1 schools starting in January. However, this may have contaminated the RCT baseline survey results and in retrospect was a mistake, caused by insufficient communication between the external evaluation team and the project team about the evaluation requirements. We also received some feedback from LMs that because supplements were distributed before Story Sparkers started visiting schools or teachers received training, in some instances they sat unused at first. In 2018, we only distributed supplements to Cohort 2 schools starting in April, after the baseline was done, Story Sparker visits were happening regularly, and Big Five training had taken place.

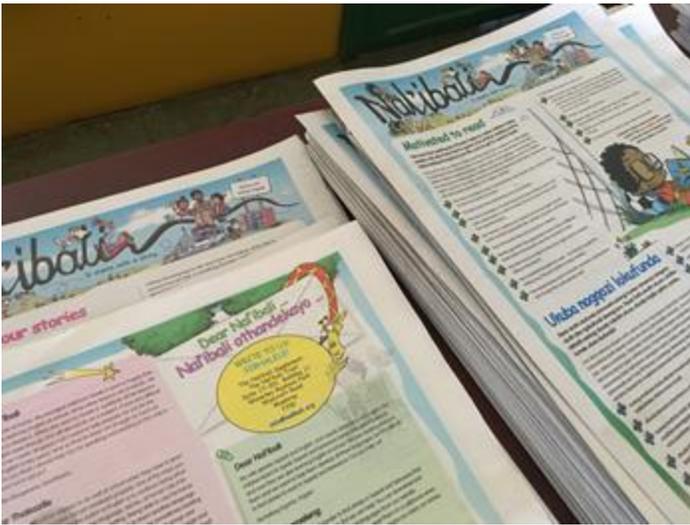


Figure 1: Copy of a Supplement



Figure 2: Copy of a cut-out-and-keep storybook

2.1.4. Indicator ES.1-13: Number of parent teacher associations (PTAs) or community governance structures engaged in primary or secondary education supported with USG assistance (community training)

In the SPS project, this USG standard indicator refers to the number of schools at which community training was run. This section covers both the number of schools reached and the number of people trained. It also looks at trends in participants' gender and profile.

Objectives and curriculum: Community training is a project strategy that seeks to strengthen the link between schools and communities, and involve caregivers and community members in supporting a culture of reading in schools. It is a day-long training. Its curriculum covers topics including the benefits of storytelling, what motivates children to read and write, and how community members can play a role in children's literacy development. It also introduces reading clubs, to ensure community members know what a reading club is and how to get involved in one. Community members are also invited to sign up as FUNda Leaders, which makes them part of the broader national Nal'ibali network of literacy activists. FUNda Leaders receive SMSes and (if applicable) emails with motivation, tips and links to stories.

Recruitment: In 2017, the project asked schools to help identify community members to be trained. Many schools decided to send School Governing Body (SGB) members, and some simply sent whoever was available - whether or not they were interested in Nal'ibali. In 2018, the project adopted a strategy to specifically recruit from social structures that focus on child care and development, targeting parents, volunteers, early childhood development (ECD) practitioners, and some educators who were not available to attend the Big Five⁹ training when it was hosted. Story Sparkers, Big Five educators and Literacy Mentors mobilized communities and identified 12 community members to be trained. This happened through community training briefing sessions.

Implementation: Community trainings took place between 28 May and 14 June 2018. Schools offered schools halls for trainings at no cost. Community trainings were facilitated by Story Sparkers. To prepare for these trainings, Story Sparkers attended a two-day refresher training, where the Nal'ibali training team identified and signed off Story Sparkers who were ready to train independently. For those who were not yet ready, Story Sparkers co-facilitated with Literacy Mentors.

⁹ 'Big Five' educators are the five teachers from schools who have been trained by Nal'ibali and are responsible for the roll out of the programme at their schools.

For the period under review, the project conducted **221 training events** that reached participants from a total of **221 schools (92% of 240-school target)**. Bizana and Maluti districts did particularly well, where 96% of schools (all but one in each district) hosted community trainings. Overall, these trainings reached **2 361 participants¹⁰ (82% of the 2 880-person target)**, an average of 10.7 people per school reached. This is an improvement over 2017, when the project conducted community training at 207 schools (a 7% increase in 2018) and trained 2 047 people an (18% increase in 2018).

Progress against the target of 240 schools trained and 2 880 people trained (12 people per school), is shown in the table below.

Number of Community Trainings Table

District	# of schools attended community training			# of people trained		
	Target	Actual	% achievement	Target	Actual	% achievement
Bizana	24	23	96%	288	252	83%
Lusikisiki	44	40	89%	528	397	75%
Maluti	24	23	96%	288	265	92%
Mt Ayliff	28	24	82%	336	241	72%
EC total	120	110	92%	1 440	1155	80%
Ilembe	96	89	92%	1 152	1002	87%
Umgungundlovu	24	22	92%	288	204	71%
KZN total	120	111	93%	1 440	1206	84%
2018 Project total	240	221	92%	2 880 (12 per school)	2 361	82%
2017 comparison	240	207	86%	2 400 (10 per school) ¹¹	2 047	85% (of lower target)

Table 4: Number of schools hosted community trainings

Gender of participants: During the trainings, **90%** of participants were female (2 126 people) and **10%** were male (235 people). It is interesting though unsurprising to note that although this project was promoted amongst all members of community, most participants are female.

Profile of participants: Of 2 361 people trained, 54% were volunteers, 38% were parents, 4% were educators, 2% were Early Childhood Development (ECD) practitioners, and 2% identified as “other”.

¹⁰ In the June milestone report, we reported 2370 participants. That has decreased to 2361 (a variance of 9 participants), due to duplicates identified during monthly data cleaning.

¹¹ In 2017, in addition to these 10 community members, two additional community members were invited to Big Five training alongside three teachers. In 2018, the project separated out educator training and community member training.

While most schools were able to host a training, there is a variance of **19 schools** and **519 participants** that did not receive training. The challenges that led to the shortfall, responses and recommendations include:

- **Insufficient planning time:** The pace and tight time frames of the milestone plan do not allow for sufficient planning. In particular, more engagement is needed to onboard and recruit community members, who are not within a specific institutional setting like a school. Recommendation: This is difficult to shift in 2019, but should be addressed if funding for the project is extended.
- **Poor attendance:** Trainings conducted towards end the month were affected by poor attendance. Recommendation: in 2019, the project can be more strategic in identifying training dates. Month-end dates and the first of the month should be avoided.
- **Drop out rate:** 99% of the project is implemented in rural areas. People in some of these areas are very old, and youth migrate to urban areas for work purposes. Recommendation: Elderly people have a good sense of telling stories in traditional way. It is vital that in 2019 the project start community conversations around storytelling, language and literacy. Story Sparkers can be trained to facilitate community conversations in their specific communities.
- **Youth unemployment:** The majority of people in the rural areas are unemployed. Young people in particular are only interested in programmes that will offer employment opportunities. Response: This dynamic is present across similar development initiatives, particularly in rural areas, and is not unique to the project; it is a matter that is beyond project control. Nal'ibali must continue to take care to clearly communicate that it does not pay volunteers to run reading clubs or assist at schools.
- **Population size:** Some villages are small in nature, which makes it difficult to find non-governmental organizations (NGOs), retired teachers and professionals, early childhood development centers and civil society movements, which are preferred targets for recruiting community members. The team **suspended** scheduled training for one week to regroup and re-strategise as to who to recruit for the planned trainings. Recommendation: In 2019, community training must not be a once-off activity, it should be an ongoing process. The first phase can take place in order to meet funders' requirements (milestone submission), but ongoing community capacity building and dialogues should take place, led by Story Sparkers.
- **Scheduling of trainings:** Participants often arrived very late – an hour later than the scheduled starting time. This resulted in the early arriving participants losing patience and wanting to leave instead of waiting. Some participants also wanted to leave earlier than the scheduled time, which put pressure on the facilitator to rush the programme to accommodate his/her participants. Recommendation: Recruit more than 12 community members per training, to reduce the dropout rate, mobilize and sensitize community members to be trained, and agree on a specific time for training to start.

Despite challenges, we saw significantly greater participation and reach in 2018 than in 2017: an additional 14 schools (7% of schools) and 315 people (a 15% increase) attended compared to last year.

2.1.5. Indicator ES.1-5: Number of learners reached in reading programmes at the primary level with USG assistance (disaggregated by sex)

In the SPS project, this USG standard indicator and the associated target refers to the number of children enrolled in reading clubs (direct beneficiaries). This section covers the number of children enrolled in reading clubs, and general trends in enrolment and reading club profile. It also addresses the number of children reached via other project activities, and the number of indirect beneficiaries (all children enrolled at project schools).

In May-June, the project team supported schools to register reading clubs. The involvement of Big Five members and community members was important in this process. The project target was to register 10 800 children in 720 reading clubs (3 clubs per school, 15 children per club).

As of 30 October, 16 882 children were registered in 680 reading clubs, an achievement of 154% against the target. This is an average of 24.8 children per reading club. This includes 21 children with a disability.¹²

Reading club enrolment per district and province, against targets, is shown in the table below.

Number of Children Reached Through Reading Clubs Table

District	# of children attending reading clubs			# of reading clubs			Average # of children per reading club
	Target	Actual	% achievement	Target	Actual	% achievement	
Bizana	1 080	2 251	208%	72	80	111%	28
Lusikisiki	1 980	2 642	133%	132	109	83%	24
Maluti	1 080	1 221	113%	72	66	92%	19
Mt Ayliff	1 260	2 787	221%	84	97	115%	29
EC total	5 400	8 901	165%	360	352	98%	25
Ilembe	4 320	5 840	135%	288	252	88%	23
Umgungundlovu	1 080	2 141	198%	72	76	106%	28
KZN total	5 400	7981	148%	360	328	91%	24
2018 Project total	10 800	16 882	156%	720	680	94%	25
2017 comparison	10 800	18 394	170%	720	732 ¹³	101%	25

Table 5: Number of children reached through Reading Clubs.

Analysis by province: The EC province registered 8 901 children (4 119 boys and 4 735 girls), whereas KZN registered 7 981 children (3 559 boys and 4 332 girls) total number of children in reading clubs. The below chart shows that when it comes to children, there is no significant variance between boys' and girls' participation, with slightly higher female participation rates. This suggests that the programme is promoting gender equity for children. See chart 4 below

¹² The First Rand Empowerment Foundation (FREF), another Nal'ibali funder, is committed to mainstreaming disability in the projects it supports. Nal'ibali has made this a standard indicator across the organisation.

¹³ In our 2017 annual report, we reported 799 reading clubs. This was based on an independent data analysis report conducted by an economist, using multiple data sources to conduct analysis outside of Nal'ibali's database. Since that time, we have made further efforts to clean our data and consolidate it in one central database. Our current master list includes 732 SPS reading clubs registered in 2017.

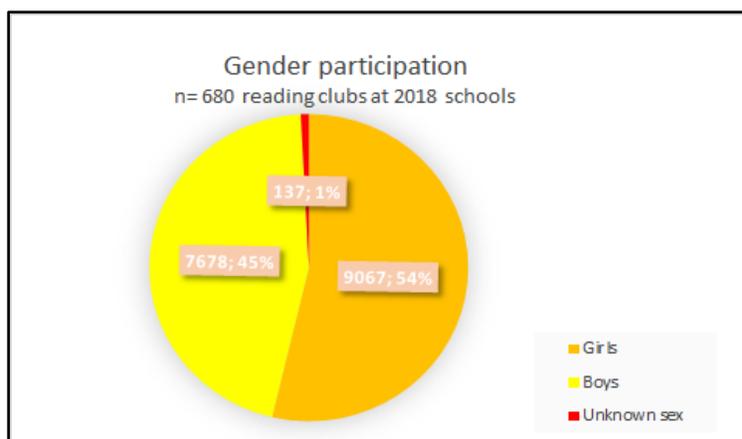


Chart 4: Number of children disaggregated by sex

Below these figures are disaggregated by age groups and sex. Although the project targets children in grades R to 4, reading clubs at some schools also welcome older children who are interested in taking part, or establish reading clubs for older learners. This may help explain the 140 children ages 16+ who are part of SPS reading clubs. See chart 5 below

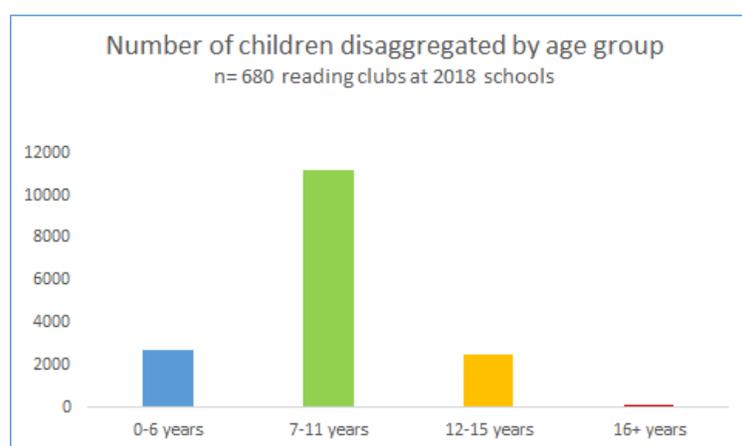


Chart 5: Number of children in the RCs by age group

In addition to reading club enrolment, children also participate in the project in a number of different ways, such as attending events; attending a holiday programme; or whole-school activities, such as before-school literacy sessions or Drop Everything and Read [DEAR] time. The figures shown below do not represent unique participants, as they also include some reading club participants - the project does not track participation in each milestone at a learner level. As such, we have not totaled them to avoid double-counting. However, the table below shows that the project does reach tens of thousands of children beyond those who are directly enrolled in reading clubs: a total of 89 616 children attend the 240 schools in the 2018 cohort.

Additional Project Beneficiaries (Direct and Indirect Reach)

Project activity	Date(s)	Description of participants	Type of beneficiaries	# of people reached		
				Eastern Cape	KwaZulu - Natal	Total
World Read Aloud Day (WRAD)	Feb 2018	Children read aloud to at a WRAD event.	Direct	26 914	44 142	71 038

Holiday programme (milestone 23)	2-6 July 2018	Children who attended a one-day holiday programme during winter holidays.	Direct	2 424	3 385	5 809
Reading club showcase (milestone 24)	Aug-Sep 2018	Children who participated in the RC showcase competition. (Reading club members)	Direct	3347	3001	6 348
Story Bosso contest (milestone 25)	Sep 2018	Children who participated in a Story Bosso storytelling event.	Direct	1838	2122	3 950
Total enrolment in 2018 SPS project schools	n/a	Children enrolled at an SPS 2018 project school, according to data submitted by schools at project registration.	Indirect	40 583	49 033	89 616

Table 6: Number of Children reached through events

It should be noted that Nal’ibali’s highest beneficiary reach comes through our largest flagship event for the year, World Read Aloud Day (WRAD). For this day a special story is commissioned by a local author and translated into all the South African languages. Nal’ibali then encourages South Africans across the country to share the story with children in their lives on that particular day, so elevating the importance (and ease) of reading aloud to children. This year, we were able to reach 71 038 children in the SPS project through this event, however the number is significantly lower than what was possible, as due to the requirements of NORC’s research team, we were only able to carry out events in the 2017 cohort of schools, and not at all the 2018 cohort of schools.

2.1.6. Indicator ES.1-6: Number of primary or secondary school educators who complete professional development activities with USG assistance (disaggregated by sex)

In the SPS project, this USG standard indicator refers to the number of educators who attend a two-day “Big Five” training on reading for enjoyment. Between 26 February and 15 March 2018, the project facilitated “Big Five” training for educators in the six project districts. Schools offered schools halls for trainings at no cost.

The intended training outcomes were that by the end of the training, participants should:

- know about the Nal’ibali reading-for-enjoyment campaign and its vision
- understand how adults are reading role models for children
- understand and value the role that family and community members can play in children’s literacy development
- know what motivates children to read and write
- understand the benefits for children of reading for enjoyment
- know which activities and environment are needed to create and sustain a Story Powered School
- know what a reading club is and how to start one
- identify different kinds of language and literacy activities, know about their benefits and explain possible places in which they can be used, other than in reading clubs
- know where to get books and other resources to share with children, as well as know how to use them with children
- know how to make the most effective use of the Nal’ibali newspaper supplements.

The project sought to train a total of 1 200 people, 5 people per school (the “Big Five”): one HOD, two foundation phase teachers, and two intermediate phase teachers. Each school nominated five educators to attend as per these guidelines. Participants attended the two-day training events in different school clusters.

Of a target 1200 participants, only 849 participants (71.57% of target) from 240 schools were trained at 44 training events. 689 participants were trained during the planned milestone, and an additional 160 were reached during top-up training. Training participation vs. targets per district and province, and in relation to 2017 achievement, is shown in the table below

Number of Educators Trained (Big Five Training) Table

District	# of educators trained					# of schools whose educators were trained		
	Target	Actual - round 1	Actual - round 2	Total educators trained	% achievement	Target	Actual	% achievement
Bizana	120	71	11	82	68%	24	20	83%
Lusikisiki	220	133	0	133	60%	44	35	80%
Maluti	120	60	42	102	85%	24	24	100%
Mt Ayliff	140	101	0	101	72%	28	28	100%
EC total	600	365	53	418	70%	120	107	89%
Ilembe	480	222	107	329	69%	96	75	78%
Umgungundlovu	120	102	0	102	85%	24	24	100%
KZN total	600	324	107	431	72%	120	99	83%
2018 Project total	1 200	689	160	849	71%	240	206	86%
2017 comparison	720 ¹⁴	-	-	693	96%	240	199	83%

Table7: Number of Educators Trained (Big Five Training)

Initially, there was a difference of 509 participants who could not attend the initial training. However, a ‘top up’ training was offered and 160 of the remaining 509 participants were trained. Therefore, we have trained a total of 849 participants (71%) out of the target of 1200. The 160 participants were made up of 11 males (7%) and 149 females (93%). The trainings were hosted over two periods the first training started on the 27 March 2018 and the second on the 25 May 2018.

Disaggregation by sex: 94% of training participants (649 people) were female, and with 6% (40 people) were male (40 people).

¹⁴ In 2017, Big Five training targeted three educators and two community members/volunteers per school. One lesson of implementation from 2017 was that it would be better if more teachers per school were trained, as the programme seems to run best when champion teachers are committed and active. Not every trained teacher will take up the programme and run with it, and teacher turnover is also high. Thus, the target changed from 720 educators in 2017 to 1 200 educators in 2018.

Disaggregation by profile: 99% of training participants (684 people) were educators. Five (5) training participants (0.7%) reported that they are ECD practitioners. (It is unclear from the data provided whether they are in fact Grade R teachers at the project schools.)

Challenges that affected this milestone, including small schools with few educators, distance and transport issues, and competing commitments at schools (notably the Jika iMfundo programme in KZN), are discussed in section 6 below.

Despite challenges in reaching targets, for those educators who attended training, the lessons learned and the manner in which the programme was embraced in different schools were visible during the reading club showcase competitions and holiday programmes.

2.2 Implementation Status

The above section on activity implementation progress focused on the standard indicators signed and agreed with the USG. This section provides a brief chronological narrative of all programme milestones, including those that are not directly aligned to the standard indicators, to show how the project unfolded during the reporting period. Where a milestone has already been discussed in detail, the section above will be referred.

Milestone 14: Annual report

On 31 October 2017, Nal’ibali submitted its annual report for the period September 2016 - October 2017. This was accompanied by a supplementary data analysis report.

Milestone 15: Recruitment of field staff

In November–December 2017, 67¹⁵ Story Sparkers (SS) were recruited to support the 240 selected Cohort 2 schools. Adverts were placed in schools, shops and other local facilities. Interested and eligible candidates had to drop their application in the nearby district office, where the project placed lockable boxes. This was due to lessons learned in Year 1 when Nal’ibali asked school principals to help identify local youth who met the criteria to be SS. Some principals were later accused of being biased, and some SS were rejected by their school communities. This milestone was achieved with the support from the DBE and local stakeholders such as chiefs, headmen and local councillors. Nal’ibali’s Human Resource (HR) unit assisted the team with relevant process and conducted background checks, including police clearance checks. The candidates were shortlisted by project staff and interviewed. Overall, recruitment went smoothly, and all SS were recruited before the organisation closed for the December 2017 holidays.

A breakdown of SS recruited per district is shown below.

Recruitment of Story Sparkers Per District Table

District	# of Story Sparkers and schools recruited per district	
	# of Story Sparkers	# of schools served
Bizana	8	24
Lusikisiki	11	44
Maluti	7	24
Mt Ayliff	7	28

¹⁵ 67 Story Sparkers were recruited instead of 60 (for 240 schools divided by 4) due to distances and transport challenges. Some schools were too remote to be reached easily. To serve all schools selected, instead of replacing them with easier-to-reach schools, we hired some part-time Story Sparkers.

EC total	33	120
Ilembe	28	96
Umgungundlovu	6	24
KZN total	34	120
2018 Project total	67	240

Table 7: Recruitment of Story Sparkers by districts

Milestone 16: Field sustainability plan

In December 2017, Nal’ibali facilitated a leadership, teambuilding and skills development training for 55 of the 60 [Story Sparkers](#) who worked with 2017 schools and were exiting the programme. The purpose of this one-week training was to give skills to SS that will help them pursue other employment or studying opportunities after their contracts with Nal’ibali ended.

Some positive outcomes were observed with regards to access to employment: some Story Sparkers were recruited back to the programme to assist with the roll out the reduced support programme to 40 schools from the 2017 cohort (discussed in section 4.2), and some who had bachelor’s degrees and diplomas in education were absorbed as educators by the Department of Education.

Milestone 17: Institutional capacity building plan

In January 2018, the project team trained 67 new Story Sparkers. The five-day training focused on how to roll out literacy programmes in schools using the SPS and Nal’ibali approach and material. Training also covered monitoring and evaluation (M&E), events, media engagements, information technologies (IT), and human resources (HR) for internal policies and procedures and internal operations.

World Read Aloud Day (WRAD)

Although this is not an SPS project milestone, it is a Nal’ibali flagship event. On 1 February 2018, the SPS team mobilised 2017 schools to participate in World Read Aloud Day and read aloud to 71 038 children: 26 914 children in the Eastern Cape, and 44 124 in KwaZulu-Natal. (The 2018 cohort was not able to participate, because the RCT baseline was not yet complete.) The project did not quite reach its target of 100 000 children, in part due to violent weather conditions that damaged school structures (one school’s roof was blown off). However, it still made a significant contribution to the national effort - across South Africa, a total of 1 294 345 children were read aloud to that day. 240 posters and 7 200 story cards were distributed to promote the event.

Milestone 18: Training of educators

In March 2018, “Big Five” educator training took place. This was pushed back from February (as scheduled) to March, to wait until the RCT baseline was complete. Top-up training was also conducted in May. A total of 849 educators were trained. This milestone is linked to a standard indicator and detailed in section 2.1.6 above.

Milestone 19: Previous year quality assurance results

In April 2018, Nal’ibali’s research and innovation (R&I) department submitted an internal evaluation report, based on site visits to 10 2017 schools undertaken in September 2017 and March 2018. The sample included schools that were “flying” and schools that were struggling to adopt the programme. The researchers conducted 18 interviews and 11 focus groups with a total of 54 stakeholders, including 7 principals or deputies, 32 teachers, 8 community members and 7 Nal’ibali staff members. They also observed activities at schools. The research sought to answer three questions:

- To what degree, and in what ways, did schools take up and use the different aspects of the Story Powered Schools programme that Nal’ibali had provided?
- What types of changes have stakeholders observed in their schools, in relation to the programme?

- What can be done to improve or strengthen the Story Powered Schools programme?

The findings of the research were used to strengthen project implementation and have influenced the design of a proposed project extension should funding be secured. Key lessons and outcomes already implemented included:

- M&E tools and systems were redesigned for Year 2, based on findings from September 2017 visits.
- Return to 2017 control schools for 2019 implementation, as demand is high in these communities.
- Promote communities of practice for principals and teachers.
- Improve reading club showcase design and adjudication. (In 2018, Story Sparkers replaced high school teachers as adjudicators, which significantly improved the programme.)
- Give schools permission to innovate - demonstrate a diversity of good practice, and make it clear there is not “one right way” to be a Story Powered School.
- Clarify criteria for ‘what makes a reading club.’

Key lessons that have shaped the extension proposal include:

- Test different resourcing strategies (i.e. number of books, frequency of book delivery) and book storage options for classrooms.
- Strengthen and test different incentive programmes.
- Extend the face-to-face support period, when Story Sparkers visit schools weekly, to at least 18 months.
- Expand the target age group, to promote full-school adoption (instead of focusing on Grades R to 4).
- Position children in Grades 5 to 7 as leaders and peer mentors, who can lead and support reading club implementation.

The report is enclosed as Annexure 12 : D.

Milestone 20: reading club registration

In May-June, the project team supported schools to register reading 532 clubs. An additional 270 reading clubs were registered in August, September and October following the reading club showcase. The project registered a total of 802 reading clubs reaching 19 561 children: 680 clubs at 232 2018 schools, reaching 16 882 children, and an additional 122 clubs from 2017 schools, reaching 2679 children. This milestone is linked to two standard indicators - number of reading clubs registered, and number of learners reached at the primary level - and is discussed in detail in sections 2.1.2 and 2.1.5 above.

Milestone 21: community training

Between 28 May and 14 June, the team trained 2 360 community members at 221 of the 240 schools. This milestone is linked to a standard indicator and is covered in detail in section 2.1.4 above.

Milestones 22 and 23: holiday programme

In July, Nal’ibali deployed its holiday programme kit (milestone 22) and ran holiday programme activities in communities during the school holidays (milestone 23). The purpose of the activity was to ensure that Story Sparkers keep the young children in their wards engaged in reading over the two-week break. Unlike last year, Story Sparkers ran multiple one-day programmes in each school community they serve, to ensure all communities were included. Three story cards were also distributed.¹⁶

Of a targeted 7 200 children (30 per school community x 240 schools), 5 809 were reached (81%) via 189 events, as shown in the table below. 52% were girls and 48% were boys. This was a significant increase over 2017, when only 55 events were held and 3 312 children were reached. Some children did not attend because they were visiting family or because of geographical barriers that hindered access. See table 2 below.

Number of events and children Reached by Province and Sex

¹⁶ Story cards distributed included: “The king, his sons and the blue-footed bird story”, by Phumlani Mavimbela and illustrated by Magriet Brink and Leo Daly; “Adun, the baboon, tricks Ananse”, retold by Helen Brain and illustrated by Jiggs Snaddon-Wood; and “The big brass band”, by Patricia de Villiers and illustrated by Heidel Dedekind.

	Number of events	Number of children reached			Children by sex	
Province		Target	Actual	Performance	# / % girls	# / % boys
Eastern Cape	75	3 600	2 424	67%	1 293 (53%)	1 131 (47%)
KwaZulu-Natal	113	3 600	3 385	94%	1 720 (51%)	1 665 (49%)
2018 Project Total	189	7 200	5 809	81%	3 013 (52%)	2 796 (48%)
2017 Project Comparison	55	7200	3 312	46%	Unknown	Unknown

Table 8: Number of holiday programme events and children reached, by province and gender

Additionally, 749 community members who had recently attended community training were involved in the holiday programme events. They helped SS mobilise children, prepared refreshments, shared stories, facilitated activities and ensured children got home safely.

Milestone 24: reading club showcase competition

Between 22 August and 21 September, the project facilitated 31 reading club showcase competition events, first at cluster and then at district level. This milestone sought to establish inter-school relationships; demonstrate, celebrate and reward good practices of reading for enjoyment; promote school-based reading clubs as a reading promotion strategy; and encourage schools to take ownership of and sustain their reading clubs.

Participation was high:

- **224 of the 240 project schools (93%)** participated in showcase events, indicating that the project is well-received in schools and demonstrating schools' motivation and ownership of the programme. 16 schools did not participate in the competition, mainly due to transport challenges for very remote schools. A few schools did not participate because they did not feel their reading clubs were ready to compete.
- **6 348 children** entered the competition of a targeted 7 200 (**88% of target**), including 2 648 boys (42%) and 3 700 girls (58%). This was a 98% increase over 2017, when only 3 210 children participated.

A few changes were made to the model in 2018, based on lessons from 2017. These include:

- Using Story Sparkers as adjudicators, instead of high school teachers and library assistants. Story Sparkers attended a one-day adjudication training.
- Running the events over two days instead of one, as described below, to allow enough time for adjudication and performance.
- Revising adjudication score cards to better represent the desired practices and behaviours Nal'ibali is promoting.

Each event was divided into two days.

- On day one, two learners and one or two teachers attended per reading club. Adjudicators evaluated the displays and evidence of practice at reading club stalls, using criteria jointly developed with DBE, and interviewed the learners and reading club leaders. The criteria looked for evidence of reading club and reading-for-joy activities, print-rich environments, interactive role modelling, and M&E documentation (for example, attendance records, permission forms, evidence of sessions held). This evaluation contributed 90% of the reading club's overall score.

- On day two, all learners (up to 30 per reading club) attended with their teachers. Learners performed their “Zalise”¹⁷ piece onstage, which contributed 10% of the reading club’s overall score. The top three reading clubs were awarded, and at cluster events these clubs were invited to proceed to the district level events.

Overall, the showcase events motivated schools and created excitement amongst children. The adjudication criteria helped codify good practice, and strong evidence of practice (regular meetings, attendance registers, children’s work, and some book check-out records) was observed at the five events visited by the research and innovation team. However, the large scale of the events placed a significant logistics burden on the team. There is room for improvement in planning, logistics, and child protection and safety at venues, which was not sufficient in a few instances (e.g. safe, clean toilets; secure perimeters). See below figures 3 and 4 showing the reading club showcase competition.



Figure 3: Reading club showcase stalls

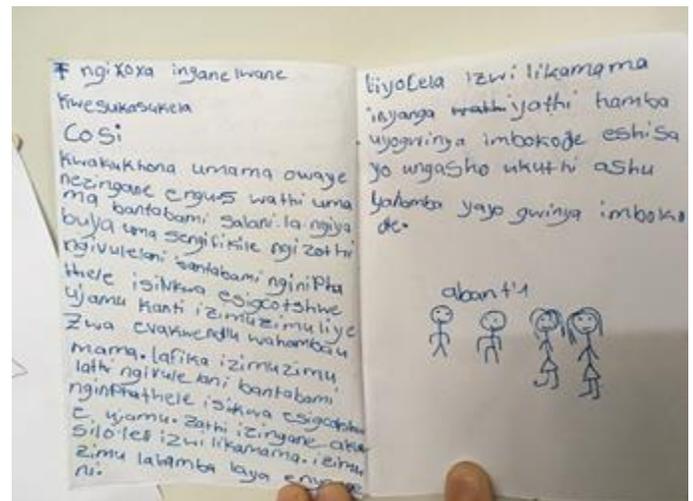


Figure 4: Story written in Zulu by one of the children

Milestone 25: Story Bosso

In September, 211 events were held as part of Nal’ibali’s national Story Bosso contest - 203 events at schools, and eight events in community spaces. This milestone seeks to motivate children, teachers and schools, and to elevate the importance of storytelling for literacy development. In collaboration with the United Nations Information Centre, this year’s competition theme was “South African Heroes.” Participants could enter a three-minute story about their hero in any of South Africa’s 11 official languages. A bilingual storytelling board game was also produced and used at the events. The campaign reached **950 children** (156% of the 2500-person target) and collected **977 stories**.

PR coverage of \$22,787.20¹⁸ was secured in provincial and community media. An additional \$20,920.20¹⁹ of PR coverage was secured via mention of the project’s participation in the broader campaign’s media drive. Nal’ibali’s media partner Tiso Blackstar provided \$9,555.42²⁰ worth of added-value advertising to promote the contest, and national broadcaster Primedia provided R100 000 worth of airtime. Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal provincial winners will be announced at the end of October.

Media drives and activations

Throughout the year, Nal’ibali amplified the project by promoting a number of drives and activations in partnerships with local media. These sought to drive interest in the project and promote behaviour change. They included:

- an announcement highlighting the project’s 2017 achievements and 2018 areas of operation;
- the extension of literacy development training from schools into surrounding communities;
- an awareness-raising drive focusing on literacy and human rights;

¹⁷ This is a showcasing of something creative that has come from the stories read in reading clubs. It could include reading the story out loud, acting out parts of the story, sharing a song written about the story, or other imaginative ways to bring the tales to life.

¹⁸ ZAR R333 800 converted USD on the 2018/10/31 on <https://www.oanda.com/currency/converter/>

¹⁹ ZAR306 451 converted USD on the 2018/10/31 on <https://www.oanda.com/currency/converter/>

²⁰ ZAR 139 973 converted USD on the 2018/10/31 on <https://www.oanda.com/currency/converter/>

- a Mandela Day drive that invited members of the public to share a special set of three stories showcasing Madiba's values;
- publicity of the annual Reading Club Showcase and Story Bosso storytelling contest.
-

A new PR and events officer in our Margate office helped us build and strengthen partnerships with local and provincial media. This increased staff capacity resulted in a 73% increase in the value of the media coverage secured over the year: \$184,593 has been secured to date, in comparison to the \$106,856²¹ achieved in 2017.

2.3. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Update

Development and strengthening of Nal'ibali's monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) systems and processes has been informed by a number of learning processes. These have included:

- Quality assurance visits to schools conducted in September 2017 (the first round of visits for the Milestone 19 research).
- A USAID DQA process conducted in September 2017.
- Refinement of Nal'ibali's theory of change and standard indicators in collaboration with the FirstRand Empowerment Foundation in September 2017
- USAID training on MEL, attended in October 2017 and March 2018 by project staff.
- An independent analysis of Year 1 project data, completed in October 2017 (submitted with last year's annual report).
- An independent review of the project M&E system and resulting recommendations, completed in November 2017.
- A feedback workshop with the Literacy Mentors and Provincial Support Coordinators, in November 2017.
- The onboarding of two new skilled staff members with significant M&E experience in May 2018 (a new M&E manager, and an M&E data and systems specialist).

Highlights and achievements in the reporting period include:

- Nal'ibali **revised the project M&E tools** and developed **new M&E manuals and training materials for staff**, with input from the project team between Nov 2017 and Jan 2018. These revised tools were better aligned to the organisational theory of change and standard indicators and adapted to better serve field staff needs. We also stopped relying on volunteers to capture programme-critical data, which did not work in 2017. Accountability was also strengthened with a revised Daily Report tool that requires two signatures and a stamp from the school to confirm that a Story Sparker conducted a visit.
- The M&E team **trained Literacy Mentors as trainers**, who subsequently trained Story Sparkers in M&E tools and processes. This improved their knowledge and confidence in enforcing and supporting M&E processes.
- Nal'ibali **was invited to present to a group of USAID grantees** at the MEL training in Pretoria in March 2018, about the lessons it learned in the first year of implementation and its journey of building these into a stronger system.
- The **internal evaluation** conducted for Milestone 19 (discussed above) yielded useful lessons and recommendations that have both helped us strengthen the SPS programme and influenced Nal'ibali's campaign design more broadly, particularly insights about how reading materials are used.
- Nal'ibali significantly **grew its M&E team in 2018**. We hired a full-time SPS project data entry clerk in March, and a new M&E data and systems specialist in May. We also hired an SPS project M&E officer in late April, who unfortunately resigned after two months. We replaced him with an internal hire from the programmes team in September 2018.

²¹ ZAR1 565 282 converted USD on the 2018/10/31 on <https://www.oanda.com/currency/converter/>

- Nal’ibali developed draft **standard operating procedures (SOPs)** for monitoring and evaluation. These aim to codify and improve the organisations’ data quality management processes and efficiency of M&E system and processes. It is currently being finalised after a pilot period and will also inform the review and finalisation of the SPS project M&E manual.
- Story Sparker daily site visit report submissions increased significantly in 2018 as compared to last year: 3 942 submissions had been made in 2018 at 31 October. This is more than 12x as many as were submitted in 2017, when the tool had been designed but was not adopted or enforced.

Challenges we still seek to address going forward include:

- **Limited database access.** Although we now rely on one master database for all our key indicators, monthly management reporting for field staff is not aligned to the database, and staff still rely on paper data collected rather than the database masterlist. New technology is still intimidating and using known, paper-based methods is often easier for team members. Additional capacity building is required re: accessing and interpreting the database, to better support data-driven decision making at the project office level using one master set of data.
- **Challenges using ODK data collection tool.** Although use of the tool was much higher and more consistent than last year, Story Sparkers do not always communicate with the M&E team when experiencing technical issues with ODK, which causes delays or submission gaps. Poor mobile data signals delay and sometimes prevent submission. This is discussed further in section 6 below.
- **Submission gaps and data quality issues.** In May 2018, we adopted the use of data submission and data error log sheets. This has surfaced a number of data quality issues and enabled us to work towards addressing them via monthly planning and review meetings. Key challenges include lack of verification before submission, late data submission, limited time to verify and clean data before milestones are due, and blank fields (particularly re training costs). Consistency and accuracy are also a challenge. Reading clubs sometimes change their names, and schools sometimes register multiple reading clubs with the same name, which makes it difficult to detect duplicates.

We believe the two key things we need to do to improve the above issues are:

- Ensure **frequent feedback is provided to project staff** on M&E submissions and data analysis. This will help us address data quality issues quickly, build capacity and sustain motivation. This was an ambition for 2018 that was set back due to the resignation of the first SPS M&E officer. With a new SPS project M&E officer on board from September 2018 who regularly attends project planning and review meetings, we are optimistic that this is going to improve significantly.
- Allocate more time for **joint reflection, debriefing and planning.** This will enable more data-driven and practice-based decision making and strengthen the “Learning” component of MEL within the project.

3. INTEGRATION OF CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND USAID FORWARD PRIORITIES

3.1 Gender Equality and Female Empowerment

Nal’ibali promotes gender equality and female empowerment throughout its work, including the Story Powered Schools project. The table below summarises participation in key project activities by sex for both children and adults.

Gender Participation for Key Activities

Project activity	# of people reached, disaggregated by gender				
	# female	% female	# male	% male	Total
Child participation in SPS project					
Activity 1: Participation in reading clubs	9 067	54%	7 678	46%	16 882
Activity 2: Participation in flagship events	3 013	52%	2 796	48%	5 809
Adult participation in SPS project					
activity 1: Community Training	2135	90%	235	10%	2 361
activity 2: Big Five Training	649	94%	40	6%	689

Table 9: Gender Participation for key activities.

When it comes to children, there is no significant variance between boys' and girls' participation, with slightly higher female participation rates across most project activities. This suggests that the programme is promoting gender equity for children.

Among adults, we see much higher participation rates for women than men. This is consistent across our campaign, as Nal'ibali does a lot of work with educators. Feminisation of the teaching profession is a longstanding trend in South Africa, particularly in early childhood and primary-level education. When working in community spaces, we also observe that women are often trusted more than men for reasons related to culture and child protection.

In 2018, we did not track gender for a few key project activities, including volunteers in a holiday programme. While it is not viable to track gender for our national World Read Aloud Day campaign, we have incorporated it into all other activity monitoring as per feedback from USAID this year.

For 2019, in conversation with USAID, we have also committed to update our M&E forms to change 'gender' to 'sex', to better align to USAID standard indicators, and to add the options "Other" and "Prefer not to say" in order to recognise that sex and gender are non-binary.

3.2 Sustainability Mechanisms

The SPS project was designed to work intensively in schools for a calendar year, then move on to a new cohort of schools. As the project approached its one-year mark, it needed to think about how to sustain activity at schools without the help of weekly Story Sparker visits.

In 2018, parallel to its work in the new cohort of schools, Nal'ibali piloted a reduced support programme (RSP) during the first six months of the year. The RSP sought to ensure that the programme continued in the 2017 schools, driven by teachers and community members, and to facilitate a seamless handover between Nal'ibali and DBE. To do this, it shared sustainable practices with DBE and other partners regarding common management issues, training, and resources to support reading culture in schools. Nal'ibali has been assured that the DBE would prioritise Story Powered Schools in their support management plans to ensure continuity.

To develop the RSP model, in late 2017, the project team conducted a closeout assessment for the 240 schools from the 2017 cohort. M&E data and Story Sparker and Literacy Mentor input were used to rate schools on two dimensions: level of school activity/effort, and level of Nal'ibali support.

The results of the assessment were used to develop three school support packages for sustainability and ownership:

1. **Package A: focused support.** This package prioritised willing and under-supported schools - in particular, schools that had not received the full model of support in 2017 (e.g. schools that did not receive a training or did not have a Story Sparker for a portion of the year). These schools continued to receive weekly Story Sparker visits through June 2018. Additionally, they received two Literacy Mentor visits per month, and monthly management check-ins from the SPS programme administrator and the DBE. **40 schools** benefited from this package.

2. **Package B: limited support.** This package was available to active schools. It included district-level mentoring workshops and a half-day training; guided literacy development support from the SPS Programme Administrator and the Nal'ibali training team; and negotiated monthly management check-ins from the DBE. **140 schools** were in this category.

3. **Package C: responsive support.** This package was available to highly active schools. It included on-site/school-level mentorship sessions from Literacy mentors; support from the Programme Administrator and Training Department; and negotiated monthly management check-ins from the DBE. **26 schools** were in this category.

The above totals 206 schools. The remaining **34 schools** from the 2017 cohort were not willing to participate in the RSP. They believed that it would be difficult for schools to continue with the programme without Story Sparker visits. As network members, they continued to be supported by Nal'ibali's call centre and digital media platforms.

All schools, regardless of which RSP support package they received, continued to receive Nal'ibali supplements.

To support the 40 focused support schools, 22 Story Sparkers were retained on a part-time basis (9 in the Eastern Cape and 13 in KZN). Two Story Sparkers were promoted to be RSP Literacy Mentors, and a programme administrator was redeployed as the RSP programme supervisor - with 25 staff members in all to support the 2017 cohort.

The outcomes of this pilot were mixed. Key elements are discussed below.

- **Reading clubs:** Of 732 reading clubs that registered in 2017, 249 re-registered to continue in 2018 (34%). 279 reading clubs reported that they were no longer running, and 204 reading clubs could not be reached (we re-registered clubs via a phone drive). Additionally, 122 new reading clubs registered in 2018 from the 2017 school's cohort. This meant a total of 371 reading clubs were active this year in our 2017 schools.

We had hoped that at least one reading club per school would continue per Story Powered School during the reduced support phase. With a total of 371 Cohort 1 reading clubs in 2018 (122 new + 249 returning), we exceeded our target number of reading clubs by 55%. However, these reading clubs were only active in 116 schools, leaving 124 schools without active reading clubs this year. This means ~~just over two-thirds~~ only 56% - (69%) of the 206 schools participating in the RSP, and ~~48%~~ 60% of all 2017 schools, still had reading clubs in 2018.

Reading clubs particularly struggled to continue in schools where Story Sparkers acted as reading club leaders in 2017 and handover to teachers was insufficient or not taken up. Although "Story Sparker left" or "Nal'ibali left" were the most common reason clubs closed down, 19 clubs we reached during the phone re-registration drive reported that the clubs stopped running because the Grade 7 pupils who were leading the club left the school. A few also closed for unusual reasons such as flood damage.

- **Training:** 135 teachers from 23 schools were trained. The one-day training session focused on reading clubs and supplement usage. The trainings were welcomed in most schools, and teachers felt that the trainings should have not been a once-off activity to ensure that schools start owning the programme.
- **Reading materials:** In many schools, books continued to be used. However, some misplaced the hanging libraries or had a large portion of books missing. A few had their books ruined by heavy storms. Additional top-up books would have been useful to include as part of the exit strategy and will be taken into account for 2018 reduced support plan.

- **Regular reading activities:** Many schools have continued their regular practices of including reading aloud and storytelling during morning assembly and having regular DEAR periods. Community members remained active at some schools. At other schools, where community member participation had fallen away, teachers took over their activities.
- **Resources:** Other than the bimonthly newsprint story supplements, 2017 schools did not receive further resources to support programme continuation, such as 2018 calendars. This will be corrected for 2019.
- **Event and competition participation:** 2017 schools participated in World Read Aloud Day in February 2018. Later in the year they were invited to the 2018 reading club showcase. Nal'ibali communicated that schools would be required however to arrange their own logistics to attend, while schools expected significant support from Nal'ibali, as experienced in the previous year. As a result, 2017 schools did not participate in the reading club showcase competition. In 2019, the reading club showcase competition is not part of the project budget or milestones, as it would fall after the implementation period, but if we are able to run it again we will take these lessons into account.

On reflection, we have seen that we need to be clearer and more proactive in how we hand the programme over to schools. Although the project took great care to plan its sustainability strategy, clarify it to district officials and principals, and enlist the district in supporting its implementation, it seems that this clarity did not always reach the Big Five teachers and community members. Many schools still see the programme as “Nal'ibali-owned”, not school-driven. The project needs to strengthen its exit strategy to enable effective communication and engagements with schools before end of 2018. In particular, handover of reading clubs run by Story Sparkers needs to be done intentionally and early, before Story Sparkers exit schools.

3.3 Environmental Compliance

n/a - Education Reading Projects in South Africa have a Categorical Exclusion from this requirement.

3.4 Global Climate Change

Due to long distances, poor road conditions and lack of infrastructure, transport is already a challenge in the project. Bad weather has had negative impacts on implementation: in some instances, heavy storms have prevented teachers from attending training, prevented Story Sparkers from visiting their schools, and in some cases even destroyed school infrastructure. Global climate change may exacerbate these challenges. This is largely out of our control and the project does not currently have a strategy in place to anticipate or mitigate climate change.

3.5 Policy and Governance Support

Nal'ibali has explicitly linked its model to the DBE's national Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), and to the Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) period, which is a mandatory reading period endorsed in the DBE policy. This mandate helped support the practice of holding regular DEAR periods in schools, a key project outcome.

Nal'ibali also collaborated with the DBE this year to give input on the design of its reading club registration form, which is used in areas where Nal'ibali is not working directly.

3.6 Local Capacity Development

Staff development is a strong thread in the project. The following capacity development programmes took place in the reporting period:

- Eight Literacy Mentors (LMs), two Provincial Support Coordinators (PSCs), one Programme Supervisor and one Project Manager attended an accredited facilitators course in January 2018 and applied these skills to facilitate Story Sparker training the following week.
- 67 Story Sparkers and 8 DBE district officials were trained on how to effectively facilitate reading for enjoyment in schools and communities in January 2018.
- 22 2017 Story Sparkers received a refresher training to facilitate the reduced support programme (RSP) at 40 2017 schools in February 2018.
- The Project Manager and two PSCs attended “Free to Grow” leadership training, which concluded in the Oct-Dec 2017 quarter.
- The Project Manager attended a training on how to use the cloud-based Salesforce M&E database in June 2018.
- 15 SPS team members attended an accredited project management course in August 2018.
- The Project Manager, 1 PSC and 1 master trainer attended an accredited assessors’ course.
- 6 Story Sparkers from Bizana attended a library services training facilitated by the Department of Education.
- 11 Story Sparkers are currently undergoing the modular Activate! leadership for public innovation training.

Additionally, as discussed above, the project trained 849 teachers and 2 361 community members on how to effectively run reading clubs and facilitate reading-for-enjoyment activities.

3.7 Public Private Partnership (PPP) and Global Development Alliance (GDA) Impacts

3.7.1. High Level Partnerships

The Nal’ibali SPS programme has made it possible for the private sector and government to work with USAID to build Global Development Alliances (GDAs) that address important partner interests and objectives, pursue the educational goals of the Department of Basic Education, advance USAID’s strategic priorities and objectives, and achieve sustainable development outcomes, results and impact.

In addition to the partnership with DBE described above, Nal’ibali established a relationship with the African Union (AU) in 2018, when its Head of Research & Innovation and its M&E Manager were invited to attend the inaugural AU Innovating Education Expo in Dakar, Senegal. At the Expo, the Nal’ibali supplement was named the third-place innovation in the continent-wide Innovating Education Prize. At the summit, many representatives from other African countries expressed a keen interest in the Nal’ibali supplement and training materials. Since the Expo, Nal’ibali has been invited to two other AU summits to share its model. The RSP Programme Supervisor is attending one of these events (the Committee of Ten Heads of State and Government summit on Education, Science, Innovation and Technology in Lilongwe, Malawi in early November) to share the SPS programme model.

3.7.2 Local Partnerships

Much of the work that takes place within the SPS project is made possible through leveraging technologies, support structures and development costs in Nal’ibali that are funded by South Africa’s DG Murray Trust, Volkswagen Community Trust, and the FirstRand Empowerment Foundation.

Local partnerships with community radio stations have significantly strengthened the project. These were entrenched when the project’s new PR and events coordinator did a roadshow in June. Five stations agreed to air Nal’ibali audio stories in local languages. They also requested reading for enjoyment training for their own staff, which Nal’ibali will try to offer in the last quarter of the calendar year.

The table below shows location and listenership of these community radio partners.

List of Community Radio Stations

District	Name of the Radio Station	Listenership
Ilembe	Khwezi FM	140 000 listeners a day
	Siyathuthuka FM	19 000 listeners a day
Umgungundlovu	Umgungundlovu Community Radio station	88 000 listeners a day
Mount Frere	Alfred Nzo Community Radio	273 000 listeners a day
Lusikisiki	Inkonjane Community Radio	116 000 listeners a day

Table 10: Community Radio Stations and listenership

3.8 Science, Technology, and Innovation Impacts

Nal'ibali uses Open Data Kit (ODK) as a monitoring & evaluation tool. Story Sparkers submit their daily reports, event reports and reading club registrations on the ODK platform. ODK has a simple interface, and stores data locally when Story Sparkers have no internet connectivity (data is submitted later when a connection is available). Last year, ODK adherence was low, in part because Story Sparkers struggled to use the geolocation feature when working in rural areas. This year, we removed the geolocation and submissions increased significantly (more than twelvefold). This innovation reduces the need for manual data capturing, improves the quality of data capturing through the use of validation rules and makes data available in real-time. However, we still have some challenges with user experience and adherence, which are discussed with proposed mitigation strategies below.

4. STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION AND INVOLVEMENT

4.1 Department of Education involvement and support

The involvement of DBE at national, provincial and district level has been very instrumental in the project.

4.1.1 National DBE

Nal'ibali has a formal relationship with the national DBE in the form of a signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). An updated revised MOU was signed in 2017. This official document serves as a guide that defines the role of each partner in reading for enjoyment promotion at schools.

The MOU influenced and strengthened relationships between Nal'ibali projects and DBE stakeholders at provincial and district levels, both within areas where the SPS project is implemented, and elsewhere in the country too. In 2017 and 2018, the national DBE prepared letters to provincial and district directors introducing the SPS project. The project team made reference to these letters during the principal briefings. This mandate enabled the project to receive principals' buy-in.

National DBE also facilitated a reading club showcase competition preparation workshop, on 18 May 2018. This was attended by SPS project staff, Nal'ibali national campaign staff, and national and district education officials. The success of these initiatives in the SPS model has led the DBE to consider and action similar initiatives in other provinces in the country, with the support of Nal'ibali.

Senior representatives from the national DBE office also sit on a **project steering committee**. The steering committee meets at least twice a year to review project activities and achievements, and to provide strategic oversight, input and guidance to the project. It includes representatives from National DBE, USAID, Nal'ibali, and Nal'ibali's other major funders, the DG Murray Trust and the FirstRand Empowerment Foundation (FREF).

Two SPS steering committee meetings took place during the reporting period:

- On 23 February 2018, Nal'ibali presented its annual report and 2018 plans, and alignment with the DBE's Read to Lead campaign was discussed.
- On 20 August 2018, the external evaluation shared the baseline findings with a senior DBE research official, Dr Stephen Taylor. Nal'ibali also presented findings of its internal evaluation.

4.1.2 Provincial DoEs

The KZN Department of Education (DoE) has been more actively involved than the Eastern Cape DoE. The project had two meetings with the KZN DoE at a province level during the reporting period: one to present the reduced support programme (RSP) in January, and one to solicit ideas on how to best sustain the programme in schools (which was also attended by USAID representatives). Engagement with the Eastern Cape has happened primarily at a district level this year, though reports have been shared.

4.1.3 Education districts

At a district level, education officials and the project team worked closely together. Five stakeholder meetings were held during the reporting period. Joint planning took place with education districts for major milestones, and district officials sent circulars to principals to communicate and mobilise schools for upcoming activities. This helped the project secure attendance at and positive responses to meetings and events. DBE officials have also conducted joint support visits to schools with LMs and in some instances have intervened in crisis situations, where Story Sparkers were not being supported by schools. One district official also joined for an internal research visit.

The education department also offered the project team office space in all six districts, to do administrative work and hold weekly team meetings. Venues are also provided for project meetings and workshops, enabling the project to save funds for use elsewhere in the project.

Additionally, the project was recently invited by Ethekewini Municipality to participate in its Literacy Summit. The municipality has indicated a serious interest in partnering with the project.

To date the project has shared the following reports with the district officials:

- RCT treatment and control school lists
- RCT baseline report
- Letters from National Department of Education
- Letters of introduction for SS to present to Principals
- List of 2018 schools
- Big Five training schedule
- Calendar of events
- Story Sparker job description and KPIs (Key Performance Indicators)

4.2 Nal'ibali advisory committee

Nal'ibali has an advisory committee made up of education researchers and literacy and behaviour change experts. This panel convenes a few times a year, along with major funders and senior staff members, to provide input on a key campaign strategy questions. The advisory committee is focused on the Nal'ibali campaign as a whole, thus providing support to the SPS project.

The advisory committee held four sessions in the period under review, to discuss the following strategic topics:

- **Public communication for behaviour change** (February 2018): This session sought input to shape a billboard campaign, which is currently rolling out.
- **Positioning Nal'ibali in the literacy space** (February 2018): This heated session sought to explore whether, in what ways and to what degree Nal'ibali has a role to play in teaching children how to read, or referring reading club leaders and partners to other organisations that focus more on *teaching of reading* rather than on *reading culture*. While Nal'ibali is not changing its essence, it intends to strengthen resource packs, partnership plans and referral mechanisms for partners in its 2019 reading club support journey.
- **Print reading material distribution** (August 2018): Nal'ibali presented an overview of print material distribution to date, based on M&E data, internal survey findings and qualitative research. JET Education Services presented its [external evaluation of the Nal'ibali supplement](#). Participants gave input on key strategic questions to help Nal'ibali improve access and targeting of reading materials.
- **Research agenda** (September 2018): For this session, Nal'ibali circulated and presented a [summary of research conducted to date](#), and gathered input to shape its 2019-2021 research agenda. Carien Vorster from USAID attended this session.

4.3 Stakeholder input on project design and implementation

The internal qualitative research conducted for Milestone 19 created an opportunity for principals, teachers, Story Sparkers and community members to share feedback with Nal'ibali about how it could improve the programme. These suggestions were compiled into recommendations that were included in the final report and taken into account for the extension proposal.

5. MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

In 2018, the project used lessons from 2017 to ensure implementation proceeded smoothly and teams on the ground were adequately supported. To ensure that various HR issues that emerged in 2017 did not occur again, Story Sparker training included a full orientation workshop on organisational culture and Nal'ibali's cultural manifesto, as well as careful and deliberate unpacking and simplifying of the staff policies and procedures documents. Head office staff continued to visit the project field team regularly and as needed to provide support, address new organisational developments and provide clarity on issues. The improved systems and communication provided project stability and reduced HR challenges noted in 2017.

An anonymous staff survey was conducted in the second quarter of 2018. Members of the SPS project team reported that they felt significantly better supported and appreciated and had higher morale, as compared to the survey undertaken in 2017.

To safeguard the use of assets, the organisation updated existing policies to make conditions pertaining to the use of resources clearer. The organisation also introduced and elevated its sexual harassment and whistle blowing policies. The latter was further strengthened by support visits conducted by members of USAID's investigations unit.

To further strengthen staff support, the organisation introduced a matrix management system to allow head office functions to be decentralised to SPS regional office. The initiative created vacancies and opportunities for internal staff growth and development. It is through this initiative that the following positions were created and filled with capable candidates who enhanced the performance of the project:

- A full-time data capturer in the Margate project office was appointed in March. A part-time data capturer was also contracted as needed, to meet milestone deadlines.
- An M&E officer was appointed in April to give support to the project team. The officer was also housed at the regional offices in Margate. He later resigned and was replaced in September 2018 by an internal candidate from Nal'ibali's national programmes team.
- A public relations and events coordinator was appointed to the regional office in Margate.
- A master trainer dedicated to supporting the literacy aims of the project was appointed.

5.1. Other staffing issues

Disciplinary action

- In August 2018, Nal'ibali was alerted by USAID to the fact that one of its staff members was under investigation for fraud committed in his previous place of work. Though this individual was not working on the SPS project, Nal'ibali took immediate action, which included disciplinary action leading to dismissal of the employee in question as well as disciplinary action for the staff member responsible for his recruitment. The latter individual had failed to adhere to Nal'ibali's recruitment policies and had hired the said individual without consulting management, despite knowledge that he possessed a criminal record for fraud. Our recruitment cycle has since been revisited and revised to ensure that no future episodes occur. Nal'ibali also contracted a forensic auditor to determine whether funds had been misappropriated by the guilty staff member. The report concluded that they were not.
- To ensure that the policies of the organisation are adhered to, disciplinary action that resulted in dismissal was undertaken for one staff member. The position was advertised and filled by an internal candidate.

Promotion and retention

- Two Story Sparkers from the 2017 cohort were promoted to Literacy Mentors for the Reduced Support Programme. 22 SS from the 2017 cohort were also recruited back to the programme to facilitate RSP in schools.

Staff turnover

- Seven of the 67 Story Sparkers hired in 2018 resigned in the course of the year. All were successfully replaced by new SS.

5.2 Procurement

We encountered a few procurement issues in 2018, namely:

- In 2018 Nal'ibali commissioned an Eastern Cape based community project to create its hanging libraries, in an effort to help build local economies in project communities. However, the quality did not stand up to the libraries procured in 2017, and so in 2019 we will be using the original service providers once again.
- Procurement at a local level continues to pose some organisational risk, as many rural service providers (caterers, taxi drivers, etc.) are not able to provide the sort of supporting documentation that Nal'ibali is comfortable with. For example, receipts might be handwritten, and service providers are often not registered companies so the banking details provided are for individuals, not companies. While these sorts of challenges are to be expected when working in poorer rural communities, Nal'ibali's finance team conduct regular random dipstick financial audits, calling up service providers to ascertain the validity of the quotes and invoices received.

For 2019 implementation, the project will source cell phones for SS that are due to be recruited in November 2018. The phones are used for communication, emails, and M&E submission via Open Data Kit (ODK). The project will further source various items of branding, 1 200 hanging libraries, 36 000 books, banners and stationary for activities. Data and airtime contracts will be procured to enable the Story Sparkers to work effectively.

6. LESSONS LEARNED

2018 was a year of building on lessons from our pilot year, strengthening our model, and learning as we responded to new challenges.

Throughout the report, we have noted some of the changes we implemented in 2018 based on our first year of learning, and some recommendations for further improvement in 2019. This section reflects on some of the key, cross-cutting areas of learning for the project in 2018, and how we have addressed or will address these going forward.

6.1 Story Sparkers: workload, support and accountability

In 2017, each Story Sparker supported 5 schools, one per weekday. This left little time to reflect on their work, submit data or plan.

In 2018, we changed the school cluster model so each Story Sparker supported 4 schools instead of 5 schools. On Fridays, Story Sparkers and Literacy Mentors got together in their clusters for reflection, data verification and submission, financial administration, and planning for the following week. This increased the quality of work submitted by field staff. Weekly meetings also meant Story Sparkers were more connected to and supported by their colleagues.

We also strengthened monitoring of school visits, by adding sections for principal signatures and school stamps to the daily school visit report. These forms are also used for finance verification.

6.2 Pace of milestones

The milestone framework is a highly compressed time frame, and the activities laid out are very ambitious to achieve within the capacity of the project team. We have learned that the milestone plan also allows insufficient time for data submission, capturing and analysis or for report writing between activity completion and report submission. The team worked hard to achieve targets timeously, but the relentless pace of milestones led in some cases to under-achievement of targets, under-reporting of activities, or insufficient data verification and cleaning.

The randomised controlled trial (RCT) also pushed back most major 2018 milestones: Nal'ibali had to wait until the baseline was complete to train teachers at project schools, and training was delayed from February to March. This delay of a key project activity had a knock-on effect all year, as implementation of most activities (and related report submission) was delayed by approximately one month due to the later start. Implementation time frame and report extensions were discussed and cleared with Nal'ibali COR, Morgan Mthembu.

To help the project team rise to the challenge of a fast-paced project, we sent Literacy Mentors on two accredited trainings: facilitation and project management. The project management tools are being customised to refine planning and reporting systems. We are optimistic that this will enable more effective planning and project management in 2019.

We have also continued to verify and clean data even after milestones have been submitted, leading in some cases to shifts in numbers between previous reports and the current report. Where this has happened, we have used footnotes to flag the shifts.

Going forward, we will take these lessons into account as we put together an extension proposal. In particular, we will look at how the milestones build on one another to optimise their sequence and school calendar alignment, and we will build more time between activity-end and report submission to ensure all data is submitted, verified, cleaned, and analysed.

6.3 Meeting teacher training targets

This year, we struggled to meet our Big Five teacher training targets for a few major reasons.

First, a number of very small schools were selected, with few teachers or learners. When a school only has seven or eight teachers, principals are reluctant to release five of them on the same day for training. Due to the randomised controlled trial, in the first two years of implementation Nal'ibali was committed to working with all selected schools, despite constraints. However, in 2019 the new schools will no longer be part of the RCT, which gives Nal'ibali more opportunity to ensure schools are well-suited and eager to participate.

Second, training for the Jika iMfundo programme running in Ilembe, KZN coincided with Nal'ibali Big Five teacher training, which reduced attendance. Jika iMfundo is a large-scale, DoE-driven programme that seeks to improve curriculum management by providing training, curriculum trackers, and teaching and learning materials.²² Some schools also saw Nal'ibali as a programme that was competing with, not complementary to, Jika iMfundo, which led to delays in programme take-up.

Nal'ibali was unable to meet targets in full due to small schools. However, it addressed the Jika iMfundo challenge via a meeting with DBE, at which a national DBE official clarified that the two programmes are compatible, not in competition, and outlined a process for joint implementation planning.

Going forward, when inviting schools to join the project, the SPS team can assess whether the school is willing and able to send five educators to training, and whether there are other projects taking place, in order to avoid the challenges faced this year. For 2019, this will be assessed as part of community mapping before launching the programme.

If an extension is granted, the project design could also consider more frequent teacher training. The project team finds that after two days of training, teachers are not always ready to implement reading clubs, and need further support to grasp and solidify these skills. This recommendation of more frequent training is in line with findings from other large-scale reading projects in South Africa such as the DBE's Early Grade Reading Study (EGRS), which found that regular coaching was more effective than infrequent centralised training.

²² Jika iMfundo is implemented by PILO (Project to Improve Learning Outcomes) and funded by NECT (the National Education Collaboration Trust). It was piloted in Pinetown and King Cetshwayo districts from 2015 to 2017 and is now rolling out across all of KZN.

6.4 Digital M&E tools

Last year, we received very few daily report submissions from Story Sparkers, and did not have much information about what kinds of activities were taking place at schools each day.

This year, we developed new training materials and M&E manuals, hired an M&E specialist at head office, and set up regular, automated reports for programme managers to see submission rates. Daily report submissions in particular increased significantly – more than twelvefold. Data coming into the cloud-based Salesforce database was much cleaner than before, and available more timeously.

However, even though we have collected more and better data, we still encountered challenges (already mentioned briefly in section 2.3). Story Sparkers did not always communicate with the M&E team when experiencing technical issues with ODK. Sometimes they used the wrong ODK forms to submit data. In a few cases, phones were lost. This led to delays and submission gaps: only 57% of daily reports submitted were submitted within four days of the activity (the submission deadline).²³

Going forward, the project will implement an improved version of ODK – ODK2. This app allows Story Sparkers to view the data they have already submitted, so they know where they stand. It also automatically updates forms, so Story Sparkers do not have to download new forms if systems improvements are made. We will strengthen data validation rules, and reduce the number of free text fields on ODK forms to streamline data analysis and reduce the data capturing burden for field staff. And we will strengthen training to ensure all field staff are comfortable using the tool, via capacity building site visits.

6.5 Insufficient time or people-power to organise reading club showcase

When planning the ambitious, multi-level and multi-day reading club showcase model for 2018, the project expected the Department of Basic Education would offer more logistical support than it ultimately provided. This placed a large event planning and logistics burden on the project team, and we encountered some challenges, such as unsuitable venues, and suppliers and adjudicators who were not paid on time.

Despite some challenges, the team pulled off an impressive reading club showcase campaign. As noted above, the number of children participating nearly doubled. Improvements were made on our 2017 model, including extending the event to two days, revising the adjudication criteria to be more in line with the “Nal’ibali way”, and using Nal’ibali-trained Story Sparkers as adjudicators instead of high school teachers, who did not always look for or award the characteristics Nal’ibali wants to elevate in reading clubs (such as emergent writing or dog-eared books).

The reading club showcase falls outside the current project milestone plan and time frames for 2019. However, if Nal’ibali runs this project again, it will seek to appoint a short-term project manager to focus on logistics and events planning, to reduce the burden on the team and avail more of their time for their core work of mentoring and supporting schools.

6.6 Rural challenges: distance and transport

As with all projects working in similar communities, challenges of distance, poor road conditions and lack of transport continue to affect implementation. Under these circumstances, harsh weather can severely impact the project. Story Sparkers cannot always attend schools on rainy days; in Maluti district, sometimes snow is an obstacle in winter. In Lusikisiki, one Big Five training was cancelled due to rain and road conditions. In Uthukela, two schools that were part of the Reduced Support Programme (RSP) were damaged by heavy storms, which forced learning activities to stop for a period.

²³ This figure is based on analysis conducted by a student intern of 2 847 daily reports submitted up to 30 August 2018.

Although the project purchased four additional vehicles (bakkies) to support project activities in late 2017, Literacy Mentor and PSC support visits to schools were still limited by the available vehicles, particularly in the Reduced Support Programme (RSP).

To address these challenges, we:

- Improved our school selection process (as described in in section xxxx) to reduce transport challenges for Story Sparkers.
- Hired 7 additional Story Sparkers to serve schools that were particularly far from other schools or hard to reach.
- Ensured all Literacy Mentors, Provincial Support Coordinators and other project staff (including Communications and M&E team members) had completed advanced driver training.
- Hired vehicles for Literacy Mentors when required, to ensure event logistics ran smoothly and milestones were completed on time.

We will continue to employ these mitigation strategies in 2019.

6.7 Sustainability

As discussed above in section 3.2, although we saw more reading clubs than we anticipated continue or register this year at our Cohort 1 schools, they were only running in 116 (48%) of the 2017 schools. Some schools still view SPS as a “Nal’ibali project”, not something that is owned by the school. It seems the programme is “sticking” better in some schools than others.

We took steps to address this in 2018 by providing focused support to 40 schools and lighter-touch support to another 166 schools, including training for 135 teachers, in the first 6 months of the year. We included all 2017 schools in a phone-based reading club re-registration drive and enrolled people who were trained in 2017 in the Nal’ibali FUNda Leader network.

We have learned that a one-year face-to-face intervention is not sufficient to ensure the programme is embedded and owned by schools. (This is further affected by the fact that “one year” is often only 6 to 7 months, as the RCT baseline, school holidays and year-end exams eat into implementation time.)

Going forward, we will equip Story Sparkers and teachers to involve children in Grades 5-7 in a more intentional and structured way, as peer leaders within their schools.

In our extension proposal, we are recommending that Story Sparkers should visit schools weekly for a minimum of 18 months. We have also recommended top-up books, incentives, and local communities of practice for SPS school principals.

7. PLANNED ACTIVITIES FOR NEXT QUARTER INCLUDING UPCOMING EVENTS

7.1 Submission of annual report (Milestone 26)

This annual report submission marks completion of this milestone.

7.2 2019 school selection

In 2019, Nal'ibali is giving first priority to 2017 control and buffer schools in Uthukela (KZN), Ugu (KZN), Maluti (EC) and Bizana (EC) districts who did not have the opportunity to participate in the programme, now that the RCT endline is complete in cohort 1 schools.²⁴ Additional schools from these districts will be chosen to make up a full 240 schools. Feedback in these districts points to strong demand for the programme in schools that have not yet participated, and strong relationships with district officials are already in place.

District officials are once again helping with clustering. They are also helping ensure that the selected schools have enough teachers and learners for Nal'ibali to meet targets, as per lessons learned in 2018.

7.3 2019 school principal briefings

After identification and clustering of schools, the project team will facilitate briefing sessions with principals from the 240 selected schools. The purpose of these sessions is to introduce the project, highlight the role of schools and the involvement of staff and learners, and complete all relevant documents such as school registration forms, Big Five nomination forms and school profile forms. School principals are instrumental for project success; therefore, during these sessions the project team seeks to ensure that buy-in is secured.

7.4 2019 Story Sparker recruitment (Milestone 27)

Recruitment will follow a similar process as we did for 2018, to ensure Story Sparkers recruited are from the school communities they will serve. Local schools, shops, community halls and libraries will be used to advertise, and DBE district offices will be used for CV submission and interviews.

7.5 Year End Reflections (Milestone 28 - field staff sustainability plan)

The last programme team activity of the quarter is year-end reflections and capacity building with Story Sparkers. This week-long activity will include reflecting on the year; capacity building and skills development for Story Sparkers, to help prepare them for future education or employment; and a celebration and prize-giving to recognise Story Sparkers' achievements. Specifically, for a few days during that week, SS will attend Harambee's youth development programme. Harambee is a youth employment accelerator that prepares young people for the world of work and links them to job opportunities. The programme is instrumental in linking young experienced people to relevant Job opportunities.

7.6 Preparation for January 2019 training

In November and December, all Nal'ibali departments will be preparing for January 2019 training. This includes planning; travel and venue logistics; sourcing training material; procurement of phones, T-shirts and caps; and screening of new Story Sparkers.

7.7 Data quality assurance and revision of M&E tools

Compiling the annual report revealed some data quality challenges. Though many of these were resolved in time for this report, some remain outstanding. With our new M&E officer finally on board since September, we will work hard both to

²⁴ 57 schools in Bizana (including nine 2017 control schools) were excluded because they are too close to 2018 control schools, whose endline will only be conducted at the end of 2019.

address existing issues, and to put stronger data quality assurance procedures in place for 2019, including data quality site visits and follow-up on irregular data trends.

We will also review and revise M&E tools as needed, based on input from the field team, the M&E team and USAID. Finally, for 2019 we will introduce ODK 2 (which allows staff to see their M&E submissions on their phones after sending) and Salesforce Chatter (which will give field staff easier, more timely access to reports).

7.8 Individual school reports (Milestone 31)

Although these reports are not due until March 2019, the M&E team will begin working on individual school reports, to give schools feedback on how they did in the programme, and to help classify schools into different reduced support streams for 2019.

9 HOW IMPLEMENTING PARTNER HAS ADDRESSED A/COR COMMENTS FROM THE LAST QUARTERLY OR SEMI-ANNUAL REPORT

Nal'ibali promotes mainstreaming of gender across all activities and inclusive participation of all children. In the previous reporting of standard indicators using AID Tracker, we received feedback from the project manager where he advised the organization to disaggregate data by sex for *all* project activities, including milestones such as the holiday programme, and not only for the standard indicators. We have adopted the number of people reached or trained disaggregated by sex as an organisational standard indicator. It will be monitored and tracked in all our activities.

We are also planning to modify, adopt and pilot the USAID data quality assessment (DQA) tool, in order to assess project progress accurately at all reporting levels.

9. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Expenditure

In 2018 a skills assessment was conducted on all the field staff, and a project management gap was identified. 12 Project staff went through a project management accredited training at a cost of \$16,793.5.

In 2018, a budget adjustment of \$9,625.53 (R141 000) was done to accommodate 24 team members that were employed under the Reduced Support Plan (RSP) for one more month. The project noticed that there was still some work that needed to be done by field team members to ensure that schools can continue with the programme post-SS involvement.

Unexpected Costs

In 2018 we moved to new districts. Our budget had been prepared based on 2017, and the new districts had different terrains which made it difficult to access the schools. The project encountered unexpected transport costs for all activities that needed transport. We hired more cars and the taxi associations were charged based on distance, yet we had budgeted based on trips, using the 2017 districts as basis.

Savings

However, we had savings coming from our partners, mainly DBE and District Offices. DBE provided transport for all educators who travelled to info sessions, cluster meetings and Margate meetings. District Offices provided free venues for Big Five trainings. Eight Literacy Mentors were offered office space in different district offices, and SS and LMs were given free office space every Friday for their meetings.

Internal Audit

In 2018, we had an internal systems audit conducted by the USAID team. Their findings will be helpful in strengthening our internal control policies and procedures.

ANNEX A: FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Cash Flow Report and Financial Projections (Pipeline Burn-Rate)

We are expecting our expenditure to be in line with our obligation

Timelines	Projections for year 3	Notes
Q1	\$768,077.00 ²⁵	As per Milestone agreement
Q2	\$1,200,330.00 ²⁶	As per Milestone agreement
Q3	\$809,759.00 ²⁷	As per Milestone agreement
Q4	\$365,768.00 ²⁸	As per Milestone agreement

The below chart is showing the total obligation of \$7,051,480.00.²⁹ Actual spend to date is \$3,907,520.00.³⁰

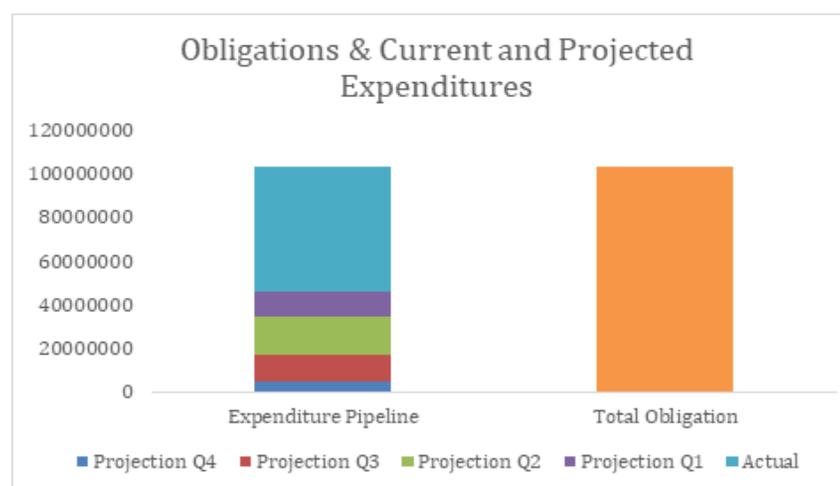


Chart 6: Obligations & Current and Projected Expenditures

²⁵ R11 251 208.80. Converted to USD on 2018/10/31 on <https://www.oanda.com/currency/converter>

²⁶ R17 583 159.79. Converted to USD on 2018/10/31 on <https://www.oanda.com/currency/converter>

²⁷ R11 861 790.53. Converted to USD on 2018/10/31 on <https://www.oanda.com/currency/converter>

²⁸ R5 357 966.40. Converted to USD on 2018/10/31 on <https://www.oanda.com/currency/converter>

²⁹ R103 293 975.44. Converted to USD on 2018/10/31 on <https://www.oanda.com/currency/converter>

³⁰ R57 239 549.89. Converted to USD on 2018/10/31 on <https://www.oanda.com/currency/converter>

ANNEX B: GPS INFORMATION

The spreadsheet attached includes GPS information for all project schools in the 2017 and 2018 cohorts, as well as the project office. GPS coordinates for district offices will be included in the next report (see Annex B GPS Information)

ANNEX C: BASELINE REPORT

The PDF attached named “Annex C SPS Baseline Report Final Public” includes the baseline study results referred to in the document.

ANNEX D: SPS DQA REPORT

The PDF attached called Annex D SPS DQA report contains information on the final story powered schools data quality assurance report.

ANNEX E: SUCCESS STORY TEMPLATE

Success Story

Program Element: *Primary Education*

Key Issues: *Literacy activism, community mobilisation, social and behavior change*

Title: My Story, My Community and Our Reading Club

Operating Unit: USAID/Southern Africa

School reading club leader shows new levels of commitment and initiative

The Mount Frere district in the Eastern Cape consists of three sub-districts – Mount Ayliff, Ntabankulu, and Mount Frere – which fall under the Umzimvubu Local Municipality. The area is largely rural. More than 90% of the population survives on subsistence farming and lives in small villages without proper roads, water or electricity. Not surprisingly, the district has low levels of educational achievement: only 7% of residents have completed their final year of high school.

To help bring a reading revolution to the community, the Department of Education selected 28 primary schools in the towns of Mount Frere and Mount Ayliff to participate in the Nal’ibali Story Powered Schools programme. These schools were identified as those most in need of intervention and located in areas that receive minimal external support.

Promoting a culture of reading in the community

In February 2018, a group of six Nal’ibali Story Sparkers, led by Literacy Mentor Zenkubeko Mpongoma, began work in the community. They introduced the schools to the project and Nal’ibali’s special approach to literacy development.

Each school was given five fully-stocked hanging libraries (one each for Grades R to 4) and a subscription to Nal’ibali’s bilingual reading-for-enjoyment supplement, which arrives every two weeks during school terms. Story Sparkers visited the schools weekly to bring reading for enjoyment practices into the school day. Further, they were helped to set up and run after-school reading clubs, which would have an opportunity to participate in the annual Reading Club Showcase Competition later that year.

Motivation and Interest

However, when Story Sparker Zizipho Mavovana arrived at Sirhoqobeni Primary in Mount Ayliff, the school no longer had a principal. To ensure the programme continued, the acting principal quickly selected two teachers to be trained.

Although she did not attend the initial training, teacher Thulisa Njomboni showed enormous interest in the programme, and soon formed Sirhoqobeni’s Phathisanani Reading Club. The group of 30 children between ages 7 and 11 meets twice a week and is supported by one community member.

“Both reading for enjoyment and reading clubs were new concepts for the children and the staff at the school. But, with access to a regular supply of colourful, different, and exciting stories in the children’s home language as well as English, their perceptions and attitudes towards books and stories soon began to change,” said Mpongoma. “Songs, games and regular visits from Zizipho helped to keep reading alive and entertaining.”

Phathisanani quickly built a complete and substantial portfolio of evidence and made it through the first elimination round of the Reading Club Competition to the semi-final in late August. Held at a nearby church, eight reading clubs from different primary schools attended. Each club displayed photographs and examples of their writing and drawing before demonstrating their favourite reading club activities.

At the event, Phathisanani was attracted by another reading club’s unusual display table, which included a branch hung with copies of children’s work, journals and favourite stories, and photographs of the many community members that support the club. Phathisanani approached the club, Beyond Books of nearby Sillasville Primary, and requested a meeting with the club. After special provision was made to finance their transport, the two clubs got together a few days later.

“It is common for learners to leave school for activities such as sports, music, or choir, but not for reading. The meeting was enormously unusual and groundbreaking. And, while the schools knew each other, the children did not. They were excited to share poetry, read-aloud and storytelling sessions with each other and to sing songs and play games together,” says Mavovana.

Demonstration of best practice

Back at Sirhoqobeni Primary, reading club leader Njomboni implemented some changes in her club. She had learned that Beyond Books functioned mostly on teamwork, and she began to provide much less instruction to the community member supporting her. Creativity blossomed and later, in September, after performing, *‘Itekisi Nabahlobo Abathathu’ (Three Friend and a Taxi)* by Maryanne Bester, Phathisanani Reading Club was awarded first place in the Reading Club Competition district finals.

“The competition is designed as an opportunity to celebrate and acknowledge schools and reading clubs and to build inter-school relationships to help promote a culture of reading, but what we saw was a new level of initiative and commitment. These are the fruits of inspiration, motivation and belonging,” said Story Powered Schools Programme Manager Michael Cekiso.



Picture 1: A community member telling a story to the two groups: Phathisanani and Beyond Books Reading Clubs

For the past two years, Story Powered Schools has held its annual Reading Club Competition to celebrate and acknowledge schools and reading clubs. This year's competition triggered a new level of commitment and initiative by a reading club leader that clearly demonstrates internalised behaviour change.

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Picture credits to: Zizipho Mavovana

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