



GLOBAL BOOK FUND FEASIBILITY STUDY

Executive Summary

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The Results for Development Institute (R4D) and International Education Partners Ltd. (IEP) partnership led the feasibility study and analysis. The findings, interpretations, and conclusions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad), the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID), and the Global Reading Network (GRN).

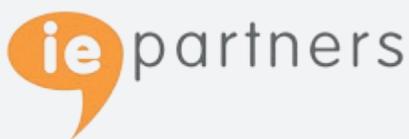
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Results for Development Institute (R4D) is a global nonprofit organization working with partners in more than 55 countries to find new ways to help people escape poverty and reach their full potential. We apply fresh thinking and rigor to emerging and stubborn development challenges – particularly within the fields of health, education and governance – and we pioneer and advance creative, high-impact solutions.



International Education Partners (IEP) specializes in consultancy, research, and training on a wide range of education issues in developing countries. IEP works with development partners and governments worldwide and focuses particularly on the provision of learning, teaching, and reading materials, Education Management Information Systems (EMIS), and ways of using technology in education to reduce the digital divide.

Following the finalization of this report in April 2016, the Global Book Fund was renamed The Global Book Alliance: Books for Every Child.

Cover photos are provided courtesy of Room to Read (www.roomtoread.org).

Executive Summary

Despite advances in enrollment over the past 15 years, 250 million children of primary school age are unable to recognize basic letters and numbers.¹ Worryingly, 130 million of these children attend 4 years or more of school and still leave without basic foundational skills.² The learning crisis is thus acute, and it constrains the potential and growth of children around the world.

Because of this, global focus has begun to shift in recent years to the quality of education and learning, with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 specifically focused on inclusive and equitable quality education, including inclusive and effective learning environments. Improving education quality and learning outcomes requires a number of inputs for teachers to use, chief amongst which are teaching and learning materials. These are essential aids for supporting learning and include textbooks, reading books, teachers' guides, and reference books. Many studies document that these materials show the most impact in improving primary school outcomes in developing countries³ when they are of appropriate quality and properly utilized. Specifically, numerous studies indicate that textbooks are not only a necessary input, but are one of the most cost-effective investments for raising learning outcomes.^{4,5,6} Reading books—which

include leveled and decodable readers, story books, information books, or topic books to provide reading instruction practice—are particularly important in building the foundational skill of literacy and in developing children's background knowledge in key content areas. Importantly, given the evidence of the benefits of mother tongue instruction⁷ and the value of teaching children in languages that they speak and understand,⁸ particularly in early years,⁹ books in such languages are crucial.

However, despite this evidence on the role of books in improving learning and reading acquisition, many children lack access to both reading books and textbooks. For example, a recent UNESCO survey in Africa showed that in most countries primary school children have to share textbooks. In some countries, more than 4 pupils share 1 mathematics or reading book, and in Cameroon, on average, 14 pupils share 1 mathematics textbook.¹⁰ According to two recent World Bank publications on textbook provision, the primary causes of low book availability and usage include the following: shortage, unpredictability, and unsustainability of book and book systems financing; failure to apply cost-reduction strategies in procurement, resulting in high cost of books; insufficient book management information systems and lack of data on current teaching and learning

¹ UNESCO. (2014a). Teaching and learning: Achieving quality for all. EFA Global Monitoring Report.

² Ibid.

³ Boissiere, M. (2004). *Determinants of primary education outcomes in developing countries background paper for the evaluation of the World Bank's support to primary education*. The World Bank Operations Evaluation Department.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Lockheed, M., and Verspoor, A. (1990). *Improving Primary Education in Developing Countries*. A World Bank Study. Washington, DC: World Bank for the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien.

⁶ Majgaard, K., and Mingat, A. (2012). *Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Comparative Analysis*. World Bank, 122–154.

⁷ UNESCO. (2015a). Education for all 2000–2015: Achievements and challenges. EFA Global Monitoring Report.

⁸ Read, T. (2015). *Where have all the textbooks gone?: Toward sustainable provision of teaching and learning materials in Sub-Saharan Africa*.

⁹ UNESCO. (2008a). *Improving the Quality of Mother Tongue-based Literacy and Learning: Case Studies from Asia, Africa and South America*.

¹⁰ UNESCO. (2015b). *School resources and learning environments in Africa: Key results from a regional survey on factors affecting quality of education* [PowerPoint slides].

material stocks in schools; poor planning; ineffective book distribution systems that often result in loss, damage, and delivery delays; and poor book management and care in schools.^{11,12} Corruption in the book chain is of particular concern. In several instances, corruption issues have even halted nationwide textbook supply for multiple years.¹³

Although data about the availability of reading books in primary grades is not easily available, the magnitude of the challenge is at least as great as it is for textbooks.¹⁴ Our country studies confirm a significant undersupply of reading books, particularly in mother tongue languages, and even when books are available, there are major issues including poor quality and worryingly low usage.

Donors, including bilaterals and private foundations, have provided millions of dollars in funding and programmatic support to improve book provision and usage.¹⁵ Despite this extensive support, however, there continues to be an underfinancing of books, and the problem persists.

A transformative international mechanism to mobilize funding, raise awareness, and address issues across the book chain may thus be needed as a solution. In this study, we analyze the feasibility and design of such a mechanism – referred to as the Global Book Fund (GBF) – as well as gather evidence to inform the set of interventions needed to transform the book chain in order to improve reading outcomes. Our analysis was informed by data collection in 13 countries and global stakeholder consultations to apply relevant experiences from funds in health and other sectors and to learn from experiences in reading programs, commodity procurement, and provision of books.

Our recommendations are based on a detailed analysis which draws on:

- ▶ Evidence from interviews with expert stakeholders and our country studies
- ▶ Analysis of the merits and costs of a new mechanism
- ▶ Consideration of the functions and design of the GBF

A summary of our analysis is below.

Evidence from interviews with expert stakeholders and our country studies

In exploring the feasibility of a Global Book Fund, we considered the experience of health and other sector funds that have successfully revolutionized the development and provision of health and other commodities. Analysis of global health funds highlighted many differences between books and the services and commodities these funds were created to support. For example, when The Vaccine Alliance (Gavi) was created, the value of vaccines was already broadly appreciated by governments and households in most low and middle income countries, and immunization systems, though imperfect, were able to achieve 70% or higher coverage with basic vaccines in most countries. These conditions are not in place for reading books, especially in mother tongue languages.

However, although a straightforward attempt to replicate any of these mechanisms as a solution to the books problem is not recommended, there are useful lessons to be drawn from their experience.

¹¹ Read, T. (2015).

¹² Fredriksen, B., Brar, S., and Trucano, M. (2015). *Getting Textbooks to Every Child in Sub-Saharan Africa: Strategies for Addressing the High Cost and Low Availability Problem*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

¹³ Read, T. (2015).

¹⁴ Global Partnership for Education. (2013). *A Reading Fund: Reading materials to 100 million children* [Internal note].

¹⁵ The exact amount of funding provided is difficult to quantify due to the complex nature of donor funds reporting, the mix of funding from partners (e.g. country governments, NGOs) that are often involved in book provision projects, and the fact that books provision is often integrated into larger education projects with multiple components. However, triangulation of data from a variety of sources leads to the conclusion that at minimum, millions, if not billions, of donor dollars have been channeled to address the books problem over the past few decades. A review, of donor-funded books projects, a selection of which are cited in Section 1.2 of the main report, feature many projects that independently total millions of dollars. The GPE grant of \$70 million to Rwanda is just one example cited in the main report.

For example, there are relevant lessons in pooled procurement from various health products, catalytic flexible funding to accompany targeted technical support (UNITAID and Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn and Child Health [RMNCH] Trust Fund), and the importance of integrated, nationally-conceived programs (The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria [GFATM]).

Although the scope of the feasibility analysis was primarily focused on reading books, the dearth of literature on reading books meant that much of the evidence cited relates to textbooks. Where possible, our findings specifically focus on reading books; in other instances, we infer the challenges in reading books using data from textbook provision practices. The findings along each line of inquiry are presented in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Summary of Findings

Line of inquiry	Finding
Demand, planning, and financing of books	1: Lack of awareness among governments, parents, and teachers of the value of reading books in supporting literacy.
	2: Lack of data on book provision and learning outcomes limits the ability to assess progress, identify inefficiencies, and mobilize appropriate resources. A GBF could play a key role in (a) providing funding or technical support to implement improved in-country data systems, (b) making country-level data collection a requirement for GBF book funding, and/or (c) hosting or supporting an online data sharing platform.
	3: To meet a theoretical minimum book standard for all pre-primary and primary students, low and middle income countries need to spend between US\$3.1 billion–US\$3.9 billion yearly. However, research is needed to understand a more realistic, current, addressable market size.
	4: Analysis of primary education spending reveals an underfinancing of books, including textbooks and reading books. To meet minimum book standards, out of 32 countries studied, 18 face significant annual budget gaps that total nearly US\$200 million. However, improving spending efficiency, rather than raising absolute funds, is a priority for half of LMICs and all UMICs.
	5: There are three distinct categories of countries exhibiting different financing needs, thus requiring different types of support from a GBF: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="475 1507 1471 1579">▶ Group 1 countries do not spend enough on both textbooks and reading books and do not have the capacity to increase spending <li data-bbox="475 1591 1487 1663">▶ Group 2 countries also have significant funding gaps but improved efficiency could help counter some of the gap <li data-bbox="475 1675 1016 1707">▶ Group 3 countries do not face funding gaps

Line of inquiry

Finding

Procurement and production of books

- 6: There is an inadequate supply of appropriate mother tongue reading book titles due to low awareness of the value of reading books, limited authorship capacity, and lack of content sharing arrangements. Given these challenges, the GBF could, at the global level, serve as or support a content repository to expand access to published titles, and at the country level, support the growth, sustainability, and quality of local publishing industries as needed.
- 7: Public sector book procurement is not always optimized for cost, quality, and sustainable supply. A GBF could play a role in (a) disseminating and incentivizing the use of procurement best practices, (b) improving the consistency and predictability of demand, and/or (c) promoting centralized pooled procurement for reading books at the national level to lower book costs.
- 8: The cost to implement a digital reading program based on a library model is about 12–13 times more expensive than the cost to implement a similar print reading program. However, for structured reading programs where each child is reading the same book at the same time, digital programs are less expensive per child than print programs.
- 9: There are high technical, investment, and recurrent cost barriers to the adoption of digital reading materials, including a lack of sufficient infrastructure to support device use, and high intellectual property related (IP-related) transaction costs.
- 10: Operational challenges also constrain the uptake of digital materials and include challenges related to education policy, content availability, and utilization.

Supply chain management of books

- 11: Supply chain and distribution issues vary by country, although common challenges include weak demand forecasting, poor management systems, inadequate financing, lack of trained staff, and inefficient distribution.
- 12: Distribution can be centralized or decentralized, with the public, private, and NGO sectors playing a mix of roles. The effectiveness of the distribution model varies by context and is influenced by accountability measures and the capability of the responsible actor.
- 13: Citizen accountability mechanisms to monitor distribution have been used successfully in some countries—for example, India and the Philippines—and may hold valuable lessons to reduce corruption in sub-Saharan Africa.

Usage of books

- 14: Although data on reading books is limited, research on textbooks reveals that book provision does not equate with usage.
- 15: Many teachers are unaware of how to appropriately use books in classrooms and how to set up and run school and classroom libraries. Usage can therefore be optimized through ensuring pedagogical quality of books, teacher training on how to incorporate books into lessons, establishment of classroom libraries, and advocacy campaigns.
- 16: Although complementary reading programs can improve reading achievement in students, uncertainties on the cost-effectiveness of these programs persist due to lack of data and agreement on the ideal number of titles needed per student or per class.

Analysis of the merits of a new mechanism

A new mechanism is needed to raise awareness about the high returns from books at the global and country level, to develop and disseminate best practices, and to mobilize funding. Our findings suggest a lack of awareness of the value of reading books in supporting early literacy, which inhibits demand from teachers, parents, and ministries of education. This in turn results in inadequate funding (or in many countries no funding at all) for reading books as well as textbooks, and for many low income countries (LICs), external financial mobilization is needed to close the funding gap. Additionally, there is a critical need for countries to rapidly access specialized technical knowledge for high-impact activities that can lead to the most significant opportunities for savings and quality improvements around the development, procurement, and supply chain management of books. Thus there is a need for a fast-moving entity to disburse targeted funding consistent with country plans.

An analysis of the benefits and costs of a new mechanism—specifically, a GBF—in contrast to using existing bilateral or multilateral channels indicates that the creation of a new mechanism is justified for three reasons:

- ▶ A new mechanism can play a critical role in harmonizing current funding for books and in ensuring greater effectiveness of funds. This may represent an opportunity to strengthen the coordination of funding and subsequently ensure greater transparency and predictability through the architecture of a new dedicated mechanism.¹⁶
- ▶ A new global entity is needed to break away from the traditional donor-project approach and instead play a system-strengthening role.
- ▶ Financing needs in this area are substantial, and although it may be difficult, a new mechanism could possibly mobilize dedicated funds.¹⁷

That said, establishing a new global mechanism is inherently a sensitive and political topic. One of the most significant potential criticisms is that new funds can contribute to increased fragmentation and may not be needed.¹⁸ There is also the danger that new funds can add transactional costs, not be well integrated within the relevant sector, and stall systemic change. Other concerns are that funds may be vulnerable to corruption and may lessen or replace domestic resource mobilization.¹⁹ Stakeholders consulted also cautioned that there is a low appetite for a new global fund, in contrast to the political climate that existed during the creation of health funds.

Despite these arguments, however, we find on balance that the severity and fundamental nature of the books problem requires the creation of a new mechanism. To guard against the aforementioned risks, careful attention has been paid to the proposed activities and design of the GBF.

Consideration of functions and design of the GBF

We propose that the GBF serve four functions. Careful consideration must be given to prioritization and sequencing, with specific activities expanded and refined over time.

At the global level, it would:

Function 1: Develop and disseminate knowledge and best practices on the effective development, procurement, distribution, and usage of all books.

Influential donors and implementation partners are already supporting reading initiatives—for example, at the multilateral level, the GPE, World Bank; at the bilateral level, USAID and DFID; and at the regional level, the Working Group on Books and Learning Materials at ADEA. However, there does not exist at the global level a dedicated technical unit with the expertise to serve as a repository of knowledge and best

¹⁶ Sustainable Development Solutions Network. (2015). *The Role of Global Funds in a Post-2015 Development Framework*.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Bezanson, K. A., and Isenman, P. (2012). *Governance of New Global Partnerships*. CGD Policy Paper 014. Washington, DC: Center for Global Development.

¹⁹ Sustainable Development Solutions Network. (2015).

practices and to enhance the effectiveness of support already provided in books provision. Nor do most of the agencies supporting reading themselves have sufficient staff familiar with the book market and supply chain. The GBF could thus serve as a repository and generator of information around all aspects of the book chain.

Function 2: Advocate and instill the importance of reading materials and gain buy-in from champions to spur long-term policy dialogue. Our consultations revealed a lack of awareness on the importance of reading books, particularly in mother tongue languages. It is crucial to ignite a culture of reading specifically focused on supporting children in learning to read and write and in reading to learn within school and home contexts.

At the country level, it would:

Function 3: Fund technical assistance to improve the development, procurement, distribution, and usage of books to improve learning outcomes. We propose that a country-driven exercise be used to identify needs and areas of support all along the book chain. This could form the basis for proposals to the GBF to request specialized technical support. We recommend that the GBF fund the provision of technical assistance but not itself assume responsibility for its provision. In addition, learning from the success of flexible program financing in the health sector, we propose that the GBF provide programmatic funding to complement the funds for technical support and address demand side barriers. For example, such funding could be used to raise awareness of the value of books, support teacher training, and foster accountability systems and other mechanisms to ensure that books are effectively used to improve learning outcomes.

Function 4: Fund reading books in mother tongue languages that correspond to languages of instruction (LOIs) where there is demonstrated financial need and country commitment. In countries that demonstrate need, we propose that the

GBF provide multi-year funding to purchase books, increase demand predictability, and engage and build local publishing capacity. Amongst all experts consulted, there was agreement that it is ideal to have local publishing industries in all countries where it is feasible. Although the evidence base is limited, consulted stakeholders noted that local publishing is important to ensure that book content is culturally relevant. In certain circumstances, for example in emergencies or where government capacity is absent, the GBF might also procure reading books directly from publishers.

Our exploration of market-shaping opportunities reveals that the greatest opportunity for efficiencies is in increasing print run sizes to achieve economies of scale in book production. The three primary ways to achieve this would be (1) increasing funding and procurement volumes for reading books, (2) creating nationally standardized book lists to aggregate demand around a fixed number of titles, and (3) centralizing national procurement. Although there is currently insufficient funding and little procurement of reading books by governments, if funding is provided to countries that demonstrate need, then centralized national procurement is likely to be the most cost effective system. Specifically for reading books, facilitating the pooled procurement at the *national* level and moving from a 5,000 to 25,000 print run size corresponds to a 33% savings per book. However, pooled procurement at the regional level across countries with common languages would only be relevant if funding for reading books remains limited in each country such that full-potential print run sizes are not realized.²⁰ As part of Function 3, the GBF could thus fund technical support to countries to develop a system where there is local autonomy over book choice within centralized national procurement, while through Function 4, it could require and support pooled procurement at the national level.

²⁰ Full-potential print run size is defined as roughly 50,000 copies, as per-book savings are marginal above this amount (Finding 7, Section 2.2.2). As previously examined, if reading book funding increases significantly such that 50,000 print run sizes can be realized in each country, pooling volumes across countries would provide limited benefit, given that cost savings are marginal above this volume level.

All functions of the GBF have been purposely designed to take on the broader challenge around access and provision of all books. However, we propose that in its initial stage, Function 4 prioritizes the funding of pre- and primary grade reading books in mother tongue languages that correspond to the language of instruction, given the critical role that this plays in improving literacy. Over time, the GBF might also move to fund the provision of textbooks in certain circumstances and expand its scope to regional and international languages of instruction as well as to higher grade levels. However, this is not proposed initially, due to the more urgent need to provide reading books in languages that children speak and understand.

We outline below six structural and operational considerations for the design of the fund:

- (i) **Funding and implementation model:** We propose that the GBF provide cash *grants* and fund *technical assistance* to eligible countries in response to *country proposals* which would be assessed by a technical committee and then approved by a governance body. There likely is scope for experimenting with using results-based financing (RBF) techniques for books, in order to help tackle the huge issues associated with ensuring that books are supplied, distributed, and used. Specifically, if payments were to be tied to results at the different stages of the book supply chain, considerable efficiencies could result.
- (ii) **Country eligibility, “graduation,” allocation across countries:** We propose that eligibility to apply for technical assistance from the GBF be quite broad, perhaps including all low and middle income countries. To receive funding for books, however, countries should have to demonstrate both need and government commitment, and poorer countries should have priority.
- (iii) **Country co-financing:** Both Gavi and GFATM require countries to share the cost of funded programs to ensure that programs which are started or expanded through their support are sustained (Gavi does this by independently procuring an agreed fraction of vaccines, GFATM by demonstrating that a certain share of program costs are coming from domestic resources). We propose that some form of co-financing also be central to the GBF strategy, with the required share dependent on country income and other considerations.
- (iv) **Monitoring and evaluation:** The GBF will need to have its own robust Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system and will need to support country M&E systems. A robust GBF M&E system can assure quality, safeguard against fund diversion, and demonstrate project effectiveness and efficiency. Additionally, a strong M&E system will be crucial in evaluating country performance. Meanwhile, at the country level, systemic data on books provision, collected through M&E systems, can also serve as an important global public good. The GBF’s M&E structure must address the tension between balancing the benefits of M&E with the often high transaction costs of gathering robust data. We propose that the GBF align its M&E as much as possible with not only its host organization but also with information that countries are already collecting. In order to support a robust system at the country level, we recommend that the GBF provide sufficient funding for technical support to countries in order to build internal capacity and country ownership in M&E and data management.
- (v) **Institutional structure:** It would be preferable for the GBF to be hosted by an existing organization, if an appropriate and willing host can be found. The main advantages of this option are cost (as the GBF would not have to develop all the necessary structures and capabilities of a free-standing financing organization) and greater integration (in that it would be easier to ensure that the GBF’s investments are well coordinated with complementary investments in the education sector). Given considerable reluctance to create new international mechanisms, it would also be essential that the GBF be as lean an operation as compatible with its functions, and

housing it within an existing organization should help contribute to this.

- (vi) Governance:** The appropriate governance model depends on whether the GBF is hosted by another organization and, if so, on how that organization is governed. If the GBF is hosted by another institution, these arrangements would be subject to and circumscribed by the governance structures of the host organization, and the exact division of responsibility between the host organization's structures and that of the GBF would have to be negotiated.

Further areas of exploration and analysis

Based on our consultations, potential next steps for the advancement of the GBF include:

Fund concept development and refinement

1. **Refine operational and governance structures:** Based on the institutional structure ultimately decided for the GBF, the governance structure will need to be carefully developed and assessed through consultations with technical experts.
2. **Refine the model for fund disbursement:** A number of areas still need to be further explored around this process, including how country proposals will be developed and submitted, eligibility criteria, appropriate results-based financing techniques, and coordination of GBF funding with other education support.

Political support and buy-in

3. **Consultations to generate political buy-in for a new mechanism:** Opportunities to build political support (e.g., through the activities of the new International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity or through the G7) need to be explored, as does the fit with other international educational priorities such as helping educate refugees and the promotion of global citizenship.

Deeper analysis in a select number of areas

4. **Further analysis on the feasibility and provision of reading materials to targeted populations:** More analysis and exploration of the specific needs of children in distinct contexts (for example, children living with disabilities) is needed to better understand how the GBF could effectively support reading in such circumstances.

Test approaches

5. **Test and explore specific approaches to demonstrate proof of concept:** Small-scale pilots in a select number of countries to test specific approaches should be undertaken in the first phase of the GBF.



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