Evidence to Policy: The Journey of Scaled TaRL in Sub-Saharan Africa

Who is TaRL Africa?
TaRL Africa’s mission is to support every child across Africa build foundational skills for a better future.

Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) Africa is a not-for-profit organisation registered and headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya, with teams in Côte d’Ivoire, Nigeria, and Zambia. TaRL Africa began as a joint venture by Pratham and RIF in 2019, with the goal of supporting governments and organisations across Africa to accelerate children’s foundational skill learning using the evidence-based TaRL approach. We support governments and partners to design, pilot, and scale-up TaRL in 12 countries in Africa, together with partners, we have reached over four million children with TaRL programming as of 2022.

What is the TaRL Approach?
TaRL is an evidence-based approach that builds grade 3-6 learners’ foundational skills in basic reading and maths. Grouping of learners is by current learning levels rather than age and grade, based on simple one-on-one assessments. Activities are appropriate for the level and fun.

Establishing Evidence and Impact of the TaRL Programme
Since 2001, J-PAL-affiliated researchers have rigorously tested the theory of change underlying the TaRL approach. Through six randomised evaluations in India, as well as a growing body of research in Africa, they find that when TaRL is successfully implemented, learning outcomes improve.

TaRL impact shown in different studies using standard deviations indicates small to very large positive improvements of between 0.04 and 0.7. This is done by comparing SD improvements in test scores for learners who receive TaRL, versus a similar group of learners who do not receive TaRL.

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Building on the evidence and programme implementation led by Pratham in India, TaRL started in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) as a pilot in Zambia in 2015. Since then, the TaRL approach has spread across SSA with governments and partners taking up locally contextualised versions of the programme.

The scaling journeys of 3 countries show the different pathways in which the TaRL approach has been taken up and expanded by governments.

TaRL in Zambia
- As of 2019 over 500,000 children.
- As of 2020 over 1,000,000 children.

- TaRL piloted in Zambia in 2015 and 2016.
- As of 2017 over 30,000 children, and over 150,000 children as of 2018.
- As of 2019 over 500,000 children.
- As of 2020 over 1,000,000 children.

TaRL in Côte d’Ivoire
- As of 2016 over 50,000 children.
- As of 2017 over 100,000 children.
- As of 2018 over 200,000 children.
- As of 2019 over 500,000 children.
- As of 2020 over 1,000,000 children.

TaRL in Nigeria
- As of 2015 over 10,000 children.
- As of 2016 over 50,000 children.
- As of 2017 over 100,000 children.
- As of 2018 over 200,000 children.
- As of 2019 over 500,000 children.
- As of 2020 over 1,000,000 children.

What approaches helped TaRL scale-up and influence the government systems?
- TaRL Approach is driven by learning outcomes
- It is pragmatic deeply grounded in the local context
- It addresses both technical and human components of the system

- TaRL Approach is driven by learning outcomes
- The TaRL approach enables teachers to generate and use data immediately while also equipping them with practical tools and methods to help children catch up in their learning. The data are aggregated upwards through the system to construct the subnational and national pictures of learning.

- It is pragmatic deeply grounded in the local context
- We look for opportunities to connect with and build on locally defined priorities
- We centre on actors rooted in the context and have the mandate to define and address education problems in the long-term

- It addresses both technical and human components of the system
- This happens from the ground up, starting with classroom the children and their teachers.