

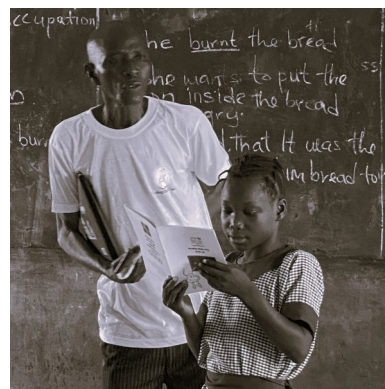


Telling Our Tales



# SCALING CHILDREN'S LITERACY IN NIGERIA

A Statistical Analysis of the  
Reading Made Easy Programme (2021-2023)



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# 1. Executive Summary

## 1.1 Scaling Literacy, Shaping Futures

Between 2021 and 2023, Telling Our Tales in partnership with Christianna Foundation piloted the Reading Made Easy (RME) programme in 10 public primary schools across rural Oyo State, Nigeria. This initiative aimed to improve foundational reading skills using accessible, culturally relevant reading materials developed specifically for Nigerian children.

To measure the programme's effectiveness, researchers implemented a longitudinal study using the internationally recognised Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) Toolkit. The results were striking: participating pupils demonstrated significant gains in core literacy areas, especially in letter sound recognition and listening comprehension, skills that are critical to long-term educational success.

## 1.2 Key Impact Highlights

- **95.8%** of pupils improved their **listening comprehension**; zero scores dropped from 97.2% to 4.2%
- **85.9%** of pupils showed progress in **letter sound recognition**
- **63.4%** of pupils improved **familiar word reading** by over 31 percentage points
- **90.2%** of pupils demonstrated growth in **letter name recognition**

## 1.3 What We Learned

*"Our children can't develop better than this system."*

*Mr. Opatade, Headmaster, St. John's Primary School, Idi-Osi*

The Reading Made Easy programme not only advanced children's reading scores but also influenced reading behaviours, parental involvement, and classroom dynamics. Children began to read voluntarily at home, and parents – many of whom could not read themselves – became active supporters of their children's literacy journey.

## 1.4 Path Forward

Based on the evidence, we recommend:

- **Scaling the RME programme** to more schools across Nigeria
- **Strengthening community engagement** through reading clubs and home-based initiatives
- **Supporting parents and teachers** with ongoing literacy training
- **Exploring mobile-accessible tools** to reach households without internet connectivity

## 1.5 A National Opportunity

The Reading Made Easy pilot demonstrates a scalable, data-backed path to foundational literacy. As digital access grows, the ability to read in English opens doors to education, employment, and full participation in an increasingly global society.



Mr Opatade  
(source: field photo by John Okeleye)

## 2. Introduction

At Telling Our Tales and Christianna Foundation, our shared mission is to support children in Nigeria to thrive through literacy. The Reading Made Easy (RME) programme was designed not just as a reading intervention, but as a movement to reimagine what learning to read can look like – in classrooms, homes, and across communities.

The RME books were created as universal teaching resources, tailored to centre Nigerian children. Designed to be accessible both in school and at home, the books complement the national curriculum while engaging children through lively storytelling, phonics, and whole-word recognition techniques.

From September 2021 to July 2023, we piloted the programme with 300 children across ten government primary schools in Ona Ara Local Authority, Oyo State. Over the course of two academic years, pupils attended ten 30-minute workshops per year, received seven RME booklets, and were encouraged to read actively at school and at home – with the books remaining their own to keep.

The Reading Made Easy approach was built on six core aims:

1. **Increase access** to appropriate English reading books
2. **Promote positive behaviours** around reading
3. **Strengthen motivation** to read
4. **Build confidence** in reading English
5. Encourage **parent and community involvement**
6. Ultimately, **improve English literacy skills**

This report focuses on the sixth aim – English literacy improvement – using quantitative data to evaluate the programme’s impact. While the full spectrum of outcomes includes behavioural and community effects, here we present the findings from a two-year statistical study, capturing the measurable shifts in children’s reading skills.

The results show that even in rural schools with limited resources, when children have access to culturally relevant books, support from teachers and parents, and a structure that encourages practice, they can make dramatic strides in literacy.



RME Workshop, IMS, Akanran, Ona-Ara, Oyo State (source: field photo by John Okeleye)

### 3. Key Findings

The Reading Made Easy (RME) pilot produced clear and measurable improvements in children's reading abilities across every literacy task assessed. These results reflect not only the effectiveness of the books and workshops, but also the commitment of teachers, facilitators, and communities who supported pupils throughout the programme.

#### 3.1 Strong Gains Across Core Reading Skills

Across all five assessed literacy skills – letter name recognition, letter sound recognition, familiar word reading, non-familiar word reading, and listening comprehension – children showed marked progress from baseline to the end of Year 2.

- **Zero scores** – which indicate pupils unable to attempt a task – dropped dramatically. This metric is particularly useful in low-literacy settings because it reflects foundational skill acquisition.
- **Average scores** increased significantly, indicating both breadth and depth of learning across the group.
- Many pupils achieved **improvements of 30 percentage points or more**, signalling that gains were not just incremental but transformative for many.

**Reduction in Zero Scores by Literacy Skill (Pre-Workshop to Year 2)**

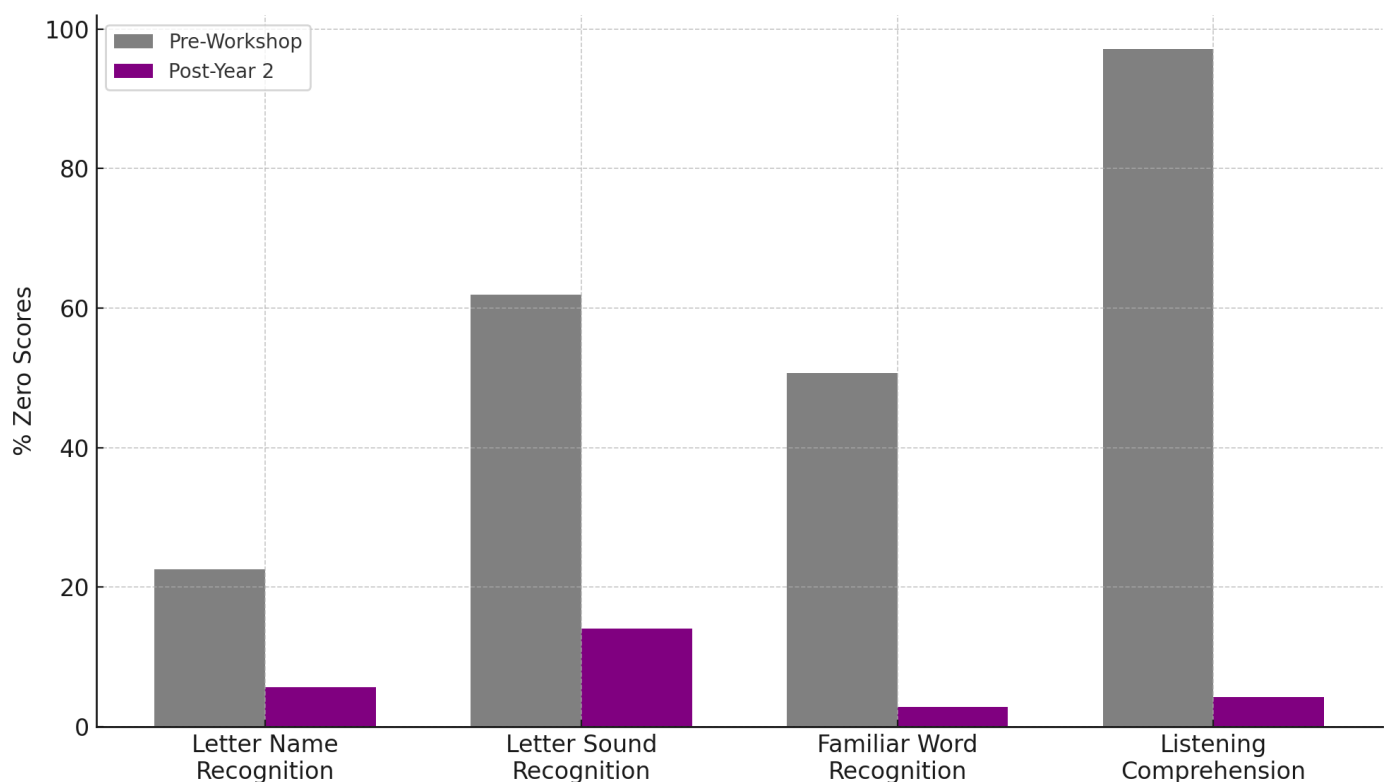


Figure 1. Percentage of pupils scoring zero across literacy tasks, from baseline to year 2.

## 3.2 Exceptional Growth in Letter Sound Recognition and Listening Comprehension

Two skills in particular stood out:

**Letter Sound Recognition:** Zero scores fell from 61.97% to 14.08%, with 85.9% of pupils improving – a critical step toward decoding words and independent reading.

**Listening Comprehension:** At baseline, 97.2% of pupils scored zero; by the end of Year 2, only 4.2% scored zero. This suggests that pupils moved beyond word recognition to understanding meaning – a vital part of literacy.

## 3.3 Visible Trajectories of Progress

Graphical analysis shows a steady upward trend in literacy skills across Year 1 and Year 2. The reduction in zero scores, paired with increases in average scores and high-percentile performance, paints a compelling picture of consistent improvement.

These trends held **across schools, grades, and genders**, underscoring the programme’s broad accessibility and potential for scale.

## 3.4 Children Reached Critical Thresholds in Reading Proficiency

By the end of Year 2:

- **90.2%** improved in **letter name recognition**
- **95.8%** improved in **familiar word reading**
- **Over 88%** showed large gains in **listening comprehension**
- Many moved from complete **non-readers to readers** who could decode and understand unfamiliar words

These findings suggest that RME helped many children cross a crucial threshold – from struggling to read at all, to beginning to read with fluency and confidence.



Reading out loud to class, Methodist Basic School, Ona-Ara, Oyo State (source: field photo by John Okeleye)

## 4. Methodology

The Reading Made Easy (RME) programme was evaluated using a structured and evidence-based approach, drawing on internationally recognised assessment tools and statistical methods to ensure the reliability and credibility of results.

### 4.1 Assessment Tool

To measure literacy outcomes, we used the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA), first adapted for English-language learners in Northern Nigeria and further tailored to reflect RME word lists. The EGRA toolkit, endorsed by UNESCO and USAID, is widely respected for its effectiveness in evaluating early-grade reading proficiency across multilingual and low-resource settings.

The adapted version focused on five core skill areas:

- Letter name recognition
- Letter sound recognition (phonic awareness)
- Familiar word reading
- Non-familiar word reading
- Listening comprehension

### 4.2 Study Design

The study employed a two-year longitudinal design to track pupil progress over time. This allowed the research team to compare individual and group-level performance at three points:

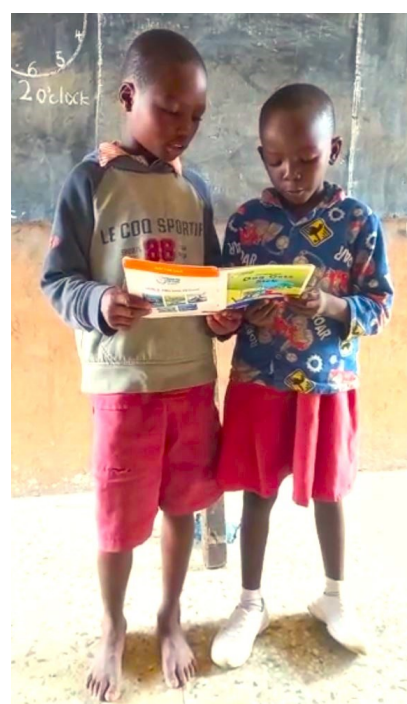
- Baseline (Pre-Workshop)
- End of Year 1
- End of Year 2

This design ensured a dynamic understanding of how literacy skills developed over time and captured the lasting impact of the intervention.

### 4.3 Participant Profile

The programme was implemented in 10 government primary schools within the Ona Ara Local Government Area of Oyo State, Nigeria. All participating schools had previously taken part in the Christianna Foundation's Book Box Library Club.

- **Sample size:** 300 pupils
- **Selection criteria:** Head teachers nominated children from the lowest-performing group in English reading for inclusion in the pilot
- **Demographic:** Children from rural, low-resource school environments, with limited prior access to English reading materials



Supported reading in pairs  
(source: field photo by John Okeleye)

#### 4.4 Sample Size Determination

To ensure that findings were statistically significant, the sample size was calculated based on:

- Desired alpha value ( $\alpha = 0.05$ )
- Target power level (80%)
- Expected effect size (25%)

This allowed the study to detect meaningful changes in literacy performance – especially reductions in zero scores, which are key indicators of reading readiness and ability.

#### 4.5 Data Analysis Approach

The analysis focused on three primary indicators:

- **Zero Scores:** The proportion of pupils unable to attempt or complete a given reading task. A reduction in zero scores indicates foundational literacy gains.
- **Average Score Improvements:** Mean scores were calculated at each assessment stage to demonstrate overall performance shifts across the cohort.
- **Skills Improvement by Percentile:** Pupils were grouped into percentile ranges based on the scale of their progress, with particular focus on those achieving gains of 30 percentage points or more – representing highly significant improvement.

This mixed approach combined population-level trends with individual-level outcomes, allowing for a rich understanding of the RME programme's reach and effectiveness.



Building confidence through shared reading: pupils reading out-loud together  
St. John's Primary School, Idi-Osi, Oyo State (source: field photo by John Okeleye)

## 5. Results

The data collected over the two-year pilot of the Reading Made Easy (RME) programme reveals substantial gains in children’s foundational literacy skills. Improvements were observed across all five assessed areas, with strong upward trends in average scores, sharp reductions in zero scores, and large numbers of pupils achieving high levels of progress.

These results not only confirm the programme’s effectiveness but also highlight the potential for RME to drive transformational learning outcomes in low-resource, rural school settings.



*Adebowale, Primary 6 Pupil*  
*St. John's Primary, Idi-Osi, Oyo State*  
(photograph by Ayodamilola Film Works)

### 5.1 Overall Literacy Gains

Across all five skill areas, pupils demonstrated clear and measurable improvements from Pre-Workshop to Year 2. The strongest growth was seen in Letter Name Recognition and Letter Sound Recognition, where average scores increased by over 40 percentage points.

These gains are consistent with a wider shift across the cohort – not only were more children able to attempt tasks, but many began performing them with confidence.

***“I didn’t know how to read before Reading Made Easy.***

***Now, no book is difficult for me to read.”***

*Adebowale, Primary 6 Pupil*

*Reading Made Easy Pilot Participant*

### 5.2 Skill-by-Skill Improvements

Each literacy task showed unique patterns of progress:

- **Letter Name Recognition:** Average scores rose from 12.8 to 55.2 (out of 100), with nearly all pupils improving.
- **Letter Sound Recognition:** Increased from 1.2 to 30.3, showing foundational phonics gains even among the lowest-performing pupils.
- **Familiar Word Reading:** Progressed from near zero to functional decoding for most children – over 90% of pupils improved.
- **Non-Familiar Word Reading:** Demonstrated growth in decoding unfamiliar text, with more pupils attempting complex words by Year 2.
- **Listening Comprehension:** Perhaps the most dramatic shift – pupils went from scoring 0/3 on comprehension tasks to interpreting short passages and answering questions, indicating real understanding.

## Average Score by Literacy Skill: Pre-Workshop vs. Year 2

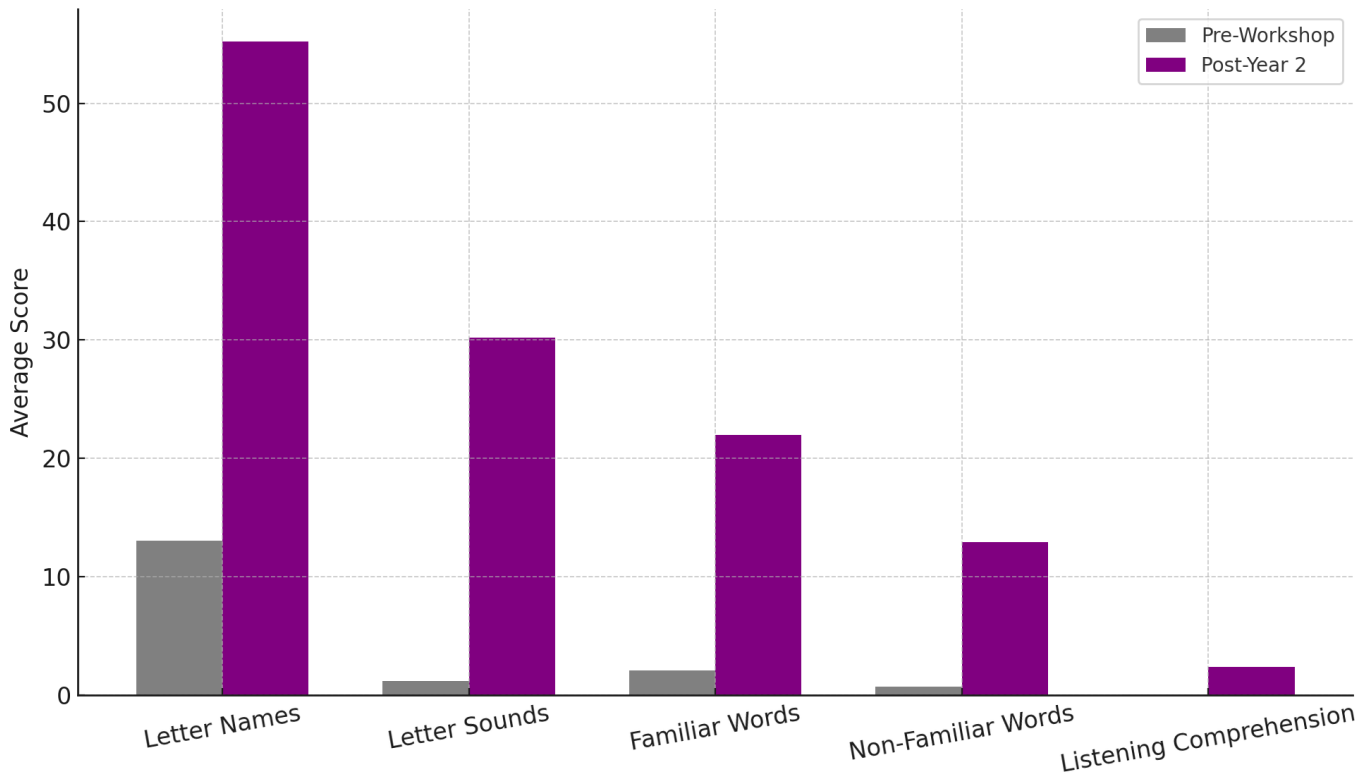


Figure 2. Average scores across all five skill areas show marked improvement from baseline to Year 2.

### 5.3 Depth of Progress: More Than Just Participation

Not only did the majority of pupils improve – many showed significant jumps in ability:

- A large portion of the cohort **improved by 31+ percentage points**
- **Zero scores dropped across all tasks**, indicating that children previously unable to attempt reading activities became active, engaged learners
- The distribution of scores widened in Year 2, suggesting that pupils progressed at different rates, but **few were left behind**

This level of improvement reflects not just a shift in literacy, but in confidence, classroom participation, and home engagement with books.

### 5.4 Impact Across Groups

The gains were not isolated to specific schools, ages, or genders. **Improvements were observed across all 10 schools**, and early comparisons suggest similar outcomes for boys and girls.

This consistency strengthens the case for the RME programme as a **scalable, equitable intervention** that can work in diverse classroom environments.

## 6. Recommendations and Future Opportunities

The success of the Reading Made Easy (RME) pilot demonstrates the power of targeted, culturally responsive literacy programmes in improving foundational learning outcomes. Building on this momentum, the following recommendations outline how RME – and similar models – can be scaled and adapted to benefit more children across Nigeria and beyond.

### 6.1 Scale the Programme Nationally

The results show that RME works – not only for improving scores, but for transforming engagement with reading. The programme is low-cost, easily replicable, and integrates well with existing curricula.

We recommend:

- **Expanding** to additional local government areas
- **Working with state and federal education partners** to integrate RME into foundational literacy frameworks
- **Training more facilitators and teachers** using the existing implementation model

### 6.2 Strengthen Community-Based Learning

Parental involvement emerged as a quiet force behind the programme’s success. Many children brought their books home, read to younger siblings, and taught their parents to read.

To deepen this impact, we propose:

- Establishing **Reading Clubs** for children and parents
- Providing **take-home guides** for families
- **Training community literacy volunteers** to support out-of-school learning

***“Now my mum wants to teach me how to read the books.”***

*Abdulkabir, Primary 6 Pupil*

*Reading Made Easy Pilot Participant*



(photograph by Ayodamilola Film Works)

### 6.3 Continue Supporting Teachers

Teachers reported a significant shift in classroom dynamics and confidence. With additional support, they can become long-term champions of early reading.

Recommendations:

- **Offer ongoing training** on phonics and guided reading
- **Distribute more RME books** and resources for classroom use
- **Incorporate RME into teacher induction** and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programmes

*“Reading Made Easy helps them to read more  
in school and at home.  
During break time,  
they use it and teach each other.  
The improvements are clear.”*

*Mrs Oluyomi Felicia, Teacher  
St. John’s Primary, Idi-Osi, Oyo State*



(photograph by Ayodamilola Film Works)

### 6.4 Build Long-Term Evidence

Finally, the strength of this pilot lies in its data. Continued monitoring and rigorous evaluation will be essential for scaling with integrity.

We recommend:

- Extending **longitudinal tracking** for a subset of pupils
- **Partnering with academic institutions** for independent evaluation
- **Sharing findings** openly with government and civil society partners

**The opportunity is clear:** with a model grounded in evidence, rooted in culture, and led by communities, Reading Made Easy offers a path toward literacy at scale — and with it, a better future for every child.

## 7. Conclusion

The Reading Made Easy (RME) pilot has shown that when children are given the right tools – engaging, culturally relevant books and supportive instruction – they can make extraordinary gains in literacy, even in resource-limited environments. At the heart of RME is a simple but powerful idea: that children’s natural attraction to bright, beautiful, joyful things can itself be a tool for learning. By embedding this innate curiosity into the design of its books and workshops, RME captures children’s attention and channels it into meaningful reading experiences.

Across 10 schools and 300 pupils, we saw consistent improvements in core reading skills, from phonics to comprehension. Children not only became more confident readers – many also showed clear gains in speech and pronunciation, suggesting that reading out loud, paired with phonics-based learning, contributed to broader language development. Teachers, too, reported improvements in their own skills and confidence, with many integrating RME methods into their everyday classroom practice.

What began as a targeted literacy intervention for early-grade pupils has grown into something larger. The ripple effects of this programme are reaching beyond the classroom – into homes, families, and communities. In many cases, children are teaching their parents to read. Non-literate adults are now listening to their children, following the stories, and beginning their own journeys with literacy.

This is the promise of Reading Made Easy: not just improved scores, but generational learning – a pathway to opportunity, and shared growth through reading.

The challenge now is not whether it works. It is how quickly and how widely we can ensure that more children – and their families – benefit from it.



***“I am happy. This will enhance our children’s knowledge.”***

*Mrs Akinrinsola Esther, Parent  
St. John’s Primary, Idi-Osi, Oyo State*

(photographs by Ayodamilola Film Works)

***“There are no better reading books for students in public schools.”***

*Mr Irinle Zacchaeus, Parent  
Islamic Mission School, Akanran, Oyo State*

## 8. Acknowledgements

This research and pilot programme would not have been possible without the support and partnership of many dedicated individuals and institutions.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the Ona Ara Universal Basic Education Board (UBEB) in Oyo State for their guidance and endorsement throughout the implementation of the Reading Made Easy (RME) programme.

Our thanks go to the Head Teachers, classroom teachers, and parents from the ten participating public schools:

St. Paul's Anglican Primary, Kajola

CAC Primary, Akinkemi

IDC Basic School, Olorunda

St. John's Basic School, Idi-Ose

St. Peter's Anglican School, Ojuku

IDC Primary School, Olode

Islamic Mission Primary, Akanran

Methodist Primary, Are-Alasa

St. James Anglican Primary, Olorunda

St. Joseph's Primary, Gbedun

Your openness, cooperation, and belief in the value of this work were essential to its success.

To the pupils who participated, we thank you not only for your enthusiasm but for everything you taught us. Your progress has been inspiring, and your voices have shaped the future of this programme.

We are especially grateful to the Christianna Foundation facilitators, Mr. John Okeleye and Mr. Kolawale Olasupo. Your dedication, insight, and day-to-day commitment on the ground made this work possible. The impact of your contribution will continue to ripple far beyond the pilot classrooms.

Finally, thank you to all volunteers, researchers, and supporters who gave their time, skill, and energy to this project.

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Telling Our Tales

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Freedom for the  
next generation



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