The Reading for Children Programme

The Reading for Children Programme (an independent research institute) reported six key findings:

1. **Fathers noted that they became closer to their children after attending training.**
2. **The training helped us understand that the father who should read books and spend time with their children in the past, when the children asked me to read, I used to tell them to go and ask their mother to read for them, but now I read books with my children for pleasure.”**
3. **Nearly half of the trained parents mentioned that their children have become more respectful and more respectful towards them, and that family relationships are closer.**

### Finding 2: The Reading for Children Programme helps to improve academic performance.

- Of the 137 trained parents sampled in the study, 50 percent reported that their children started receiving better grades. **Better school performance is not an explicit aim of RFC, so this finding provides anecdotal evidence of a welcome outcome to be further investigated.**

### Policy recommendations

Based on the programme’s successes, the Aga Khan Foundation recommends that the government of the Kyrgyz Republic allocate funding to scale up the establishment of mini-libraries and trainings for RFC facilitators and parents. Specific recommendations are as follows:

#### Policy recommendation 1: That the Ministry of Education and Science introduce family reading nation-wide by:

- Integrating Reading for Children themes into the national pre-service and in-service teacher training course for preschool and primary school teachers;
- Organising street-week workshops and workshops, drawing on internally and externally experienced, publishing storytells, for authors and early grade teachers.

#### Policy recommendation 2: That the Ministry of Culture promote children’s reading through:

- Strengthening and updating book funds and organising activities with families and children to build the habit of reading at home;
- Training for facilitators and volunteers using the Reading for Children programme as a lesson plan template;
- Building the support of local and district governments and communities for family reading initiatives, to encourage local responsibility for the establishment and activities of mini-libraries. As noted in the findings, the study identified an expenditure of about US$ 142,400 per year for the family for the establishment of a mini-library and
- Actively involving mass media to promote the idea of family reading, especially for instilling a culture of love and reading, and family practices such as purchasing books and offering books as gifts.

### As for non-governmental organisations, the Aga Khan Foundation recommends that they continue to:
- **highlight the importance of increasing children’s access to age-appropriate storybooks and reading at home;**
- **publish new, high-quality children’s books in appropriate languages;**
- **search for and implement innovative models to promote family reading.**

The Mountain UNICEF Development Support Programme in Kyrgyzstan (MDSP KG) was initiated by the Aga Khan Foundation in 2003 with the goal of improving living conditions in mountainous areas of the country. For more information on the Reading for Children programme or to obtain the full impact assessment report on which this brief was based, please contact:

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The Mountain UNICEF Development Support Programme in Kyrgyzstan (MDSP KG), with the support of the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF), introduced “Reading for Children” (RFC) – an initiative to rekindle a love of books and reading amongst children and their families. Ensuring access to books and helping caregivers understand why and how to read with children transforms interactions between family members and encourages children in their studies at school.

An assessment of the programme carried out in 2012 identified key outcomes that are highlighted in this brief. Based on these successes, the assessment recommends that the government of the Kyrgyz Republic support similar activities throughout the country.

Before the programme

Small baseline surveys conducted in Alai Rayon of Osh Oblast in 2006 and Naryn Rayon of Naryn Oblast in 2008 showed that while most families had books in their homes, only 14 percent of them had books for children. In Alai, 20 percent of parents said they never read to their children.
The Reading for Children Programme addresses constraints to children’s early reading development by establishing “mini-libraries” from which parents, caregivers and librarians can borrow simple, illustrated storybooks to read with young children. Mini-libraries are complemented by workshops for parents and other family members, which build their confidence in interacting with their children and teaching reading skills to their children an enjoyable experience for all.

Based on the initial success of ARK’s Reading for Children programme in the Kyrgyz Republic, comparable programmes in nine other countries were established between 2008 and 2011: Portugal, Mali, Egypt, Kenya, Uganda, Mali and Egypt. By the end of 2012, 68 percent of parents from RfC villages reported increased reading satisfaction in their children and more than half of them stated that their children have favourite books. A few parents also reported discussing the stories with their children and more than four out of five parents observed that their children ask questions about the stories. By comparison, 95 percent of parents from non-RfC villages reported that their children and more than four out of five parents from non-RfC villages, suggested increased interest in reading associated with the programme.

Finding 2: The Reading for Children programme is cost-effective.

- On average, 33,000 Kyrgyz som ($US172) were spent on the establishment of each mini-library, an expenditure of 140 Kyrgyz som (around US$ 0.3) per family.

By 2012, 68 percent of mini-libraries had been established in Osh and Naryn oblasts and the programme had benefitted approximately 20,000 young readers aged 2-12 years (65 percent of whom were girls) and over 12,000 parents and caregivers.

The reading for children programme addresses constraints to children’s early reading development by establishing “mini-libraries” from which parents, caregivers and librarians can borrow simple, illustrated storybooks to read with young children. In-service librarians in the two villages trained family reading facilitators and help conduct a wide range of activities for children’s early reading development.

Finding 5: Families that read together feel stronger bonds.

- After attending RfC training, many parents reported that they prefer to read books with their children over spending time in front of the television.

Before the training, “I used to simply read to our daughter. In the training I learned to ask about the books we were reading, to change pictures, pause when reading, ask questions, try to find answers together, and discuss.”

Table: Learning about the training she received from the Programme

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<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Learning about the training she received from the Programme</th>
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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>I learned many useful things for me. For example, how to read and stop while reading stories, and how to ask questions or help a child to seek parents. I can see how children become more interested in reading when I work with them.</td>
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— A Reading for Children facilitator speaking about the training she received from the Programme

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Finding 1: Access to age-appropriate reading materials
In the study, described amongst chil-

Finding 2: The Reading for Chil-

dren programme is cost-effective.

Finding 3: Reading for Children
facilitators play a key role in changing reading habits.

Finding 4: Trained parents read
more with their children.

The Reading for Children Programme
addresses constraints to children’s early
reading in rural areas by establishing “mini-libraries” from which families can
borrow simple, illustrated storybooks to read with young children. Mini-libraries
are complemented by workshop
sessions for parents and other family
members to promote family reading
and to build confidence in the
programme’s ability to support children’s
early reading experiences for all.

In-service librarians received training as Reading for Children programme
facilitators, and in addition to mini-libraries,
additional books were developed.

By 2012, 66 mini-libraries had been
established in Chuy, Naryn and Chui
oblasts, and the programme had benefitted approxi-
ately 2,000 young readers aged 2-12 years (65
percent of whom were girls), and 6,100
parents and caregivers.

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The first AKF Reading for Children
programme globally was launched in
Chuy Oblast, later expanding to Naryn
oblast, before being expanded to
Chui Oblast.

The programme’s scope has since
broadened. Reading for Children
was initially designed as an initiative
to benefit children before they went
to school. As the programme evolved,
and as families and communities
maintained interest in it, new
intensive training sessions were
introduced. These sessions were
now open to adults in order to
strengthen interactions and
teaching skills between parents and
children.

The programme is a holistic
approach designed to engage and
empower the community, including
parents, to contribute to their
children’s development.

The AKF “Reading for Children”
programme in the Kyrgyz Republic
was established as a joint venture
by Imna Nizovskaya of the Critical
Development, including a training
workshop for children and
librarians who facilitate the
programme in RfC villages, suggesting increased
interactions between parents and
children.

All mini-libraries scored highly on
library performance. 10 out of 13
mini-libraries had been established
by AKF/MSDSP KG.

Key successes
In 2012, an external impact assess-
ment of the Reading for Children
programme in the Kyrgyz
Republic was carried out by
Inma Nizovskaya of the Crirical
Development, including a training
workshop for children and
facilitators in RfC. They recognise
the fact that all RfC facilitators
were already paid, as school
teachers or social workers, and
help to keep costs down.

Finding 2: The Reading for Chil-
dren programme is cost-effective.

• All 13 mini-libraries were
visited by parents/caregivers
who facilitated the
programme in RfC villages,
suggesting increased
interactions between parents and
children.

• 68 percent of parents from
RfC villages have visited up to 50
books at home compared with only
34 percent of the parents from non-
RfC villages, suggesting increased
interest in reading associated with
the “mini-library.”

• Without a “mini-library,” our
children would read only “school”
books.

• A parent speaking about the
Reading for Children Programme

“The programme was successful in
leading us to understand the
importance of reading to
children; it raised our confidence
in reading to children, and our
children’s interest in reading increased.

Based on the initial success of
AKF’s Reading for Children programme in the Kyrgyz
Republic, comparable programmes in nine
other countries were established
between 2007 and 2011. In
Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Russia,
Mali and Egypt, the by the end of
2012, there were 500 mini-libraries
around 500 children’s books,
and 13 libraries were provided with
an expenditure of 140 Kyrgyz som
(US$ 750) was spent for the
establishment of each mini-library,
or were brought books from the library by
older siblings.

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In-service librarians received training as Reading for Children programme facilitators, including new children’s books, developed by AKF/MSDSP KG. They facilitated the mini-libraries and taught book reading and storytelling to parents in the RfC programme villages. The mini-libraries began to conduct a wide range of activities for children’s early development, including new children’s books, developed by AKF/MSDSP KG. They facilitated the mini-libraries and taught book reading and storytelling to parents in the RfC programme villages.

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Finding 2: The Reading for Children programme is cost-effective.

• On average, 33,000 Kyrgyz som (US$70) were spent on the establishment of each mini-library, an expenditure of 140 kyrgyz som (around US$0.3) per family.
• From 2007 to 2012, each of the 13 libraries were provided with around 500 children’s books, including the new book titles developed by AKF/MSDSP KG.
• All mini-libraries scored highly on library performance. 10 out of 13 libraries scored 80 percent or more. These high scores indicate frequent use of the mini-libraries, despite the fact that many libraries are in remote or bitterly cold winters. Where the atmosphere is emotionally warm and welcoming, families find it easier to make the trip to the mini-library.

Finding 3: Reading for Children facilitates a key role in changing reading habits.

• All 13 mini-libraries involved were very keen to keep working with facilitators in RfC. They recognize the value of the programme and enjoy what they have received and which they provide to parents.
• Touched the parents and grandparents’ readiness to use the mini-library.
• I did not read with my children regularly before because I was busy if I did not have enough time. But now I try to read with my children every day.”
• A parent speaking about the Reading for Children Programme.

Finding 5: Families that read together feel stronger bonds.

• After attending RfC trainings, many parents reported that they prefer to read books with their children over spending time in front of the television.

Finding 6: Trained parents read more.

• Parents rated highly the training on family reading. More than two-thirds of parents said that reading is important to their children’s development. However, only an estimated 40 percent of young readers aged 12-15 years (5 percent of whom were males) and 9 percent in the country, the youth literacy rates are by comparison very poor.

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In its impact assessment of the Reading for Children project in the Kyrgyz Republic, the Critical Thinking and Writing Program (an independent research institute) reported six key findings:

1. Of the 137 trained parents sampled in the study, 90 percent reported that their children had become friendlier and more respectful towards them, and that family relationships are closer.

2. The Reading for Children programme helps to improve academic performance.


4. Nearly half of the trained parents reported feeling closer to their children as a result of time spent reading together and talking about stories.

5. Fathers noted that they became closer to their children after attending training.

6. "The training helped us understand that the books we need to read books and spend time with our children. In the past, when the children asked me to read, I used to tell them to go and ask their mother to read for them, but now I read books with my children with pleasure."

Policy recommendations

Based on the programme’s successes, the Aga Khan Foundation recommends that the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic allocate funding to scale up the establishment of mini-libraries and training for RBC facilitators and parents. Specific recommendations are as follows:

- strengthen and upgrading book funds and organisational activities with families and children to build the habit of reading at home;
- training for facilitators and parents using the Reading for Children programme to perform better at school;
- building the support of local and district governments and communities for family reading initiatives, to encourage local responsibility for the establishment and activities of mini-libraries.

As noted in the findings, the study identified an expenditure of about US$ 90,000 to provide free books per family for the establishment of a mini-library, and actively involving mass media to promote the idea of family reading, especially for instilling a culture of love and reading, and family practices such as

- reading for children as a child is one of the strongest predictors of late academic success. All over the world, too many children leave primary school unable to read and write fluently. This can have a fundamental impact on their future school, work and life opportunities. The challenge to address this mass partly with schools, but also with families.

Children who have been read to before they go to school, and whose family members continue to read to them, are shown to outperform those who have not. Reading for pleasure helps to develop children’s language, literacy, critical thinking, communication, social and emotional skills. Reading at home also reinforces positive relationships within the family. Put simply, being read to from an early age helps children become confident learners.

In Kyrgyzstan, several challenges keep families from reading with their children. There is a serious lack of easily available, affordable and illustrated storybooks, especially in the Kyrgyz language. Parents and caregivers lack time and opportunity due to heavy workloads. In addition, families often underestimate the significance of their role in supporting children’s language, learning and development of self-esteem.

In response to these challenges, the Mountain Societies Development Support Programme in Kyrgyzstan (MSDSP KG), with the support of the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF), introduced “Reading for Children” (RFC), an initiative to rekindle a love of books and reading amongst children and their families. Encouraging access to books and helping caregivers understand why and how to read with their children transforms interactions between family members and encourages children in their studies at school.

An assessment of the programme carried out in 2012 identified key outcomes that are highlighted in this brief. Based on these successes, the assessment recommends that the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic support similar activities throughout the country.

The Reading for Children Programme

The Mountain Societies Development Support Programme in Kyrgyzstan (MSDSP KG), was initiated by the Aga Khan Foundation in 2003 with the goal of improving living conditions in mountain communities of the country. For more information about the Reading for Children Programme or to obtain the full impact assessment report on which this brief was based, please contact:

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The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) is a group of private development agencies working to improve communities and individuals, often in disadvantaged areas, to help create a path to progress for the benefit of all children, regardless of their gender, origin or colour. AKDN makes a significant contribution to the welfare of all children, regardless of their gender, origin or colour. AKDN makes a significant contribution to the welfare of all children, regardless of their gender, origin or colour. AKDN makes a significant contribution to the welfare of all children, regardless of their gender, origin or colour. AKDN makes a significant contribution to the welfare of all children, regardless of their gender, origin or colour. AKDN makes a significant contribution to the welfare of all children, regardless of their gender, origin or colour.

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The Reading for Children Programme

Policy recommendation 1: That the Ministry of Education and Science introduce family reading nation-wide by:
- Integrating Reading for Children training modules into the national pre-service and in-service teacher training courses for preschool and primary school teachers; and
- Organising school-wide reading awareness and workshops, drawing on international experiences and publishing storybooks, for authors and early grade teachers.

Policy recommendation 2: That the Ministry of Culture promote children’s reading through:
- Strengthening and updating book funds and organising activities with families and children to build the habit of reading at home; and
- Training for facilitators and parents using the Reading for Children motivating booklet.

Policy recommendation 3: That the National Writers’ Union of the Kyrgyz Republic:
- Enhance children’s writers’ skills in children’s book development through trainings and workshops; and
- Promote local oral stories by exploring and publishing them as books with the help of teachers, parents and children.

As for non-governmental organisations, the Akh-Aga Khan Foundation recommends that they continue to:
- Highlight the importance of increasing children’s access to age-appropriate storybooks and reading at home;
- Publish new, high-quality children’s books in appropriate language(s); and
- Search for and implement innovative alternates to promote family reading.

Policy recommendations are as follows:

• Of the 137 trained parents sampled in the study, 90 percent reported that their children started reading better.
• Parents who receive training read more with their children.
• Fathers that read together feel stronger bonds.
• Reading for Children helps to improve academic performance.

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- Training for facilitators and parents using the Reading for Children motivating booklet.
- Building the support of local and district governments and communities for family reading initiatives, to encourage local responsibility for the establishment and activities of mini-libraries.
- As noted in the findings, the study identified an expenditure of about US$ 160 Kyrgyz som for each family for the establishment of a mini-library; and
- Actively involving mass media to promote the idea of family reading, especially for instilling a culture of love and reading, and family practices such as:
  - Purchasing books and offering children books as gifts.

Policy recommendation 3: That the National Writers’ Union of the Kyrgyz Republic:
- Enhance children’s writers’ skills in children’s book development through trainings and workshops; and
- Promote local oral stories by exploring and publishing them as books with the help of teachers, parents and children.

As for non-governmental organisations, the Akh-Aga Khan Foundation recommends that they continue to:
- Highlight the importance of increasing children’s access to age-appropriate storybooks and reading at home;
- Publish new, high-quality children’s books in appropriate language(s); and
- Search for and implement innovative alternates to promote family reading.

Policy recommendations:
- Policy recommendation 1: That the Ministry of Education and Science introduce family reading nation-wide by:
  - Integrating Reading for Children training modules into the national pre-service and in-service teacher training courses for preschool and primary school teachers; and
  - Organising school-wide reading awareness and workshops, drawing on international experiences and publishing storybooks, for authors and early grade teachers.

Policy recommendation 2: That the Ministry of Culture promote children’s reading through:
- Strengthening and updating book funds and organising activities with families and children to build the habit of reading at home; and
- Training for facilitators and parents using the Reading for Children motivating booklet.
- Building the support of local and district governments and communities for family reading initiatives, to encourage local responsibility for the establishment and activities of mini-libraries.
- As noted in the findings, the study identified an expenditure of about US$ 160 Kyrgyz som for each family for the establishment of a mini-library; and
- Actively involving mass media to promote the idea of family reading, especially for instilling a culture of love and reading, and family practices such as:
  - Purchasing books and offering children books as gifts.