

IMPROVING LITERACY OF CHILDREN THROUGH SUPPORT FROM COMMUNITY NETWORKS

**CONSOLIDATED REPORT OF THE RESULTS FOR THE FIRST
PHASE, NICARAGUA 2021**



Canada



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Managua Nicaragua, March, 2022



Canada





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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

CNA	National Literacy Crusade
CAS	Complex Adaptative Systems
DGF	Focus Group Discussion
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
EIC	Key Informant Interview
EPA	Popular Literacy Army
FOSDEH	Social Forum on Foreign Debt and Development of Honduras
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
GESI	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
IDRC	International Development Research Center
KIX	Knowledge and Innovation Exchange
MECA	Measuring Evidence of Quality Achieved
MINED	Ministry of Education
MHCP	Ministry of Finance and Public Credit
OISE	Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
PNUD	United Nations Development Program
SITEAL	International Institute of Education
UL	Unlock Literacy
ULLN	Unlock Literacy Learning Network
UfG	University of Ghana
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WV	World Vision



INTRODUCTION

This report on the first phase of the community component of the "Unlock Literacy Learning Network" (ULLN) project focuses on sharing the findings of the research study based on the perceptions of key stakeholders, considering how they answered the research questions around the adaptation of the UL model and how networks support children's literacy, the qualitative evidence, and the changes and perceptions found in the sample of 10 communities where the project Unlocking Literacy (UL) is being implemented in Nicaragua, which are part of a sample. And at the same time, the report covers how the stakeholders responded to the research questions about the adaptation of the UL model at the community level and how networks support children's literacy. Similarly, it deals with how to carry out the scaling up of the UL activities for improved literacy of children from first to third grades in rural and urban territories of the program target areas, from a comprehensive perspective through community involvement with the implementation of community reading clubs. Quotations from key informants regarding the challenges faced due to the Covid-19 Pandemic and the effects of hurricanes Eta and Iota, among other vulnerable contexts, are also shared in this report as evidence.



The Unlock Literacy Learning Network (ULLN) project produces research funded by the International Development Research Center and Innovation and Knowledge Exchange Program (IDRC/ KIX), as part of one of twelve global grants which aim to strengthen education systems with proven innovations in context of development. The purpose of these grants is to generate knowledge and evidence to support the adaptation of proven innovations to address fundamental education priorities in Global Partnership for Education (GPE) partner countries and to mobilize research and knowledge to support the scaling up of proven innovations.

To document the description of the Nicaraguan cases, the information collected and coded from the data collection in the community component, carried out from August 9 through September 3, 2021, was used. There were a total of 102 instruments collected: including 63 key informant interviews, 30 focus group discussions, and 9 observations of reading clubs in 10 communities (8 rural and 2 urban) in the territories of Condega, La Trinidad, La Reynaga, and Tipitapa.

Among the findings, something that stands out is the level of buy-in from mothers, and how they support their children's participation in the reading clubs, as well as the role of the volunteers, who provide a community-based learning environment where girls and boys get to learn. It was noted that, for the participants, the reading club represents an opportunity for interaction for the new generations of children and young people as members of the community, where they can socialize, get to know each other, and strengthen their relationships.

It was also noted that the children who attend the "Reading Clubs": referred to in this way in Nicaragua, while in other countries they are called "Reading Camps", which has motivated them to attend school, which is reflected in school retention, because they provide a form of support and encouragement for education. They have developed an interest in attending book clubs; children feel that this is a learning opportunity and families with children in reading clubs support their children and they do so because they have seen positive changes in them. Another aspect to highlight is the participation in the reading clubs by community volunteers, as well as mothers and caregivers involved in the club's activities to support the literacy of their children. Particularly noteworthy is the involvement of religious leaders who support the efforts by providing access to physical spaces and the active staff of the churches to facilitate the sessions. Among the stakeholders, there was also the participation by community leaders. This report details other insights and quotes from the key informants that can be read in the chapter on changes and perceptions.

The structure of the report is divided as follows: first, the theoretical-methodological elements that make up the research design are described. Next, some relevant characteristics of the socio-educational context of the country are presented, as well as of each of the communities studied, background that helps to frame the work carried out by World Vision through the UL project. Subsequently, a general description of the study findings is made in each of the cases or communities analyzed. Based on this information, the next section discusses the factors that are enabling or hindering the implementation of reading clubs in the communities. Afterwards, we reflect on the dimensions of gender equality and social inclusion reflected in the results of the study. Following this, the main changes perceived by the participants as a result of their participation in the UL project are detailed. Finally, the report provides some conclusions about the results of the study.

Similarly, World Vision Nicaragua, through the "Unlock Literacy Network" project in the municipalities of Condega, La Trinidad, La Reynada and Tipitapa, in coordination with the Learning and Program Quality Management Unit of the National Office, and specifically with the Monitoring and Evaluation Coordination Unit, implemented the measurement of indicators related to children's reading comprehension in the third grades of elementary school, through the EGRA tool, designed to evaluate early reading skills.



RESEARCH DESIGN

Purpose of the Research

Through this exploration, the ULLN study provides evidence on how to enhance collaborative networks of stakeholders that promote quality, sustainable, and effective literacy that is gender sensitive and inclusive for early grade school age children, by implementing UL methodologies that address low levels of literacy in vulnerable populations. The ULLN study uses this evidence to establish a general working theory about how community networks in the education system collaborate to implement the main components of the UL model – Reading Assessments, Teacher Training, Community Action, and Teaching and Learning Materials – with quality and fidelity at the local, regional or national levels.

This research will provide key education stakeholders in these three (3) GPE partner countries with the evidence required to inform the dialogue on how education systems can be strengthened through networked learning (i.e. how to develop, scale up, and use evaluation data to support educational improvements from a comprehensive perspective through better community engagement), and specifically, how to improve the delivery and impact of literacy programming within such networks.





The study is also considered to provide valuable qualitative evidence about how communities with schools that have implemented the UL project are responding to the impacts of the global COVID-19 pandemic (which began in March, 2020) and in Honduras and Nicaragua with the addition of the impacts of hurricanes ETA and IOTA (in November, 2020) on the literacy of young children, both those who are in school and those who are not part of the education system.

Research questions

The main question proposed in the research design of this study is presented below: How can community stakeholders and networks be enabled and strengthened in Ghana, Honduras and Nicaragua, each with their own particular contexts, so that they can develop and use their own adaptive systems when implementing World Vision's Unlock Literacy program at large scale to improve children's literacy outcomes, including the most vulnerable?

Specific questions include the following:

1. How are community members in each country adapting the UL model in terms of their actions and interactions when implementing the community-based activities of the UL project to support the literacy of girls and boys, especially the most vulnerable?
2. How are community members, including teachers and principals in each country, scaling up UL activities by broadening and deepening the impact of UL activities in different ways, including disseminating ideas, approaches, activities and/or underlying principles that lead to better literacy for girls and boys?

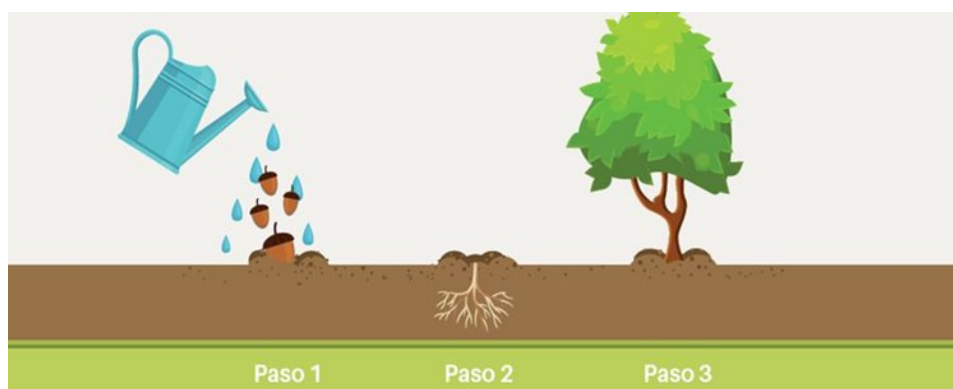
Theoretical frameworks

The general conceptual framework for this study is Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) theory, which is rooted in systems thinking. Using a CAS lens for this research allows researchers and implementers not only to work collaboratively to understand and describe the complex partnerships that allow community members to tailor UL activities to better fit their contexts and needs, but also to generate and promote collaborative learning networks where formal and informal stakeholders and peers work together towards a specific shared goal within a structure of interdependence (2005 Edition).

The research also feeds into the Educational Marginalization Framework, which places Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) as a fundamental crosscutting perspective. From such a perspective, marginalization in education is conceived both as a process and as a result, characterizing the way in which universal, contextual, systemic, community and family conditions combine with each other, facilitating or hindering the educational opportunities for children (United Kingdom's Department of International Development, 2018; FOSDEH; OISE; UG, 2021). When we consider questions of scaling up in the book clubs as an innovation in Nicaragua, in the case of this research, scaling up refers to a process through which different approaches could be used to broaden and deepen the impact of effective educational innovations that can improve children's learning – with a focus on the most vulnerable. These approaches include the dissemination of ideas, approaches, and/or underlying principles that lead to improved literacy for the children.

Figure 1 introduces a metaphor of three simplified steps under the scaling up process of an innovation, as is the case of the UL. In Step 1, the acorn or seed that is being planted represents a new model or way of doing things, being introduced at the community level where the school operates. In Step 2, the underlying ideas, approaches and/or principles of that model can be disseminated and thus “take root”. In Step 3, with time and effort, the spread of the underlying ideas, approaches, and/or principles related to the model lead to positive and fruitful results, for example, with improved literacy outcomes for children, both those who are in school and those who are not part of the education system in the case of UL. In the diagram, this process is represented by the acorn taking root and growing into a strong, healthy tree with its own particular growing conditions, growth pattern, and characteristics.

Figure No. 1 A metaphor for scaling

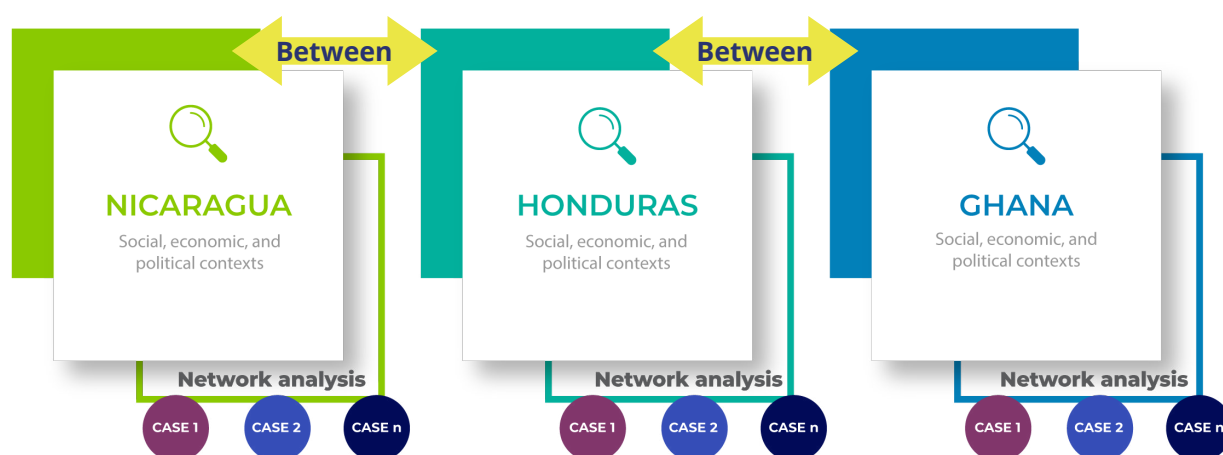


Source: Brookings Institution Center for Universal Education (personal communication, January 25, 2021)

Since the book clubs in the research study's target communities had been operating for two years at the time of Phase 1 data collection, Nicaragua can be considered to be in Step 2 (see diagram above), as the innovation of the reading club was introduced a few years ago and they have already been expanded and disseminated with at least two clubs for each community and in some communities up to four clubs, increasing children's participation and attendance constantly and with motivation. Findings from this study will enable key stakeholders to learn about what enables and what hinders book club implementation so that innovation can "take root" more effectively.

Methodology

The methodology of this work describes the study of comparative cases of three countries using primarily a qualitative approach, with certain quantitative elements. Case studies of 10 communities with schools implementing the UL project in each of the three countries (with a total of 30 case studies) provide rich and detailed qualitative findings to describe how community members (including teachers and principals) work together to support children's literacy acquisition by adopting the UL model.



Limitations

The gathering of information for the first phase of the UL project research study coincided with the process prior to the presidential elections held in Nicaragua in November, 2021, and this directly affected compliance with the research schedule, since the data was collected only with the participation of community level stakeholders, given that the teaching level stakeholders were involved in the election process (since many of them are part of the staff that make up the Polling Stations) and schools were used as voting centers, both at the rural and urban levels.

It was not possible to carry out the survey with the teaching component, since the research instruments for the scheduled date had not yet been approved by the authorities of the MINED. At the time this report was drafted, the approval from MINED had not been received to carry out the first stage of data collection with the teaching component. We anticipate receiving approval and conducting this data collection during Phase 2.

In the context of the Covid-19 Pandemic in Nicaragua, schools remained open throughout 2021, but at the time of carrying out the community survey by World Vision, they had to make frequent adjustments to the programming of the communities to visit, which were part of the study sample, since rural and urban areas were being affected by Covid-19 cases, resulting in changes from immediate invitations to community members, and despite that, it was not possible to carry out all the observations planned for the Reading Clubs, leaving two communities pending.

It should be noted that the researchers participating in the data collection process were also putting themselves at risk of being affected by Covid-19 by visiting the rural territories of the North and West regions of Nicaragua and the two urban communities of Tipitapa that were also being affected by the pandemic, taking into account that the vaccination process by those dates was not yet agile or massive, especially in the rural areas of the country. It should also be mentioned that as a result of Covid-19 the person who was acting as the liaison with the MINED passed away, and this affected the approval of the research instruments for the teaching component, having to propose them for the first quarter of the year 2022.

Phase I data collection process I

Once the different partners of the ULLN project jointly completed the design stage of the research plan and the data collection instruments (the stage prior to gathering information), together with World Vision, the various field visits were scheduled as required to carry out reading club observations, key informant interviews (KIs) with members of the municipality, parents, World Vision staff and faith leaders. There was no data collection with indigenous leaders because there are no indigenous leaders in the communities where the sample data was collected. This work included focus group discussions (FGDs) with volunteer facilitators from the reading clubs, children and community members who are the local stakeholders that make up the community networks where the UL project is being implemented.

FOSDEH research team collected data in each of the 10 communities between August 9 and September 3, 2021. In coordination with World Vision, the volunteers responsible for the invitations and those in charge of the implementation of the UL project, and FOSDEH's team carried out the application of the research instruments in 10 communities; 8 rural and 2 urban communities in the departments (states) of Estelí, León, and Managua. The research team conducted 63 key informant interviews, 30 focus group discussions, and 9 book club observations with a number of stakeholders listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of data samples collected at the community level by type of tool and participant.

Tool type	Participant Type	Sample	Number
Focus Group Discussion	Book Club Facilitator	10	10
	Boys and girls who participate in reading clubs	20	15
	Community Members	10	5
Key informant interview	Members of the Municipality	6	2
	Parents who send their children to the reading clubs	40	37
	World Vision International Level Personal	1	0
	World Vision National Level Staff	1	1
	World Vision staff working in different regions of each country	6	3
	World Vision Community Development Specialists (CDF)	10	4
	Faith Leaders	20	16
Book Club Observation	Book Club Observation	10	9
Total		134	102

On the same dates that data collection occurred, the quantitative EGRA measurement process was carried out, for which instruments were applied that were administered and applied by field interviewers previously trained with the tool, directly with children who are in the third grade of elementary education, the purpose of which was to collect primary data for processing and analysis of results (World Vision Nicaragua, 2021).

The "Early Reading Assessment" project is part of the "Literacy Learning Network" project. It was carried out in a total of 34 Schools, which have an initial enrollment of 1,059 boys and girls in the third grade of elementary school, of which a sample was generated that permitted the application of 704 EGRA tests to the same number of boys and girls.

Of the 34 schools, 8 are located in urban areas, in which 285 boys and girls participated, 26 schools are located in rural areas, where 419 boys and girls participated. The disaggregation according to the educational approach shows that 20 schools implement the standard single grade classroom approach with 524 students, while 14 schools use the multi-grade approach with a student population of 180 students. This study was carried out in the month of August at the beginning of the second semester of the 2021 school year, after the semester vacation period. The main objective was to obtain an assessment of the reading comprehension knowledge and skills, demonstrated by the children at the third grade level of elementary school, with the participation of 704 students from 34 schools located in urban and rural areas under regular and multi-grade approaches.



BACKGROUND

Country Socio-Educational Context

Nicaragua is located in the geographic center of the Central American isthmus, bordering Honduras and Costa Rica, with a continental surface of 130,373 km². It is divided into 15 departments (states), 153 municipalities and 2 autonomous regions, with a population of approximately 6,496,000 people, with a population density of 50 inhabitants per km². It is estimated that 51.71% are women and 50.2% are men (SITEAL-UNESCO, 2019).

In Nicaragua, basic education is managed and regulated by the Ministry of Education. Elementary education is free and compulsory in public schools:

A. The Basic and Elementary School Subsystems are made up of the following levels:

1. Basic Education: which offers formal and non-formal modalities. The age group from 0 to 3 years operates under the non-formal mode, with greater community participation, while the age group from 3 to 5 years, operates under both modes, non-formal and formal, the group from 5 to 6 years operates under a Formal Education mode.

2. Elementary Education: this includes Regular Elementary, Multigrade, Accelerated Elementary Education, and Adult Education, Special Elementary Education and Elementary Night School, with two Cycles: First Cycle (1st to 4th grades), Second Cycle (5th and 6th grades) operating under innovative modalities to cover the educational demand (Basic National Curriculum, pages 12 and 13).





As per the Law, Education is offered under several modes: regular, multigrade, accelerated, special and night. The General Directorate of Elementary Education (MINED) also indicates the over-age and distance modalities which operate in remote areas. In the over-age elementary school mode, children and adolescents between 9 and 16 years old from urban areas, who for some reason did not complete their schooling at the appropriate age for their grade, have the opportunity to complete elementary school in three academic years. Distance elementary school is for boys, girls and adolescents between 9 and 16 years old from rural areas who for some reason did not study at the appropriate age, so weekly meetings are held on Saturdays and tutorial sessions are provided. In the multigrade modality, the curricular contents are adapted to the characteristics of the socioeconomic, productive and cultural environment of the communities. Pedagogical strategies are developed for the simultaneous participation of boys and girls of different ages and educational levels (SITEAL-UNESCO, 2019).

Before Covid-19, it was estimated that in Latin America and the Caribbean, around 100 million children between the ages of 2 and 17 had been exposed to or had witnessed some form of violence. With schools closed and higher levels of stress among parents and caregivers, a growing number of children and adolescents have been victims of domestic violence, neglect and abuse, including emotional, physical and sexual violence. In recent months, there has been an increase in reports of domestic violence, including violence against children and adolescents throughout the region. At the same time, almost all countries in the region have reported that social services such as domestic violence helplines, which would normally respond to these cases, have been interrupted due to the pandemic (UNICEF, 2020).

The pandemic has short-term and long-term impacts on society, threatening the hopes and future of new generations. The measures taken to slow the spread of the virus have led many families to lose their main or only source of income. Unable to cover the costs of housing, food and medical care, families are struggling to make ends meet as Latin America and the Caribbean braces for the worst recession in a century.

The economic repercussions of this crisis must be measured not only in terms of the current loss of jobs and income, but also by the losses that the region's labor force will suffer in the years to come. According to World Bank data, each girl and boy in elementary and secondary school in Latin America and the Caribbean could lose between US\$242 and US\$835 in annual income, which is equal to more than US\$15,000 throughout their working lives. This will have a significant impact on poverty levels in a region where inequalities are already a pressing issue. Overall, the region could suffer a loss of up to US\$1.2 trillion in lifetime income for this generation of students as a result of missed months of schooling, lower learning achievement, and a greater likelihood of dropping out of education altogether. All of these are characteristics of a potential generational catastrophe (Education in Pause, p. 12, UNICEF 2020).

Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, schools have remained open in Nicaragua, following health protocols established for teaching staff and students, in accordance with guidance issued by the MINED. However, until the month of February, 2022, a total of 31,809 suspected cases of Covid-19 were reported, in all the departments (states) of the Pacific and the two autonomous regions of the Caribbean coast. This caused 5,976 deaths related to Covid-19 and 5,807 deaths related to pneumonia, and between January and February, 2022, 290 new cases were reported. (Citizen Observatory, 2022). The Ministry of Health (MINSa) has reported that they continue to make progress in the vaccination process and as of February, 2022, they report 13,877 Covid-19 cases, 13,549 recovered, 328 deaths and 104 confirmed cases of Covid-19 for the months of January and February, 2022, with one death (Gobierno19 Digital).

The impact of the pandemic on education poses important challenges for its current operation, as well as in the short, medium, and long term. It is particularly important to mitigate those effects of the pandemic that can represent an increase in inequalities around access and quality, especially because of the greater impact that the crisis has on the poorest and most vulnerable families.¹

Regarding the educational aspect, according to its 2018 annual report, UNDP and UNICEF in Nicaragua report that the adult literacy rate is 88.5%, and the completion rate of the last grade of elementary school is 48.4%. Access to elementary education has improved in Nicaragua. According to the Ministry of Education, 9 out of 10 girls and boys attend school.

1. MINED. (2020): National Strategy of the elementary and secondary education subsystem, facing the challenge of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

However, the largest gaps affect the poorest and those living in rural areas, especially in the Caribbean Coast of the country. It is estimated that 5 out of 10 girls and boys attend preschool and 4 out of 10 adolescents and young people do not have opportunities for secondary and/or technical education (UNICEF Nicaragua, 2018).

Nicaragua has made great strides in improving access to and quality of education at all levels. However, much remains to be done. For example, in terms of access, Nicaragua reports a gross enrollment rate at the elementary level of over one hundred percent. In contrast, the enrollment rates for the preschool and secondary levels are around 70 percent in both cases. The gap that exists at the preschool and secondary levels is the result of several factors that prevent girls and boys between the ages of 3 and 6 years old, and adolescents between 13 and 18 years old from attending school. Among the reasons for this situation is the lack of classrooms and teachers, educational modalities that are not adapted to the needs of the students, and lack of support from parents in the education of their children. (Equitable Quality Education, UNICEF).

In Nicaragua, “non-formal” initial education institutions, are described as subsidized private institutions, they have the highest levels of enrollment (53%). This type of school includes the participation of the community and is financed by different non-governmental entities. (UNESCO, 2013). As part of the goals set by the MINED, the educational system is to see an increase in elementary school enrollment, due to a reduction in repetition and dropout rates, and there is evidence of that happening already. A slight reduction was projected for 2021, which would be the longer-term effect of the reductions in repetition and dropout rates, as students who are still in the system and who pass to the next grades move on to secondary school. In high school, a growth of 30% is projected for that same period. The commitment to restore the right to education is recognized, which means that the transcendent goal is qualitative: no boy, girl, adolescent, young person shall be left without the opportunity to access quality education at an appropriate age. At the same time, efforts are being made to reduce overage and the adult education gap. They have also set a goal for 2017-2021, with the execution and investment to replace, repair and expand classrooms as follows: preschool 390, elementary: 1,299, secondary: 879; for a total of 2,568 classrooms (MINED, 2020).

2017-2021 Projected Enrollment (Boys and Girls)

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Early education enrollment	268,488	277,617	278,917	280,317	281,817
Elementary education enrollment	874,750	874,188	874,998	875,600	875,750
Secondary education enrollment	535,299	542,370	551,964	562,966	591,479

Document source: Basic and secondary education subsystem strategy 2020 table 14, MINED

With the Sandinista Government, general poverty has seen a significant reduction in Nicaragua, going from 48.3% in 2005 to 24.9% in 2016, and extreme poverty from 17.2% to 6.9% during the same period, thanks to all the socio-productive programs that have been implemented, along with security, peace, macroeconomic stability, and national and foreign investment (National Plan to Fight Poverty 2022-2026, 2021).

Even before the victory of the Sandinista Popular Revolution in 1979, an FSLN work team had drawn up a Literacy Draft Project, which served as the starting point for what would later become the Great National Literacy Crusade "Heroes and Martyrs for the Liberation of Nicaragua" (CNA). Immediately after the victory of the Revolution (after 15 days), the National Reconstruction Government appointed the Jesuit Priest Fernando Cardenal as coordinator of the CNA, and all the planning and organization work took place with the launch of the Popular Literacy Army Program (EPA), in the Revolution Plaza, on March 23, 1980. The task was huge: the national illiteracy rate was 50.35%, but with the participation of 95,582 dedicated and supportive students, teachers, health workers, pedagogical advisors, drivers, office workers and housewives, it was possible to teach 406,056 Nicaraguans to read and write (fulfilling the mandate of Commander Carlos Fonseca Amador..." and teach them to read as well"), thus reducing illiteracy to 12.96%. The CNA for Spanish language officially concluded on August 23, 1980, and on September 30 of the same year, literacy training began in English, Miskito, and Sumo, to teach 16,500 Nicaraguans on the Caribbean Coast of the country to read and write. Literacy efforts went on until 1990, led by the Vice Ministry of Education. (National Plan to Fight Poverty 2022-2026, 2021).

The Government, aware that Education is one of the essential factors to achieve better levels of social welfare and economic growth, since 2007 has prioritized and increased the budget allocation for Education (World Bank, 2016).

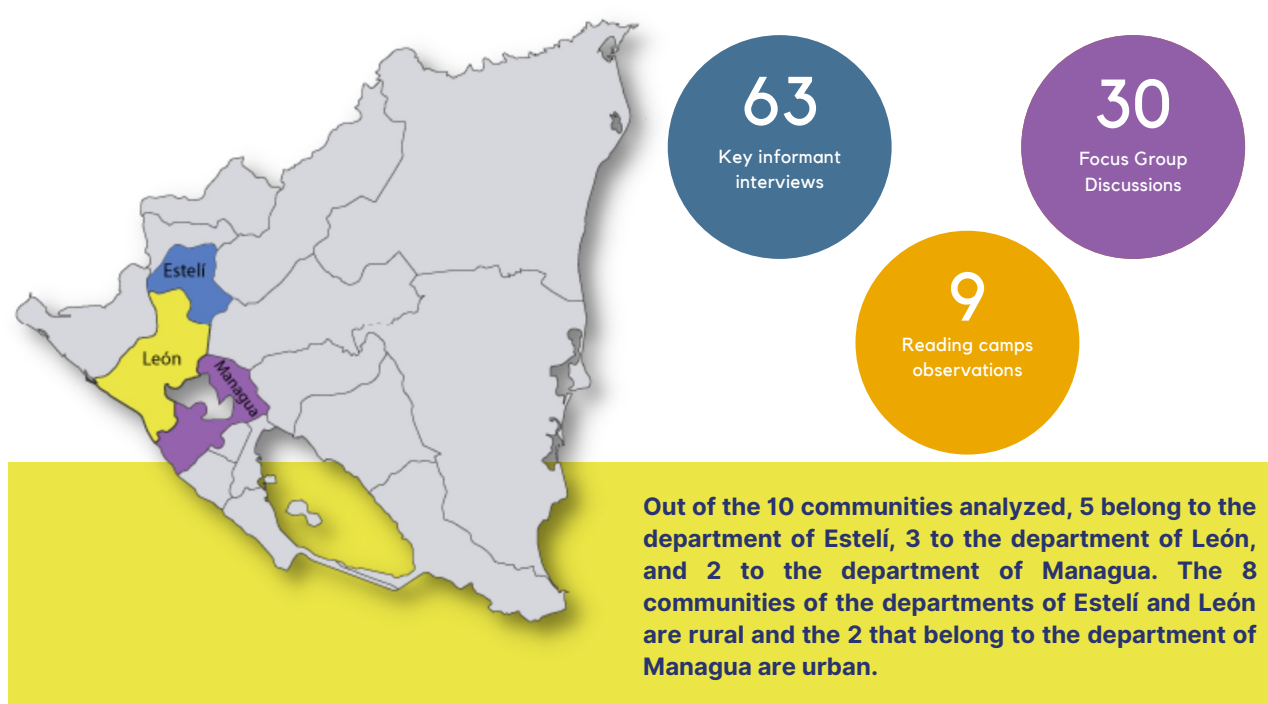
In 2010, young people without any type of schooling totaled 7%, a figure that was almost halved, to 4% in 2018; those who completed their secondary education increased from 15% to 21%, while the completion rate of tertiary education increased from 13% to 19%. (National Plan to Fight Poverty 2022-2026, 2021).

Description of the communities studied

For this research, FOSDEH, World Vision Nicaragua and OISE worked together to identify 10 sample communities in the different territories and areas in which the UL project is implemented.

For Nicaragua, the UL project aimed to work in 3 departments (states) and their schools, which are spread throughout the ten communities where World Vision implements the UL program (see *illustration 2*).

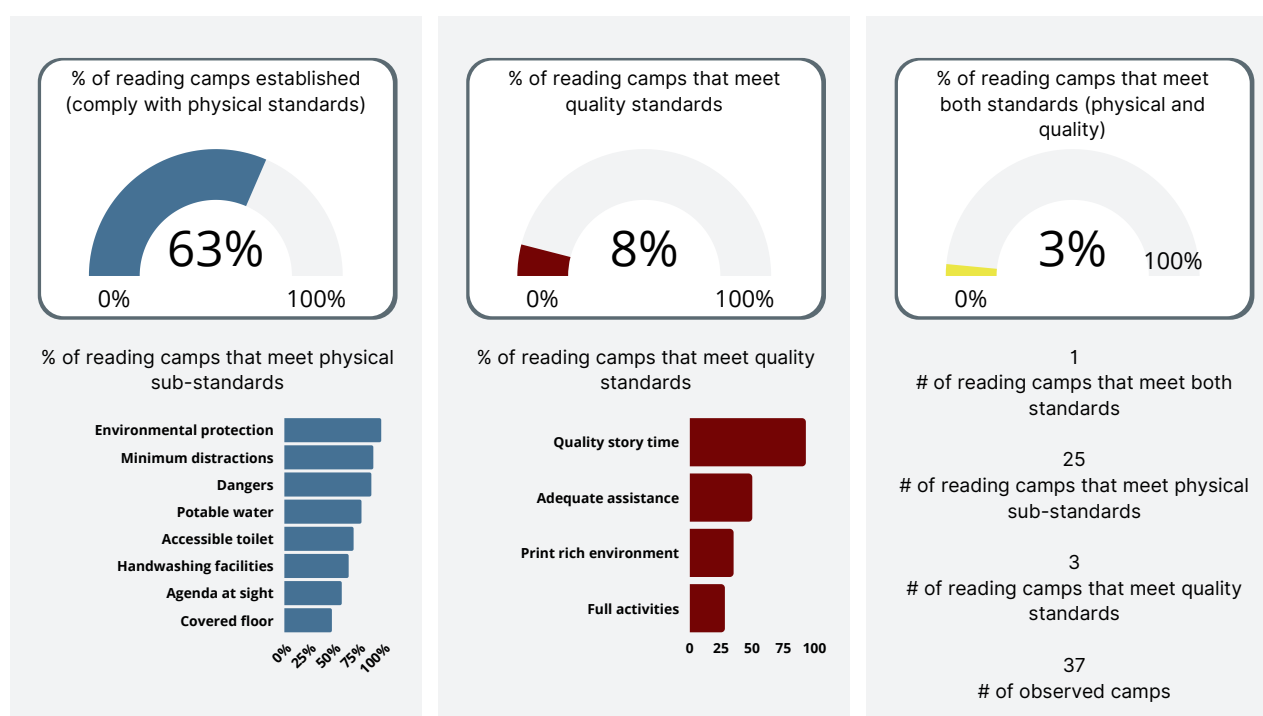
Illustration 2. Regional division of Nicaragua as per the work implemented by World Vision



Measuring Evidence of Quality Achieved (MEQA)

The MEQA component is the digital monitoring and training system for World Vision's educational programs, whose purpose is to monitor and improve the quality of the programs, including the UL project. Through this tool, information is collected through the observation of reading club sessions and interviews with the facilitators, and progress in the physical and quality standards of the project can be measured in real time. (World Vision, 2020).

Illustration 3. MEQA data for the communities of Condega and Tipitapa



Source: Taken from World Vision MEQA, 2021

In 2021, World Vision began collecting the first MEQA data in two of the territories where the UL project is currently being implemented: Condega and Tipitapa. As can be seen in Illustration 2, the results of this process indicate that 63% of the reading clubs meet the physical standards of the project (environmental protection, minimal distractions, hazard-free, drinking water, accessible facilities, among others). However, only 8% of reading clubs in this community are meeting quality standards (quality story time, sufficient attendance, print-rich environment, etc.). In total, only 3% of the reading clubs meet both physical and quality standards.

EGRA; Early Grade Reading Assessment

The results of the research study reflect on reading fluency; which consists of the ability to read words, and texts, without making mistakes aloud at an adequate pace. When children learn to read, they gradually become familiar with written words, until they reach the optimum level of reading comprehension. Thus, out of the 704 children consulted, 15 of them discontinued the exercise because they could not decode the words of the text, all 689 who managed to exercise reading managed to read an average of 68.37 words in 60 seconds. The comparative findings with the report of the measurement carried out in 2019 indicate that there was a decrease of 1.66%, since it reflected a 70.03 average.

The results of this fluency and comprehension indicator show that only 38.5% achieve an adequate level, which is much lower than that achieved in the 2019 research study, which was 43.4% of children who met both criteria. In the data disaggregated by gender, it is observed that in the 2019 study the percentage of children was 38%, while in the present study children represent 32.8% with a decrease of 5.2 percentage points. In the case of girls, a decrease of 4% is observed, since it went from 48.8% to 44.8% in fluency and comprehension (World Vision Nicaragua, 2021).

Effect of the Hurricanes

A total of 5 out of 10 rural communities from the department of Estelí were significantly affected by hurricanes Eta and Iota in 2020 and the 2 urban communities by floods, in such a way that at the time of data collection, effects caused by the hurricanes were evident, especially with the loss of crops, less food for family and self-consumption, an impact on school infrastructure, and the deterioration of their homes especially in the most affected areas.

Previous work by other organizations and World Vision

Currently, World Vision is developing a technical program in Nicaragua that was found in most of the communities where the data was collected: spirituality, protection, education and sponsorship. This technical program works in strategic partnerships with churches and state-owned institutions, among others, so that girls, boys, adolescents and young people feel loved by God, while they learn to become socio-emotionally resilient while living within protective environments (World Vision Nicaragua, 2022). In addition to these, the key informants mentioned other programs such as the *traveling backpack* and *youth ready*.

We were able to see that the World Vision is characterized by its long history and experience working in favor of the communities studied

From the interviews held with the World Vision team, we were able to see that the institution is characterized by its long history and experience working in favor of the communities studied, where it has carried out these and other development projects over a period of time which, depending on the community, extends up to 30 continuous years, promoting sustainable development projects in the areas of child protection, food security, water and sanitation, education and life skills. This strong presence of World Vision in the territories where it is currently operating has earned it very significant recognition by all, including the community leaders, as well as the government authorities with whom it has worked and consolidated relationships during this time. That aspect is considered an important asset for the implementation and development of projects such as UL, which is positioned and supported by World Vision's experience and credibility within the different territories in which UL is implemented.

In some UL intervention communities, it was identified that the Compassion International organization that works in the area of education with elementary school children to strengthen reading skills, provides the children with a package of illustrated stories they sponsor and this complements the community work in the Reading Clubs implemented by World Vision.

Unlock Literacy Project (UL)

The UL project is an evidence-based initiative of World Vision aimed at supporting the efforts of schools, parents and communities to improve children's literacy processes. The UL project focuses on four particular areas: 1) reading assessment; 2) teacher training; 3) community action; and, 4) teaching and learning materials. While the first two components focus on schools, the third one focuses on parents and communities. The teaching and learning materials can be used to improve literacy processes inside and outside of the classroom. Each of the areas are built with the goal of promoting five reading skills: 1) knowledge of the alphabet; 2) phonetic awareness; 3) fluency; 4) vocabulary; and, 5) reading comprehension (Save the Children; World Vision, 2019). As part of the community action component of the UL project, World Vision promotes the development of reading clubs, which consist of a space outside of the classroom in which trained community leaders support children from first to third grade to improve their literacy skills through a series of playful activities that promote the five key reading skills.

CASE DESCRIPTION

This section contains a summary of the 10 cases of the communities in which the initial community data collection of the research study was carried out for the Unlock Literacy project in Nicaragua, a description which is based on assistance provided by the UL model. In short, most of the communities have currently operating reading clubs, and, because of the implementation period, in some cases areas they have been in place up to three years. The sessions are usually led by community leaders, who not only have a close relationship with World Vision, but also with local education and municipal authorities, as well as with other non-governmental organizations in the area.

Most of the sessions observed are held weekly, from Monday through Friday, adapting the activity schedules in accordance with the school day. In some communities, because the reading club is run by faith leaders, sessions are held on Sundays as part of Sunday School. Regarding the duration of the reading club, based on the field observation, the sessions run for one or two hours, and more time is involved when considering the children's arrival and reception processes.



LA TRINIDAD

Community 1 Rural

Community 1 is located in the rural area of northern Nicaragua. World Vision is present with significant programs for the community such as "Sponsorship", as well as the important work that the reading club facilitator volunteers carry out, since they highlight the commitment and the manner in which they plan to implement the reading clubs. The two reading clubs that were implemented during data collection, were carried out in the homes of the two volunteers. World Vision is mentioned as one of the key stakeholders that collaborate in the implementation of the reading club, since they have provided tables and materials for the development of the sessions.

Observation Start Time			Ending time		
01:00 pm.			02:45 pm.		
Number of Reading Camp Facilitators in session					
Women	1		Men		Total1
Number of girls and boys					
Girls	18		Boys	8	Total26
Number of girls and boys outside the school system (if the facilitator knows the data)					
Girls	0		Boys	0	Total0
Number of girls and boys with disabilities (if the facilitator knows the data)					
Girls	0		Boys	0	Total0

The two volunteer facilitators have mentioned that there is a local school in the community where a MINED teacher uses a classroom to teach preschool classes. A volunteer also uses the facilities to teach Catechism to children on Sundays. The infrastructure of this facility is deteriorated and consists of a building with three classrooms that once functioned as the former school and if they were to refurbish it, they could use it to hold reading clubs. It is spacious and there is a field where children who attend the reading club could play.

Volunteers lack training regarding the implementation of the reading club. There are no male volunteers at the club. It is led by the two young female volunteers, and both are mothers who are committed to their community. One of them is also the Catechist of the Catholic Church and the other volunteer is a housewife.

Mothers are considered key stakeholders who guarantee the attendance of the children and the implementation of the reading clubs. The children in the focus group said that they attend the club: **"Because it's fun, it's exciting, joyful, we can draw, sing, paint and read stories" (Boys and girls, community 4).**

One of the faith leaders is a male and he is the Deacon on behalf of the Catholic Church. Another faith leader, a lady, is a catechist and also volunteers for one of the reading clubs. The faith leader considered that the work carried out by both volunteers is quite significant, since they instruct and teach children without remuneration. The Delegate of the Word (Catholic Church) helps out at the reading club, motivating and advising the children to participate in the sessions and to keep attending the reading club meetings.

Community 2 Rural

This community is located in a rural area in the northern region of the department of Estelí. This community has a health clinic and a school. The village is located on both sides of the Pan-American Highway with many vehicles passing through on the road, 24 hours a day, producing lots of traffic noise, and children are at risk when trying to cross the road. This is why they have divided them into two clubs, one on each side of the road. Children attend the club closest to them without having to cross the road, and some of them are accompanied by older siblings or parents when they attend the club.

Observation Start Time	Ending time
01:20 pm.	02:21 pm.

Number of Reading Camp Facilitators in session					
Women	1	Men	0	Total	1

Number of girls and boys					
Girls	7	Boys	4	Total	11

Number of girls and boys outside the school system (if the facilitator knows the data)					
Girls	0	Boys	0	Total	0

Number of girls and boys with disabilities (if the facilitator knows the data)					
Girls	0	Boys	0	Total	0

There are two reading clubs that have been operating for eight months where two women volunteers collaborate in their implementation. Both volunteers develop the reading club once a week in a space inside their homes and they have received help from World Vision through equipping them with tables and chairs for each club and didactic materials to develop the club. The homes do not have all of the necessary conditions to assure an adequate space for the children, since the place is small, and they cannot walk nor do they have space for activities with the children.

It is important to note that the volunteer facilitators have organized themselves well to care for the children, since the two homes where the reading clubs are held are located on opposite sides of the main Pan-American highway, thus seeking to ensure that the children who live in the communities at one end don't have to risk crossing the road to attend the other book club.

Children have learned to read more fluently with their participation in the reading club. There are some older children (10 and 12 years old) whose parents do not send them to school because they assign them homework assignments, but they participate in the reading club and it has allowed them to make progress with their reading level.

For the son of one of the reading club facilitators, participating in the activities of the reading club has represented a personal benefit for him because he now has new tools and opportunities to support him in his literacy process. The children who attend the club stated the following: **"We come here to read better and to study, to learn more, this helps us to have better handwriting, we learn to multiply, and study the multiplication tables" (Boys and girls, community 2).**

Regarding the structure of the World Vision team: a coordinator for the UL project was hired, who works in coordination with the technical education coordinator. There are also education specialists who work in each area or territory, and they bring the information directly to their areas. They have a WhatsApp group through which they send orientation to the reading club volunteers along with the weekly plan. They also have area meetings.

With regard to capacity building and raising awareness among the stakeholders who are involved in the Project: World Vision has conducted a capacity building process for those involved in the community component, with the participation of education specialists, reading club volunteers and community members.

In this community, children (7-12 years old) participate in two reading clubs, and mothers, faith leaders and volunteer facilitators of the reading club are also involved. The participation of a Parents' Committee was also identified, made up of those mothers who are more involved in the activities, offering logistical support to the volunteer facilitators.

Regarding the gender equality and social inclusion dimension, there are no differences in the treatment of boys and girls in the reading club by the facilitators, however, participation is more active in terms of girls and the number of girls who attend is greater than the number of boys. The lack of participation by the parents is due to the fact that they are working outside the home (all day in agricultural activities) and the mothers are the ones who support and accompany their children to attend the reading club. In the case of faith leaders, the pastor of the evangelical church supports both reading clubs, by inviting children to attend the reading club activities.

CONDEGA

Community 3 Rural

In community 3, which belongs to the rural area of the northern region of Nicaragua, the residents describe the community as "very calm, without danger". They have a school, a community center, a health clinic, a Catholic and an Evangelical church, and community leaders who promote activities and the organization of the community. World Vision implements child protection, sponsorship and education programs, to which the organization's Community Development Facilitator dedicates 80% of his time. Regarding the UL program, the community component has been implemented for more than a year.

Observation Start Time	Ending time
01:00 pm.	02:45 pm.

Number of Reading Camp Facilitators in session					
Women	1	Men	0	Total	1

Number of girls and boys					
Girls	18	Boys	8	Total	26

Number of girls and boys outside the school system (if the facilitator knows the data)					
Girls	0	Boys	0	Total	0

Number of girls and boys with disabilities (if the facilitator knows the data)					
Girls	0	Boys	0	Total	0

World Vision has supported the training process for community stakeholders involved in reading clubs. An education specialist has been assigned to cover this community, organizing and imparting training for teachers and volunteers around the reading club methodology.

There are two community-based reading clubs, one with the Catholic Church and the other one is run by a protestant church.

The four women volunteers who facilitate the reading clubs implemented in the community are committed to their community and feel useful, doing unpaid work. Some thought that they could not teach in the club because they are not teachers, but now they have become counselors. The volunteers exchange experiences and socialize with each other. The key to the didactic process among the volunteers is exploration, creation, reflection, understanding and participation. There were no male volunteers in this community.

Involvement of mothers and caregivers in activities to support children's literacy: Mothers and caregivers support and motivate their children, helping them to love reading and writing. A greater participation and involvement on the part of mothers is observed, due to the fact that men go to work in the fields and the mothers, as always, have been more involved in caring for their children.

Involvement of religious leaders in activities to support children's literacy: In addition, religious leaders are involved (catechists, Delegates of the Word and Sunday School teachers) who participate as volunteers and the protestant and Catholic churches collaborate by providing access to facilities to implement the reading clubs. The children who attend the reading clubs expressed their opinion: **“because we like the new things they bring for us, because we like to learn, we like to learn to paint and draw, to be someone in life, discover something new, I like to attend because I learn many things like doing handicrafts, how to draw, they give us homework assignments” (Children, Community 3).**

The support of community leaders for the implementation of the club was identified as a strength.

In the case of this community, the community leader and a person from the municipal office support them in the activities requested by community volunteers, such as facilitating access to community facilities, looking for chairs so that they can be comfortable, motivating children to attend the reading club. World Vision is involved in the training process for reading club volunteer facilitators, providing them with didactic materials, stories, and Covid-19 biosafety supplies.

Regarding the gender equality and social inclusion dimension: there is greater participation and involvement by mothers than fathers. Likewise, the participation and involvement of girls is greater than that of boys, both in the club and at school. Another finding is that the reading club volunteers do not differentiate in the way they treat boys or girls, they work with the shyest children and identify the most active ones and organize their work in mixed groups. Children "are not selfish, they are united." There is no violence among them, they all work with the same methodology, even though they work in different spaces.

Community 4 Rural

In community 4, in the rural area of the northern region of Nicaragua: The community work that was being carried out by World Vision, as mentioned by the facilitator, has been going on for quite some time. Therefore, there was a long process that needed to be considered. The education specialists "believe" in the model, which *"they adapted to the country, but World Vision had already been working on the strategies before"*.

The community has also been able to implement the clubs thanks to previous work with the Ministry of Education and with community promoters. There are existing skills and abilities in the community members who have experience with organization skills and professional staff in the areas of health and education. An important achievement is the fact that the MINED recognizes World Vision's technical contribution as an important one. The elementary education director was one of the persons who supported the implementation of the reading clubs. He opened the doors to World Vision's contribution to education. In this community, the program began in 2018, however, as mentioned before, it has been operating for quite some time now. In 2018, the UL model applied the teaching and community components, and in 2019 they began to adapt it. One of the World Vision facilitators mentioned that there is another organization that is implementing education programs in the community (Compasion Internacional), and that their work is complemented by the UL project.

Two reading clubs are implemented in this community: One is held in the house of a reading club volunteer facilitator and the other one takes place in the chapel of the Catholic Church and is facilitated by the catechist.

Community members have an important role and involvement, since they are key stakeholders who make the project sustainable. There are retired teachers in the community. There is great potential for the implementation of the reading clubs. The community also has many volunteers willing to teach the children. World Vision contributes through materials and other types of aid. Children shared their opinions: **"I am going to continue coming to the club because we learn to read and write, because they teach me, because they have us draw, I cannot miss it" (Children, Community 4).**

Among the key stakeholders for each of the clubs, first of all, the reading club facilitators, since they are in charge of carrying out the activities, as well as the support provided by World Vision, and the parents, allowing their children to attend. One of the facilitators in charge of the reading club is a person involved in several community activities. She became a facilitator when the clubs were growing and needed more people to collaborate, and that is how she was also trained.

In this sense, there were training and socialization days in which some community members were invited to participate in the reading clubs. Facilitators have received three training sessions, first to learn the methodology, then they were trained on how a child should read, how to decorate a study space, or what they should draw. There has also been support from World Vision staff who have been in charge of providing training to the community on how to support their children in learning to complement what they receive in the reading club.

Regarding gender equity and social inclusion: It appears that there are no significant contrasts. The adults interviewed were women. There was participation of both genders in children's focus group. An interesting observation from the interviews with key stakeholders is related to the participation of parents supporting the reading clubs, where mothers play an important role: supporting and accompanying their children, and in contrast, fathers show lower levels of participation because they are working during the day. In this community all the volunteers involved with the clubs are women.

There are challenges to working with children with disabilities in the reading club since prior training is necessary for those who work with the children so that they can better guide them in their learning. It is the municipality with the highest level of children with disabilities and the schools do not have the proper conditions for them.



Community 5 Rural

Community 5 is located in the rural area of northern Nicaragua and has one school. The leader/coordinator is a member of the community who has worked for fifteen years in a health brigade and as a promoter with other cooperation and government agencies. She has been a collaborator in other World Vision programs for five years. The leading coordinator of the community plays a fundamental role not only at the level of the UL project, but also for the entire community, since she has been a teacher, a brigade member, a political leader, etc. Her convection power is valuable for this project.

There is a reading club that has been implemented for more than one year and a half in this community, and the reading club is held in the house of the lead coordinator and is facilitated by the nephew of the lead coordinator and the daughter of the lead coordinator, also a volunteer for the book club in the community. Both facilitators are committed to their community and to developing the book club. The young volunteer facilitator stated that his experience with the club has significantly changed his communication skills, generating an attitude of greater openness and new expectations for the future for his own life. The boys and girls who attend the club gave their opinion: **"It has helped me to read, draw, and improve my handwriting. To be more obedient, they teach us to respect elders, we do several things"** (Boys and girls, Community 5).

For the development of the club they have received support from World Vision, providing them with teaching and handicraft materials, as well as biosafety supplies.

In this community, many people attend the reading club, including children, mothers, facilitators, (members of the same family: community leader coordinator, nephew, daughter), community members, faith leader and other community leaders. The faith leader has an active role in inviting children and youth to the club. When children attend church, catechists guide children and invite them to attend the reading club, in fact, many of them participate at the club and attend catechism classes.

Involvement of parents and caregivers in activities to support children's literacy: Mothers consider that the reading club is an opportunity to improve their children's education. They affirm that children have improved in reading and in school in general.

Regarding the gender equality and social inclusion dimension: the fathers are involved to a lesser degree compared to the mothers due to their work responsibilities in the field. The mothers are more involved in their children's care (food, school, reading club, among other activities). Mothers are the ones who support their children and motivate them to attend the club, especially because the fathers are working outside the house all day in agricultural activities. Participation in the club tends to be mostly by women, as is the case for the mothers and the faith leader. Most of the children participating in the reading club are girls, and they also tend to be the most active. However, boys and girls are treated equally by the facilitators.

LARREYNAGA

Community 6 Rural

This community is located in the rural area of western Nicaragua, and it includes a school and a Catholic church. There is a road that leads directly to the community. There are transnational mining companies in the community providing employment for men. The population living in this community is affected by the constant noise and detonations from the mining company. The mining companies provide electricity to the community.

Observation Start Time	Ending time
01:11 pm.	01:50 pm.

Number of Reading Camp Facilitators in session					
Women	2	Men	0	Total	2

Number of girls and boys					
Girls	4	Boys	7	Total	11

Number of girls and boys outside the school system (if the facilitator knows the data)					
Girls	0	Boys	0	Total	0

Number of girls and boys with disabilities (if the facilitator knows the data)					
Girls	0	Boys	0	Total	0

World Vision is an important stakeholder that trains parents and sensitizes the community about the reading club activities and helps by providing them with materials for the reading clubs. Volunteers express that this help represents approximately between 30 and 40% of the effort required, especially in terms of materials, but the community also contributes with their mobilization and completing other required tasks.

There are two clubs that began with the support of the local Catholic Church, which has played an important role in their implementation. Children participate in the reading clubs in connection with what caregivers call *missionary children*. Two young university students (male) and a lady (the catechist) are the reading club facilitators.

A positive observation is that children enjoy the reading clubs. Children gave their opinion: **"We cannot take them home, they keep them here for when we are working here, we narrate it and copy it in the notebook, and they have us draw to tell stories, we would like to take books to read" (Boys and girls, Community 6).**

Church leaders are key stakeholders. For example, the Catholic Church priest supports the reading club by facilitating areas within the Church and together with his assistant, who is also a volunteer at the reading club, they motivate children to attend the sessions and catechism classes.

Mothers help with the reading club activities providing some of the resources required to carry out activities at the clubs.

No differences were identified in terms of the way boys and girls are learning, and it is worth noting that this club has two male and one female volunteer facilitator.

Community 7 Rural

This community is located in the rural area of western Nicaragua. There is easy access to the cobblestone road and it has a health clinic, a Catholic church chapel, and a school, and a river that shares the same name as the school. The volunteer facilitator stated that at first she had the impression that World Vision only collaborated with protestant churches, however, when she got involved with the reading club project, she felt strong support and no difference in the way people were treated and interacted with the organization.

Observation Start Time	Ending time
01:57 pm.	02:55 pm.

Number of Reading Camp Facilitators in session					
Women	1	Men	1	Total	2

Number of girls and boys					
Girls	10	Boys	6	Total	16

Number of girls and boys outside the school system (if the facilitator knows the data)					
Girls	0	Boys	0	Total	0

Number of girls and boys with disabilities (if the facilitator knows the data)					
Girls	0	Boys	0	Total	0

There are at least three reading clubs in this community, one that collaborates with the Catholic Church, another one with the protestant church, and another one which is more community-based with children who do not necessarily attend church. They have been working with World Vision for two years now. The catechist of the Catholic Church has helped by leading the club (a volunteer), and the Deacon of the Catholic Church also helps as a volunteer.

There are two reading clubs that hold weekly sessions and are held in the Catholic chapel and facilitated by the Deacon and the young catechist who lives in the community. The chapel where the Clubs are held has a patio where children can carry out club activities. The priest also provides security for the children in the church premises where they hold the club since everything is fenced around them and the children can play freely. The other club takes place in the house of the community leader. Volunteers highlight the support of the mothers who support and motivate their children to attend the club, supporting their children's learning processes and having organized a committee among mothers. The volunteers who run the clubs have gained much recognition for the work they do in the community. Some children even visit the volunteer at her work, she works in a pharmacy, and they like to spend time with her there. Children shared their opinions: **"The club has helped me in reading and writing, before I could not read fast, but now that God gave me the opportunity I can read well, that helps me in school, I do well in all my grades, I get nineties and higher, it is important because I can have a future in my life, I have improved in school, in my grades, I am reading better, before I could not and I asked my mother what each word meant, now I understand her stories"** (Children, Community 7).

The community leader shared that her goal is also to create a reading club with adolescents to work with them and prevent substance abuse in the community.

As part of their support, World Vision has provided them with materials to implement the methodology, including rugs for the children to sit on, and has fostered community cohesion. The volunteer has learned to teach the children with the same materials and has been trained. In addition, support for the clubs is strengthened with the help of the community leader and facilitator who has worked for more than thirty years in the community as a judicial facilitator and political leader. This means that the leader can help with problems that arise in children, adolescents, and families, and is also able to work with the organizations that help the development of the community.

Regarding awareness and capacity building, World Vision has led these processes, providing the materials and resources required by the volunteers.

In this community, many people attend the reading club, including children, mothers, facilitators, the faith leader, community members, Parents' Association (mainly made up of mothers). The volunteer facilitators are part of the Catholic Church, including: the catechist, the Deacon, the Sunday school teacher, and a community leader.

In terms of participation among men and women in the clubs, mostly women tend to participate, especially the mothers. In terms of the children, both girls and boys participate actively in the reading club. There are no differences in the way boys and girls are treated at the reading club by the facilitators and the volunteer; however, participation is more active by the girls, just like the number of girls who attend is greater than the number of boys.

In the case of the mothers who are the ones who support and motivate their children to attend the club, it is because the fathers are working outside the house all day in agricultural activities. The presence of a male facilitator generates equity in the distribution of club activities. This is not something common in the clubs that were observed.

The community has an adult leader who has participated in several programs and gives moral support and helps with the different projects. Three members of the Catholic Church are faith leaders: the Deacon, communion minister, and the catechist. They work with the priest who works in several communities.

Community 8 Rural

In community 8, which belongs to the rural area of western Nicaragua, when the reading clubs began, mothers were informed about the program so that they could send their children. They have mentioned that this is the first experience their children have with community literacy programs like this one. In terms of the reading club facilitators interviewed, one is a housewife and the other one is a nursing student. Both help with club activities, and they were both trained by World Vision.

Observation Start Time		Ending time			
02:05 pm.		03:05 pm.			
Number of Reading Camp Facilitators in session					
Women	1	Men	2	Total	3
Number of girls and boys					
Girls	8	Boys	8	Total	16
Number of girls and boys outside the school system (if the facilitator knows the data)					
Girls	0	Boys	0	Total	0
Number of girls and boys with disabilities (if the facilitator knows the data)					
Girls	0	Boys	0	Total	0

Both volunteer facilitators are young women and are key stakeholders, since they are committed to the club's activities and manifest satisfaction with the work. Likewise, the participation of parents along with the help provided by World Vision is important so that the clubs can be carried out in the community. The children mentioned that the club teaches them to: **“draw, color, read, write sentences, I like to study and write, I write cow, cheese. I like the rabbit” (Boys and girls, Community 8).**

Regarding gender equality and social inclusion, regarding participation of boys and girls, facilitators mention that there is an equal participation of both girls and boys and that they encourage the participation of children who seem shy.

The club's volunteers are two young women from the community who are motivated and committed to helping the children and their community, given that this community is close to a community that has a parish, and the same priest play an important role there also.

TIPITAPA

Community 9 Urbana

This community belongs to the urban area of the Pacific department of Managua, Nicaragua. Because it is an urban area, it is not known by the name of "community", but rather "barrio" and is located in a municipality where the population is characterized by working in activities related to businesses, farmer's markets, informal economic activities, at the bus stations and intersections that lead to the capital city. Some people are highly vulnerable and have no source of employment, they are dedicated to collecting and recycling garbage on the outskirts of the municipality and usually the whole family participates in this activity.

Observation Start Time	Ending time
09:00 am.	10:35 am.

Number of Reading Camp Facilitators in session					
Women	2	Men	0	Total	2

Number of girls and boys					
Girls	8	Boys	4	Total	12

Number of girls and boys outside the school system (if the facilitator knows the data)					
Girls	1	Boys	1	Total	2

Number of girls and boys with disabilities (if the facilitator knows the data)					
Girls	0	Boys	0	Total	0

World Vision has implemented the UL model for 2 years through the community component. In terms of awareness and capacity building of the stakeholders involved in the UL model, World Vision started the process with the volunteers and then with the community members involved in the reading club. Some children in the reading club are sponsored by the World Vision program. In the case of the community component, it is necessary to work closely with the communities and in-person visits are made to the reading clubs. First, volunteers are trained in the methodology to lead the sessions, since the volunteer facilitators are community members and not necessarily professionals or teachers. In this community they also work with *Compasión Internacional*. They work with the churches in the field of education throughout the elementary and secondary school levels, especially in reinforcement activities.

In total, there are 5 reading clubs, two that were visited during the data collection process are held on the premises of the protestant Church. Book club sessions are held once a week at an after-school time that allows everyone to participate, both in-school and out-of-school children. The facilitator volunteers mentioned that being part of the reading clubs gives them satisfaction in a fragile context, because they can be part of a positive change in children.

In this community, many people attend the reading club, including children, mothers, faith leaders, and volunteer facilitators from the protestant church and Sunday School teachers. Most of these participants are involved with the book club as part of their work within the church. For example, sessions are held in the temple. It was observed that there is minimal involvement of the mothers in the club, since almost all of the responsibility is assigned to the members of the church. This was evidenced by the fact that mothers just leave their children at the location and do not know in detail the activities being carried out in the reading club.

This community faces complex problems related to violence and insecurity. In this community (barrio) the legitimacy of the protestant church is seen as a strength. The church becomes a positive reference within the community for the promotion of values, which allows it to support and help with a variety of children's needs.

Regarding the gender equality and social inclusion dimension: women tend to participate more than men. In terms of children's participation, both boys and girls are actively involved in the reading club. In this community there are no differences in the way boys and girls are treated by the facilitators at the reading club. Mothers are the ones who support and motivate their children to attend the club, especially because the fathers work outside of the home.

Community 10 Urbana

In this community, which belongs to the urban area of the Pacific in the department of Managua, the reading clubs began with an invitation for the children to attend and parents to collaborate with the program.

Observation Start Time		Ending time			
01:15 pm.		02:42 pm.			
Number of Reading Camp Facilitators in session					
Women	2	Men	0	Total	2
Number of girls and boys					
Girls	9	Boys	12	Total	21
Number of girls and boys outside the school system (if the facilitator knows the data)					
Girls	0	Boys	0	Total	0
Number of girls and boys with disabilities (if the facilitator knows the data)					
Girls	0	Boys	0	Total	0

There are two reading clubs in this community and they are held on the premises of the Church of Christ. The clubs are implemented by two volunteer facilitators, one in the morning and another one in the afternoon, so that children can attend at a time that does not interfere with their classes at school. The club facilitators have a high level of commitment, evidenced in the way they express themselves about their activities.

World Vision has had a footprint in this community through sponsorship programs. Some of the community members have been World Vision volunteers.

Church members have also become involved in the book clubs. They have played an important role, as there are members of the congregation who are involved with the reading clubs. The mothers are also key stakeholders involved in the reading clubs.

No children with disabilities have been identified in the community. Although according to the facilitators, there are some children with disabilities, but they were not identified as part of the data collection activities. The facilitators mentioned the need to have an inclusive education approach. There are cases of some children who face situations at home which might be considered harassment or bullying.

FACTORS THAT ENABLE OR HINDER THE IMPLEMENTATION OF READING CLUBS

1. Enabling Factors

Factor 1: Children's reading club is an opportunity for learning and interaction outside of school.

The reading club represents an opportunity for children and young people to interact as members of the community, to socialize, get to know each other and strengthen their relationships. Data collection shows that the reading clubs have motivated children to attend and stay in school. They have developed an interest in attending the reading clubs, they feel that this is the opportunity for learning and receiving the support of their families. Of the 10 communities that implement reading clubs: 4 of them are implemented on the premises of the Catholic or Protestant Churches, 2 in a community center and 4 in spaces conditioned by the volunteer facilitator.

"The biggest change we could mention is the relationship between the children and the volunteers, because when they come here they know that they are going to do something worthwhile and that they will be treated with affection. They will be provided with whatever they need, so they feel good and are happy to come" (Father, Community 5)



"Yes, the children are improving so much. When we started they did not read very well, and now they do better, and they are enjoying it. Some tell me that their parents help them at home, we ask parents about that and they confirm that they do help them, especially the mothers" (Reading club facilitator, Community 3).

Factor 2: Participation of volunteers committed to the implementation of reading clubs.

The volunteers in the 10 communities of the sample are committed, organized, motivated, and feel that they make a difference; even when that means doing work without pay. Facilitators in 6 communities thought that only teachers could teach at the club, but now they have even become guidance counselors for the UL project. The volunteers from 6 communities mentioned that being part of the reading clubs gives them the satisfaction of being able to be part of the positive change in children. Key informants in the 10 communities had a positive opinion of children's participation in the reading club. Both in the focus groups and in the interviews with key informants, they agreed that reading clubs have fostered school attendance and that can be seen in the school retention rates.

The work of the volunteers is completely free of charge and they need to be supported by World Vision to expand coverage. Community members can support them by accompanying their children to the clubs.

"As a facilitator of the reading club, at first, I felt a little nervous, because I didn't know, but now that I have more experience, I have more confidence and am more motivated. This shows when you are reading a story, the reading part, or during the activities as well. The most difficult thing is that the children get restless, and they all get... it becomes impossible to keep going, how to control them, sometimes it gets out of control, controlling the children is the hardest part. All the children that attend the club live with their parents" (Reading club facilitator, Community 5).

"Yes, it helps us to draw, read and write, the teacher gives us letters so that we can read them, to grow. It has helped me to read, draw and improve my handwriting. To be more obedient, they teach us to respect elders, we do different things" (Boys and girls, Community 5).

A volunteer comments: "Some children do not read properly, here we read a story together, they get excited, the story catches their attention, and they try to discover what it means" (Reading club facilitator, Community 5).

Factor 3: Effective engagement of religious leaders in activities to support children's literacy.

Religious leaders from both the Catholic and Protestant churches support reading clubs. From their point of view, the program is very positive because of the moral values that they instill in children. In 6 out of 10 communities there is participation of catechist volunteers, and in 5 communities the Sunday School teachers are involved (Protestant Church). Some members of the protestant church work as volunteers for the reading club, and in the case of the Catholic church, catechists participate as volunteers.

"For example, these children prepare with the catechism classes, we have catechists who work with them and mothers also take part. We are all involved. There is affection and we help children improve and reinforce what they see in school. We have a community environment with love, availability, open to the activities that are available for children" (Faith Leader, Community 5).

Children are happy, "We did an activity, we did this, we did that, we made a piñata, and they are happy to come here and do something" (Faith leader, Community 5).

Factor 4: Mothers participating in activities to support children's literacy.

In the 10 communities, greater participation and involvement in the club is observed on the part of the mothers in comparison to the men, since they are the ones who go to work out in the fields. The volunteers also highlight the support of the mothers in their children's education as very positive, since they are usually in charge of household chores, especially in terms of having to take care of the children.

The findings of this study show the importance of the support of the mothers, since they consider that the reading club is an opportunity to improve their children's education, and children have improved their reading skills and schoolwork in general. They are more confident, they have better communication with the other children, they behave better, and consider the reading club to be a reinforcement of school. Children have fun together and learn appropriate behaviors in an integral way. Children have changed their behavior by learning to be more respectful, obedient and have made new friends among the children who attend the reading club.

At the same time, the participation and involvement of girls is greater both in the club and at school. Another finding is that the volunteers treat boys and girls equally, they work with shy boys and girls and identify the most active ones so that they can work in mixed groups.

“Encourage fathers, let them know that what is happening here is good, that their children are not going to waste time by coming here. Some parents have doubts and ask what it is that their children will do here and we clarify things for them. For example, when I have the opportunity to meet with them, I tell them that this is a good thing, that what is being done here is good for their children” (Reading facilitator, Community 5).

Faced with the challenge that may exist in the reading club regarding the inclusion of children with disabilities, one of the mothers, based on her own experience as a mother of a special needs child, suggests *"integrating the teaching of sign language"* (Reading club facilitator, community 6). This shows a mother taking an active role to find solutions so that her son can take advantage of all of the opportunities, including participating in the reading club.

“Yes, at first there was more participation of the boys, the girls were shy, but later they changed and now they play with the boys, now they share more, or there was that thing where the girls would only hang out with the girls, and the boys with the boys. Children now participate more and interact more” (Reading club facilitator, Community 6).

“Well, only with my mom, she has been involved, helping her to copy, helping her because my mom doesn't know how to draw. At least if I'm busy, she helps with different things, even if it's not something related to the club, for example, school things” (WV development facilitator, Community 2)

Factor 5: Effective involvement of community leaders in activities to support children's literacy.

The support of the community leaders for the implementation of the club was identified as a strength in itself, insofar as it is possible for them to express the needs of the community. As representatives of the rest of the community members, they manifest the consensus of the community, possible alternatives, manifesting their willingness to participate and help.

The involvement of community leaders can be very beneficial, as seen in the example below, when a community leader was thinking of additional improvements for children after understanding the impact of the reading club. A community leader raised the need to have a space in the community where adolescents could also join a reading club when they turn 12 years old, taking into account that boys and girls are exposed to dangers and require support and other activities to guide them, help them and keep them busy with academic activities, this, to avoid having them get involved in harmful habits such as drug use (Community member, Community 1)

Factor 6: Methodology implemented by volunteers/facilitators increases children's attendance.

In the 10 communities, the implementation of reading clubs began approximately two years ago, and at least two reading clubs operate in 6 out of the 10 communities. In 2 out of the 10 communities studied there are 4 reading clubs. Children participate on a weekly basis, and in the case of reading clubs that use church facilities to have their sessions, activities are held on Sundays, in connection with catechism classes or Sunday School.

"Another relevant aspect is the methodology that they are implementing in the reading clubs and the training provided by the World Vision education specialist with the volunteers, which has allowed them to fully understand the methodology, create and facilitate the club with stories, songs, dynamic activities, lots of fun for the children, and they feel happier, excited, and joyful. This program should be implemented not only in this community but in other communities as well" (WV Development Facilitator, Community 3).

"Yes, it helps us to draw, read, write. The teacher shows us letters so that we can read them. This is all to grow. It has helped me to read, draw, and improve my handwriting. I learn to be more obedient, they teach us to respect elders, we do several things" (Boys and girls, Community 3).

"In the club we paint, we play, we sing songs, we made a piñata, we read many stories, we paint, we play, we do dynamic activities, we read, we play tag" (Boys and girls, Community 3).

"At the club, the volunteer tells us stories, organizes activities, helps us, so we play, he has us paint drawings, tells us to come on time, not to miss any session" (Boys and girls, Community 3)

Factor 7: Effective training and sensitization of key stakeholders in reading clubs.

On behalf of World Vision, training and awareness sessions were held in 10 communities. Some community members were invited to participate, including volunteers, religious leaders, and parents or caregivers who send their children to book clubs.

“World Vision provides us with everything, starting with the training sessions, and the materials that we are going to use. If we go to a training session, World Vision provides us with everything, we have always been there, they have helped us with whatever we may need” (Faith leader, Community 6)

Factor 8: Local recognition of World Vision and strategic alliances.

The grassroots work that World Vision has done for years in the territories and at the national level through a variety of support programs for children and work with the church is recognized, which facilitates the working relationship with the communities where they implement the reading clubs. Likewise, there is good coordination between World Vision and local authorities such as: Delegates, Directors, MINED teachers, and mayors. This allows the implementation of the UL program.

“Well, I have seen that World Vision and other organizations are contributing to this reading club project, and I see that it is good because we are preparing, we are teaching children to be intelligent, to be children, to let go of their shyness” (Community member, Community 9)



2. Limiting Factors

Factor 1: Training and education for reading club facilitators and other community members.

Although the volunteers go through a training process imparted by World Vision to learn how to implement the reading clubs, they commented that they do not have pedagogical material to guide them in carrying out the activities of the UL model. It is suggested to expand the coverage of teaching materials to meet the demands of all children. As a result of the observation carried out in a reading club, it was clear that the facilitators have limited knowledge about the lessons imparted through the activities.

A suggestion related to training is to include the tools required to work with children with disabilities and to provide printed materials with sign language which can be taught also to the club facilitators. In general, mothers are aware of the scope and objective of the program, but more awareness is still needed to help their children in the literacy process, so that they can also help the reading club volunteers.

One of the reading club facilitators commented: “Yes, we have received all the training, they were held from 8:00 am to 12:00 noon, about a year ago, when it had just started. First, with one World Vision specialist, now with another WV specialist who works now in this community. *First of all, we were trained on the steps to work with the children, how to welcome them, the prayer before starting the club, reading the one-page stories, the entire methodology, and then we practiced, they were effective, I learned how to relate to the children, how to carry out each activity, and I learned a lot because we practiced, and then we applied it here with the children and I learned many things*” (Reading club facilitator, Community 5).

Factor 2: Insufficient reading materials for reading club activities.

Volunteers in 8 out of the 10 communities indicated that the reading club has no books to read, and all reading activities focus on a single picture story board. It is necessary to be able to reinforce the work with written materials, as well as more training to reinforce the work with the children.

"The limitation that we have right now is with the material, which is already finished, they always read the same materials that we have, and regarding other materials, like crayons and pencils, we have the limitations, they need that, I have 13 children attending this club" (Faith Leader, Community 4)

Factor 3: Challenges related to the calendars and invitations as per the availability of the members.

It is important to consider the times when volunteer facilitators are available since they have personal responsibilities beyond the reading club. The volunteers of a community reading club suggest that when World Vision asks volunteers to take part in activities such as trainings or other activities related to the reading club, they should be scheduled and implemented respecting their schedules and responsibilities outside of the project.

"The challenges that we can see include difficulties in coordinating times, children's time, because most of them go to school, and we have found that some go to classes in the morning, others in the afternoon, and we are trying. That is why there is a group in the morning, and one in the afternoon, the largest one in the afternoon" (Faith leader, Community 9)

Factor 4: Problems Recruiting New Potential Reading Club Volunteers.

Once they find a job, many volunteers leave, or sometimes, they migrate to another country, especially during harvest time. It is necessary to continue identifying new potential volunteers at the local level to facilitate reading clubs for sustainability in communities.

It is necessary to look for new potential volunteers to become facilitators and ensure the long-term continuity of the reading club; "Because many young people, once they get a job, leave this activity and also migrate looking for better opportunities" (Reading club facilitator, Community 8).

Factor 5: Continued and sustainable support for reading clubs.

World Vision is the key to keep the reading clubs running *"there should be more frequent monitoring by World Vision to guarantee the quality of the reading club. The program does not have an exclusive facilitator assigned to the communities"* expressed the facilitators of the reading club. 8 out of the 10 rural communities only have an education specialist for all of the territories. It is necessary to activate the community network that allows greater communication with the communities, considering the fact that volunteers do not have funds to pay for phone expenses, internet or smartphones to take part in the community network.

Within the findings of the study as per the community component, we can conclude that, although at the time of the research study, reading clubs were being implemented in the 10 communities visited, we did not see evidence of the implementation of a defined method by the volunteers. In some cases, due to the limitations pointed out by the volunteers, they do not have a written strategy or a manual to allow them to follow the systematized steps when leading reading club activities. Most of the volunteers have no teacher training and were only trained by World Vision to become club facilitators. However, their unquestionable willingness to lead reading clubs is something that stands out.

Factor 6: Communication and monitoring strategies between World Vision and volunteers.

Key informants suggest that World Vision should have effective communication with volunteer facilitators and be mindful of schedules when involving them in reading club-related activities. In one of the churches, the volunteers of the club stated that they had to continually adapt to World Vision's constant training. In this regard, one of the volunteers expressed her disagreement with the schedules and planning by World Vision.

"We request better communication regarding the invitations that affect us in future events with World Vision" (Reading club facilitators, community 8).

Facilitators in 2 out of the 10 communities suggested establishing more fluid communication with the volunteers in the territories, especially when they are assigned tasks that require organization, logistics, and invitations that affect their personal agendas.

Factor 7: Adequate facilities to carry out the Reading Club activities.

It is important that adequate toilets/latrines are available for children to use. In some cases, there is no exclusive space to implement club activities. In cases where reading clubs take place inside a church, it is not possible to have a "reading corner" and paste the materials on the walls, besides, there is no blackboard.

"In the community there is a space that is not being used (the old community school), it has three classrooms. The preschool classroom is currently being used, the other two are not available, it is deteriorated: the roof, the windows. But it can be very useful for setting up reading clubs because its location is more accessible and safer. In addition, they have more space to develop the activities (in their homes, the space is more limited).

They have an abandoned school. This would be a task that requires external support, but above all the interest of the community to work with the mayor's office and the Ministry of Education to get it going" (Reading club facilitator, Community 1)

The leaders of two communities suggested that, since the homes of the volunteers do not meet the conditions required to carry out the activities, community spaces should be made available to keep the reading club going.

"Well, I would need a bigger table, more chairs, an acrylic board, because some children like to write, so we would like that support, yes, that support" (Reading club facilitator, Community 8).

In some communities, children must walk long distances to reach the club.

"Just because of the river, yes, because of the distance, as I told you, maybe I'll drop them off and then to pick them up, it's not a problem because we live far away, so I am the one who has to find a way to guide them, I come every day to guide them to school at seven a.m., they go to my mother's house and I go up at there around one to pick them up and return home around five" (Mother, Community 5).

Factor 8: Poor participation of the fathers in the reading club activities.

Due to the agricultural and mining work, the fathers do not get involved in the activities of the reading club, but they allow their children to attend. In general fathers do not attend club related meetings, so the mothers support their children so they can attend the club, they play an important role in childcare (food, school, reading club).

"For me, the most important thing is that they learn to read. It feels good to know that the child who started out and couldn't read, is now able to read, this is important... It is also a support for parents, because perhaps parents want them to read, but they don't have books available, and we have all the materials here, so children learn more, so it's support for them also, for the parents" (Reading club facilitator, Community 9).

Factor 9: Violence and insecurity in the communities.

In the two urban communities and one rural community, the context of violence and insecurity represents a great challenge for the reading club. In addition, there are conditions of great socioeconomic vulnerability among the population, and local needs may exceed the objectives of the reading club (learning, memory, access, coverage, among others).

According to what was expressed by the community leaders, in some communities there are problems related to alcoholism and the use of drugs among youth, and sometimes they do those things around the house where the reading club is held.

Factor 10: Effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic.

The Covid-19 Pandemic has affected the activities of the reading club, lowering the attendance of children, and in some cases the club is not held to avoid infecting volunteers and mothers. At a time when the cases of Covid-19 have increased, volunteers do not carry out the reading club or group activities and the volunteers implement other alternatives in the communities with the support of World Vision, which provides them with materials so that children can continue to implement reading activities at home.

Overcrowding (children and parents) when attending the reading club represents a permanent risk in the context of the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Although World Vision provided reading clubs with hand washing and gel kits, in a couple of cases, the reading club was in a place that was not suitable to facilitate their use, since it was not located at the entrance of the place where participants could wash their hands before engaging in the reading club activities. In 2 communities, the negligence of some adults in the use of biosecurity measures stands out.

“Well, right now, this week here in the community, yes, it’s been an issue, for example, the children I work with, they have been ill, so they don’t attend because sometimes they may be affected, as now, they are ill” (Reading club facilitators, Community 1).

“Water runs up until 10 a.m. here, well, in my case what I do is I control the water and the children use their masks, I already told you, well, the problem was with the attendance when the parents were sick, sometimes both parents get sick, there was one case and people stopped coming, now things are picking up again” (Reading club facilitators, Community 1).

"Well, at the moment, they are bringing their children, and they wear their masks, they bring alcohol, they are punctual. Yes, they motivate the children because, for example, if the parents told them not to come, then children would not attend" (Reading club facilitators, Community 9).

Factor 11: Effects of Hurricanes Eta and Iota.

When Hurricanes Eta and Iota hit land, children were only affected in terms of attendance, since during heavy rains they cannot leave their homes, as a way to prevent accidents. In the community there are 3 children who have to cross a river to reach the house where they have the reading club. However, families were affected mainly in terms of the production of their harvests due to heavy rains.

"Yes, when it rains they don't attend the club, the river rises..., of course, if she's sick I won't let her go, when she wants to do things at home she is very active, otherwise she does not help, I don't keep her from doing her activities, when it rains is better for her not to attend, there was a lot of rain these days, with such heavy rains they couldn't attend, no, it is a danger for children to go out when it is raining, there are a lot of streams here and it is dangerous for children to attend" (Reading club facilitator, community 5).

GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION (GESI)

Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) are fundamental cross-cutting elements for this study. The core elements for GESI are defined as follows:

Gender equality: This is the state or condition that allows women and girls, men and boys, the equal enjoyment of human rights, socially valued goods, opportunities and resources. It includes expanding people's freedoms and voices, improving power dynamics and relationships, transforming gender roles, and improving the overall quality of life for men and women to reach their full potential.

Social inclusion: seeks to address the inequality and/or exclusion of vulnerable populations by improving the terms of participation in society and improving opportunities, access to resources, amplifying people's voices and respect for human rights. It seeks to promote empowerment and achieve peaceful and inclusive societies and institutions (World Vision, 2020, p. 4).

When exploring the gender dimensions of the reading clubs, it is valuable to identify the degree and scope of participation that adults, boys and girls, are having in the development of the sessions. Table 2 provides gender-disaggregated data regarding the number of reading club facilitators in each community and across all reading clubs observed in this study, while Table 3 does the same for boys and girls participating in reading clubs that were observed (applying the observation instruments).



Table 2. Number of reading club facilitators, by gender and community

Community	Number of reading club facilitators		
	Women	Men	Total
1	4	0	4
2	2	0	2
3	1	1	2
4	2	0	2
5	2	0	2
6	1	2	3
7	2	1	3
8	2	0	2
9	5	0	5
10	2	0	2
Total	23	4	27

When analyzing gender dimensions regarding reading club facilitators in the 10 communities, it was found that 23 (85%) of the 27 reading club facilitators were women, only 4 (15%) were men.

This indicates that women are much more likely than men to volunteer to facilitate reading clubs because of their cultural, employment, and socioeconomic background. As has been pointed out in each of the cases described, this significant difference in the participation of women with respect to men is, according to their own testimonies, framed by the context of a culture with strongly rooted gender roles in the beliefs and practices of the communities visited, where it is common that, while men work outside of the home (generally in agricultural work and in extractive mines) and provide the resources to satisfy the material needs of the family, women work in family care, including supporting their children at school, mainly in elementary education and sometimes in secondary education.

Table 3. Number of children who participate in the reading clubs observed by gender and by community

Girls	Boys	Total
18	8	26
5	4	9
6	3	9
7	4	11
8	8	16
10	6	16
4	7	11
8	4	12
9	12	21
75	56	131

When analyzing gender dimensions in 9 communities regarding who attends the observed reading clubs, of the 131 children who attended, 75 (57%) were girls and 56 (43%) were boys. While this seems to indicate that slightly more girls than boys participated in the clubs observed in this study, only 1 reading club had the same number of girls and boys (Community 6). Two clubs had significantly more boys than girls (Communities 8 and 10), while 6 clubs had significantly more girls than boys. In general terms, as previously pointed out, one of the reasons why a greater participation of girls is identified compared to boys, is because from an early age, boys are usually integrated into child labor activities related to agriculture, such as coffee harvesting and crop planting in the case of rural areas, and trade and recycling of garbage, and scrap metal for sale in urban areas.

Findings from key informant interviews with mothers and religious leaders show that girls' participation and involvement is higher both in the club and at school. Another finding is that reading club volunteers treat and support boys and girls equally. They work with the shyest boys and girls and identify the most active ones so that they can work in mixed groups.

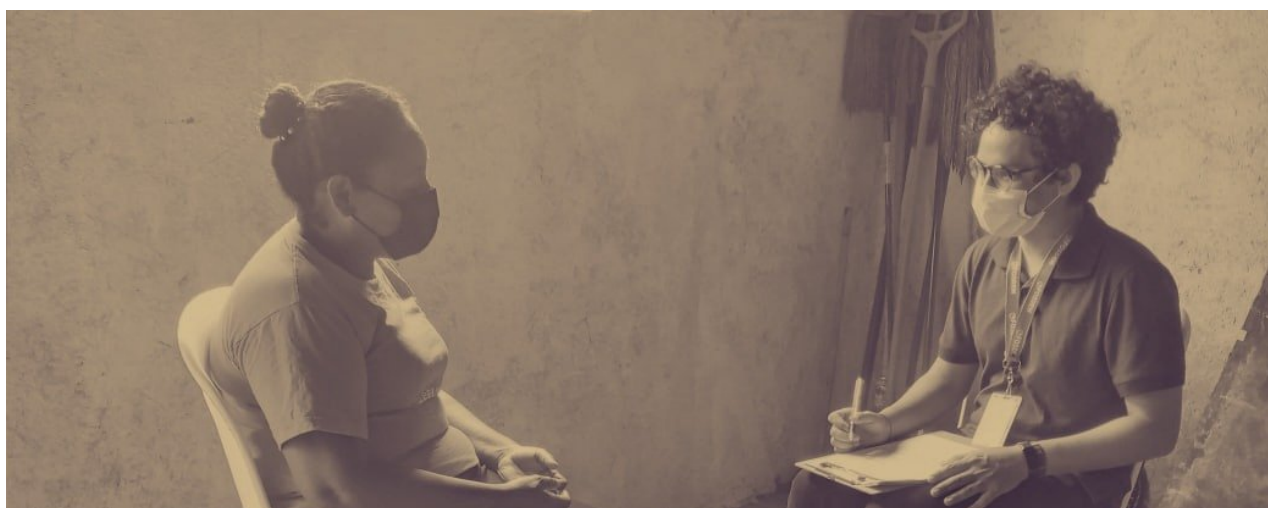


Regarding the participation of parents from all of the communities in this study, there is a greater participation of women in relation to men. According to one of the testimonies of the World Vision team, such a situation demonstrates the commitment of the mothers who, despite having a heavy workload at home, decide to take time to take and accompany their children to the reading club activities. Through the data collected in the 9 communities, it was possible to verify that the leadership to address issues related to the education of boys and girls in general, and of the reading clubs in particular, is assumed by women who are leaders in the community.

“Yes, the boys and girls are improving so much, when they were just starting to read, they didn't read very well, and now they do better, yes, they are enjoying themselves. Some tell me that their moms help them at home, we ask the parents and they say that, yes, they help them, especially the moms” (Reading club facilitator, Community 3).

“Just because of the river, yes, because of the distance, as I told you, maybe I'll drop them off and then pick them up, it's not a problem because we live far away, so I am the one who has to find a way to bring them. I come every day to guide them to school at seven a.m., they go to my mother's house and I go up at there around one to pick them up and return home around five” (Mother, Community 5).

In summary, when analyzing gender dimensions, in 7 communities the reading clubs are led mostly by young volunteers (female), housewives, religious leaders, Sunday School teachers and Deacons; while in three communities coordinators are young people, students, university students and Deacons, they are quite committed to their communities, to the children and to the church. It was also evident that the fathers (men) work in agricultural or mining activities, so they do not participate in the activities of the reading club, and in all 10 of the communities they noted that boys and girls have an equal participation, they treat each other with respect, kindness and are always cheerful (boys, girls, volunteers, mothers, faith leaders). Children are given their space and time to be kids (boys and girls).



PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT CHANGES IN CHILDREN

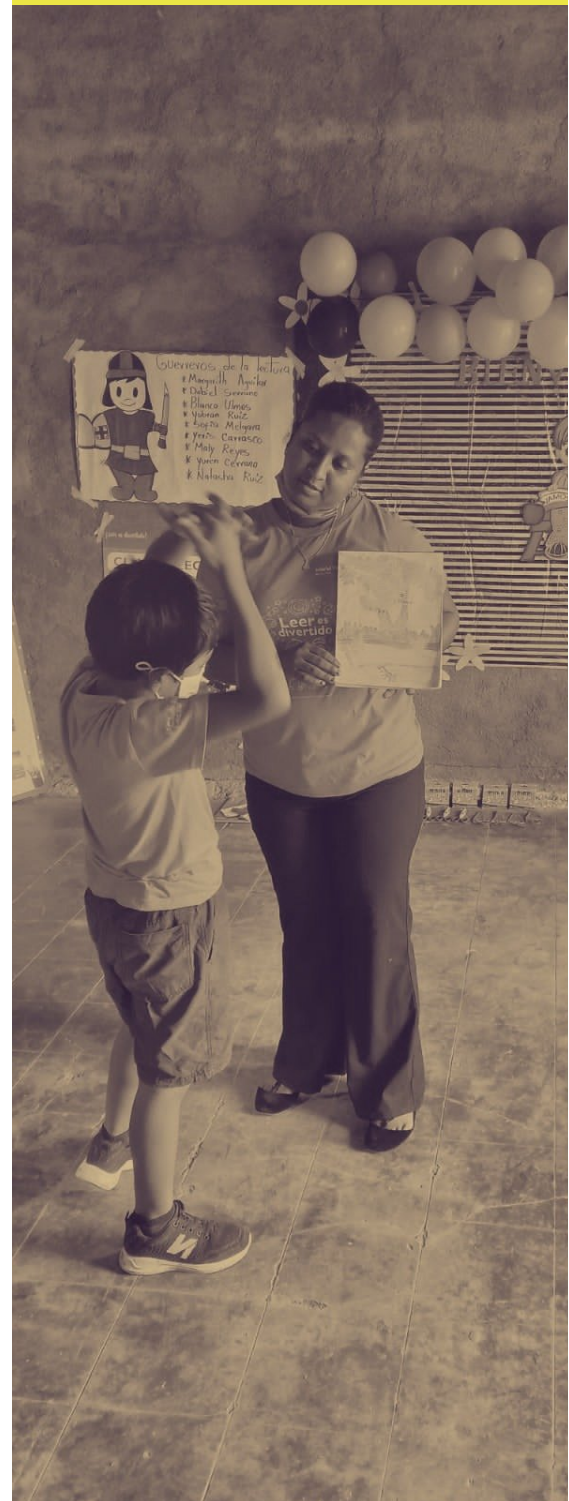
Taking into account the time that they have been implementing the community component in the places where the information was collected (most have been implemented for two years), the research findings show the perceptions of the participants about the immediate and positive benefits and changes experienced by children who attend the clubs, which enhances the impact the project aims to attain from its implementation.

Improving literacy and other skills in children who attend reading clubs.

One of the important changes that has been identified in children is an improvement in their academic performance.

“It is when they read more, that change may be the most important aspect, yes. there is a change compared to when they had just started, because now they are more active, some teachers comment that they are better than before, that they have improved a lot” (Mother, Community 5).

“Yes, her teacher called me and told me that the girl is doing well academically, that she behaves well, I would only say that she needs to talk less during classes, she is doing well, thank God (Mother, Community 2).



"Well, so far, I know that the academic performance of the children who attend the club has improved a lot. As for reading and fluency, I could tell you that even 70 or 80 percent, depending on the child, right, because you know that there are children who are more restless, and others are more passive. So, yes, there has been a big change, look, I haven't heard of any child repeating a grade or who has poor performance in school, no... not at all, they are children who are doing well, relatively well" (WV Development Facilitator, Community 1).

"Improving academic performance. Look, I've seen something in the children... When I used to lead the World Vision community, almost at the end of 2017, at that time a project was carried out, at that time when the project was there, I went to school because children did not read well, they read like...they cut themselves like that...I encouraged them, come on, keep trying because you can do it, I told them, but they always got confused. Now I see they are reading fluently, normally" (WV Development Facilitator, Community 1).

Among the changes that stand out in the children, volunteers refer to progress made in literacy, commenting that now children are encouraged to read and have also learned to express themselves better, to imagine and to create and to socialize more, to be more sensitive, helpful and share what they know with other children. An example of the progress in children's attainment is that they now stand out in painting and reading competitions within the communities, winning first places, making their parents, volunteers, and community leaders proud.

Here are some quotes from key informants and mothers that highlight the changes that have occurred in their children, especially with reading, as well as in **behavioral attitudes**:

"Well, with the reading thing, because that has been his biggest problem, it was a serious problem, and he has overcome it" (Mother, Community 4).

"The biggest change I have seen is that she learns to read" (Mother, Community 5).

Community members also gave their opinion about the changes in children:

"The boys and girls who attend the club are motivated and have competed in competitions between schools with other communities and have won the first places in reading, painting and drawing, making their parents and community leaders proud" (Community member, Community 3).

"Well, the change in them that we have seen is that they have learned, because from the moment they come, they wash their hands, they sit in their chair, they take out their pencil, they begin to draw, so the children have learned." (Community member, Community 4).

Children who attend the club said: *"because it's fun, it's exciting, joyful, we can draw, sing, paint, read stories and read"* (Boys and girls, Community 3).

Likewise, the World Vision volunteer community facilitators expressed their opinions about the changes they have seen in the children:

"Their children have improved and learned so much, but also the same is true in the case of the fathers, mothers, family members, and the volunteer facilitators, even extending to other school subjects such as Spanish, mathematics, and science, and learning to behave better" (Reading club facilitator, Community 3).

"They learned letters, so there is motivation on the part of the children. There are children who have improved, they were very shy, they are happier, they are no longer fearful, and it has even helped them with school, they come here to read, and they are advancing with their writing and learning their letters" (Reading club facilitator, Community 3).

One of the catechists comments: "Yes, there have been changes in the children because they are more animated and, in addition to reading, they have learned to express themselves, to imagine and to create, and in the same community with the same children, to socialize more and be more sensitive, helpful and share what they know with other children". For her, a great achievement is that "many children now do not spend too much time with their cell phones in their hands, because they harm their health and during the club activities they forget about their devices and the songs they see on the cell phones, they share them with other children" (Reading club facilitator, Community 3).

The impact of reading clubs in the lives of children is not limited only to reading and writing skills, but also to the development of other equally valuable skills for their academic and personal growth, such as drawing, handicrafts and a willingness to collaborate in group activities.

"... changes have been seen because some time ago, many older children did not have the ability to draw, and there are children in preschool, I have a girl who, if you tell her to sign there, she signs, then there is progress, because the child advances" (Local Government Official, Community 4).

"I think that the way... the drawing, I think, helps them in the way they want to do the drawing, so the brain picks up skills, also when they sing, they develop skills, yes, the club has helped them. Yes, because the children get help at home... so I wouldn't know if they have help from other people. Yes, he has experienced changes because he also helps me, because he has acquired different knowledge, he also helps me" (Faith leader, Community 4).

"...these are the biggest changes the girl has had, not just the reading club, and me helping her, supporting her, telling her to come here" (Mother, Community 4).

"Yes, she always comes back and tells me that they do lots of handicrafts and drawings, that they play a lot and that they read stories to them" (Mother, Community 5).

Children gave their opinion: *We attended the club to read and study, to learn more, they help us have better handwriting, to multiply and learn multiplication tables* (Children, Community 2).

"We attend the club because I like to study and read a lot, read and copy, read all night, and I like to tell stories, I draw pictures from the book" (Children, Community 2).

"It helps me because at school I have doubts and when I have go up front and read, and then that helps us and now they have us read too, I am the best reader" (Children, Community 2).

"They have also taught us to do many projects, they have taught us to make cardboard puppets" (Boys and girls, Community 2).

Some children are shy, and with their participation in the reading club they foster their communication skills.

There are children who are shy, and with their participation in the reading club they foster their communication skills. A mother says that her daughter is shy and a major achievement that she has had here with her daughter is that now she is communicative and expresses herself better *"at times I feel that she is a whole different little person"* (Mother, Community 3).

For many participants, the involvement of children in the activities of the reading club has allowed them to improve their reading fluency and has allowed them to overcome being shy in many different activities.

The significant changes mentioned in the interview with one of the community members are related to communication skills that children acquire because of their participation. *"It is also good in that sense, because they were a little shy, but when they participate more their sadness goes away, they feel more confident, sometimes they ask us what activities to do, and sometimes when we have a nice activity, they come back next time and to organize dances, crafts, some dancing, some singing"* (Reading club facilitator, Community 3).

"Yes, she started to make more friends, she was shy, and she started to interact more with people, she plays more, interacts more with people, before she didn't greet people and now she greets people, they have more confidence to play with children and she tells us about her activities" (Mother, Community 2)

Providing children with a pleasant space and activities to reinforce literacy.

Interviewees emphasized that the club is like a fun entertainment space, because of the activities that they teach the little ones which allow them to interact.

"Drawing and reading are fine, but they don't do it like formal and serious classes, it's like a game for them to have fun, there are stories then, girls and boys. If your daughter says that she's bored at home, so this is the moment when you let her go out to attend the club, happy because she plays, has fun, paints, runs here, runs there, then it is very important and she also learns in a way that no one demands that she learns as in school and comes back willingly. [She, like her mother, has allowed her to accompany her knowing her daughter's spelling, she can dictate a text to her, so the girl asks her mother] Is there a comma here? and she helps her." (Mother, community 3).

"... you can see that the child is having fun, that the nice thing is that the child is having fun and it is not all like a straight line" (Reading club facilitator, Community 4).

Facilitators are gaining new skills and aspirations from the reading club experience.

The change occurs in relation to their perspectives and their new ways of looking at the book club and collaborating with it.

“They feel useful as a professionals, and they thought that only teachers could do this, but now they have even become counselors” (Community facilitator, Community 3).

“Well, the knowledge we have acquired is good and we have put it into practice, it is evident, of course there are weaknesses, not everything is easy, but it is about managing... I am not a specialist in girls, but it is clear that children have fun, the beautiful thing is that the child has fun and does not feel a straight line” (Reading club facilitator, Community 4).

“We are contributing to improved education because there has been a deficit in education, and this type of methodology helps the child to become interested in reading, because that is an area that is not available, so early on we foster the idea that reading is easy” (WV development facilitator, Community 6).

“Well, it has been a good significant change, first, I was very shy, and when I worked with the children, I became more communicative, and more sociable with people, for me it is... I will always continue with the children because I like the work I do. When I was studying they told me to study to become a teacher, but I didn't like it, and now I have more communication with the children's parents” (Reading club facilitator, Community 5).

Reading club facilitators highlighted the great contributions World Vision has made to the community.

“World Vision supports this, they train the volunteers, they are developing their position here by teaching children and achieving great changes in children. This has greatly strengthened family ties, and being here together makes us stronger, in addition to the fact that they are learning to read, they go with their minds more alert to see what is wrong and what is right” (WV development facilitator, Community 3).

“Yes, they have trained me, the first trainings, there were 3 trainings, first what was the methodology that we should follow, then there were training on how a child should read, how to decorate a study space, to draw details that could stand out for children and us to see, they trained us for all that, all those things that I had no idea about. We received training on how to work with puppets, in all the trainings we made summaries of all the activities, the main thing was for the facilitator to adapt to the methodology, singing time, story time and activity time and we had to know how to handle those activities. Not all the volunteers have the level of schooling required to help the child, and those are some difficulties, as I told you, I know how to read, but can I sing? For example, I have experience with different activities, as a specialist in making puppets” (Reading club facilitator, Community 4).

Parents or caregivers accompanying their children.

In many of the communities, it was identified that some parents support the reading club, which is essential for the proper functioning of the sessions, "sometimes when we have to do crafts, some come by and support us and that's how we finish faster with their help, when we ask them, for example, to bring boxes and the children bring them, in addition, they support us because they encourage the children to come to class, they tell them to attend the reading club, the teacher of the school supports us and she is from the community” (Reading club facilitator, Community 5).

Book club activities have provided mothers with opportunities to support their children.

Mothers are totally willing to support their children. Mothers are also clear with the purpose of the clubs and therefore how important they are for the community, especially for the children.

“It is evident when parents accompany their children. As a club facilitator I advise parents to allow their children to attend the club. Teachers tell us that we are doing a very good job, then parents talk to the teachers” (Reading club facilitator, Community 3).

Reading club activities are allowing community leaders to contribute to the community.

Interviewees emphasize that the club is like a space for fun and entertainment, teaching the little ones through activities and that allow them to interact.

"Drawing and reading are good, but they are not like formal and serious classes, it's like a game, so they have fun, there are short stories, then children learn, if your daughter says that she's bored at home, that's when you allow her to attend the club, she feels happy because she gets to play, she has fun, paints, runs here, runs there, that's very important and she also learns in a way that no one is demanding that she learn, like in school and comes back willingly. She, as a mother, has had the opportunity to give her support and gets to see her daughter's spelling, she can dictate a text, so her daughter asks things like: mom, is there a comma here? and she helps her." (Mother, Community 1).

"You can see that the child is having fun, the nice thing is that the child is having fun and you don't feel that straight line" (Reading club facilitator, Community 4).

The community and municipality leader pointed out that: among the strengths that stand out is the fact that the community is committed, organized, motivated, that "we all learn and win". He added that "*The community is proud of all the social work personnel, because they are from the community (teachers, nurses, health brigade members and volunteers)*" (WV Development Facilitator, Community 1).

As a result of their participation in the reading clubs, community members identified the strengthening of community networks to support children's literacy learning.

"Yes, the facilitators, the parents, we as a community and the World Vision organization, the change has been great, because it has been evident, from the moment the facilitator leaves his house, he is already contributing, because he wants to teach, there is a lot of interest in helping children, they are also people who at least have a degree, the other woman has been a catechist for years" (Community member, Community 4).

"Well, yes, something has been contributed, because they [the children] were restless, they did not pay attention to the readings, but with the club they became more active, the day the club is held, they attend and the day Bible class is held, they read, it used to be that there were days when they did not attend, and now they have been motivated with that, with the stories, they are dynamic and the readings also, they became more enthusiastic, they have been behaving very well. Yes, with the parents' meetings, they tend to have better attendance" (Faith leader, Community 4).



"Unity among people, because it used to be difficult for people to take part in teamwork, also with regards to childcare, there has been more awareness, which is something very important, that has been developed by WV through the trainings, that's one of the most important aspects, because most of these children are the ones who attend catechism" (Faith leader, Community 6).

"The biggest change that we could mention is in terms of the relationship among the children themselves and the volunteers who teach, because when they come here they know that they are going to come to do something and that we treat them with affection, we provide them with what they need so that they feel that they come to this place to feel joy" (Mother, Community 5).

Children who attend reading clubs build trust with others.

For many of the participants interviewed, one of the most valuable effects of participating in the reading clubs is the trust generated both among adults and among children as a result of their involvement in the different activities of the project.

"The most important change in my opinion is confidence in her, because the most important thing is to believe in oneself to move forward and have a love for studies" (Mother, Community 6).

"It's great that they are moving everyone to participate, and it helps to see that what is being done for the children is something beneficial, that they develop their abilities, because a child who can read and write, they have them do a handicraft and they learn quickly, so it is a benefit for the child which will help him later" (Reading club facilitator, Community 3).

"Parents are aware of the importance of sending their children to this type of activity. Because in the end, the child learns to read in one way or another, they have to do it, but that the parent has the confidence to send their child to the reading club and that they feel that it is yielding good results, that's what matters. I think it is very significant and it is also something sustainable, well, over time". (WV Development facilitator, Community 6).

Children who attend reading clubs are more interested and excited about reading and writing.

"Children enjoy the reading clubs, that is one of the positive things to note about what is happening at the club with children in the ages between 5 and 12 years old, they go to school in the morning and come here in the afternoon. It helps children a lot because at school they do a job and here they do something similar, they come to have fun and learn to read a little more, they know more about the letters we write, they don't get bored, they have fun at the club" (Mother, Community 5).

"The biggest change is, like the children would tell you, parents and children who want to be different, parents who want children to be different, to be intelligent, to be different from how they may have been taught, the education that children want, for their children to be different" (Community member, Community 10).

"One of the changes to mention would be participation, the motivation in children, but internally in the children and in the parents it is not difficult to see it, but children seem very happy and motivated, and something must be left to them through teaching. They have improved in reading, I have heard that they tell the story to each other, you know, there are some children who have greater abilities than others, some retain, and others do not, some understand and retain the story" (Faith leader, Community 7).

"Cheerful, happy, because we come to paint and draw, we play and sing, I feel better because we go ahead to read, drawing and reading, I don't like going to school, but I do like going to the club because we don't have to move" (Mother, Community 5).

"The girl feels happy, because she only gets to tell what she did at the reading club" (Mother, Community 2).



Reading clubs allow older children to acquire literacy skills.

Children have learned to read more fluently with their participation in the reading club. There are some older children who are above the age for 1st to 3rd grade (10 to 12 years old) whose parents do not send them to school because they are assigned chores to do at home, but they do participate in the reading club and that has allowed them to advance in their reading level.

The fact that the son of one of the reading club facilitators is participating in the activities, has meant a personal benefit for her because she has new tools and opportunities to support him in his process to learn to read and write.

One of the findings that stands out in the opinion of the key informants is related to the age ranges of the children who participate in the reading club. It was evident that in the communities that were analyzed, they do not focus only on children from first to third grade exclusively, as established in the UL model, but the clubs open their doors to all children who wish to participate. This is why the program should consider monitoring children who are leaving the age range (11 or 12 years old) and older than 12 years old who no longer attend the club and wish to participate, and who at the same time have weaknesses from previous grades.



CONCLUSIONS

Considering the findings of the study, at the time when the community survey was performed, the UL project in Nicaragua was in the implementation phase, with strong evidence of how the stakeholders had assimilated the UL model.

In terms of the timeframe during which the community component has been implemented in the study's target areas where information was collected: Most have been implementing the project for two years now. The research findings show the perceptions of the participants about the immediate benefits and positive changes in children's learning as a result of children's participation in the reading clubs. This has had a positive impact as per the project's objectives and goals.

The data collection process for the community component in phase one complied with the planned sample of instruments at the community level. The key informants interviewed during the survey included the children who attend the reading club, parents, reading club volunteer facilitators, religious leaders, community members, municipal leaders, and interviews were conducted with World Vision community development facilitators, as well as with education specialists at the local and national levels. As mentioned above, it was not possible to collect data for the teaching component, which is expected to be covered during the first quarter of 2022



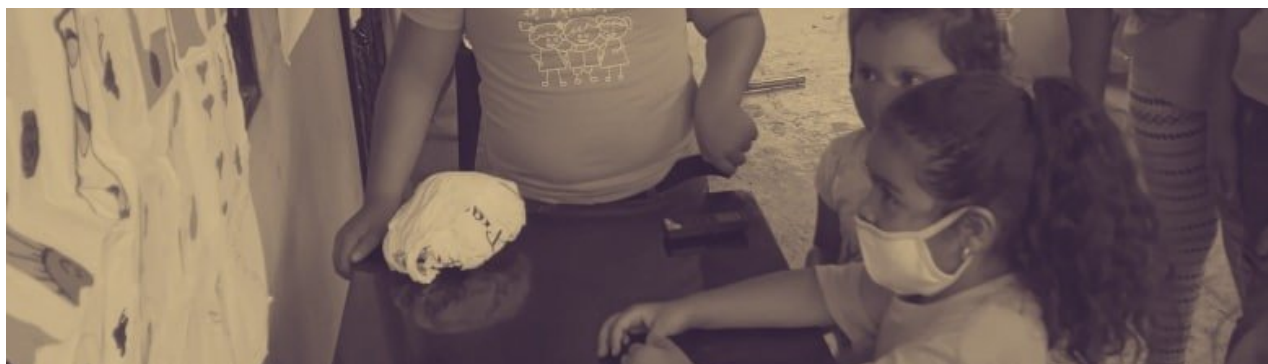
It should be noted that a key factor was being able to match the times to collect information to coincide with the times available to the stakeholders, which was part of the construction of the instruments, which allowed a better appropriation of the same to facilitate them with greater mastery during the interviews and focus groups, facilitating the transcription of the data collected. Having carried out the team reflection for each community as the survey work progressed helped the research team to improve the work in subsequent communities and organize the relevant results of each community in memos.

When analyzing the gender dimensions, it was identified that in 7 communities the reading clubs are led mostly by young women volunteers, housewives, religious leaders, Sunday School teachers and Deacons; while in three communities these are coordinated by young men, students, university students and Deacons, who are quite committed with their communities, with the children and their church. It was also identified that fathers work in agricultural or mining activities, and they do not participate in the activities of the reading club, although they do allow their children to attend the sessions. Reading club volunteers in the 10 communities commented that there are no differences in the participation of boys and girls, they are treated with respect, kindness, and joy, as reported by all key informants (boys, girls, volunteers, mothers, faith leader). Children are given their space and time to be what they are: kids.

The role of the church in the reading clubs in 8 out of the 10 communities observed is key and essential for the organization, infrastructure and operation of the reading club. Religious leaders have facilitated spaces in the churches and are involved in the reading club through their volunteer work. This is true among members of both protestant and Catholic churches.

The complex context of violence and insecurity in 3 communities was identified as a challenge and at the same time as an opportunity due to the legitimacy that the church gains when carrying out the activities of the reading club. Thus, the church becomes a positive reference within the community for the promotion of values, which places it in a position that allows it to provide support to children's different needs. Some reading club volunteers mentioned that being part of these gives them the satisfaction that, in a fragile context, they are part of the positive change children and young people can benefit from.

The involvement of women who are mothers in the 10 communities is relevant, since they support their children to attend the club and fulfill the role of caring for the children, encouraging them to attend school and the reading club.



Mothers consider that the reading club is a space for reinforcing school content, and in which their children have fun, producing greater levels of confidence and communication, as well as better academic results at school.

An assessment of the key informants in 3 communities agrees that the program must anticipate and think about monitoring the boys and girls who are leaving the age range served by the club and become pre-adolescents, thus becoming potential leaders and valuable human resource in their community. Something else that they highlighted as key for the reading club, is that the boys and girls can be constant. They also emphasize on the need to increase the quantity and quality of work materials.

Volunteers in the 10 communities had a positive opinion about the support that World Vision has given them with the training and materials for the reading clubs. This also highlights the willingness of the women leaders in 3 communities, participating in several programs in their communities and supporting clubs as volunteers, making available a space in their homes to carry out the activities. The Parents' Committee identified in 3 communities stands out as an important and key factor. They are made up of mothers, and this structure allows them to be more actively involved in the activities, offering logistical support to the reading club volunteers.

Since the reading clubs in the communities in this study had been implemented for two years at the time of Phase 1 data collection, Nicaragua can be considered to be in Step 2 according to *Figure No. 1 A metaphor for Scaling*, since the innovation of the reading club was introduced two years ago and they have already been expanded and disseminated with at least two clubs in 6 out of the 10 communities while two communities stand out where there are up to four clubs, increasing participation and attendance of children constantly and with motivation. Children participate weekly, and in the case of reading clubs that use churches as a space to hold sessions, they carry out activities on Sundays, either in connection with catechism classes or Sunday School.

As outlined in Figure 1 in the background section, the findings of this study will enable key stakeholders to learn about what enables and hinders reading club implementation, so that innovation can “take root” in a more effective manner, aiming for scaling up.

In general, the results of the EGRA study show that the indicators linked to literacy have suffered a deterioration, comparing it with the results of the measurement carried out in July 2019, which confirms that education and especially literacy as a key element of skill development is still a priority and a challenge. As per the risk level established under the DIBELS scale, when comparing the results for reading fluency, a gap was identified, because in 2019 it reported 48.1% under the ‘Good’ level, that is, children achieved more than 70 pcpm, while the current measurement reports a decrease, reaching 44.8%, which represents an increase of the risk level, going from 42.4% to 43.2%. This may tend to decrease depending on the factors that are affecting children’s learning. Reading comprehension in relation to a text read by children reports that, out of four questions related to the text, they managed to answer assertively an average of 2.6 by 63.9% of students, which reports a decrease compared to the 2019 results. Oral comprehension, in which children manage to understand what the other person expresses or reads, the level of achievement was 3.96 on average, achieved out of a set of five questions. When reviewing each of the questions answered correctly by each child, only 43.9% managed to get the right answers to the 5 questions.



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