

# ACCELERATOR PROGRAM

The World Bank Accelerator Program is designed to fight learning poverty—focusing on countries committed to improving foundational literacy.

The World Bank and UNICEF, together with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation; U.K.'s Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO); UNESCO's Institute of Statistics; and USAID, launched the Accelerator Program in late 2020 to reduce learning poverty and accelerate global foundational learning.

Foundational learning is exactly what it sounds like—the foundations of a child's education. It refers to basic literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional skills, that are the building blocks for a life of learning. Just as we would not build a house without solid foundations, we cannot expect a child to thrive without solid foundational skills. Yet today, across most of the developing world, these foundations of learning are not strong enough.

The Accelerator Program recognizes and supports an initial global cohort of 10 countries that demonstrate a strong political and financial commitment to reducing learning poverty through evidence-based foundational skills interventions. These "Accelerators" can offer inspiration to one another and exchange experience on what works. They can motivate other countries to join the Program, by demonstrating how evidence-based action and commitment can lead to tangible improvements in the education sector.

## BACKGROUND

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the World Bank estimated that more than half of children in low- and middle-income countries were not acquiring the necessary foundational reading skills that underpin future learning. In September 2019, the World Bank introduced the concept of Learning Poverty, defined as the percentage of 10-year-olds who cannot read and understand a simple story. At that time 53 percent of children in low- and middle-income countries were estimated to be learning poor by the end of primary school. The pandemic has intensified this global learning crisis, with learning poverty estimated to rise to 70%.

## PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

The objective of the Accelerator Program is to support governments to reduce learning poverty through focused, evidence-based action.

The program aims to demonstrate that with technical support and specific evidence-based interventions, it is possible for governments to improve their foundational learning outcomes at scale within a 3-5-year period. The World Bank and UNICEF are working together with governments to help accomplish this:



## THE ACCELERATOR PROGRAM IN ACTION

An initial cohort of 10 countries or subnational entities have been selected and engaged as Accelerators—**Brazil's state of Ceará, Ecuador, Kenya, Morocco, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria's Edo State, Pakistan, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone.** More countries are expected to be added over time. The first "Accelerator Exchange Forum" took place in June 2021 with more than 100 participants meeting online.



### SPOTLIGHT

#### ACCELERATORS AT WORK IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

**Rwanda** has been taking proactive measures to improve the learning opportunities for all children. In addition to opening over 600 new schools, the focus has been to train the 28,000 new teachers in those schools. The Accelerator Program is helping the ministry establish its **National Strategy for Accelerated Learning**. The program has delivered deep-dive workshops to senior government representatives and development partners on target setting and the investment case. Among key takeaways was the need to build momentum to promote foundational skills and to engage all sectors of society in these efforts.

In **Edo State, Nigeria**, the Accelerator Program is complementing government-led programs to strengthen foundational learning. This potentially includes increasing textbook coverage to students, developing scripted lesson plans for teachers, and preparing a strong curriculum for pre-service teacher training. The program is also supporting the development of a state learning assessment strategy and system to support target setting, and monitoring foundational learning outcomes. The program will also support the recruitment of experienced specialists to support the government in these endeavors.

**Niger**—where half of children are yet to meet minimum reading and writing requirements—is simplifying its school programs to focus on reading, writing, and numeracy skills, and providing additional support to pupils at-risk. The Accelerator Program has provided technical support to the Ministry of Education to advance the selection of learning targets in order to monitor foundational learning outcomes. With the support of the program, the government will develop lesson plans for teachers to improve the delivery of early grade reading instruction. This will include a robust implementation plan to guide the rollout.

