INTERACTIVE RADIO INSTRUCTION: A TOOLKIT

A framework guide for implementing curriculum-linked IRI in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

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WAR child CANADA

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NTRODUCTION TO THE GUIDE

This document is meant to serve as a guide for education stakeholders looking to establish an Interactive Radio Instruction (IRI) program as one tool for helping to ensure children are realizing their right to education and that the learning and well-being needs of children and youth are being addressed. In addition to the guidance, tools and resources, the guide includes a series of illustrative case studies based on the War Child Canada Making Waves project implemented in the Democratic Republic of Congo in addition to various IRI and distance education guides and a bibliography of different resources.

In the spring of 2022, the world has transitioned from the crisis of trying to get children access to learning while schools were closed to facing the reality of learning loss and the very real, long-term implications of the pandemic on learning and well-being. The global community needs to look seriously at the lessons learned from this experience and build back better which includes incorporating more opportunities for learning at a distance in contingency planning and in reaching learners in the hardest-to-reach communities. IRI is one in a suite of educational technology tools that can help to address learning loss moving forward.

Prior to the pandemic, different approaches to educational technology were often found to be unsustainable in that they weren't adopted by communities or Ministries of Education beyond the life a project's funding. Cognizant of the need to ensure the sustainability of the interventions and local ownership, each section of the guide will include tips on sustainable ways to integrate the program and various approaches to capacity building into strengthening the overall system.

EDUCATION AND TECHNOLOGY

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of technology in education had been a divisive and for many, controversial issue. According to the Lego Foundation's Distance Learning: A guide to playful distance learning – online and offline, distance education can force children to miss out on a number of the benefits of in-person schooling such as: the safe spaces of school buildings and playgrounds; the provision of school meals programmes; stimulating environments, with books and technology; interaction and play with their peers, and other social and emotional support; as well as creative activities such as music, dance, theatre and games. Furthermore, within complex contexts teachers and learners face challenges related to access to electricity, batteries, and Wi-Fi that all have the potential to limit interaction.

However, the closure of schools during the pandemic and the transition to on-line learning has reopened the debate. As part of lessons learned from the past two and a half years and in the interest of building back better, the next step is to look critically but optimistically at the potential of technology to promote quality education, as a key tool in contingency planning and reaching the most marginalized when used in the correct way. At the same time, it is important to note that when carried out in a manner that is mindful of the importance of social interaction for children's well-being, distance learning can encompass playful and educational activities that are contextually relevant.

Following the principle of 'building back better', IRI programs can help strengthen the education system as the COVID-19 pandemic transitions to a different phase. The combination of IRI radio programs with other educational interventions may have synergistic impacts. When IRI programs are introduced along with new textbooks, for example, the effect on gains in learning is almost double that of only providing textbooks[4]. IRI is also an effective way to provide access to education even in hard-to-reach areas and those with a low teacher to student ratio.

Interactive Radio Instruction

Interactive Radio instruction (IRI) refers to an approach to learning in hard-to-reach areas, initially combining radio broadcasts with active learning to improve educational quality and teaching practices. IRI has been used for more than 50 years in various contexts globally including remote communities in the Global North and has demonstrated that it can be effective on a large scale at low cost.

IRI can be delivered in myriad different ways and for various purposes using different media: When schools are closed, IRI can be provided to support:

- **Non-formal learning –** IRI scripts, lessons and activities can be developed to promote social and emotional learning, basic literacy and numeracy or other skills outside of the formal curriculum.
- **Curriculum delivery –** IRI scripts, lessons and activities can be developed to align with the existing formal curriculum or an accelerated or competency-based version that has been endorsed by the government with learners sitting for their exam upon completion.

When schools reopen, IRI can help to facilitate:

- **Return to learning –** following an acute crisis or during a period when schools were forced to be closed, IRI can promote learning continuity, help facilitate the transition back into school and provide learning opportunities for children and youth to catch up on missed material.

IRI can be delivered in different ways depending on the context:

- **Live broadcast with a teacher –** regardless of whether the IRI lessons are broadcast live over the radio or pre-recorded and played back for a group of learners, a live broadcast with a teacher could be included to help reinforce specific lessons and learning or offered as a call-in show to answer learner questions for the wider audience to hear. A schedule for teacher "lectures" could be developed and circulated to the community.
- **Hotline –** as an additional support to self-directed learning or even classroom-based learning with an Educational Assistant (EA), in many contexts IRI is accompanied by a teacher hotline where learners can call and have questions about material answered.

- **Pre-recorded lessons –** where it is not feasible to broadcast live lessons over national or community radio due to cost, connectivity, etc. often IRI programs use lessons that have been pre-recorded on USBs and then either distributed to radio stations or on a player in a smaller group setting.

IRI should include programming to supplement educational material:

- **Short radio dramas –** these can be performed either purely for entertainment or on a particular topic including issues of public health, to promote peacebuilding and women's leadership and to address any harmful social norms. There are a number of ways to supplement the broadcast with a more interactive component, i.e., bringing community members together in a public space to listen to the broadcast with a live performance or discussion following or based on the broadcast.

- **Educational panel discussions –** these could be discussions on a range of topics from improving the delivery of education, teacher training, issues covered in the curriculum, the role of learners in decision-making and could feature teachers, parents, learners and representatives of the Ministries of Education. Members of the listening audience could call in and ask questions of the panel members or groups could gather to listen to the discussion then host their own large group discussion to follow the broadcast.

- **Live or pre-recorded parent/caregiver talk show –** IRI is not only for the benefit of children and youth. IRI was born because radio is such a popular and accessible medium. With this, parents and caregivers would likely use radio programs and discussions to learn about ways to better support their children. The live or pre-recorded sessions could include a way for listeners to call in and have their questions answered or parents and caregivers could gather to listen collectively and be provided with learning materials to take home with them after the session.

Supplementing radio lessons with learning materials can help to address the varying learning levels and needs of all children and allow them to engage in activities that reinforce the concepts heard during the broadcast lessons. Some ideas for paper-based materials are included below. When deciding on supplementary materials, remember to build in budget for production or procurement and distribution.

- **Story books –** These could be either copies of books read as part of the IRI lessons or books for further independent reading at the appropriate level.

- **Workbooks with short stories and comprehension questions –** Workbooks would need to be developed in conjunction with the learning materials and could be used along with the broadcasts. After the broadcast, the EAs could go over the materials with the learners. These stories can be illustrated, or a single large poster illustrating the story of the notebook that learners can observe under the guidance and facilitation of the EA to prepare for reading and understanding the text to be studied.

- **Journal with writing prompts –** Blank journals can ensure learners get sufficient practice writing. Writing prompts and activities could be developed into individual or class story books and could be graded by EAs or peer reviewed. Initiation to writing can be overlooked in distance learning but is fundamental to all learning.

- **Puz z lesand math/language games –** These sorts of materials should be procured locally and could be kept in the classroom (if applicable), provided for learners to take home after class or distributed to home-based learners.

- **Song sheets for children to sing along to learn new words, letters, numbers, etc. –** Song sheets and comics or cartoons could be downloaded from the internet (or developed as new) and provided to enrolled learners as classroom-based activities to complement lessons.

- **Teaching Materials –** Prior to embarking on their role in the IRI classroom, EAs are trained on curriculum and pedagogy and paper version of curriculum materials and teaching guidelines should be provided to all as a resource they can refer to as needed. The guidelines are the educator's most important resource. It contains a description of each lesson in the series; and includes suggested activities for before, during and after the show. Songs, descriptions of games and how to make teaching aids can be found in the appendix of the guide.

WAR CHILD CANADA'S MAKING WAVES PROGRAMME

Background

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has one of the world's most complex and long-standing humanitarian crises, particularly eastern DRC. Despite having abundant natural resources, DRC continues to rank as one of the poorest countries in the world. In 2019, gross domestic product (GDP) per capita was only US$564, and an estimated 76.6 per cent of the population lived in extreme poverty (on less than US$1.90 per day). DRC accounts for 7 per cent of the total population of extreme poor globally and ranks third (after India and Nigeria) in terms of the absolute number of extreme poor – about 62 million people.[1] DRC has been a complex emergency for more than 30 years. Population displacement is persistent owing to armed clashes and intercommunal violence. More than 5 million people are internally displaced in the DRC. [2]

Despite the ongoing violence, there are concerted efforts to support access to quality education, though many barriers stand in the way. Education access is a critical, strategic goal for the Government, more pertinent as DRC's under-14 population accounts for 46 per cent of the country's total demographic.[3] Despite this, DRC is ranked 146 out of 157 countries on the 2018 Human Capital Index (HCI), and a child born in the country today is only expected to obtain 4.7 learning-adjusted years of schooling.[4]

As many as 87 per cent of primary-school-aged children were believed to have been enrolled before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.[5] This amounts to approximately 17 million children enrolled in primary education (including public and private education providers) across more than 53,000 schools staffed by 540,000 teachers. And yet despite relatively high primary school enrolment nationally, an estimated 3.5 million children of primary school age were out of school before the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the WIDE database, 17 per cent of girls and 13 per cent of boys aged 9–12 years have never attended school in the DRC. In addition, most unenrolled children are based in rural areas, highlighting that in DRC, location is an essential factor in education access.[6] Furthermore, the discrepancies in data suggest that while enrolment rates are somewhat hopeful, they do not reflect the actual rates of attendance.

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[1] Accelerated Education Working Group (AEWG) Inter Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) (2022). Accelerated Education in the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda, pg. 10

[2] https://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/democratic-republic-of-the-congo

[3] AEWG, pg.10

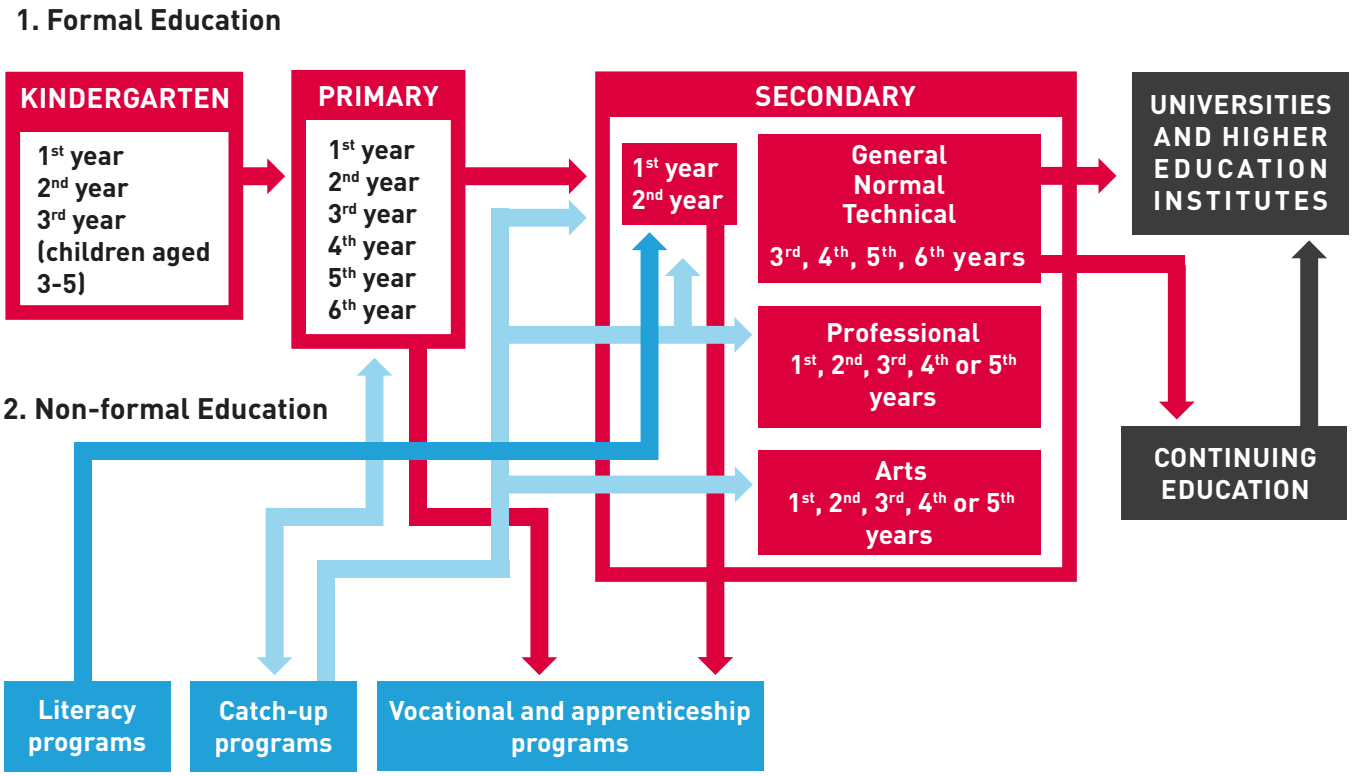
[4] World Bank (2020) Project Appraisal Document: Education DRC, available at: https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/950891592618926682/pdf/Democratic-Republic-of-the-Congo-Emergency-Equity-and-System-Strengthening-in-Education-Project.pdf

[5] AEWG, pg.22

[6] AEWG, pg.22

The image below depicts the DRC education system – the respective ministries with responsibility for formal and non-formal education and potential transition points between accelerated and formal education.

Holistic and Integrated Diagram of the Congolese Education System



Programming

A 2015, War Child Canada baseline study, in the region, revealed that 42 per cent of female students dropped out of secondary school and 58 per cent had never enrolled in secondary school because of school fees, early pregnancy, and/or parents opting to send boys to school over girls, among other reasons. This mirrored the secondary school situation in the rest of the DRC. Based on a rapid assessment of the local community, it was found that there were myriad reasons for this discrepancy including extreme poverty, cultural norms and safe proximity to school in the area. Interactive Radio Instruction was identified as a useful approach to address the challenge as it would be a way for girls to access learning safely in their community, would be implemented at no cost to the students and their families and would allow the team at War Child Canada to work alongside community members to address some of the harmful cultural beliefs preventing girls from accessing their right to education. The War Child Canada Making Waves project was introduced in 2014, as a pilot project to respond to the abysmally low rates of girls' enrollment in education in South Kivu.

The first phase of the project (January 2014 to August 2017), with support from a philanthropic donor, was initiated with an assessment of the communities proposed for the IRI centres, to develop an understanding of the best approach for introducing IRI. War Child Canada trained and supported a team of 12 scriptwriters who developed a total of 90 lessons for Standards 1 and 2 (the two first years of secondary under the formal system) at the time but since that point, the levels have been shifted so that the curriculum is actually the last two years of upper primary. Those lessons were recorded and broadcast for six months, as a pilot, reaching the 300 children enrolled in the IRI centres as well as the teachers from the formal schools that would listen to the broadcast in the morning and use the material for their classes in the afternoon. There were a number of challenges during the first phase of the project that shortened the amount of time for the initial piloting and provided a number of lessons learned for moving forward. During the script development phase, the writers were found to need additional familiarity with the school material, and schedules for writing, editing, and proofreading were not respected. As a result, the scripts needed to be revised before recording. After the lessons had been broadcast, the Ministry identified some significant gaps, to ensure a contextualized DRC curriculum (vs European) so they had to be integrated and re-recorded.

Grade equivalence DRC and Canada/U.S.

DRC new curriculum (since 2019)	DRC old curriculum	Canada / U.S.	WCC IRI
Kindergarten			
1st year	1st year	4 / "junior"	
2nd year	2nd year	5 / "senior"	
3rd year	3rd year		
Primary School			
1st year	1st year	1st year	Level 1
2nd year	2nd year	2nd year	
3rd year	3rd year	3rd year	Level 2
4th year	4th year	4th year	
5th year	5th year	5th year	Level 3
6th year	6th year	6th year	
7th year	**Lower Secondary School**	7th year	
8th year	1st year	8th year	Level 4
	2nd year		
Secondary School	**Upper Secondary School**	**Secondary School**	
1st year	3rd year	9th year	
2nd year	4th year	10th year	
3rd year	5th year	11th year	
4th year	6th year	12th year	

The first phase of the pilot project demonstrated that the communities, students and parents responded well to the introduction of the IRI approach. It was endorsed by the Ministry of Education (ESPT) and Ministry of Social Affairs (MINAS) who agreed to provide official certificates for children that complete and pass the exams to enable them to transition into formal school. An external evaluation found that IRI students performed as well as or better than formal students on a proctored test, scoring higher in subjects of French, history and geography. IRI students also sat for ministry-approved exams and achieved an overall 80 per cent pass rate.

The second phase of the project (2017 to 2019) built on the initial pilot, including the completion of 80 additional lessons for a total of 170 – covering the entirety of Standards 1 and 2. The approach was adapted based on lessons learned and negotiations continued with MoPSPE (Ministry of Primary, Secondary and Professional Education) and MINAS to ensure certification of learning in the IRI was included in the Education Sector Plan. By the end of the project period, students who attended the IRI lessons were registered with EPST and upon successful completion of a final exam, eligible to enroll in the formal school system in Standard 3.

The success of the project under the philanthropic fund enabled War Child Canada to secure an additional $3.1 million in funding from Global Affairs Canada (GAC) for the Making Waves project which represented the project's third phase and included the development of a national expansion plan for IRI and forging strong partnerships with MINAS and its sub-division of non-formal education (DGNEF), as well as EPST. This phase built on the upper primary accelerated curriculum experience to develop levels 1-3 of the primary ALP, using the IRI approach. The project grant was signed in September 2019 with activities planned for the following two years. This coincided with the declaration of the global pandemic and the closure of schools which on the one hand, disrupted plans to draft additional curriculum and expand the program but on the other hand, underscored the importance of an approach to distance learning.

The third phase included training 28 scriptwriters, 84 MoSA (Ministry of Social Affairs) with responsibility for alternative education and MoPSPE staff and 80 EAs who were then tasked with setting the new primary-level programs in motion. War Child Canada staff members were sent to the new regions to introduce the communities to the program. Training of EAs and community committees was done remotely. 1,629 new students were enrolled in level 1-4 classes in September 2020, for a total of 2,091 students who had taken part in the programs altogether. The new students included 51 per cent girls who participated in 40 classes in 10 recently rehabilitated IRI learning centres. The school remedial centres (known as Centre de Rattrapage Scolaire or CRS centres are overseen by the Ministry of Social Affairs. War Child Canada supported several but not all with the IRI approach as they are spread across the country. The centres supported by War Child Canada followed content related to the government curriculum while the other centers lacked the curriculum, textbooks and teaching materials.

In May of 2020, War Child Canada applied for and was successful in securing $500,000 USD from the Education Cannot Wait (ECW) First Emergency Response (FER) window and an additional $2,000,000 CAD from Global Affairs Canada to scale up and adapt the program to address not only the learning but also the well-being needs of teachers and learners in the wake of COVID-19. Since March 2020, COVID-19 has also presented a major barrier to education and learning for students in DRC. The expansion of the Making Waves project to provide distance education in three new provinces has reduced barriers for over 350,000 learners through lessons broadcast on six radio stations, and with support from trained Education Assistants (EAs).

In January of 2021, War Child Canada engaged School-to-School (STS) International, a global international development firm with expertise in research, evaluation, curriculum, training, and strategic planning, to evaluate the program. Overall, the findings were quite positive.

- On the topic of learning, both quantitative and qualitative results are promising for the effectiveness of the IRI program. Students in the IRI program had higher mean scores on all the assessment's reading and math subtasks. Factors that contributed to these increased scores included reduced distractions for students and IRI offered a complementary approach to education that combined radio lessons with teacher-facilitated instruction and group work.

- Students who are part of the IRI program have higher psychosocial well-being than their traditional peers as measured by the quantitative psychosocial questionnaire. Interview respondents suggested they thought the program had improved acceptance of others, especially students with disabilities. Some parents reported having observed improved self-confidence and open-mindedness among students due to the program.

- Tolerance was seen as an important success of the program. Respondents frequently acknowledged that orphans, students with disabilities, girls, students in remote areas, students who speak a minority language, and students affected by conflict faced barriers to education and that IRI reduced barriers to education by avoiding fees. At the time of the evaluation, program elements to promote gender sensitivity had not yet been introduced.

Lessons Learned

Over the last more than eight years of implementation of the IRI program, War Child Canada has collected a number of lessons learned that have informed ongoing adaptations and adjustments of their own program as well as those that have been collected from other IRI projects and provide useful reflections for implementing IRI programs.

- **Cost of radio broadcast –** As mentioned above, airtime costs were found to be prohibitive, so War Child Canada opted to pre-record the sessions on USB keys and play in classroom settings. As part of the COVID-19 national scale-up of the program, War Child Canada worked with the government which included providing them with USB keys to cover or offset some of the airtime costs.

- **Lack of learning materials –** A number of the recordings were made based on the assumption that learners and EAs had the appropriate textbooks and/or workbooks and included "turn to page X" which was problematic when the materials were not available.

- **Preference for USB keys –** Live lessons often do not succeed given the problems of class shifts and the challenges of reaching all learners through live broadcasts with limited airtime.

- **Role of the educational assistants –** The EAs are truly integral to the success of the program. While it is not realistic to expect they would have formal teaching qualifications, it is important to identify a cadre of EAs who are able to help learners navigate the lessons including supporting with language as needed (it should be noted that the language of instruction in DRC schools is French, but many speak Kiswahili at home). It is also important to ensure gender parity in the recruitment of EAs wherever possible. This is reflected in the recommendations but as EAs are meant to be paid a government salary (and too often are not), it is important that agencies advocate to the government to improve their working conditions and provide a stipend for their services as appropriate. As part of the Making Waves project, War Child Canada created a guide to help the EAs facilitate the lessons.

- **Can't really make it just about girls –** While the original intention of the project was to focus exclusively on addressing the gap in educational access between boys and girls, the program was so popular that boys and their parents requested that they also be included. This still presents an important opportunity to deliver quality education in a gender sensitive manner. The external evaluation found that more support is needed related to teacher training to ensure they are using gender-sensitive approaches and are demonstrating and promoting equality of girls and boys.

- **Validate curriculum with Ministries –** In the DRC, because the country is so large, there are both regional curricula and a national curriculum. Before the eastern DRC program could be scaled up nationally, the IRI material needed to be redrafted for alignment with the national curriculum. While this did not present a serious challenge, anyone interested in implementing a curriculum aligned IRI program should first check with the curricular requirements, expectations, assessment and whether similar adaptations of the curriculum have been undertaken and endorsed previously.

- **Adapt school calendar to avoid drop-outs –** One finding of the War Child Canada project that was not expected when it was decided to run the program year-round to accommodate different work and learning schedules was that students would drop out to try to reenroll in the formal education program. Before embarking on an IRI program, community consultations should include questions and decisions about the timing and hours of the program.

- **Ensure an approach to support distance learning (in this case, the IRI package) is included as a back-up/contingency plan –** COVID-19 and the pivot to distance learning has increased the understanding of the potential of IRI and educational technology. Moving forward, IRI programming, with options to ensure contextual relevancy (classroom-based or radio) needs to be integrated into Ministry of Education contingency plans in the event of future school closures or as part of alternative education programming as a way to reach the most marginalized. During the Ebola response in Liberia, despite the fact that there had previously been a national radio education program, it was not available for use because it hadn't been formally integrated into the education system.

- **Ensure pathways to formal education –** If the decision is to align the IRI lessons with the official curriculum, it is important that learners are equipped to successfully transition into the formal system and are authorized to write an exam or transfer their records of learning as appropriate. War Child Canada worked with the MoE to assure the curricula matched and to ensure learners were able to make the formal transition after passing an exam.

- **School safety –** The second phase of the War Child Canada project included a research component that provided a number of interesting findings including one related to school safety. According to the study, learners in the IRI centres reported feeling safer than learners in the formal schools. It was also found that learners in the IRI performed better than their counterparts in formal schools. The researchers drew a preliminary correlation between feelings of safety at school and academic performance.

- **IRI needs to find ways to address the unique learning needs of various excluded groups – including orphans and inclusion.** This work will include working to address the stigma around children with disabilities and education. One War Child Canada staffer pointed out that in DRC, these children are often sent to specialized centres for children living with disabilities and more often parents and children living with disabilities prefer to attend these schools to avoid stigma as opposed to sending them to the IRI centres. This should be seen as a key advocacy point with communities to reduce stigma and to engage these learners in IRI programming.

- **Difference between local and national implementation –** War Child Canada found through the process that while engagement and support from the Ministry of Education was fairly straightforward at the district level, it was much slower and bureaucratic when the decision was taken to scale the program nationally. The lesson learned in this process was therefore to consider starting with a small pilot involving fewer stakeholders and only then look at the feasibility of scaling either regionally or nationally.

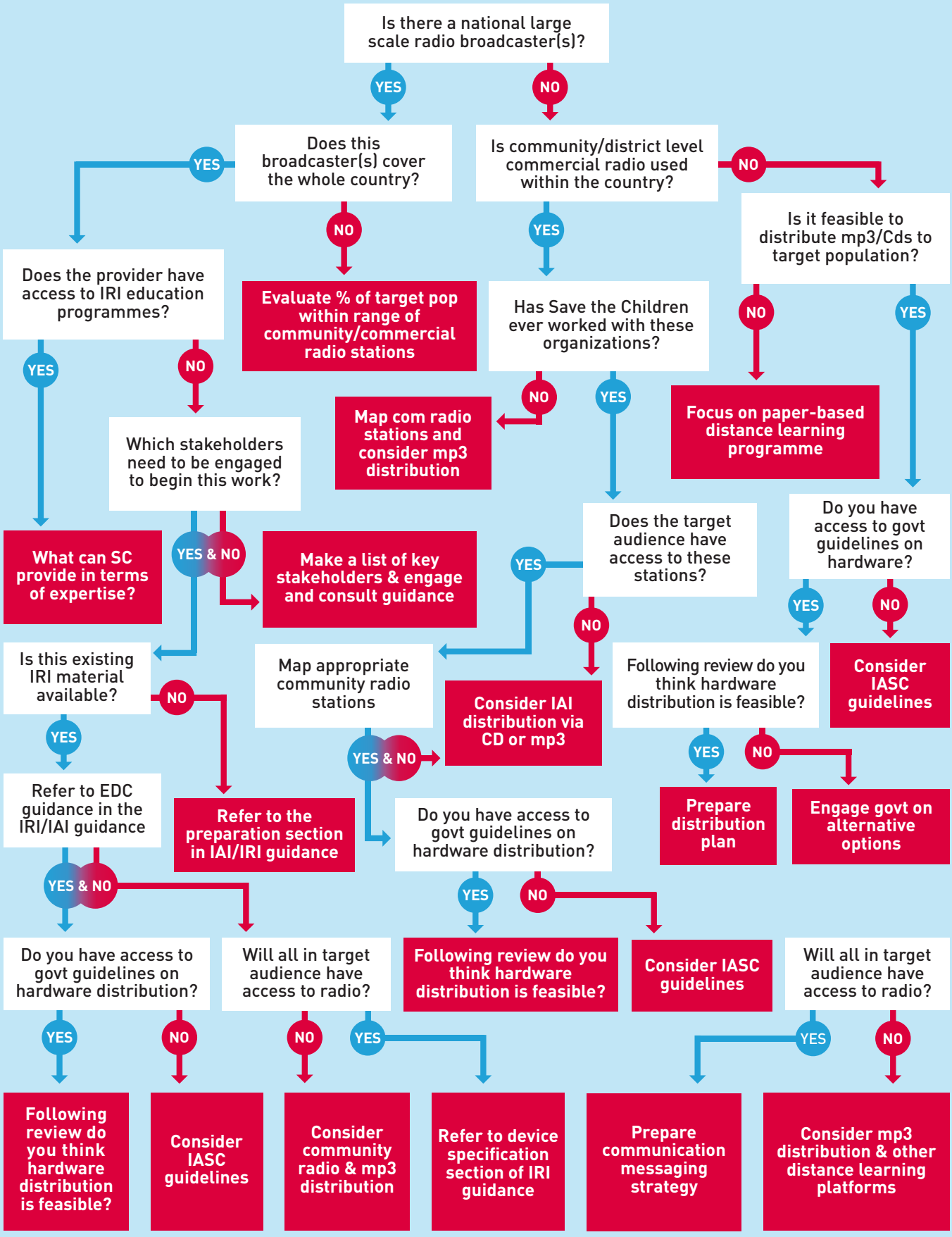
IS IRI RIGHT FOR MY CONTEXT?

Before establishing an IRI program in your context, it is important to consider the context and the appropriateness of such an intervention. The two key areas to assess before moving forward are the available infrastructure and the needs and wants of the local community.

Infrastructure Assessment

The decision tree below was developed by colleagues at Save the Children. Based on the answer to a series of questions about the nature of media infrastructure and available IRI-ready content, the user can determine the most appropriate path forward for beginning to implement an IRI program. The tree should be adapted for your own context and the capacity of your own organization.

IAI/IRI Implementation Option Decision Tree



When making decisions about the space to be used, consider whether the space has cost implications and the sustainability of such a decision: could the space used to be donated by the community at no cost to the project? Is it preferable that listening groups be formed and meet in homes or compounds to limit the size of the groups? Given that IRI is more frequently introduced in a context that is either lacking a formal school or one that is not large enough to accommodate, consideration should be given for how the selection of location will help to build the case for or serve as a temporary location for a school.

In the Making Waves project, as the decision to hold the IRI in classroom settings was ultimately made, meetings were held with members of the community to provide access to spaces free of charge. The cost of renting the spaces was incurred by the parents of the learners themselves as an investment in their children's education. During the first phase in Uvira, the three centres operated from 2015 to 2020 in two community churches and a house of a student's parent. In 2020, the DIVAS provided access to 3 centres or four classrooms.

Context & Audience Analysis

Another key step in establishing the appropriateness of an IRI program is to assess the context and needs of the specific community. Following are a series of secondary data sources and recommended activities and consultations to develop a better understanding of the context.[7]

- Review recent stakeholder analysis, analysis of children with disabilities, conflict analyses or other documents that provide useful insight into the context and existing relationships and potential sources of tension.
- Find out from the children themselves what hours are best to run the program to increase participation and limit stressors
- Identify whether there are any analyses available of the education context. What are the most significant gaps in enrolment? Learning?
- Ask what will be the best way to ensure equitable access to the distance learning program being proposed?
    - How will the approach to implementation account for differences in access to resources (technology, financial, most marginalized communities).
- Ask what adaptations need to be made to ensure that the content is as inclusive as possible?
    - What adaptations need to be made for children with disabilities?

[7] This section is based on Save the Children's Covid-19: Interactive Radio and Audio Instruction – Implementation Guidance

- What additional support must be provided for girls and boys so they both have the same opportunity to learn? For example, what time should programs be aired to accommodate other household responsibilities?
- What languages does content need to be available in so all children can learn?

- If listening groups are a delivery method, how will EAs or parent facilitators get access to teaching and learning materials?
- Consider how parents' and caregivers' needs differ as they take on the additional role of supporting their children's learning and wellbeing? This might be best understood through one-on-one conversations, telephone-based surveys or focus group discussions (FGDs) with parents and caregivers.
- Consider how feasible it is to reach these stakeholders to ensure their voices are heard and that they are meaningfully and safely able contribute to how these materials are developed and distributed.

Budget considerations

One of the many benefits of IRI is that it is low-cost and makes use of appropriate technology but of course there are always unanticipated costs. As mentioned in the lessons learned, costs related to air-time were much higher than originally anticipated. As part of assessing the feasibility of the project in your context, it is important to plan for the various costs by setting out a preliminary budget. The table below includes some indicative budget items based on the War Child Canada project implementation.

Budget item	Description of the item
Script writing and recording	Costs involved in these activities include hiring experienced consultants to write the scripts and record the lessons (may be the same consultants or different). In addition to consulting fees, consider potential costs related to studio and equipment rental for recording. A way to minimize the overall cost of IRI over the long term would be to consider establishing a recording studio in the MoE. Contingency planning in case of a need for rewriting and rerecording should also be reflected.
Supplementary material development	Unless supplementary teaching and learning material is available, it may be necessary to hire individuals (or local teachers) to develop sets of materials as highlighted above to supplement the radio lessons.

Budget item	**Description of the item**
Salary for educational assistants	This should be comparable to the salaries of similar jobs in the community so as not to create a pull factor or to have EAs drawn to other types of work. EAs are meant to be on government salaries but in many cases, they are not paid. If it is agreed that a stipend will be provided to the EAs, this should be established in conjunction with the government with the understanding that organizational support is only a temporary measure.
Airtime	As mentioned above, in the DRC context, this cost was found to be prohibitive but could be offset by partnering with the government and broadcasting through government-run radio stations. Could also look at local sponsorship opportunities. In DRC there are community radio stations that do not have a very wide reach and commercial radio stations with more reach and listenership, but which are significantly more expensive to broadcast lessons (top Congo one minute of broadcast = $11, RTGA = $8, info7=$9).
Space	This could be a rented space or in the case of the War Child Canada project donated by the community at no cost.
Printing or procuring supplementary material	This cost can add up significantly but should be factored into the overall budget as part of the appeal of the IRI project is the accessibility due to very limited costs commitment on the part of the parents and caregivers.
Textbooks	Textbooks are meant to be provided by the MoE when lessons are curriculum-aligned but it may be necessary to print additional copies to accommodate the increased numbers of learners. Supplementary materials required should be itemized and produced independently.
School kits	It is common practice for learners enrolled in school in crisis contexts to be provided with basic school kits – notebooks, pencils, backpacks, etc. IRI students should be supported with the same resources. The Education Cluster in the DRC spells out the recommended contents of a student school kit and estimates the costs to be $17.50 per student. Working from a common unit cost is a good way to ensure material purchase and distribution does not contribute to existing tensions in communities.
School uniforms	While this wasn't an anticipated cost in the project, the students in the IRI program requested uniforms so they wouldn't feel stigmatized for not attending the closest formal school.
Exam fees	There is a cost involved in registering students to write exams to transition into the formal system. The project should incur these fees to ensure student success in the next steps of their educational journey.
School operating costs	Since the establishment of free basic education in the DRC, the government provides the operating costs in formal schools. However, the government does not provide operating costs in alternative learning centres. At the moment, directors of the CRS request 30,000 FC (15 USD) to cover operating costs.

GALVANIZING SUPPORT FOR IRI

Members of the local community, including learners, parents and caregivers, teachers and school administration and the government each has a role to play in the success of an IRI program and need to feel they are invested in the program from the initial assessment and design stages. In the immediate term, the community is needed to help promote enrolment, in the medium term the various actors can help to ensure the program's sustainability beyond the life of NGO support and then over the longer term, help to make a contribution to the wider education system.

Engaging Learners

- Engage children and youth in the community in FGDs about the needs and gaps related to education in the community
- Conduct participatory activities with learners to understand the potential challenges in the context and engage them in designing the program
- Identify opportunities where learners can play an active role in the program as peer mentors, support for younger learners, etc.
- Ensure the program includes an element of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) for the learners and talk to them about what they see as their needs in that area
- Make sure there is student representation on school management committees

Engaging Parents and Community Members

- Hold community meetings to understand the barriers local children and youth face in accessing education
- Organize listening sessions to an introductory "episode zero" radio program that will introduce the community to the IRI broadcasts. This program will explain the generalities of IRI, the nature of radio programs and how they work, so that parents understand their relevance and commit their support – which will contribute to learners' success.
- Engage parents and members of the community in the process – donating spaces, bringing them in as EAs
- Engage parents and caregivers to support with site selection and helping to prioritize the grade levels and the focus based on community needs

- Identify and engage community members who could provide in-kind contributions through their work (i.e., staff at the local radio station)
- Work with parents and community members to identify ways IRI could be a wider benefit to the community
- Establish school management committees as per formal schools and try to create links to support with transition
- School management committees can play various roles depending on the needs including upkeep of learning centres and vetting of EAs.

Working with local School Administrators and Teachers/EAs

- Work to build connections between IRI centres and nearby schools so learners feel they are being treated equitably and the transition to formal school is smooth
- Be open and transparent with EAs at the beginning about the expectations, the type of training they will receive, the expectations of their roles, etc.
- Work with EAs to identify well-being needs and how the support will be integrated into the role – peer groups, opportunities for mentorship, WhatsApp groups, etc.
- Try to ensure professional development and support opportunities are provided on a regular basis, including refresher courses, reflections and experience sharing between EAs from different centres.

Working with the Government

- Before moving forward to develop curriculum-aligned lessons, must secure endorsement of the Ministry of Education
- Ensure IRI learners are supported to successfully transition into the formal education system upon completion of the program
- Even if IRI programming is remedial, should be discussed and signed off by relevant government authorities
- As part of preliminary negotiations with the MoE, talk about ways the IRI program is not only a response activity but should also be included in contingency planning and disaster preparedness as well as programming to reach the most marginalized and how to ensure this can be sustained
- Advocate for the inclusion of IRI in the Education Sector Plan so it is coordinated with other alternative education programming
- Advocate for the government to support and help offset cost of broadcasting on national commercial or government-run radio stations
- Advocate on behalf of EAs to ensure they are fairly compensated for their work through the government system
- Begin the discussions early to establish a pathway for the government to take it on

CONTENT DEVELOPMENT

In a typical IRI session, characters on the radio run through a lesson for roughly 30 minutes. This recording includes sections where instructions are given directly to a teacher or in the case of home schooling a caregiver who is acting in the role of the teacher. Timed activities are often included that ask the child to answer, often in a clearly measurable way. The radio programming should be developed in-line with the appropriate education principles for the context which could include the Education Sector Plan or other national policies and guidance around pupil teacher ratio (PTR), for example or global frameworks such as the INEE Minimum Standards (MS). In the case of the War Child Canada project, the development of the session plan and master plans for levels one through three were aligned with the national remedial school program and was validated by the General Directorate for Non-Formal Education (DGNEF). The curriculum and approach to delivery was also developed in accordance (as much as possible) with the AEWG principles for DRC.

MoE endorsement is required to ensure learners are able to satisfy the requirements for their grade level and transition to formal school. Once the most pressing needs and gaps in terms of learning (refer back to context assessment) have been identified, proceed to developing the radio-ready teaching and learning material. Unless there is in-house capacity to develop engaging and pedagogically sound scripts for radio, it will be necessary to hire external consultants for this role. In the case of War Child Canada, there was already an existing accelerated curriculum for lower secondary, so scriptwriters worked with the curriculum to translate it into script format ensuring all of the key competencies were being addressed.

In developing the lessons, each scriptwriter develops the narrative lessons for the level of study assigned to them, following a set guidance to ensure uniformity across all lessons. The scriptwriter starts with a draft lesson, which is then read and reread by their peers, who suggest modifications in terms of overall lesson length, content, interactivity between radio-facilitator and learners, breaks needed to complete classroom activities, roles assigned to series characters, and classroom management. Necessary changes are then made, all while ensuring that the lesson length remains in good time. The script is now ready to enter the recording phase.

Recording the content

Once recorded, the audio-lesson will be sent to the scriptwriter, who checks the accuracy of the recording against the submitted script. Feedback is sent back to the studio for any changes need to be made. This (revised) lesson is then ready for focus-group testing and evaluation by learners with the same characteristics as the target audience. During this focus-group testing, any inadequacies are noted, and modifications to the recordings will then be made. The final product is the post-evaluation audio scripted lesson, which is ready for broadcast.

The production of IRI and Radio based materials is not a simple process, it is one that includes a significant number of specialized personnel, and it is recommended that experienced partners are included in planning, from as early a stage as possible. The timetable below is adapted from one found in the EDC's (2015) Expanding Access to Early Childhood Development: Using Interactive Audio Instruction: A toolkit and guidelines for program design and implementation. It represents a model of a production timetable commonly found across broadcast media. The timeframes have been adapted considerably to represent an absolute minimum timeframe that could be considered in developing radio material. IRI material will likely take considerably longer to produce than, for example, recording PSA or story-centred learning activities.

Activity	Person Responsible	Target	Wk1	Wk2	Wk3	Wk4	Wk5
Technology distribution identified	Procurement and ICT teams	Target population					
Plans drafted for each lesson	Scriptwriters and education teams	Scriptwriters					
Scripts drafted, reviewed, rehearsed and timed	Scriptwriters and education teams	Scriptwriters and recording teams					
Community awareness campaign developed	Education and communications teams	Target population					
Recording of scripts	Scriptwriters and recording teams	Education teams and programme manager					
Evaluation of initial recording	Educational teams and programme managers	Recording teams					
Editing of recordings	Recording teams and script writers	Recording teams and programme managers					
Evaluation of edited recordings	Education teams and programme managers	Editing teams and programme managers					

IRI PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

Once the context analysis has been completed and IRI determined the most appropriate intervention and content either adapted from existing material or newly developed, the process of implementation can begin.

Classroom-based with pre-recorded lessons

If the most appropriate delivery mechanism for the lessons is determined to be classroom-based with a USB key and an educational assistant, decisions will need to be made about the specific grade level that will be the focus of the classes and the number of classes that can be run concurrently in a particular space.

Listening groups

In the absence of available public spaces or at the request of the local community, another option for the delivery of IRI lessons could be in small listening groups. These might gather in homes or in outdoor common spaces. The role of the adult facilitator could be filled by an EA compensated using either government or project funds, or a local parent with skills to support the small group. Alternatively, a system could be set up whereby an older student is

able to work as a volunteer in the role but will then have the opportunity to use the experience in their application for tertiary education.

Educational Assistants

Educational Assistants (EAs) rather than formally qualified teachers, are likely to be the most realistic option for instructors. In most contexts, there are not a clear set of qualifications for the role. With this, it will be important to determine what the program identifies as the criteria for an Education Assistant, working in conjunction with representation for the local government.

This criterion could then be extended across the education system. Determination of the requirements for the role should be agreed upon before recruitment and should reflect the population in the specific context. For example, if there is a very small number of people in the community with university degrees, it would not be appropriate to require that Educational Assistants hold a formal degree but instead place more weight on other qualities such as experience working with children, language, etc.

Another consideration related to the Education Assistant is the level of compensation provided (see earlier references to government salary vs. stipend). The stipend amount should be comparable to other work in the community so as not to create a situation where EAs are likely to leave for a better opportunity. If the IRI program is being implemented in response to a crisis, this could take place as a part of an intersectoral agency initiative and over the longer term, pay scales for Educational Assistants could be set at the level of the national government.

Part of the expectations of the EA and the profile should include a pre-determination of the professional development expectations of the individuals. This can be determined drawing on existing teacher training materials focused on classroom management, student well-being, pedagogy, inclusive education, language, etc. Decisions need to be made based on time and capacity development needs and gaps.

In the Making Waves project, educational assistants participated in a professional development schedule that included a 6-day training session looking at a range of topics including: an overview of the IRI program, IRI pedagogy, Ministry support, broadcast schedules and delivery format, evaluating learning through IRI, roles and responsibilities of EAs, the role of learners and classroom management techniques.

Scheduling

Decisions will also have to be taken related to scheduling and grade levels. If IRI programming will be broadcast over the airwaves and will be aligned with the formal curriculum, it could be difficult to ensure learners are accessing all of the material to successfully complete the required learning. In this situation there are a few options:

Community radio broadcast

If the IRI being delivered is curriculum-linked, it may be useful to work with local community radio stations and work with the communities to identify the biggest need with regard to specific grade level (s). In this way, it might be appropriate to broadcast lessons targeting specific levels for a period of months supplemented by home-based materials that will ensure leaners are equipped to graduate from one grade level to the next.

Transitions

In the War Child Canada project, the target grade levels were lower secondary with the intention that a young person would complete the project and transition into the formal system or complete lower secondary education and transition into work. While beyond the scope of the guide, it is important that learners are being supported to make the transition from the program into the next phase whether it be through counselling and connections with the formal school or through the type of learning options being provided. While IRI does present an opportunity for learners to access education where they might otherwise not have been able to, there should also be ample consideration given to next steps.

Crisis Response

Organizations implementing IRI programming should work with local Ministries of Education to integrate the approach into education sector planning related to crisis response and contingency planning. As has been witnessed in the face of the COVID-19 restrictions, IRI can support access to education when physical schools are closed and when it is not deemed safe to travel to and from school. It would be useful to flesh out the different modalities that could be used and supported as part of the IRI implementation including hotlines to connect learners with teachers, listening groups, and ways to support parents. Successful integration into education sector plans will also require a robust monitoring and evaluation system to ensure the program is successful in limiting disruption to learning.

PEDAGOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Inclusive teaching and learning

Inclusive education in IRI is a challenge, and there are many barriers to overcome to ensure that all children can participate meaningfully. However, much progress can be made by considering and addressing each barrier individually – little by little, changes can be made to improve accessibility and inclusion of more and more children.

Because IRI shares lessons using voice and sound, if it is used alone without additional planning or accommodations, it will be exclusive of some children. Children who are deaf or hard of hearing and children who do not speak the language of transmission will be unable to fully access the messages. Likewise, some children with learning disabilities or intellectual impairments may struggle to comprehend the messages without corresponding visual stimulus to aid understanding. When designing IRI, coordinate with Disabled Persons Organizations (DPOs) in your context, who can support in the design of materials to help ensure they're as inclusive as possible. Building inclusion into any education program requires ensuring that there are multiple ways to share information, motivate learners, and allow children to express themselves. While IRI is limited in terms of diverse information sharing, motivation, and student expression, even small adaptations in these areas may make a significant difference for children.

Similarly, gender responsive IRI programs using diverse delivery mechanisms and tools (i.e., paper and pencil, radio, TV, mobile phone, online platforms). Decisions should be based on a comprehensive gender analysis that sheds light on gender inequalities. Advocate for flexible scheduling in order to allow girls with increasing domestic responsibilities to participate.

Save the Children International has produced a set of guidance on ensuring distance education programming is inclusive for all learners and addresses the unique learning needs of girls. The table below is adapted from that resource.

Approaches	Considerations
Information sharing	Share a written **transcript** of any lessons broadcast over the radio and make available to all learners if requested. It is also important to identify learners who would benefit from such a support at the outset. Plan alternative IRI sessions in **different languages** Create **sign language video versions** of IRI sessions that can be distributed through mobile smartphone networks or shared safely specifically with target students (i.e., through providing tablets) in contexts where the technology is available. If students have access to **textbooks**, ensure lessons refer to **specific pages** so that children can engage through visual and auditory pathways (alternatively, distribute **paper-based packets** that children can use to follow along) Where students and teachers have access to phones, consider a **supplemental tutoring or hotline** to ensure that children who are struggling to keep up have the chance to discuss what they are learning with a peer or teacher.
Motivating students	To the extent possible, give students choices during lessons – for example, rather than telling everyone to repeat a song or a passage, allow students to draw a response or share what they are learning with a sibling. Plan IRI lessons to include engagement in the world around students – even if it is only to look around their house for examples of something they are discussing, giving children a chance to make what they are hearing and/or seeing tangible will help engagement and understanding. Look at ways former students can support as tutors or how small groups can be formed with the stronger students acting as peer supports.
Student expression	If student work is required, plan for flexibility in how and when that work is to be completed. For example, if students are expected to complete a written assignment, offer alternatives for students who need to demonstrate what they have learned orally instead.

Approaches	**Considerations**
Gender sensitivity	Ensure the lessons include positive messaging around girls and gender roles and that there is at least gender parity among Educational Assistants and facilitators. Look at ways to address the challenge of digital access - even in settings with adequate infrastructure and connectivity, girls are less likely to have access to digital devices than boys. Community engagement activities to promote IRI such as panel discussions, debate, role play, PSA's, jingles, radio diaries should include messaging around the importance of girls' education Ensure supplementary IEC materials mainstream gender equality messaging including on shared decision-making; equal right to healthcare; equal distribution of resources, food, nutrition in homes; and equal distribution of tasks. Use as many images, illustrations and pictorials as possible. Messages highlight the importance of inter-generational dialogues, family discussions and creating spaces within the home to discuss gender equality, child protection and other topics. School management committees and community leaders, including women, facilitate the distribution of learning materials from schools to families. Provide radio operated/solar powered radio sets to poorest households Provide USBs of pre-recorded lessons to children in remote areas not reached by radio broadcasts

Taking a "do no harm" approach

Conflict sensitivity refers to understanding the context where a program is taking place, analyzing the two-way interaction between the context and the program and acting to minimize negative impacts and maximise positive impacts of education policies and programming on the conflict or not causing further harm in contexts that may already be quite tense. There are a few ways an IRI program should be developed mindful of a potential negative impact and work to avoid.

- Meaningful child participation is paramount. Children should have a say throughout the design and implementation of the program. The hours of operation should be established in consultation with children and parents so as not to conflict with other responsibilities that can create tensions at home
- Community radio stations may have very limited bandwidth - be sure the program is not only engaging with a station that only services part of the community.
- Be sure lessons don't reinforce certain stereotypes or negative views/portrayals of different groups
- Ensure everyone can get access to radios – distribute to communities as needed
- Ensure there is programming in all languages in the community as outlined by the MoE. In the DRC, the national program recommends reading/writing lessons at N1 in the national language according to the provinces and French orally and it is only at the N2 where French is done in writing.

Promoting well-being

Look at ways that the delivery of lessons can promote social emotional well-being either by bringing in another expert to review the content for messaging or look at ways the formal system is working to support this aspect of learning. In the classroom, EAs and facilitators must be equipped with the tools and resources to support learner well-being and have access to referral mechanisms for the local community as needed.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The task of monitoring and evaluating every IRI project is two-fold. First, it is important to track the successful implementation of the program or conduct a process evaluation – part of which is attempting to capture not only feedback from the registered audience but also the indirect beneficiaries or those members of the community, both adults and children, who listen to the programs. Regardless of the modality described below, assessment activities and measures should be relevant and designed in concert with IRI content, whether assessment questions/activities are already available or ones that need to be developed for new content. These reflections are based on information taken from the Save the Children COVID-19 Interactive Radio and Audio Instruction (IRI) – Implementation Guidance.

Process evaluations answer questions about the operations of program, the quality of the programming and the targets reached through content distribution. Process evaluation in IRI often focuses specifically on the development and testing of program content, monitoring the reach of content, and collecting qualitative feedback about the quality and use of content.

- Quality and relevance of the content is the first indicator to measure. This is usually done with qualitative interviews, often in-person. Qualitative interviews about content should focus on caregivers' perceptions of the relevance the programs, teacher feedback on the content, and children's engagement in IRI activities. Where in-person interviews and feedback are not feasible, the use of call-in and text-in numbers built into Interactive Audio Instruction (IAI)/IRI programs can collect ongoing data about how children and caregivers view the quality of the content. Teachers can also be engaged in process evaluation of IRI content using SMS or internet-based messaging like WhatsApp to provide feedback and support in revising IRI/IAI content throughout implementation.

- Output-focused measures should include the range of radio stations broadcasting the IRI content and where possible, more direct data collection of how many children within specific catchment areas are accessing the programs. This can be collected as part of programming itself through the distribution of text-in/call-in numbers, and targeted evaluation within school communities by using caregivers' phone numbers from school registers and sending bulk SMS to caregivers to assess how many households have listened to IRI programming at specified points throughout the program implementation.

The second type of M&E is looking at the impact of the IRI on student learning and well-being. This can be measured using different assessment tools commonly used in education programming. They can be administered either using paper-based or mobile-based approaches.

Formative assessments are used to measure children's specific learning related to programming on an ongoing basis. In a classroom setting, this can include comprehension questions, quizzes and tests on the content or non-formal assessment to gauge learning such as thumbs up or down, hand up (if you agree or disagree) or show me on your fingers the answer to...? Or asking a selected/targeted children of different abilities to answer questions to see how their learning has progressed (I.e., a higher performing/average/lower performing child). Alternatively, children and youth who are learning independently and remotely could answer surveys or regular check-in questions via SMS or WhatsApp.

Summative evaluations focus on what children have learned over the course of the program implementation. This is challenging but IRI programs that include summative and outcome measures should identify what the baseline of children's learning is to compare against progress made. Summative evaluations can build on formative assessments. By distributing specific learning assessments at the beginning of the IRI (either paper-based or mobile phone-based) program implementers can identify a baseline of children's learning. This data can then be analyzed to understand children's baseline learning and then compared to the same assessment after a specified period of the IRI program implementation. Summative evaluations can be administered by EAs or if internet, bandwidth, and budget are available, audio questions with simple response options could be developed for children to complete themselves. Using offline audio survey tools such as KOBO, program implementers can collect data from children at baseline and end line. These tools would have to be fit-for-purpose and developed for specific IRI programming and are not currently available.

SUSTAINABILITY

COVID-19 has taught the global community the value of distance education. Many discussions over the past two years have pointed to the need to not only see distance education as a temporary response to an acute crisis but more as an innovative approach to meeting the learning needs of the most marginalized, helping to provide access to learning for those who have missed out, as a temporary solution to a shortage of teachers and as a contingency plan that can be quickly activated in the event of school closures. As such it is important that any materials used are evaluated, adapted as necessary and stored in a manner that can allow for reuse or further adaptation in the future, whether that is in response to COVID-19 or other crises.

At the same time, it is important, in the interest of programming across the development humanitarian nexus, that activities as part of IRI programming help to strengthen and build the resilience of the wider education system. The need for IRI has arisen because of the inability to reach all children and youth. A couple of interventions included above that could be implemented with an eye toward longer term education system strengthening are listed below:

- If the intervention is going to be the beginning of a more significant investment in radio education, it might be a more cost-effective idea to look at establishing human and resource capacity within the government to produce and record radio programming.

- In many contexts, individuals who enter the teaching profession without formal qualifications are able to access programs that will allow them to gain the equivalent of a teaching certificate, allowing them to become a teacher in a formal school. This type of academic bridging can help to strengthen the system in helping to expand the cadre of teachers, ensure there are more qualified teachers in more remote areas and provide access to this sort of education for teachers who might not otherwise have the opportunity to do so.

CASE STUDIES

Addressing the unique challenges facing girls

Chantal Masera Abia is a 16-year-old teenager who had to drop out of school due to lack of means and learning opportunities for children her age. Her family was no longer able to pay for her studies, so she had to stop going to school. As she got older, her hope of ever going back to school faded away. "Personally, I was desperate to go back to school and I was already thinking about marriage because I was tired of staying at home," she says. Many children and adolescents in the DRC, especially girls, are in Chantal's situation due to a lack of opportunities for adolescents.

"The use of radio for learning made me interested in the lessons. Little by little, listening to the lessons on the radio, I started to answer some of the questions asked. Then I told myself that I was able to go back to school and I am no longer thinking of getting married but rather of studying and becoming someone in society".

"This way of learning not only gives us important material, but it has also taught us how to use the radio and I feel more comfortable with the technology. I never used to watch the news, but now, I understand and discuss current events a little better, but sometimes I am limited because I do not own a radio".

According to UNICEF, prior to school closures related to COVID-19, for every 100 boys, only 89 girls complete lower secondary, and 71 girls complete upper secondary education.[8] Despite the DRC government's commitment to funding education for all, children and youth, but especially girls, face myriad financial, social and cultural barriers to accessing education. Due to lack of funding in the education sector, parents are often asked to subsidize teachers' pay. Despite the lack of tuition, there are additional costs such as uniform and materials and opportunity costs where children are valued for domestic work.

[8] UNICEF MICS 2018

Parents with financial difficulties will tend to withdraw girls from education rather than boys to support income or running of the household. In some cases, lower attainment of girls may be linked to the preference for boys over girls in the distribution of limited resources such as textbooks. Many reports suggest that girls have experienced sexual abuse from military personnel on their way to school in the DRC.[9] Often, the protection and safety of a child is a choice made over education – particularly with regard to girls and when schools or the journey to and from schools are deemed unsafe. Promoting safe schools by engaging with communities is crucial.

A study identifying barriers to schooling and reasons for drop-out in the highland territories of Fizi, Mwenga and Uvira was conducted by Children in Crisis & Eben-Ezer Ministry International.[10] In the study, 955 people from different target groups participated in a survey, focus group discussions and key informant interviews. The key issues are highlighted below:

- **Gender discrimination.** Respondents suggested that a discriminatory culture exists with girls tending to accept their inferiority to their brothers. Views around gender equity tend to be dismissed as "Western" and not applicable in the context.

- **Housework.** The survey found that girls were often kept out of school to look after younger siblings, do kitchen work and laundry while parents tend to farm work. More girls were found to be out of school with domestic responsibilities than boys.

- **Poverty and high numbers of children.** There are high birth-rates in the targeted areas and compound problems for poor families including an inability to afford the direct and indirect costs to send all of their children to school.

- **State disengagement.** Despite being the responsibility of the government, parents are frequently called upon to supplement teacher pay as state salaries are insufficient. Many schools are not covered at all by the state and the burden falls entirely on the community which presents a challenge for project sustainability. Children often drop out when they realize the fees are not manageable.

[9] Sperling, G.B. and Winthrop, R. (2016). What works in girls' education? Brookings Institution Press.

[10] Bolton, Laura (2020). "Barriers to education for girls in the Democratic Republic of Congo." IDS Helpdesk report.

- **Early/forced marriage.** In response to extreme poverty, parents may treat a daughter as a material good and exchange her for dowry money against her will which presents a significant barrier to education. While early marriage persists, there is evidence of change. One grade 6 girl interviewed reported that "she wanted to continue her studies and that marriage is not a priority. She says that girls who have studied have a better life than those who have not studied. Educated girls have the chance to marry educated boys who have a better life".[11]

- **Lack of dialogue between parents and children.** Respondents shared that many parents do not take an interest in a child's activities or achievements nor engage with them. Often, parents are preoccupied with concerns over their livelihood pursuits and do not prioritize the need of their children.

The War Child Canada project worked to address each of these barriers including working closely with communities to influence negative views about girls' education.

Working with the community

There was a gap in IRI programming between the first and second phases of the program implementation due to donor funding cycles. During that time, members of the community covered the incentives for the EAs so IRI classes could continue. Classes were supported to continue in three local centres, two community churches and a house of a student parent. This took place because of the significant investment War Child Canada had made in the community and working to secure their support for the approach in the initial stages of the project.

Community engagement is integral to international development practice and humanitarian assistance and is fundamental to the human rights-based approach to programming. The Minimum Quality Standards and Indicators for Community Engagement were developed through a consultative inter-agency process supported by UNICEF's Communication for Development team. They are intended as a tool for development and humanitarian actors and the governments they support. They provide an excellent framework and guidance for engaging with communities in support of IRI.

The Minimum Quality Standards seek to ensure the meaningful integration of community engagement standards in all aspects of community engagement practice, including project cycles, methodologies, participatory approaches, integration, coordination and resource mobilization. The purpose of the Minimum Quality Standards and Indicators for Community Engagement is to establish a common language for describing community engagement principles, key actions, goals and benchmarks. The Standards provide guidance for gender-sensitive community engagement approaches in high-, middle- and low-income countries, and in development and humanitarian contexts, across all sectors.

[11] Bolton, pg. 5.

The figure below represents the the intersectional nature of community engagement practice according to the Standards. Additional information related to IRI has been included below to demonstrate the positive impact of community engagement on programming.

FIGURE 1. **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT**

- *Civic participation, inclusion and improved governance* – This can include school management committees with equitable representation from across the affected communities and the inclusion of children.

- *Accountability to Affected Populations* – this underlying principle of humanitarianism speaks to taking account of, giving account to and being held to account by the people a program is trying to support. In the case of IRI, this means ensuring the education program being proposed is relevant and aligns to the most pressing needs in the community related to learning and work as well as seeing to it that barriers to education are reduced e.g., through improved safety and offsetting any costs.

- *Strengthened public sector and community* – this relates to the ways in which the IRI project is not a standalone, donor funded initiative but rather one that fits within the wider education sector plan to strengthen the system overall and one that is supported by community members.

- *Social and Behaviour Change* – as highlighted in many places, engaging the community around the importance of girls' education as well as education for children with disabilities is key in addressing some of the social and cultural norms that keep them from learning

Mitigating the effect of future crises

As of March 2020, as part of global efforts to contain COVID-19, the DRC government closed schools nationwide, which meant depriving over 27 million children of access to education. Schools in the DRC first reopened in October 2020, but then quickly closed again after two months as rates of infection increased again. The government finally reopened schools and universities in February of 2021.

A report put out by the Social Sciences Analytics Cell (CASS) looks at the impact of school closures due to COVID-19 on the health, protection and education of children and youth in the DRC. The key findings from the report are listed below with potential responses an IRI program could take to help mitigate the impact of the issues raised:

- A general decline in school attendance was identified after the initial reopening in October 2020: the main explanation was a reduction in household income and parents' inability to pay school fees.
    - IRI response – ensure there are no hidden fees in the IRI program
- Community and NGO reports indicate an increase in the number of girls who engaged in transactional sex whist schools were closed as a means of supporting themselves (and their families).
    - When the IRI curriculum is being developed ensure key topics in gender equity and girls' empowerment are included. Also look at ways that IRI can include PSAs to be broadcast through the community across various platforms focusing on vulnerable social issues.
- An increase in teenage pregnancy and unsafe abortion was reported by health workers and the community (associated risks: maternal death, pre-eclampsia, premature delivery, low birth weight). Similar trend observed in data from health facility patient registries.
    - Look at ways hotlines could be set up for children and youth to provide counselling and referrals to local services as well as educational support in the event of school closures.
- An increase in the risk and incidence of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), transmission of HIV and sexually transmitted infections for children and adolescents was reported by teachers, health personnel and communities.
    - Ensure Sexual and Reproductive Health lessons are included in the IRI curriculum.

- An increase in the number of boys recruited by armed groups in rural areas affected by conflict was reported by parents, teachers and students.
    - Look at ways to leverage relationships with local leaders and decision-makers established in the earliest phases of the IRI program to strengthen school safety.
- Teachers and parents reported an increased risk and incidence of forced labour, domestic violence, and sexual violence for children at home when schools were closed, and NGO reports highlight a greater number of children living on the streets.
    - Where appropriate, when EAs travel to different households to conduct listening groups or deliver teaching and learning material, they should come equipped with teaching and learning materials for school but also related to social issues and information on how learners can access local services.
- Very few students reported being able to follow distance learning courses or had access to materials during school closures: girls were apparently less likely than boys to engage (influenced by household responsibilities, chores and caring for other siblings); less motivation for informal learning; gender inequalities in access to digital technologies.
    - Look at ways to improve the IRI program through monitoring and testing. And don't wait until a subsequent emergency.
- The closure of schools was largely deemed detrimental by students, teachers, and parents in terms of lack of education, safety, and a structured environment for children. Most would have preferred for schools to remain open with appropriate hygiene measures implemented.[12]
- Spend time while schools remain open, understanding the potential needs and gaps related to distance education should there be a need to switch to this approach whether it be in terms of access to devices, teaching capacity or other challenges. Also use this time to establish opportunities for peer interaction either virtually or in-person when working at a distance and build in more social emotional learning.

[12] Social Sciences Analytics Cell Cass (2021). Covid-19 School Closures in the DRC Impact on The Health, Protection and Education of Children and Youth.

CONCLUSION

The global community and specifically the education sector will be working to recover from the effects of the Covid-19 and related restrictions and the resulting learning crisis for years to come. Radio education, while used widely prior to 2020, has emerged as one approach, when carried out with the endorsement of the MoE and the local community, to addressing this challenge using technology that is accessible in many (but not all) communities globally.

This guide provides tools and guidance for implementing an interactive radio instruction program using War Child Canada's Making Waves project in the DRC as a case study. Each context is unique and presents different assets and challenges. Before embarking on the development of a project it is important that an analysis of the context and the specific needs is undertaken.

ANNEXES

Consultations Prior to Implementing an IRI Program Interactive Radio Instruction

It is important to understand the education-related needs and gaps in a community before embarking on an IRI program. Consultations should be carried out with children from the community as well as parents and caregivers. Discussions can either be hosted as one-on-one conversations, telephone-based interviews, FGDs with a wider group or where none of these are possible, through phone or paper-based surveys. The decision of which approach is most appropriate for the context and how to ensure the exercise is reaching a reliable cross-section of the community and their needs will depend on different factors. The below is a brief overview of considerations when consulting with community members to determine how to design and carry out a program.

Considerations:

- Children and adults should be consulted in separate groups so both feel free to express themselves openly
- Before consulting with children, it is imperative to secure the consent of parents or guardians.
- Is it safe in the current context to meet in-person? If not, consider telephone interviews.
- If carrying out interviews over the phone – factor potential cost and connectivity issues into the project budget.
- If it is not safe to gather in groups or as a way to reach out to communities that are difficult to access, consider sending out a survey accessible on all phones.
- Ensure conversations are being held with representatives from different groups that may face unique challenges in accessing education ie. refugee communities, host communities, internally displaced groups
- Be sure to speak with parents and caregivers of children with disabilities
- Be equipped to facilitate dialogues with parents and caregivers in different languages as appropriate.

Topics for discussion

Children

Discussions with children, will help to facilitate an understanding of their experience with education – what they find engaging or enjoyable and what they would like to see changed that might allow them to learn more effectively. Consider using child participation methodologies in these consultations. Some suggested tools are included in the resources section.

- Collect information about the current level of education among children in the community
    - If a child is not in school, ask them about the barriers they face that prevent them from enrolling or attending
- Ask questions about their experience with education. Do they feel they are learning a lot? What are their favourite/least favourite parts?
- What type of technology have the children and youth used before?
- How comfortable would they be learning without a teacher present? What do they think they would miss?
- What do they see as strengths and weaknesses of learning through radio?
- Ask whether they have any safety, security, or protection concerns related to accessing or attending school

Parents/caregivers:

Speaking with parents and caregivers provides an opportunity to understand their perceptions of their children's education as well as their thoughts and feelings on an approach to learning using radio. Be sure to capture their recommendations. These discussions should be seen as an opportunity to talk about the importance of education with parents – especially the education of girls and the ability of parents to help with their children's learning.

- Talk to the group about why they think education is important.
- Understand what type of education their child or youth currently accessing?
    - If their children are not enrolled in school, why not?

- Ask the parents and caregivers if they generally feel good about the type of education their child is being provided?

- Talk with the group about whether they feel they can help their learners of what additional support they may need for them?

- Talk with the parents and caregivers about their thoughts on distance (radio) education. What do they see as their benefits? What are their concerns about what children might miss out on?

- Ask whether they have any safety, security, or protection concerns related to children accessing or attending school

Gender Tip Sheet for the Interactive Radio Instruction

The gender digital divide has meant that girls and women have less access to the tools and resources needed to benefit from education delivered using technology. Even in contexts with adequate infrastructure and connectivity, girls typically have limited access due to cultural norms around education. This note outlines gender sensitive approaches that should be pursued to ensure girls and women are meaningfully included and represented in IRI programming by looking at interventions at the individual level, in work with teachers and material and in the community.

Individuals

- Provide childcare support for learners in the IRI centres who are parents.
- Seek out the opinions and engagement of learners, especially girls – throughout the process of designing the program and through implementation
- Hold consultations with girls and women from the initial stages of the program's conceptualization to identify needs, gaps and challenges

Radio lesson content

- Ensure lessons include positive messaging around girls and gender roles
- In developing the teaching and learning material to accompany the lessons, use images, illustrations and pictorials that depict the importance of inter-generational dialogues, family discussions and creating spaces within the home to discuss gender equality, child protection and other topics.
- Ensure lessons use gender inclusive language ie. don't always use men and boys as examples or consistently "he" to refer to people
- Be sure the lessons cover a range of topics including:
    - Health and nutrition support
    - Sexual and reproductive health
    - Sexual and gender-based violence
    - Reproductive rights and health
    - Right to education
    - Child marriage

Teachers and school leadership

- Ensure EAs have regular and ongoing training on issues of gender sensitivity in both pedagogy and curriculum
- Ensure there is at least gender parity among Educational Assistants and facilitators
- Work with school management committees and community leaders, including women, facilitate the distribution of learning materials from schools to families

Community

- Work with community members to conduct a needs assessment related to learning and identify the homes with female learners
- Host all-girls listening groups in IRI centres or work with local women's groups to host listening sessions and to expand access and listenership and opportunities to discuss afterward
- Broadcast radio programming and facilitate in-person community engagement activities that focus on the importance of equity and girls' education including panel discussions, debates, role play , PSAs, radio diaries
- In addition to the events and discussions, distribute supplementary educational materials that highlight gender equality messaging including shared decision-making; equal right to healthcare; equal distribution of resources, food, nutrition in homes; and equal distribution of tasks.
- Provide radio operated/solar powered radio sets to poorest households
- Provide USBs of pre-recorded lessons to children in remote areas not reached by radio broadcasts
- Engage girls and women as announcers on radio programming and the voices of IRI lessons and in the development of learning material

RESOURCES

Interactive Radio Instruction

Accelerated Education Working Group (AEWG) Inter Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) (2022). Accelerated Education in the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda.

Bolton, Laura (2020) Barriers to education for girls in the Democratic Republic of Congo Institute of Development Studies.

Education Development Trust (2020). Repurposing Established Radio and Audio Series to Address the COVID-19 Educational Crises.

Kanchan K. Malik and Vinod Pavarala (2021). Strengthening Gender Sensitive Practices and Programming in Community Radio. UNESCO.

Miao, Fengchun; Ronghuai, Huang; Deijan Liu; Rongxia Zhuang (2020). Ensuring effective distance learning during COVID-19 disruption: guidance for teachers. UNESCO.

Save the Children (2020). COVID-19: Interactive Radio & Audio Instruction (IRI) – Implementation Guidance.

Save the Children International (2020). Inclusive Distance Learning

UNESCO (2020). Keeping girls in the picture - Community radio toolkit.

World Bank (2005) Improving Educational Quality through Interactive Radio Instruction: A Toolkit for Policy Makers and Planners. Washington DC.

Child Participation

UNHCR (2012). Listen and Learn: Participatory Assessment with Children and Adolescents

UNICEF (2006). Child and Youth Participation Resource Guide.