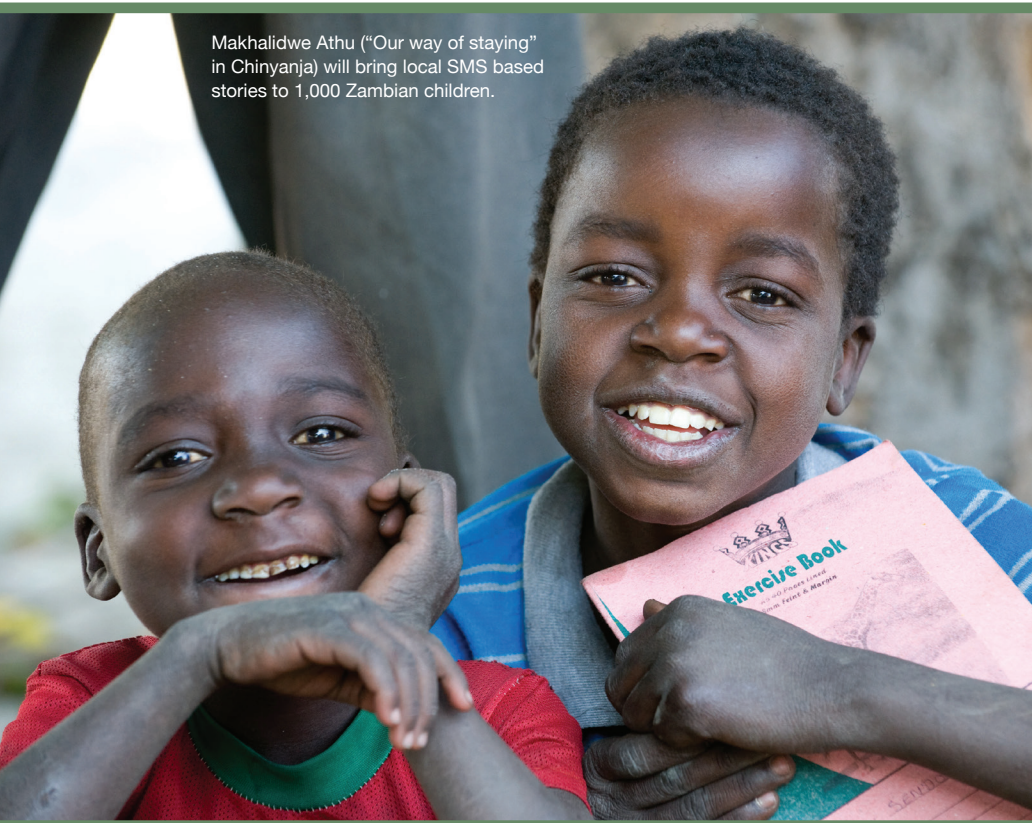


Makhalidwe Athu:

A mobile storytelling innovation for early-grade reading in Zambia

Makhalidwe Athu ("Our way of staying" in Chinyanja) will bring local SMS based stories to 1,000 Zambian children.



Program Quick Facts:

THE CHALLENGE

- Although 9 out of 10 Zambian children complete primary school, only 70 percent of boys and less than 60 percent of girls aged 15 to 24 is literate, according to UNICEF.

THE INNOVATION

- 1,000 students will gain access to mobile stories in their mother tongue
- 4,000 community members will be reached with messages about the importance of early grade literacy and mother tongue reading
- 54 mStories will be produced through *Makhalidwe Athu*, crowdsourced from local community members, elders and the diaspora

In Zambia, limited access to reading materials, especially in local languages, has inhibited children's ability to master foundational literacy skills.

With so few mother-tongue books and materials at home, parents and community members rarely find ways to support children in reading outside of school. As a result, children do not have adequate opportunities to practice reading.

It shows: The South African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality noted in 2010 that only 27.4 percent of sixth graders could read at a basic competency level.

Though literacy is low here, rates of mobile phone usage are quite high. *Makhalidwe Athu* is a communi-

ty-based and scalable model for using mobile technology to create and disseminate recreational mother tongue reading materials to families with early grade children in Zambia.

Makhalidwe Athu mobilizes community members to help author early grade reading materials by submitting their favorite local stories, folktales and original content through SMS message, voice recording or web form.

A literacy expert edits these stories to be grade-level appropriate, and parents receive them through a series of SMS messages. The stories will reach 1,000 students, both increasing the time they spend reading and improving their attitudes and ability.

By collecting these stories from community members and sending them out via SMS to parents of school-age children, *Makhalidwe Athu* raises awareness about the importance of early grade literacy, and encourages a culture of mother-tongue storytelling and reading that will excite and energize students.

“There is a passion for storytelling in Zambia, and a strong desire to help children preserve their linguistic heritage while learning to read. This innovation brings young people their own timeless stories as it capitalizes on their digital lives.”

- Tassew Zewdie, Chief of Party, USAID/Read to Succeed Project, Zambia

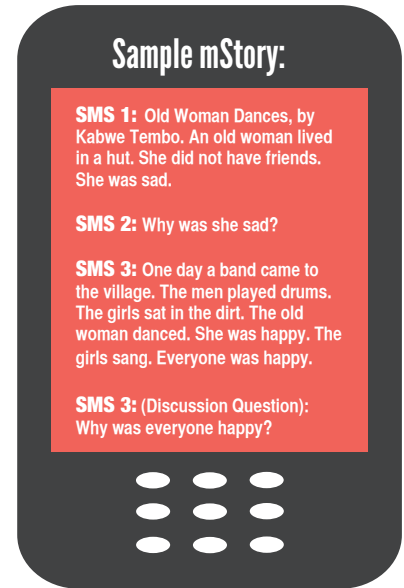
The added time spent reading with family members also creates a stronger support system for young students to continue practicing reading outside of school. The stories will be reused and repurposed for other education programs following the pilot.

In addition to community mobilizers and Parent Teacher Associations, formal local partners are taking a leading role in implementing this innovation and ensuring Zambian ownership over the process and results. In addition to Zambia's Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early

Education, associates include Lubuto Library Project, the University of Zambia, BongoHive, community radio station BreezeFM and iSchool.

Creative is piloting *Makhalidwe Athu* in cooperation with Read to Succeed, a USAID-funded program already working with Zambia's government to improve early grade reading through more effective teaching and school-community partnerships.

The cost-effective model for *Makhalidwe Athu* could eventually put reading materials into the hands of more than 8 million native Chinyanja speakers—and eventually every rural and urban schoolchild's home in Africa.



Makhalidwe Athu

STORYTELLING VIA



OUTCOMES:



Increased use of ICT for improved reading



Improvements in students' attitudes



Increased time spent by family members supporting students' reading



Increased time reading at home

Community Awareness and Engagement:

1

Crowdsourcing



2

Editing



3

Publishing



SMS!

Stories and folktales submitted:



Via SMS



Via Interactive Voice Response



Via Web

Submissions edited by literacy experts and project coordinators for:



SMS format



Age-Appropriate Content



Appropriate Reading levels

Stories distributed:



Stories distributed in a sequence of SMS messages to parents. Early grade students read the stories and answer discussion questions