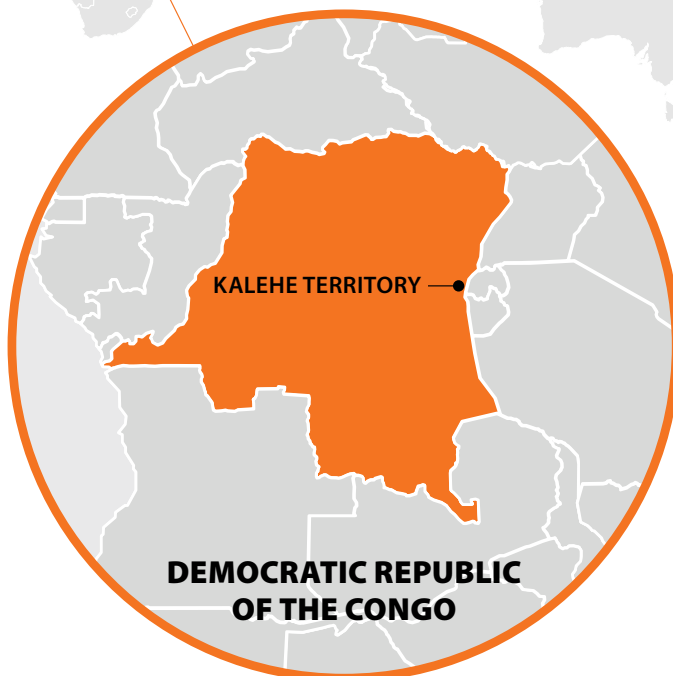


ACCESS TO QUALITY EDUCATION IN KALEHE TERRITORY

Democratic Republic of Congo | Impact Brief
(2019–2024)

THIS MEANS THE WORLD



About this report

This brief summarises the main findings of the endline evaluation for World Vision’s Access to Quality Education in Kalehe Territory project, Democratic Republic of Congo (2018–2024). The evaluation was conducted by independent consulting firm CEFAD between March and June 2024. For more information, please contact Kathryn Delahunty, Country Impact Manager (kathryn.delahunty@worldvision.com.au), or Stephen Milford, ANCP Impact Advisor (stephen.milford@worldvision.com.au), World Vision Australia.

The Kalehe project is supported by the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP). The views expressed in this publication are the author’s alone and are not necessarily the views of the Australian Government.

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Front cover photo:
After three years out of school, teenager Fiston was eager to return and make use of his school kit provided through the Kalehe project, containing a school bag, uniform, books and stationery.



SUMMARY

Goal	Increase retention and attendance rates and improve learning outcomes for 15,660 girls and 16,200 boys in 30 primary schools in Kalehe
Timeframe	2019–2024
Budget	US\$4,355,754
Location	Kalehe, Democratic Republic of Congo

Children growing up amid persistent conflict and economic instability within the Democratic Republic of Congo are missing out on their schooling – particularly children with disabilities and girls. The Access to Quality Education in Kalehe project has significantly transformed this reality for students across 30 primary schools in the Kalehe territory of South-Kivu. Supported by the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP), the project operated over five years and was evaluated by independent consultant CEFAD during its final year, 2024.



Beniela washes his hands at school using a new hand-washing device, helping to keep young learners and their school environment healthy.

Key findings from the evaluation include:

- **The vast majority of children in the project area have enrolled in school**, with gross enrolment rates reaching 95.6 percent, well above the target. Retention rates also rose from 52.6 percent at mid-term to 72.2 percent at endline, achieved through improving the learning environment, quality of teaching and parental involvement in inclusive schooling for children.
- **Children’s reading levels have improved.** Reading comprehension among grade three students jumped from 23 percent at baseline to 65.6 percent at endline, exceeding the goal by over 30 percent.
- **Infrastructure improvements and awareness-raising activities have promoted inclusivity.** Menstrual hygiene facilities were installed in 93.3 percent of schools, addressing a key barrier to school attendance for girls. Infrastructure improvements like ramps and accessible toilets have helped children with disabilities to comfortably attend school, and 75 percent of children with disabilities reported having made use of these new facilities.
- **Attitudes towards inclusive education have become more positive**, with 96 percent of households having reported positive perceptions of inclusive education, up from 63 percent at baseline. Children are noticing these changes themselves, with close to 90 percent of students perceiving their school to offer a good learning and teaching environment, compared to only 58 percent at baseline.



Textbooks in both Congolese and French are being distributed to primary students to enhance and guide their learning.

CONTEXT

For over a decade, recurrent conflict and violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo have led to massive community displacement and the deterioration of the economy and state services, including education. For children growing up in this fragile context, opportunities for learning have been severely disrupted. In 2019, an estimated 3.5 million primary school-aged Congolese children were not enrolled in school, and only 67 percent of those who were completed grade six.¹ The gaps in access, quality of education and learning environment are enormous, with children in rural areas and girls much less likely to complete their schooling.²

Free primary education was announced nation-wide in 2019, though the education system was ill-equipped to manage the influx of students. Already under-resourced, schools were quickly overwhelmed. Shortly after, the COVID-19 pandemic prompted lengthy enforced

school closures, further delaying children's learning. These events, in addition to the nation's fragile security situation and susceptibility to natural disasters, have worsened the barriers to education for children – a significant challenge given close to half of the Congolese population are aged 14 or younger.³

The country's Eastern states are particularly affected by conflict, including Kalehe in the region of South-Kivu, where conflict over mineral resource control has surged. Here, high rates of extreme poverty have exacerbated these issues, with many families unable to prioritise children's education due to economic hardships. Schools in Kalehe commonly lack basic infrastructure and resources, making it difficult to provide a safe and effective learning environment in which children can thrive.

¹ USAID. Democratic Republic of Congo: Education. <https://2012-2017.usaid.gov/democratic-republic-congo/education>

² 2017-18 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS). More information available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/empowering-girls-and-enhancing-learning-democratic-republic-congo>

³ United Nations Population Division. *World Population Prospects: 2022 Revision*. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.0014.TO.ZS?locations=CD>

PROJECT OVERVIEW

World Vision’s Access to Quality Education in Kalehe project sought to help address the severe educational challenges in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, particularly in the conflict-affected region of South-Kivu. Spanning five years from 2019 to 2024, the Kalehe project was supported by the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).

Across three outcomes, the project aimed to ensure every child in the targeted area could access and benefit from quality education, with a focus on inclusivity for children with disabilities and girls. Thirty schools were rehabilitated, including through the improvement and construction of toilets and safe water points. Teachers and school principals were empowered with improved knowledge and skills to provide safe and inclusive education. To remove barriers to children’s school enrolment and attendance, awareness was raised among families of the importance of all children receiving education, and households’ economic capacities were strengthened.

THEORY OF CHANGE

Goal: Increase retention and attendance rates and improve learning outcomes for 15,660 girls and 16,200 boys in 30 primary schools in Kalehe





A Kalehe project participant takes part in a classroom activity. Improving the physical learning conditions within the targeted schools has encouraged students and their families to enrol in and attend school regularly.

KEY PROJECT MODELS AND APPROACHES

MENCARE

Originally designed by US-based organisation Equimundo, **MenCare** challenges harmful gender norms impacting women and girls. Participants attend MenCare sessions which promote men's equitable and non-violent involvement as fathers and caregivers and encourage them to contribute to women's social and economic equality.

SAVINGS FOR TRANSFORMATION (S4T)

World Vision's S4T project model builds resilience for vulnerable families through the formation of self-managed savings groups of 10 to 15 people. Group members collectively save small amounts of money which accumulate and can be used for income-generating activities or to lend one another when needs arise, such as responding to family illness, children's education or decreased income during a drought.

UNLOCK LITERACY

Unlock Literacy is a World Vision project model that aims to increase literacy and numeracy skills for children in the early grades of primary school. The model improves teaching methods for classroom reading, as well as engaging students, families and communities in reading activities outside of school. This is done through reading clubs, and by providing other opportunities for children to access basic reading experience, tailored to their individual needs and abilities. Unlock Literacy brings a holistic approach that works with teachers, parents, community members and government structures to create a culture of reading, so that children become lifelong learners and mature into adults ready to transfer this culture.

EVALUATION OVERVIEW

An end-of-project evaluation was completed in 2024 by independent consultant CEFAD. The evaluation used a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis.

Quantitative methods included surveys with 651 respondents, such as students, teachers and community members. Reading proficiency was measured using the School-Based Test About Reading (STAR) tool among 308 grade three students. Once collected, the quantitative data was analysed and compared with the baseline and mid-term results to assess overall progress.

Qualitative methods involved 36 focus group discussions with 176 participants and 51 key informant interviews with various stakeholders, including school principals, local radio managers and project staff. These discussions provided in-depth perspectives on the project's impact. Direct observations were used to verify improvements in school infrastructure and learning environments. By combining quantitative data with qualitative insights and comparing results over time, the evaluation offered a comprehensive assessment of the Kalehe project's achievements and challenges as well as recommendations to improve future programming. results. The absence of a counterfactual or comparison group meant the evaluation could not compare results with schools that did not take part in project activities. Such a comparison could have helped assess how the project helped students, families and educators to cope with these external challenges.



New textbooks and learning materials and being distributed among participating students.

FINDINGS

PROJECT GOAL

Table 1: Baseline, mid-term and endline results for the Kalehe project

Indicators	Baseline Results	Mid-term results	Endline results	Targets
Goal: Increase retention and attendance rates and improve learning outcomes for 15,660 girls and 16,200 boys in 30 primary schools in Kalehe				
Gross enrolment rate	N/A	87.5%	95.6%	89.0%
School retention rate	61.0%	52.6%	72.2%	81.0%
% of children in grade three who can read a passage at grade three level and correctly answer at least one fact retrieval question	23.0%	36.8%	65.6%	50.0%
% of parents or caregivers with educational aspirations for their children	88.0%	88.8%	74.9%	95.0%
% of households reporting good social cohesion	32.0%	91.2%	87.2%	75.0%
Outcome 1: Improved physical learning conditions in the targeted schools for greater gender and disability inclusion				
% of schools meeting policy standards for inclusive education	0%	36.80%	85.0%	100%
% of schools with a basic water source	3.0%	64.20%	100%	100%
% schools with basic sanitation facilities	32.0%	82.6%	93.3%	100%
% schools with adequate menstrual hygiene facilities	0%	50.2%	93.3%	100%
% of grades one to three Unlock Literacy classrooms with print-rich environments	0%	76.0%	100%	100%
Outcome 2: Improved quality of teaching, learning and monitoring in targeted schools				
% of teachers trained in Unlock Literacy and using their acquired skills to teach children to read	0%	67.60%	73.8%	100%
% of students able to use numbers and basic arithmetic operations	18.0%	44.10%	N/A	50.0%
% children who perceive their school to offer a good learning and teaching environment	58.0%	62.0%	89.60%	75.0%
% children at social recovery centres* who go on to attend school regularly	0%	N/A	76.0%	70.0%
Outcome 3: Strengthened capacity of vulnerable households and communities to reduce barriers to education and promote quality education				
% of households with a positive perception of inclusive education	63.0%	98.10%	96.0%	90.0%
% of households where one or more adults are earning an income	43.0%	41.20%	48.3%	60.0%
% of households able to pay for their children's basic education	37.0%	57.50%	65.28%	60.0%
% of households aware of child protection mechanisms	57.0%	85.20%	72.0%	75.0%

* Social recovery centres are also commonly referred to as accelerated schools. Children who left formal primary school or who cannot attend primary school due to their age can attend these centres and receive their primary education certificate.

The evaluation found that the Kalehe project has achieved remarkable success across all outcomes and at the goal level, transforming educational outcomes and environments in the target area. Children’s enrolment in school soared to 95.6 percent, surpassing the project’s target. More children were found to be staying in school, with overall retention rates rising from 52.6 percent at mid-term to 72.2 percent at the project’s end. Retention rates were higher for boys (77.4 percent) than for girls (65.6 percent), though both groups saw significant improvements. In focus group discussions and interviews, parents and community members noted that it was rare to find children not enrolled in school. This result is commendable given the disruptions to education caused by two natural disasters during the project period: a flood in Bushushu and a landslide in Nyabibwe.

The percentage of children in grade three who could read an age-appropriate passage and correctly answer fact retrieval questions increased dramatically from 23 percent at baseline to 65.6 percent at endline, indicating substantial literacy gains for children in Kalehe. Teachers reported high satisfaction with the training and resources provided through the project, which have significantly improved their teaching skills and classroom environments. One teacher remarked, “the project met most of our educational challenges because it increased our technical capacities by equipping us with new knowledge.”



School libraries established through the Kalehe project are providing students with access to an engaging range of books and learning resources.

FINDINGS BY OUTCOME

OUTCOME ONE:

Improved physical learning conditions in the targeted schools for greater gender and disability inclusion

The physical learning conditions within the targeted schools have improved, with 85 percent of schools meeting policy standards for inclusive education and 100 percent of schools having a basic water source for hygiene needs. The project has provided 172 more classrooms and 1,690 desks so that children no longer need to sit on the floor during lessons. The installation of ramps and inclusive toilets has made classrooms and school facilities more accessible for children with disabilities. Reading skills were promoted by classrooms providing 'print-rich environments', immersing children in words and letters in their everyday surroundings, and this was achieved in 100 percent of grades one to three classrooms within target schools.

Importantly, 93.3 percent of participating schools have been equipped with adequate menstrual hygiene facilities, including supplying female students with menstrual hygiene kits which help girls to avoid missing out on school during their periods. Talking openly about menstruation is often considered taboo within local culture, and it was therefore significant that over 90 percent of girls, including 100 percent of girls with disabilities, reported receiving advice from their parents on personal hygiene.

"The girls already know how to maintain themselves during their menses, thanks to the advice of the supervisors... this was not the case before."

– Teacher, key informant interview

"I have several friends who stopped coming to school after starting their menstruation. We had no hygiene materials, and boys used to mock us. But it's now different."

– 15-year-old female participant

These improvements have made schools more welcoming and conducive to learning for all children, especially for girls and children with disabilities. Parents expressed their appreciation for these changes, commenting that the inclusive infrastructure and enhanced sanitation facilities had significantly improved the school environment.

OUTCOME TWO:

Improved quality of teaching, learning and monitoring in targeted schools

Considerable efforts were made by the project to enhance the quality of teaching in the targeted schools, including through supplying teaching materials, training and libraries for boosting students' literacy skills. Over 10,000 textbooks were distributed across 30 schools, and more than 11,000 books were supplied for libraries.

Teachers were upskilled in their teaching methods through Unlock Literacy, and 73.8 percent of those trained were found to be effectively putting their learnings into practice. This improvement in pedagogical practices translated into better learning outcomes for children. Importantly, these improvements were noticed by the children themselves, and close to 90 percent of students reported perceiving that their school offered a good learning and teaching environment, up from 58 percent at baseline.

“We left the individualistic teaching method and moved to the participatory teaching method. The child is gifted with books, and the teacher becomes a guide.”

– Teacher during key informant interview

OUTCOME THREE:

Strengthened capacity of vulnerable households and communities to reduce barriers to education and promote quality education

Ensuring children’s enrolment in school, and keeping them enrolled, requires support from the home and family. The project addressed barriers to education holistically by helping improve families’ social and economic situations alongside targeted education initiatives. Parents and caregivers – predominantly women – participated in savings groups to help improve their financial literacy and access to credit amid surrounding conflict and natural disasters. Over 97 percent of group members had made use of credit access, and just over half of project households had at least one income-generating activity. Ongoing conflict and natural disasters were noted to have significantly affected families’ abilities to maintain their livelihood activities.

Couples took part in MenCare sessions where respectful relationships and positive attitudes to gender equality were promoted. Commendably, the evaluation found that targets were exceeded for the number of households with positive attitudes towards inclusive education and those able to afford their children’s school fees. This shift in parents’ attitudes was reinforced during interviews with teachers, who commented positively on parents’ engagement with homework activities and involvement with meetings at school.



Asifiwe has benefited from an accelerated remedial learning program through the Kalehe project to catch up on years of missed schooling.

ASIFIWE'S FIGHT TO STAY IN SCHOOL

Asifiwe remembers well why she did not finish primary school with other children her age. "I fell ill just after grade two. As soon as I recovered, my parents decided that I should stop going to school... they gave preference to boys," she explains.

It was a common decision in Asifiwe's village in Kalehe. Poverty, plus gender discrimination, kept many girls out of school. As the fifth of 12 children, she also knew the difficult reality that her parents couldn't afford to send all her siblings to school.

Four years after leaving school, 13-year-old Asifiwe was approached by Kalehe project staff raising awareness in her community about the importance of children's rights to education. Asifiwe jumped on this opportunity and, the next day, enrolled in the La Vierge remedial centre. Alongside other girls in the same situation, Asifiwe embarked on an accelerated three-year primary school program to catch up to her school-going peers and regain her self-confidence.

She completed four years of school curriculum over the two years and passed the national exam, earning herself a spot at secondary school. Her parents are supportive of her pursuits and she is on her way to becoming a teacher herself.

"I work hard at school and study at home in the evenings. God willing, I will set up my own remedial education centre to help children with a background similar to mine," says Asifiwe.

GENDER EQUALITY, DISABILITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

The Kalehe project impacted the areas of gender equality and disability inclusion by creating a more inclusive and sustainable educational environment for all participating children. The provision of menstrual hygiene kits for students and the construction of water points and private toilets played a crucial role in making schools more inclusive for girls and women. These activities helped to increase girls' school attendance and reduce drop-out rates.

Positive masculinity was promoted through intensive sensitisation efforts in MenCare groups, contributing to positive changes in household dynamics. An impressive 92 percent of women reported seeing a positive change in their husbands' participation in household tasks and child-rearing, while 88 percent of women noticed their husbands sharing domestic chores. These shifts were evident among younger members of households as well, with 91 percent of girls observing a positive change in their brothers' behaviour regarding the sharing of household chores. This change was attributed to their fathers' participation in MenCare groups. A religious leader commented that "the teachings received opened men to help each other with their wives and reduced conflicts in households, promoting equitable sharing of inheritance and household responsibilities."

In terms of disability inclusion, infrastructure improvements for classrooms and school toilets were significant. Seventy-five percent of children with disabilities reported using inclusive toilets, and 50 percent of these children completed the school year thanks to improved accessibility. One participant noted that "the girls have improved their hygiene during menstrual periods, thus reducing shame and absences from school during these periods."

The wider community was involved in disability inclusion training activities, delivered in partnership with the Association of People Living with Disabilities for Integral Development (AHADI). The evaluation noted that disability is no longer a barrier to children's education, particularly as harassment or exclusion experienced by children with disabilities from their teachers and community members is less common.

"Before this project, people with disabilities found many difficulties in accessing both employment and education, but today they are all integrated into community life without any discrimination thanks to the training and awareness-raising carried out by the project."

– School director during interview

Caring for and protecting the natural environment were considerations during project design and implementation. Through the Kalehe project, schools were equipped to plant anti-erosion trees, maintain lawns and gardens and set up appropriate waste management systems, helping children and teachers to develop a culture of environmental stewardship. The provision of fences for schools has helped to protect trees and maintain the cleanliness of school grounds.

SUSTAINABILITY

The Kalehe project focused on developing locally led structures that promoted community ownership, supporting the likelihood of sustainability beyond its formal conclusion. Detailed sustainability plans were developed in collaboration with target groups to empower them to continue supporting their communities effectively into the future. Groups including schools, savings groups, Citizen Voice and Action and MenCare facilitators indicated a strong commitment to their communities and low operational costs. Challenges remain in renewing materials for the reading clubs and social recovery centres. However, the project's focus on integrating local school networks into academic activities will likely continue to support quality education.

CONCLUSION

The Access to Quality Education in Kalehe project has significantly improved children's education in Kalehe territory – particularly for girls and children with disabilities, who are much less likely to continue their education beyond primary school. All planned project objectives were achieved, and school enrolment and retention have improved significantly. Importantly, the overall environment within the targeted schools in Kalehe has been enhanced through more inclusive infrastructure, child-friendly learning materials, better equipped teachers, more supportive families and communities, and print-rich surroundings that immerse students in writing and language. These improvements have helped boost children's overall wellbeing and positive attitudes towards their learning, setting them up well for their ongoing education and future pursuits.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Expand reach to more Congolese schools** so that other communities still in critical need of support can benefit from and build on the learnings and success of the Kalehe project.
- **Increase efforts to shift harmful cultural norms**, such as child marriage, and promote gender equality through community leaders and local channels. Continue positive parenting initiatives to create home environments that are conducive to emotional wellbeing and learning for children.
- **Enhance savings groups and income-generating activities** to support families in covering educational expenses, and ensure sustainable funding for reading clubs and social recovery centres to maintain their positive impact long into the future.

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A group of excited students are equipped with new school bags containing books, stationery and uniforms through the Kalehe project.

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