

Learning brief

Partnership for Quality Education Project – Mali

Achieving Play Based Learning through COVID



RIGHT TO PLAY
PROTECT. EDUCATE. EMPOWER.



Project period:

2017-2022

Regions covered:

**Koulikoro, Segou, Bougouni
and the district of Bamako**

Children reached:

69,000

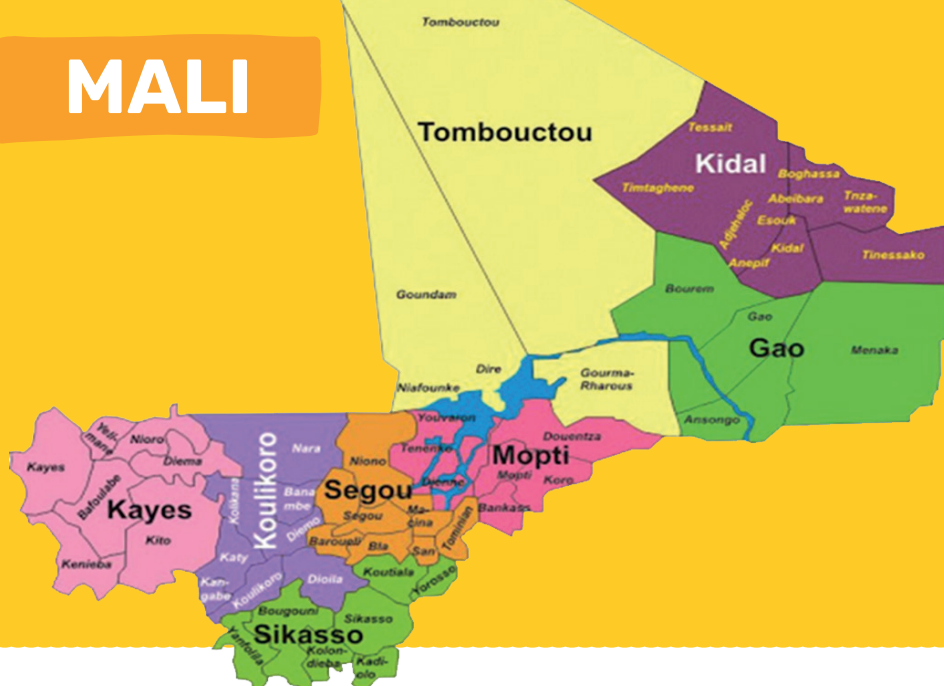
Teachers supported:

1300

Books distributed:

45,000

MALI



Project description

The PAQE II aimed to improve students' reading comprehension and life skills; while also enhancing the wider learning environment by equipping teachers, education officers and community members with tools to foster a positive learning environment. Specific focus of the needs of girls and students with disabilities was part of all project activities. Over six years (2017-2022), working in four regions, Koulikoro, Segou, Bougouni and the district of Bamako, the project reached over 69,000 children, nearly 1300 teachers and distributed 45,000 books.

Right To Play, was supported by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), worked in partnership with four civil society partners OMAES: Malian Children's Aid Organization of Sahel, RARE: Network of Actors for the Renewal of Education, ALED: Association for Reading, Education and Development in Mali and RED: Network of development Experts and the Malian Ministry of Education.

"Right To Play is very involved in the development of education in Mali. Without Right To Play's intervention, many schools would close". Teacher in Right To Play school

Implementation in a pandemic

The project was implemented during COVID-19, which strained the Malian education sector. The challenges from the pandemic occurred in tandem with various social issues such as teacher strikes and political unrest that disrupted educational outcomes. In 2019 there was a 4-month teacher strike and in 2020, schools were closed for 5 months due to COVID 19.



BEFORE



AFTER

Key Deliverables

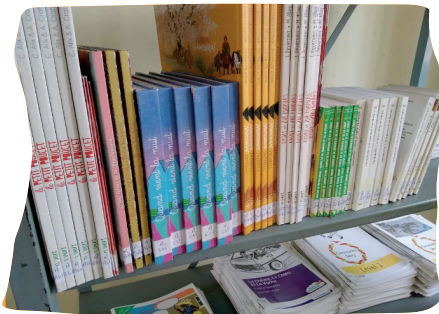
- **1261 teachers trained and coached on Play Based Learning (621 F)**
- **3 classrooms built and 9 classrooms rehabilitated**
- **7 reading centers built**
- **8 blocks of 2 latrines constructed and 10 blocks of 2 latrines rehabilitated**
- **1 football pitch built**
- **7 basketball courts built**
- **44,584 books and 800 educational guides distributed to children and teachers**
- **23,968 (50%F) children enrolled in school**
- **60 bikes supplied to children with disability to have greater access to school**



BEFORE



AFTER

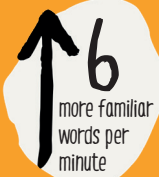


“Our teachers are not going to stop Right To Play practices. They have been successful in doing this with children. It facilitates integration, it facilitates understanding”. **Teacher in Right To Play school**

Right To Play achieved positive change across the three outcome areas, working in partnership with civil society organisations and the Ministry of Education.

1 Increased reading skills for children by the end of primary school.

The Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) is an international recognised measurement of reading skills. It measures students' progress towards reading. EGRA gauges early literacy skills through a 15-minute individual oral assessment across five fundamental skills areas - identifying the initial sound in a word, knowledge of letters and letter groups, reading familiar words, hearing comprehension and the ability to understand and read a short story. Using this tool and comparing Right To Play schools with a control group it was found that.



Children in RTP schools read nearly **20 familiar words per minute, compared to **14** in non-RTP schools.**



Over twice as many children (7%**) in RTP schools were able to read at their grade level compared to non-RTP schools (**3%**).**

2 Children improved their life skills.

Students scored higher on average on life skills within RTP schools as compared to control group schools. Students' life skills were assessed in three ways:

- Communication: including asking questions in class and listening to others
- Teamwork: including how well children work together in a group
- Conflict resolution: including how children respond to provocation from others, working cooperatively and compassionately and knowing how to work with others

The percentage of children who demonstrate improved life skills in:



Teamwork

RTP school: Non RTP school:
90% 72%

**A significant difference of
19% points**



Communication

RTP school: Non RTP school:
85% 68%

**A significant difference of
18% points**



Conflict resolution

RTP school: Non RTP school:
84% 75%

**A significant difference of
10% points***

*With the difference being higher in the girls' subgroup: 84% for girls in Right To Play schools and 69% for girls in control schools.

3 Improved learning environment in schools to enable children to grow and develop to their full potential.

Right To Play created positive learning environments through working with children and teachers; by playing games, supporting positive discipline techniques, enabling play based teaching methods and creating positive classroom management styles.

When it came to reporting on learning environment 79 percent of children reported a positive learning experience in school, compared with 25 percent at baseline. Play based learning techniques were used on average 3 times a week by teachers in Right To Play schools, and only 2 times a week in non-Right To Play schools.



PBL techniques

Use on average:

Non-RTP school: **2x week**

RTP school: **3x week**

The application of Play-based learning was hindered by the school closures and disruptions that resulted in children not being in school for extended periods of time; combined with corporal punishment being an entrenched and so common discipline method used. While Right To Play worked with teachers to show the benefits of adopting positive discipline methods in the class, limited gains were made. Looking forward, to shift thinking around corporal punishment as being 'normal' and 'acceptable' Right To Play will adopt a more systematic approach working with the Ministry of Education, schools, communities and families.

Project challenges

The project faced several challenges including:

COVID 19, political unrest and school closure

Right To Play were not being able to meet the project's targets due to COVID 19, political unrest and school closure, although community reading schools were established their reach was not as extensive as activities within the schools.

Entrenchment of Corporal Punishment

The use of corporal punishment remains extensive with around 90% of teachers resorting to it to maintain order within the class. Corporal punishment is seen as normal and acceptable.

Typical gender roles assigned to children in classroom.

Typical gender roles continued to be perpetuated in classrooms activities.

Adoption of a Training of trainer approach

Rolling out of the trainings beyond teachers trained in Right To Play techniques was hindered due to budget challenges within the schools.



Moving forward...

Learning from the project will be integrated into future programmes by.



Supporting adaptive management by embedding routine **review and reflection activities** while carrying out regular **context monitoring**, to ensure the continued support for children through challenges and uncertainty.



Create continual skills enhancement activities for teachers, such as coaching visits, refresher trainings and incentives for high performance teachers. This supports the culture of continual improvement among the teachers.



Create a positive learning environment in schools, **through building a movement of partners to shift the thinking that corporal punishment is acceptable**. Shifting thinking on corporal punishment needs to be addressed across schools, families and communities



As part of play-based learning support offer **gender equality and empowerment training** setting out alternative gender roles within classrooms



Ensure **access to a breadth and depth of education materials** for children and teachers when face to face teaching is not possible to safeguard student literacy and reading competency.



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Oumou Boire being given her prize was by the coordinator of the management committees of the Segou region, Mr. Ibrahima Famata.

Reading centres: Enabling learning through school closures

Right To Play enabled children to weather the shocks of the pandemic, school strikes and political unrest by working with not only schools but the broader school community (parents & community leaders). To overcome school closures Right To Play set up several community-based reading centres; they were equipped with books and other educational material and supported by reading volunteers. The reading volunteers set up reading clubs organising reading sessions targeting children with literacy challenges to stop them falling behind further. The centres enabled children to access learning spaces and educational material while also engaging in play-based learning such as counting, guessing time, guided reading, and word discovery games. This positive learning environment ensured children had continued exposure to learning and opportunities to improve their reading skills during the school closure.

As part of the community-based response, the reading volunteers and centre managers set up reading competitions. One of the competitions, in 2022, took place with 600 students in the 4th grade from 20 partner schools in Segou. One of the winner Oumou Boire, aged 11, from Aya Bolly school, said she participated in the contest to 'improve my literacy levels and encourage reading among my classmates so we can become autonomous women in the future'. She reported a sense of pride and increased self-confidence.

In conjunction with reading centres Right To Play further responded to the pandemic by raising awareness of COVID 19 through local radio and television broadcasts. While at the same time working with the ministry of education, providing technical support and play based learning resources.

"Children come to the reading centres for books. After the reading competition organised by the NGO ALED, we knew that the children had started to read well. When asked where this strength came from they told us by going to the library"

Reading volunteer