



# STORIES OF CHANGE

## MY VILLAGE PROJECT

(KIJIKI CHANGU)



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# WORD FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



It is with great pride that I present this My Village booklet, which captures the meaningful progress achieved through this community-driven learning initiative led by Uwezo Tanzania. The stories and experiences shared here reflect the power of evidence, partnership, and collective action in ensuring that every child can read, write, and perform basic mathematics, regardless of where they live.

My Village was born out of 10 years of learning evidence that showed us a clear truth: while access to schooling has improved, learning outcomes remain a challenge for many children. By placing communities at the center and applying the Jifunze model a contextualized Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach, My Village has demonstrated that when children are taught according to their learning needs and when communities take ownership, real and lasting learning gains are possible.

The achievements highlighted in this booklet would not have been possible without the commitment and collaboration of our partners. We extend our sincere appreciation to the PAL Network, FCDO, What Works Hub for Global Education (WWHGE), IBO Italia, RELI, TENMET, Real Centre at Cambridge University, Ubongo Kids, ECHIDNA Giving, St John's University, Njombe regional office, Ludewa District Council, TAMISEMI, MOEST, TIE, government partners, regional and district education authorities, school leaders, teachers, and community volunteers who have worked tirelessly to support children's learning across participating villages. Your leadership, dedication, and belief in the potential of every child have been central to the success of this initiative.

We are equally grateful to parents, caregivers, and community leaders who embraced the My Village approach and made learning a shared responsibility. Your involvement has helped create supportive environments where children are encouraged to learn, grow, and thrive both in and out of school.

This booklet brings together real stories of change, resilience, and impact that remind us why our work matters. As we continue to strengthen systems, deepen partnerships, and expand the My Village model, Uwezo Tanzania remains committed to ensuring that no child is left behind and that every village becomes a place where learning flourishes.

**-Baraka Mgothamwende**



## INTRODUCTION

Uwezo Tanzania's focus on learning outcomes and supporting children in realizing their full potential has been central to our vision of reaching all children. The idea to implement the My Village initiative arose after several years of conducting learning assessments, which revealed that while children are attending school, effective learning is not consistently taking place. One of the intervention programs that has shown a significant impact in supporting children who are falling behind through Jifunze model.

Jifunze (inspired by Teaching at the Right Level) is an instructional approach, whereby children are taught based on their learning levels rather than their grade level or age. Children are initially assessed so as to determine their learning levels, and then they are allocated into groups based on their learning levels. Children are then taught to acquire foundational literacy and numeracy skills in an interactive and participatory manner, within those learning level groups. Jifunze is a kind of 'targeted instruction'.

In Tanzania Jifunze was introduced by Uwezo in 2019. Jifunze fits in very well with the Tanzanian Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP) 2016/17 – 2020/21 (URT, 2018). As "Jifunze" greatly enables children who are left behind to learn the 3R skills of reading, writing and arithmetic; and thus boosts learning outcomes in Tanzania. "Jifunze" greatly uses participatory teaching and learning (learning games, learning based activities, teaching aids and learning songs) and is also a simplified version of a competence based curriculum and thus is in great harmony with both the ESDP and the Tanzanian Education and training policy of 2014 (URT, 2014; 2018).

My Village initiative through Jifunze Models helps Tanzania to achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 which states that “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”. Particularly SDG goal 4.1 which states that “by 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes” (United Nations, 2015; 2020).

And helps Tanzania to achieve SDG indicator 4.1.1 at the primary school level in reading (Swahili) and in mathematics. SDG indicator 4.1.1 aims at achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in reading and mathematics. SDG indicator 4.1.1 states that “proportion of children and young people (a) in grades 2/3; (b) at the end of primary; and (c) at the end of lower secondary achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics, by sex” (United Nations, 2015; 2020).

By doing so, “Jifunze” also helps Tanzania to achieve SDG goal 4.6 “by 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy”. And in particular SDG indicator 4.6.1 among the youth. SDG indicator 4.6.1 states that “proportion of population in a given age group achieving at least a fixed level of proficiency in functional (a) literacy and (b) numeracy skills, by sex” (United Nations, 2015; 2020).

# PROJECT SUMMARY

The My Village project is a regional initiative that has been successfully implemented in Tanzania, Kenya and Nepal in partnership with PAL Network, with the overarching goal of ensuring that every child in a village can read and perform basic mathematics. In Tanzania, the project has been implemented through three distinct phases, each building progressively toward strengthening foundational learning at the village level.

Uwezo Tanzania takes great pride in the achievements of the My Village project, which has demonstrated meaningful impact across Phases I, II, and III, implemented in Kisarawe, Gairo, Chamwino, Mvomero, Mbarali, Kilolo and Ludewa districts. The first two phases laid a strong foundation by introducing and validating the Jifunze in rural communities, leading to measurable improvements in children's foundational literacy and numeracy skills.

Phase III further strengthened the model by emphasizing broad stakeholder engagement and collaboration. The project actively involved stakeholders at the national, regional, district, community, and school levels through structured consultations, coordination meetings, targeted capacity-building initiatives, and clearly defined roles and responsibilities. This inclusive approach fostered strong community and local government ownership, alignment with existing systems, and long-term sustainability of learning gains.



# KEY COMPONENTS OF THE MY VILLAGE PROJECT

The My Village Project is a community-driven initiative designed to ensure that all children acquire foundational skills in reading and numeracy. The project is implemented through a series of interconnected components that follow a logical sequence from understanding children's learning levels to delivering support and sustaining progress within the community.

## 1. Continuous Assessment (Baseline, Midline, and Endline)

Assessment is the foundation of the My Village Project and the first step in implementation.

- **Baseline Assessment:** At the start of the project, all children aged 6–17 in the village are assessed in reading and numeracy. This establishes their current learning levels and identifies those who need support. The findings guide planning and grouping for learning activities.
- **Midline Assessments:** During implementation, especially throughout the learning camps, assessments are conducted regularly (typically every 10 days). These help track children's progress, inform teaching strategies, and allow regrouping of learners based on their improving abilities.
- **Endline Assessment:** At the conclusion of the project, a final assessment is conducted to measure overall learning gains and evaluate the impact of the intervention.

All assessments are simple, inclusive, and conducted within the community. Their results are openly shared to build transparency, accountability, and collective responsibility for children's learning.

## 2. Community Meetings

Following the baseline assessment, results are shared with the community through inclusive village meetings.

These meetings bring together parents, local leaders, teachers, and other stakeholders to:

- Understand the learning levels of children
- Reflect on key challenges
- Agree on actions to support learning

Community members play an active role in decision-making, and local committees are often formed to oversee implementation and track progress.

Throughout the project, additional meetings are held to review progress based on midline assessments and, at the end, to share endline results and reflect on achievements.

### 3. Learning Camps

Learning camps are the core intervention of the project and are implemented after community engagement.

These are structured learning sessions conducted within the village, usually at a local school. The camps follow an accelerated learning approach that focuses on teaching children according to their ability level rather than age or grade.

Children are grouped based on baseline assessment results and are continuously regrouped following midline assessments.

The camps typically run for 30 to 50 days, divided into phases of 10 days each. This structure allows for regular monitoring and targeted support, ensuring that children make steady progress in reading and numeracy.

### 4. Community Libraries

To sustain and reinforce learning from the camps, community libraries are established within the village. These libraries provide children with access to simple and engaging reading materials that match their learning levels. They encourage regular reading practice, helping children strengthen their skills and develop a culture of reading.

Community members and partners are encouraged to contribute books and support library management, making this a locally owned and sustainable resource.

### 5. Life Skills Sessions

Alongside academic learning, life skills sessions are provided to support children's overall development, particularly for those aged 12–17.

These sessions are conducted regularly during the implementation period and focus on building essential competencies such as communication, confidence, decision-making, and social responsibility.

They complement the academic components by preparing children to apply their learning in real-life situations.





## 6. Learning SMS (Mobile Learning Support)

The Learning SMS component extends learning beyond the camps and into the home.

Parents and caregivers receive simple, structured SMS messages linked to what children are learning. These messages provide guidance on how to support children's practice at home.

Typically, two messages are sent each week, ensuring continuous engagement. The content aligns with children's learning progress as identified through ongoing assessments.

This component strengthens the connection between school and home and promotes shared responsibility for learning.

The My Village Project follows a clear and structured sequence: starting with assessment, engaging the community, delivering targeted learning support, and reinforcing progress through continuous practice and engagement.

By integrating assessment, instruction, and community involvement, the project ensures that every child is identified, supported, and given the opportunity to succeed. This structured yet flexible approach allows for measurable learning improvements while building strong community ownership for sustainable impact.

# MY VILLAGE PHASES



## Phase I

Uwezo Tanzania's focus on learning outcomes and supporting children in realizing their full potential has been central to our vision of reaching all children. The idea to implement the Jifunze initiative arose after several years of conducting learning assessments, which revealed that while children are attending school, effective learning is not consistently taking place. . During the pilot phase, Uwezo Tanzania developed and tested an innovative learning model that aligns closely with national education policies. This model, known as Jifunze inspired by the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach , was designed to respond directly to evidence from years of learning assessments.

These assessments consistently revealed a critical challenge: while most children are enrolled in school, effective learning is not always taking place. Many children progress through the education system without acquiring the foundational literacy and numeracy skills required for continued learning and success. The Jifunze initiative was therefore developed as a practical, evidence-based response to this learning gap.

Jifunze . is an instructional methodology that focuses on teaching children according to their actual learning levels, rather than their age or grade.

At the start of the program, children are assessed to determine their literacy and numeracy competencies. Based on the results, they are grouped by learning level and supported through interactive, participatory, and level-appropriate activities aimed at strengthening foundational reading and mathematics skills. This approach represents a form of targeted instruction, ensuring that teaching responds directly to children's learning needs and that no child is left behind.

# SAMPLING

Jifunze intervention targeted primary school children in Standards 3 to 6 and was implemented in 30 government primary schools across six regions.

Jifunze literacy and numeracy classes were conducted over a maximum period of 30 days, with learner assessments carried out at 10-day intervals. Children who had not yet achieved the expected learning level continued in the program for an additional 10 days and were reassessed, up to a maximum of three assessment rounds (after 10, 20, and 30 days).

In literacy, children were grouped according to their learning levels into syllable, word, and paragraph groups. In numeracy, learners were grouped into addition, subtraction, and multiplication levels. This level-based grouping ensured targeted instruction tailored to each child's learning needs.

Each Jifunze class was facilitated by two qualified teachers one government primary school teacher and one trained volunteer teacher. In schools with large enrolments, a third qualified teacher was engaged. Classes were conducted after regular school hours, typically from 3:20 pm to 4:20 pm, Monday to Friday.

Teachers conducted assessments in line with Jifunze guidelines, assigning each child a unique identification number. Data were collected using two standardized tools: an information questionnaire to capture baseline details (including age, gender, grade, learning level, and visible disability), and a register form to track enrolment, attendance, assessment rounds, learning progression, and teacher and school details.

## **Monitoring and Evaluation**

The baseline assessment was conducted between November 2022 and January 2023, reaching 17,806 children. The endline assessment took place from October to December 2023 and covered 8,460 children. In addition, a total of 9,526 children participated in the learning camp.



## Phase II



### Background and Rationale

The My Village Project – Phase II was implemented by Uwezo Tanzania in Ludewa District, Njombe Region, building on evidence from national learning assessments showing that school enrolment does not automatically translate into learning. Despite Tanzania’s progress in expanding access to education, foundational literacy and numeracy outcomes remain low, particularly in rural communities.

Baseline findings from September 2024 confirmed these challenges. Among 4,107 children (1,905 boys and 2,202 girls) assessed across 20 villages, many struggled with foundational competencies. In literacy, only 52.81% could read at comprehension level, while others remained at beginner, letter, or word level. In numeracy, although 61.24% demonstrated comprehension-level understanding, substantial proportions struggled with division (21.64%), subtraction (17.28%), and multiplication (13.15%). Additionally, 88.07% of children had no books at home, and 70.99% never read stories at home, limiting opportunities for practice beyond school.

These findings reinforced the need for a structured, community-driven approach to ensure children acquire foundational skills regardless of grade or schooling status.

### Project Objective

Phase II (July–December 2024) aimed to pilot and validate a whole-village learning model that strengthens foundational literacy and numeracy while placing communities at the center of children’s learning. The project also sought to generate evidence on feasibility, effectiveness, and scalability through structured A/B testing across 20 schools (10 intervention, 10 control).



The initiative targeted children aged 8–17 years, with a strong focus on learners in Standards 3–6 and out-of-school children.

All data were recorded in Swahili, compiled, and analyzed using Stata.

i) For literacy, a total of 3,278 children were assessed at baseline, with 624 children enrolled in Jifunze literacy classes. Follow-up assessments were conducted with 624 children after 10 days, 403 after 20 days, and 223 after 30 days. Literacy assessments were conducted in Chamwino, Kisarawe, and Mvomero districts.

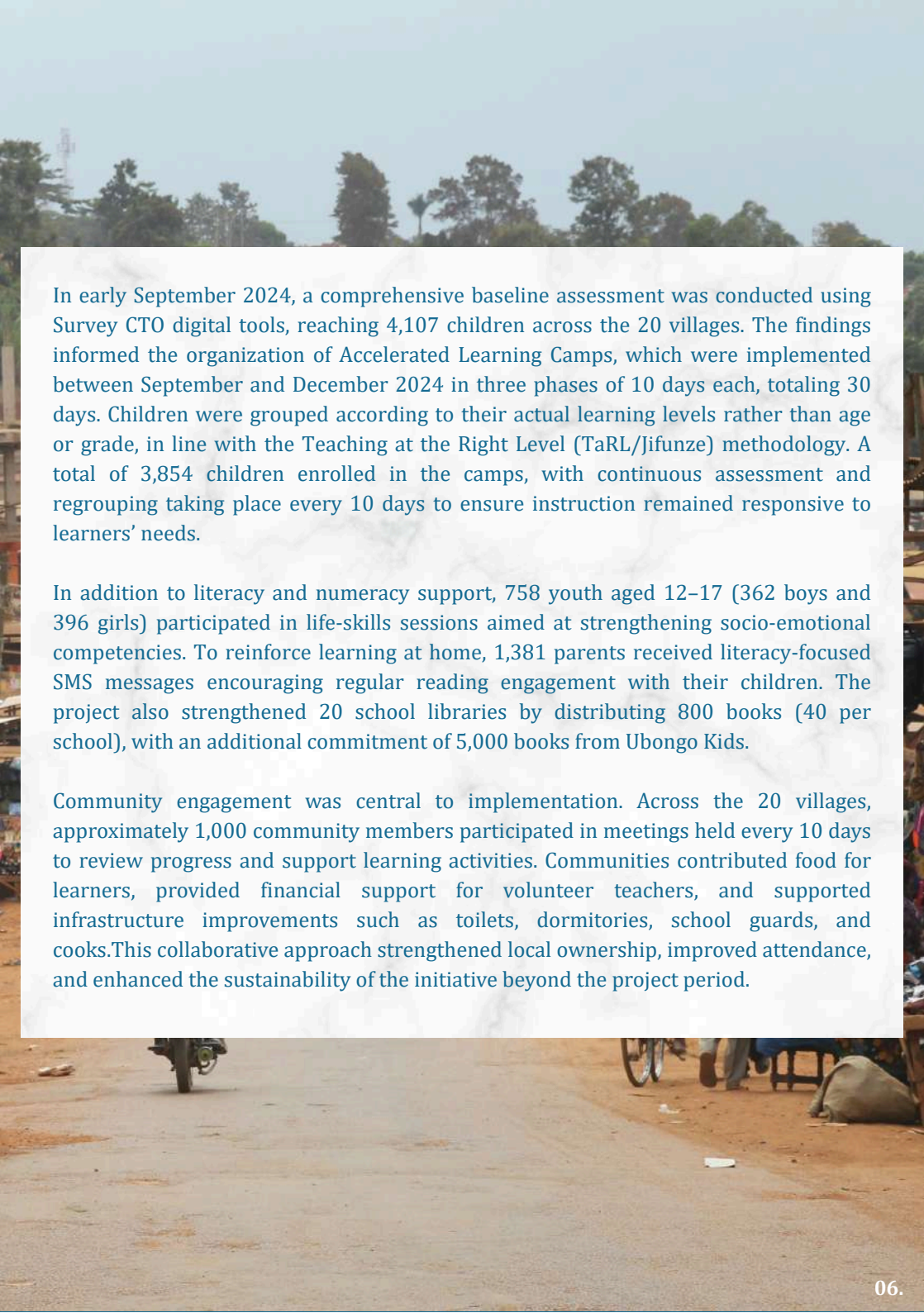
ii) For numeracy, 3,675 children were assessed at baseline, with 1,535 children enrolled in Jifunze numeracy classes. Assessments were conducted with 1,535 children after 10 days, 1,104 after 20 days, and 598 after 30 days.

Jifunze equipped children with essential reading, writing, and arithmetic skills, leading to measurable improvements in learning outcomes at the primary school level particularly for learners in Standards 3 to 6. By strengthening foundational skills, Jifunze contributed to higher pass rates in the National Standard Four and Standard Seven examinations and supported improved transition rates from primary to secondary education.

### **Implementation Approach**

Phase II was officially launched in July 2024 following a design workshop held in Morogoro that brought together PO-RALG, MoEST, PAL Network, and the implementing partner Lugalawa Development Foundation (LDF). The project was implemented in 20 villages in Ludewa District: Ibihi, Ilininda, Kimbila, Kipangala, Lifungulu, Ligumbiro, Ludende, Lupande, Lusala, Luvuyo, Manyanya, Mapogoro, Mavanga, Mholo, Ngalawale, Nindi, Njelela, Ulonge, Ushindi, and Utilili.

A strong focus was placed on teacher capacity building. Twenty head teachers participated in a one-day orientation session, while 40 teachers (23 female and 17 male) underwent a six-day intensive training covering assessment methodologies, the TaRL (Jifunze) approach, learning camp management, life skills facilitation, and community engagement strategies.



In early September 2024, a comprehensive baseline assessment was conducted using Survey CTO digital tools, reaching 4,107 children across the 20 villages. The findings informed the organization of Accelerated Learning Camps, which were implemented between September and December 2024 in three phases of 10 days each, totaling 30 days. Children were grouped according to their actual learning levels rather than age or grade, in line with the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL/Jifunze) methodology. A total of 3,854 children enrolled in the camps, with continuous assessment and regrouping taking place every 10 days to ensure instruction remained responsive to learners' needs.

In addition to literacy and numeracy support, 758 youth aged 12–17 (362 boys and 396 girls) participated in life-skills sessions aimed at strengthening socio-emotional competencies. To reinforce learning at home, 1,381 parents received literacy-focused SMS messages encouraging regular reading engagement with their children. The project also strengthened 20 school libraries by distributing 800 books (40 per school), with an additional commitment of 5,000 books from Ubongo Kids.

Community engagement was central to implementation. Across the 20 villages, approximately 1,000 community members participated in meetings held every 10 days to review progress and support learning activities. Communities contributed food for learners, provided financial support for volunteer teachers, and supported infrastructure improvements such as toilets, dormitories, school guards, and cooks. This collaborative approach strengthened local ownership, improved attendance, and enhanced the sustainability of the initiative beyond the project period.



## Phase III

### Overview

In Tanzania, My Village has been implemented through Phases I and II in the districts of Kisarawe, Gairo, and Ludewa, reaching 120 villages, 120 schools, over 16,000 children, and 240 teachers. These phases successfully introduced and validated the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach in rural communities, resulting in significant learning gains. Phase II results showed that 80% of children progressed by at least one learning level, with average village achievement rates of 60–70%.

Despite these gains, Phase II findings also revealed that 12% of children remained at the same learning level and 8% regressed, while village-level analysis showed that only 41% of children reached division level and 61% reached story level. This indicates that many children still require continued support to fully achieve foundational competencies. Phase III was therefore designed to deepen impact, address remaining learning gaps, and strengthen sustainability through closer system integration and differentiated implementation.

### Objectives of Phase III

The overall objective of Phase III is to consolidate and deepen learning gains achieved in earlier phases while strengthening system alignment, community ownership, and sustainability.

Specifically, Phase III aims to:

- Improve foundational literacy and numeracy outcomes for all primary school-age children in targeted villages
  - Provide continued and differentiated support to children who did not reach expected learning levels in Phase II
  - Expand the My Village approach to new villages with limited exposure to learning interventions
  - Strengthen teacher and volunteer capacity to deliver TaRL-based instruction
  - Enhance community, parental, and government engagement in children's learning
- Generate robust evidence to inform policy dialogue, scaling, and sustainability.

## Methodologies and Implementation Approach

Phase III (July–December 2025) adopted a differentiated implementation strategy, combining refresher support for schools previously engaged in Phase II with structured expansion to new schools in Ludewa District, Njombe Region. The approach strengthened system integration while deepening learning gains among children who had not yet reached foundational competency levels.

Capacity building was central to implementation. A three-day Training of Trainers (TOT) was conducted from 27–29 August 2025, followed by a one-day Head Teacher orientation on 29 August 2025, reaching 22 head teachers. Subsequently, a six-day intensive training for teachers and volunteers was held from 1–6 September 2025. A total of 8 trainers (2 national trainers and 6 TOTs) facilitated the sessions.

During this process, 60 teachers and volunteers (34 female, 26 male) from 30 Phase II schools received refresher training, while 22 teachers and volunteers (11 female, 11 male) from 9 villages (11 schools) were newly trained. In total, 82 teachers and volunteers were capacitated. The trainings were highly practical, focusing on TaRL methodology, learner assessment, facilitation skills, classroom grouping, and integration of life skills into literacy and numeracy instruction.

A comprehensive household-level baseline assessment was conducted in 2025 across 39 villages, reaching 5,045 children (2,567 girls and 2,478 boys) aged 6–17 years. The assessment utilized the My Village I CAN–I CARE adapted tool in Kiswahili and covered literacy, numeracy, and selected climate and gender indicators. Baseline findings informed learner grouping and targeted instruction during implementation.

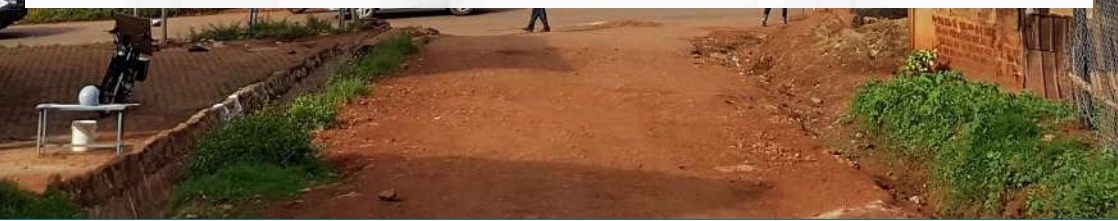


Learning Camps were officially launched on 15 September 2025 and concluded on 15 December 2025. Camps were implemented in 41 schools across 39 villages, reaching 4,183 learners (2,101 girls and 2,082 boys). The intervention consisted of three cycles of 10 days each (30 total literacy and numeracy days), with 5-day breaks between cycles for assessment and life skills delivery. Sessions were conducted after school hours, typically in the evening, with one hour dedicated to literacy and one hour to numeracy daily.

Instruction was delivered in Kiswahili, and children were grouped according to learning level rather than age or grade. Literacy progression ranged from Non-Reader to Story Level, while numeracy groups advanced from number recognition to multiplication and division. Continuous assessments enabled flexible regrouping based on learner progress.

Life skills education was integrated into the camp structure and delivered over 15 days during mid-cycle breaks across all 41 schools. Targeting children aged 6–17 years, sessions were conducted in the evenings for two hours per day and focused on communication, collaboration, hygiene, problem-solving, and decision-making. This component strengthened learners' confidence, teamwork, and resilience alongside academic skills.

School-based libraries were strengthened in 41 schools across 39 villages, with reading materials available in Kiswahili and English. Digital content from Ubongo Kids was also shared to enhance engagement. Library sessions were conducted daily after school to promote a reading culture and improve fluency and comprehension, though limited book supply remained a challenge.





Community engagement remained a core pillar of Phase III. Community conversations were conducted in 39 villages, facilitated by head teachers, teachers, and volunteers. Village report cards and project updates were shared, fostering transparency and accountability. Although farming commitments occasionally limited attendance, these forums strengthened community ownership and reinforced parental responsibility in supporting children's learning.

### Achievements and Results of Phase III

Between July and December 2025, Phase III achieved substantial reach and system integration:



**51**

Forty one schools directly supported by the program, ten schools supported by the government.



**5,045**

children assessed at baseline.



**4,183**

learners participating in Learning Camps.



**82**

teachers and volunteers trained.



**22**

head teachers oriented.



**2,005**

parents reached through SMS.



**41**

school libraries strengthened.



**14,350** Primary books distributed

The phase strengthened teacher confidence in delivering TaRL, deepened parental engagement, enhanced community ownership, and reinforced alignment with district and national education systems laying a strong foundation for sustainability and scale while continuing to address persistent foundational learning gaps among primary school-age children in Ludewa District.

# Project Highlights

## Project Goal:

By December 2029, all children aged 6–17 in the selected villages will achieve grade-appropriate proficiency in foundational literacy and numeracy. This was made possible through

  
**3,854**

### My Village learning camps

Accelerated learning camps which enrolled 3,854 children across various locations

  
**15,150**

### Enhanced existing school libraries

Enhanced existing school libraries in 61 Primary schools by donating 248 reading books to each 61 schools, overall 15,150 books were distributed

  
**758**

### Life skills sessions for youth

758 youth (362 boys and 396 girls were enrolled in the life skills sessions

  
**1,381**

### Weekly Mobile phone SMS

Educational message were sent to parents, 1381 parents received messages, the messages were focused solely on literacy.

  
**1,000**

### Community engagements

Community meetings mobilized resources to support children's education 1000 villagers participated across 20 villages, this instilled local ownership.





**25,588**

**Total children reached**



**786**

**Total teachers trained**



**276**

**Total schools reached**



**141**

**Total villages reached**



**79,628**

**Total community reach (meetings and SMS engagement).**

# OUR STORIES OF CHANGE





## A NAME WRITTEN AT LAST: HOW JENNIFER FOUND HER FIRST CHANCE TO LEARN

At only 16 years old, Jennifer had already lived through more hardship than many adults. Growing up in Mlangali village in Ludewa District an isolated rural area of Njombe Region marked by high poverty levels, limited infrastructure, and long distances to basic social services, Jennifer faced barriers to education from the very start of her life. she was one of six children raised almost entirely by one parent,-her mother. Her father walked away when she was young, leaving her mother to shoulder the full burden of providing, protecting, and keeping the family together.

*“It has always been just Mama,” Jennifer says softly. “She worked every single day whether she was sick, tired, or overwhelmed. I watched her wake up before sunrise to prepare the farm, only to come home empty-handed sometimes. She never complained, but I could see the weight on her face. She carried all of us on her back without any help.”*

The family relied on a small piece of land where her mother grew maize, beans, and vegetables. But the harvest was rarely enough to feed the family. Some days they ate; many days they did not. On the hardest days, her mother sold the very food they needed just to buy salt, soap, or cooking oil.

Meanwhile, with survival as the only priority, learning became a distant dream. Jennifer never attended school not even once.

*“I used to watch other children passing by our house with their school bags,” she recalls. “They looked free, like they belonged somewhere. I would whisper to myself, ‘One day, I want to read and write.’ But deep down, I didn’t know how that day would ever come. It felt like a dream meant for other people, not for someone like me.”*

However, when other girls of her age were joining secondary school, Jennifer made a difficult journey alone to Ludewa town in search of work. Her hope was simple: to become a house helper and send whatever little she earned back home. A woman in town took her in as a guardian, and Jennifer’s role became clear cook, clean, wash clothes, and care for the children.

*"I came there to work," she explains. "School was not something I even thought about. My life was about helping in the house and making sure everything was done. I accepted it because I wanted to support my family. Her days began early at 6:00 a.m. and were filled with back-to-back chores. Even so, she carried a quiet hope inside her unspoken belief that her story could still change.*

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Suddenly; Everything shifted when her guardian heard about the My Village Project delivered through **Jifunze class**, a free community learning initiative by **Uwezo Tanzania** in partnership with PAL Network and **Lugarawa Development Foundation (LDF) and Ludewa District council**.

*"One evening she told me, 'Jennifer, I want you to try learning.' I was shocked," Jennifer says. "No one had ever looked at me and seen potential. I almost cried because it felt like someone finally believed I could do more with my life."*

Her guardian allowed her to attend the class in the evening and get to learn from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

*"Not everyone would have said yes," Jennifer says. "She could have kept me in the house, but she chose to open a door for me. That decision changed my whole life."*

*Initially, her first day at Jifunze was filled with fear. "I was so scared," she admits. "I thought the children would laugh at me because I was older. But instead, they smiled. The facilitators welcomed me. In that moment, I felt safe. I felt seen." Said Jennifer.*

Though, for the first time, Jennifer held a pencil with purpose. She traced letters slowly. Her first written word was her own name. Day by day, she mastered sounds, syllables, and sentences. She never missed a class.

*"When I wrote my name, tears just fell, I waited my whole life for that moment. Now I can read messages and write on my own," she says proudly. "My world feels bigger. I feel like a real person with a real future."*

In the end; Jennifer now dreams of becoming a lawyer to help children who, like her, were denied opportunities because of poverty.

*"I wish to become a lawyer, so that I could seek justice for children especially girls who are denied their right to education. Jifunze classes did not just teach me to read, they gave me hope to become a change maker and desire to learn more. She concludes confidently.*

Jennifer's story reflects a much wider reality. Across Ludewa District and other rural communities in Tanzania, many children, particularly girls remain out of school due to poverty, household responsibilities, and limited access to flexible learning opportunities. Through the Jifunze classes under the My Village Project, Uwezo Tanzania and its partners have already reached 573 out-of-school children, enabling them to acquire foundational literacy and numeracy skills and rebuild confidence to re-enter learning pathways. However, many more children remain unreached, silently excluded from education and the opportunities it brings. Reaching them requires collective action. Jennifer's journey is both evidence of what is possible and a call to government actors, civil society organizations, communities, and development partners to join efforts in expanding inclusive, community-based learning initiatives so that no child's future is determined by poverty or circumstance.



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*- Jenipher -*



## LEARNING WITHOUT LIMITS: AUGUSTINO'S STORY

In the remote highlands of **Ludewa District in Njombe Region**, where life is shaped by steep terrain, long distances, and limited access to basic services, lives a young boy named Augustino, a child whose early life was shaped by both love and deep loss. From the moment he was born, his mother Selina Haule noticed that he was different. He struggled to speak, avoided eye contact, slept often, and found it hard to connect with others; signs of autism that became clearer as he grew.

Unfortunately, instead of bringing the family closer, these signs became the very trigger that tore it apart. Overwhelmed by fear, shame, and constant whispers from relatives, Augustino's father walked away when the boy was barely a year old. He never returned. Selina was left alone to carry the pain, the responsibility, and the uncertainty of raising a child with special needs in a community that did not understand him.

*"When his father walked away, I felt like my whole world was collapsing," Selina recalls. "But when I looked at my son, I knew I had to stay firm. He needed love, not shame. He needed someone who believed in him."* Narrates Selina.

Being a smallholder farmer, Selina grows maize, beans, and whatever else the season will allow just to keep Augustino and two older brothers. Every day begins before sunrise and ends long after sunset, yet she never lets her children feel her fear.

With no partner to support her, Selina often sells 20-kilogram of maize for as little as 5,000 Tanzanian shillings (**approximately USD 2**) just to survive. She would carry all three boys on her back emotionally if not physically because her family, who once tried to help, slowly stepped back as their own hardships grew.

*"At first my relatives tried to help with food," Selina says softly. "But they also had their own families. I realized I was truly alone. I had to work twice as hard and protect my son from people who did not understand him."*



Before any support reached Madunda village, Augustino struggled deeply with foundational learning. In his early years of schooling, he could not recognize letters or numbers, follow simple classroom instructions, or keep pace with lessons delivered in large, crowded classes. While other children began to read and write, Augustino remained silent and withdrawn, often sitting at the back of the classroom, unnoticed and unable to express his needs. His learning challenges were mistaken for inability rather than unmet support, placing him at risk of falling permanently behind or dropping out altogether

However, Everything changed the day the Uwezo Tanzania assessment team under My Village Project arrived in the village of Madunda. They encouraged Selina to enroll him in Madunda Primary School and introduce him to Jifunze class,-an inclusive learning program that uses songs, storytelling, communication exercises, and play to build literacy and numeracy skills.

Selina hesitated because she believed that only expensive special schools could teach a childlike Augustino, schools she could never afford

*“I had lost hope of my son ever going to school,” she admits. “I used to think education was not for children like him. I felt I could never give him what he needed. Uwezo and the Ludewa district council came to lift our spirits and hopes for his education and future”*

Later, In the Jifunze class, Augustino began to shine. He learned to count, read small words, form sentences, and speak more clearly. His confidence grew every week. Most importantly, he learned to play and interact with other children something Selina once feared might never happen.

*“For the first time, I saw my child laugh freely,” Selina recalls, her voice breaking with emotion. “He was not hiding. He was not afraid. He was part of a group. That day, I knew my son had a future.”*

Today, Augustino is among the top five students in Standard Six. His teachers describe him as focused, determined, and gentle. Classmates love him for his kindness and curiosity.



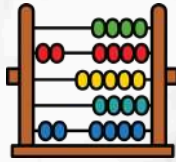


Eventually, Selina cannot hide her pride. “My son is my treasure,” she says with a full smile. *“I never thought I would say those words with such confidence. Thanks to teachers who helped me see who my child truly is, this has motivated me to work hard until I unleash his full potential.”*

Augustino’s progress is the result of a collective effort. It reflects the commitment of his mother, the dedication of teachers at Madunda Primary School, the leadership of the Ludewa District Council, and the technical support of Uwezo Tanzania through the Jifunze/My-Village model and strong partnership with PAL Network. This collaboration created an inclusive learning space where targeted instruction, assessment, and community engagement enabled Augustino to overcome foundational learning barriers.

However, Augustino’s story represents only a fraction of the need. Uwezo Tanzania’s assessments under the Jifunze/My-Village model have identified 221 children with disabilities who required similar targeted support to access foundational literacy and numeracy skills

Closing this gap will require expanded collaboration. While government leadership, schools, communities, and civil society have laid a strong foundation, additional funders and partners are essential to scale inclusive learning approaches to reach every child left behind by geography, poverty, or disability.



## HOW NUMBERS FINALLY MADE SENSE TO NURU

Sometimes I felt like numbers hated me, *“But now I am starting to understand them. I feel proud when I get answers right.”* Nuru says softly.

In Manyanya Village, Njombe Region, daily life is shaped by distance and limited access to basic services. Homes are scattered across hilly terrain, and children often walk long distances to school on rough, seasonal roads. During the rainy months, movement becomes even “harder, isolating families and disrupting learning. In this remote setting where consistent follow-up at home and school is difficult Nuru’s story reflects the silent struggles many children face., .

At only 10 years old, she has experienced more instability than most children her age. After her mother remarried and began a new family, Nuru remained with her elderly grandmother. Although her grandmother cared deeply for her, keeping up with Nuru’s Learning became difficult. Nuru started falling behind, especially in mathematics, and she lacked the close follow up she needed at home.

However, her life began to change when her teacher, Mr Mhagama, noticed her struggles. He saw a child who was always present in class but drifting academically. One afternoon, he made a decision that would shape her future.

*“I felt something in my heart when I looked at her,”* Mr Mhagama recalls. *“She was quiet, respectful and trying her best. But she was carrying a weight she could not explain. I wanted to give her a place where she felt supported and cared for.”*

Initially, he took Nuru into his home and treated her like his own child. She received consistency, attention and guidance that she had long missed. For the first time, she had a stable environment where learning was part of daily life.

Soon after, Uwezo Tanzania conducted a learning assessment in the village. Nuru was one of the children assessed at Mr Mhagama's home. The assessment team quickly identified her challenges in mathematics and recommended the Jifunze class. The Jifunze class is a structured, targeted learning program that groups children according to their actual learning levels rather than their age or grade. Through short, intensive learning cycles and continuous assessment, teachers adapt instruction to each child's pace helping learners like Nuru rebuild confidence and master foundational numeracy skills step by step within 30 days.

For Mr Mhagama, this referral was a moment he had been hoping for.

*"I was relieved," he says. "As a teacher, it troubled me that a child under my care was finding mathematics so difficult. When the assessors recommended Jifunze, I felt like Nuru had finally found a path that matched her needs. I saw hope in her eyes."*

Joining the Jifunze classes opened a new chapter for Nuru. Slowly, she began to catch up. Her fear of numbers reduced and was replaced by interest and confidence. She started solving problems she once avoided. The improvement in mathematics lifted her performance in other subjects as well.

Today, Nuru balances her days with discipline and purpose. She wakes up at six in the morning, attends school, returns home at four and completes her house chores before settling down for studies between five and six in the evening.

*"This routine helps me finish everything," Nuru explains. "I wash utensils, sweep the compound and then study. I like it because I am improving in school. I can see myself changing."*





*"It has helped me so much," she says with a bright smile. "I used to struggle in math but now I can count and solve sums. I want to ask the government and everyone who supports children to please give us more books. When we have books, we can practice even when we are at home."*

With growing confidence, Nuru now dreams bigger. She hopes to become a teacher of Mathematics, Kiswahili and Science. She believes programs like My Village and Jifunze are shaping children who will one day become strong leaders in their communities.

*"I know I can do it," she says with certainty. "If these classes continue reaching children like me, many of us will achieve our dreams."*

Nuru's dream reflects the impact that inclusive, targeted learning can have on girls when they are given the right support at the right time. Through the Jifunze/My Village model, more than 12,648 girls across rural and hard-to-reach communities have already been supported to build foundational literacy and numeracy skills, helping them regain confidence and stay on track with their education. Yet many more girls especially those living with elderly caregivers, affected by poverty, or struggling silently in classrooms are still waiting for the same opportunity. Expanding Jifunze means reaching these girls before they fall permanently behind, so that more of them, like Nuru, can learn, dream, and one day lead their communities as teachers, professionals, and role models.

# KIJI CHANGU PIONEERS



**NURU**

*"I used to struggle in math but now I can count and solve sums. I want to ask the government and everyone who supports children to please give us more books. When we have books, we can practise even when we are at home."*



**SELINA**

*"I used to think education was not for children like him. I felt I could never give him what he needed. Uwezo and the Ludewa district council came to lift our spirits and hopes for his education and future"*



**JENNIFER**

*"Jifunze classes did not just teach me to read, they gave me hope to become a change maker and desire to learn more".*



## CASE STUDY: JIFUNZE METHODOLOGY

### **Jifunze for Lasting Learning Gains**

Jifunze an evidence-based, community-driven learning methodology developed by Uwezo Tanzania under the My Village Project is transforming how children learn. Rooted in the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach, Jifunze tackles one of Tanzania's most persistent challenges: children attending school but not learning. This case study explores the journey of Jifunze, revealing how targeted instruction and deep community ownership can unlock potential for every child, especially the most marginalized. Across Tanzania, millions of children attend school but are unable to read with understanding or perform basic arithmetic. This foundational learning gap limits academic progression, reduces life opportunities, and perpetuates cycles of poverty. Uwezo Tanzania addresses this challenge through the Jifunze / My Village model, a locally adapted and evidence-based approach grounded in Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL).

### **The Learning Challenge Before Jifunze**

Despite near-universal primary school enrolment, learning outcomes in Tanzania remain critically low. Many children progress through the education system without acquiring the foundational literacy and numeracy skills essential for continued learning. National assessment evidence shows that learning gaps emerge early, widen over time, and disproportionately affect children in rural and marginalized communities. Parents and caregivers, often lacking the tools, confidence, or information to support learning at home, are unable to effectively bridge these gaps. Without timely and targeted intervention, these children face long-term educational, social, and economic disadvantages.



Over the past decade, Tanzania has made remarkable strides in expanding access to primary education, with enrolment rates exceeding 90 percent. However, these gains in access have not translated into meaningful learning for many children. Four out of ten enrolled learners fail to achieve minimum learning outcomes. In remote villages, it is not uncommon to find pupils in Standard Five or Six who are unable to read a simple sentence or solve basic arithmetic such as  $8 + 7$ .

The challenge is even more pronounced for out-of-school children, girls from low-income households, and children with disabilities. Conventional grade-based instruction often moves too quickly for learners who fall behind early, leaving them frustrated, disengaged, and increasingly excluded from the learning process. As a result, inequalities in learning deepen, reinforcing cycles of disadvantage for the most vulnerable children. Bottom of Form.

*Maria, a parent in Iringa, recalls:*

*“My son, Abraham, was in Standard 4 but could not write his name. Every morning he pretended to be sick, most of the time he was not really sick but he was ashamed to go to school.”*

### ***What Is Jifunze?***

*Jifunze means “learn” in Swahili and that is exactly what it enables. This practical intervention applies the Teaching at Right Level methodology, focusing on a child’s actual learning level rather than age or grade. Developed by Uwezo Tanzania using years of national assessment data, Jifunze brings communities to the center of the learning process.*

*Mr. Kondo, a teacher trained in Jifunze, explains:*

*“We don’t ask, ‘What grade are you in?’ We ask, ‘What can you do?’ Then we start from there. When children are taught at the right level, learning accelerates and confidence grows, you see it in their eyes.”*



## **How Jifunze Works: The Engine of Change**

Jifunze starts with a friendly one-on-one assessment. Using picture cards, number charts, and short sentences, facilitators identify each child's level in literacy and numeracy. Learners are then grouped by ability not grade.

The Jifunze model is a locally designed, evidence-based response to Tanzania's foundational learning crisis. Adapted from the globally proven Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach, the model is grounded in a simple but powerful principle: children learn best when instruction is aligned with their actual learning level rather than their age or grade. Through short, intensive learning cycles, Jifunze enables children aged 8–17 to acquire essential literacy and numeracy skills within 30–60 days, while also strengthening teachers' instructional capacity and engaging families and communities as active partners in learning.

Jifunze begins with a friendly, one-on-one assessment. Using simple tools such as picture cards, number charts, and short sentences, facilitators identify each child's literacy and numeracy level. Learners are then grouped by ability, not grade, ensuring that instruction directly responds to their learning needs.

Literacy groups may include Syllable Readers, Word Builders, or Paragraph Masters, while numeracy groups focus on Addition Beginners, Subtraction Solvers, or Multiplication Champions.

Learning sessions are playful, participatory, and highly interactive. Children learn through games, songs, storytelling, and peer teaching, creating an environment where learning feels engaging and achievable. A typical learning cycle runs for 30 days, with progress checks conducted every 10 days to track improvement and regroup learners as they advance. Sessions are held after school hours and are facilitated by trained teachers and community volunteers, ensuring that both enrolled and out-of-school children can participate.

Neema, 11, shares her experience:

“Before, I hated numbers. Now we play ‘shopkeeper’ with real coins. I can add and subtract, and I help my younger sister at home.”

A defining feature of the Jifunze/My Village model is its strong alignment with and integration into government education systems. Uwezo Tanzania works closely with the President's Office – Regional Administration and Local Government (PO-RALG) and district education authorities to embed targeted instruction within existing school structures. Through these partnerships, schools allocate additional instructional time each day for learning camps, ensuring that children who are falling behind receive focused support without disrupting the formal curriculum. Teachers, head teachers, and education administrators are trained and mentored to sustain quality implementation, contributing to long-term system strengthening. The model's effectiveness has been formally recognized through its inclusion in the draft National Framework.

### **Community Ownership: The Heartbeat of Jifunze**

What makes Jifunze sustainable is its roots in the community. From the start, parents, village elders, and local volunteers are involved in planning, mobilizing children, and tracking attendance.

Mama Asha, a volunteer in Pwani, says:

*"We go door-to-door to bring children to the learning camp. Even mothers who never went to school now sit with their children at night, practicing letters with a torch."*

This collective commitment extends learning beyond the classroom and builds a culture where education is valued by all.

Salim, a village leader, reflects:

*"Jifunze did not just teach my child to read; it restored our hope for the future. Now parents compete to send their children first to the learning camp."*

The model is intentionally inclusive reaching girls, children with disabilities, and those who had dropped out.

### **Results and Impact: Numbers and Narratives**

Across 30 implementation districts, Jifunze has delivered measurable and meaningful change. Within one 30-day cycle, most children advance at least one learning level. Teachers report higher participation, confidence, and improved performance in regular school. Up to 80% of learners progressed by one or more levels in literacy or numeracy.



Average village achievement rates reached 60–70% in foundational skills and out-of-school children and learners with disabilities showed marked improvement in engagement and skills.

Mr. Joseph, a school head teacher, observes:

*“Children who used to hide in the back rows now raise their hands first. The ‘slow learners’ have become class leaders in math games.”*

Parents note changes at home, too.

### **Way Forward**

Jifunze proves that significant learning gains are possible in a short time when instruction meets children where they are and when communities lead the charge. It is a scalable, cost-effective, and inclusive model that can be adapted across contexts.

Looking ahead, Uwezo Tanzania plans to integrate Jifunze into more government schools, train additional community facilitators, and use mobile technology for assessment tracking. The goal is clear: a Tanzania where every child, in every village, gains the foundational skills to learn for life.

Final words from a Jifunze student, Baraka, 12:

*“I used to think school was not for me. Now I know learning is for everyone. Someday I will be a teacher, and I will start where the child is, just like my Jifunze teacher did for me.”*



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