



**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF EVALUATIONS OF  
FUNDZA'S  
GROWING COMMUNITIES OF READERS PROGRAMME  
(PARTS 1, 2 AND 3)**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For Parts 1 and 2 of the evaluation of the FunDza Growing Communities of Readers Programme, a simplified and acceptable programme theory has been developed to highlight the assumptions underlying the programme. These assumptions are: improving access to reading material via MXit will get young people with few reading resources to read more, which would increase their interest in reading, their enjoyment of the activity, and the confidence they have in their own reading ability. This in turn would reinforce and strengthen their reading.

The following results were obtained from the re-analysis of the data collected from 2857 readers and inspection of 245 log files of user activity:

- **Is there evidence that participating in the Growing Communities of Readers Programme increase reading?**
  - Although not an irrefutable causal analysis, the results suggest that visits to the FunDza site increases the amount and frequency of self-reported reading, and that this does not depend on pre-existing resources at home or in the community, but is a function of the visits themselves.
- **How many readers access the site, and how much do they read?**
  - A large number (65000) of readers used the site between 3 February 2013 and 6 October 2013, and read at least 65 characters during the visit.
  - More than half of them read quite a lot: about 33000 readers clicked on the equivalent of 75 pages of reading material.
- **Does the Growing Communities of Readers Programme reach its intended target population?** The short answer appears to be “yes”, but it seems to reach an audience wider than what was originally intended:
  - Are they reading? Fifty-three percent of the readers in this study reported reading stories or books regularly. On the other hand, 47% reported that they hardly ever or never read books.

- Are they “book poor”? Not quite: more than half does have some degree of access to books, either at home (63% of respondents reported having 10 or more books at home), or through a library (69% reported visiting a library regularly). It must be said however that these figures still do not reflect exactly a “book rich” environment.
- How old are they? The majority (2857 out of 3521) were 24 years old or younger, with a mean age of 19.7 years.
- Thus there is strong evidence that the programme is improving access to reading material, but for a wider audience than young people with little access to reading material. We do not regard this as a threat to the programme. MXit is open to all its subscribers, and if readers who already read, have many books, or are older, also use the service, it does not draw on the programme’s resources.
- **How do the readers use the site?**
  - Fifty-nine percent of respondents belonged to the Growing Communities of Readers Programme for at least three months and 43% belonged for more than 6 months.
  - The log files show that 50% of Fundza users visited the site 7 times or more. The top 25% of readers, in terms of how often they visited the site, visited FunDza 39 times or more.
  - Twenty percent of the 2857 readers in the survey visited the site for a few times only (fewer than 20 times), and then not again.
  - The proportion of respondents reading stories on cellular phones increases the longer they are enrolled in the Growing Communities of Readers Programme, but it looks as if they read fewer books, newspapers and magazines.

Part 3 of the evaluation of FunDza's Growing Communities of Readers Programme was designed to answer one question:

- **Is it reasonable to conclude that participation in this programme increases the amount of reading that participants do, as well as the time they spend reading?**

This part of the evaluation is based on the responses to a brief questionnaire of new participants who joined the programme between 5 November 2013 and 30 January 2014. Six thousand four hundred and sixty six (6466) new readers completed the questionnaire. All were invited to complete it again between 10 February and 28 February 2014, and 476 usable responses were received.

The most noteworthy findings were:

- A large number (6466) of new readers were attracted to the programme in the three months this was monitored.
- All the comparisons made between the "before" and "after" measures show small but significant changes in the desired direction, as respondents reported that they: have more books at home; read more books outside of school; read more frequently and for longer; prefer reading books over other activities; and consider themselves better readers.
- It looks as if the programme attracts young people who enjoy reading already, but do not have access to physical books that they may want to read. Thus one could say that the programme gives young people who want to read, access to reading material that they don't have, which is an important objective of FunDza. It is however not possible from this data to say whether the programme attracts new readers and turns them into enthusiastic readers.
- As stated in the first report, these new readers also read a substantial amount of material.

- The more participants read, according to the objective measures of their reading behaviour, the more likely they were to indicate that they enjoyed reading outside of school, that they thought they are good readers, that they read for longer, and that they read more outside of school in the most recent month.
- The attempt to link the programme more directly with positive changes showed that the more the respondents participated in the programme, the more they enjoyed reading, the longer they read, and the more confident they felt about their self-rated reading proficiency.

The findings of this, the third part of our study of FunDza's Growing Communities of Readers Programme, indicate that changes are occurring in the participants who answered the brief survey, and that these changes are in the desired direction.

In conclusion, the analysis contained in the three parts of the evaluation showed that the Growing Communities of Readers Programme is working as it is changing reading behaviour of participants in a positive manner.