



MLE INTERNATIONAL
MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION FOR ALL

**ALEF Adult Literacy and Empowerment Program
Evaluation Phase II**

FINAL REPORT

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Executive summary

This report describes a comprehensive external evaluation conducted in 2024 of ALEF's method, implementation and organizational support for adult empowerment and literacy. This mixed-methods evaluation of the Empowerment Groups program follows up on our earlier analysis of patterns and trends from the 2023 dataset of testimonies from individual participants and groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda and Togo. That first study identified a number of positive changes in people's lives that could be attributed to participation in ALEF's program, including improvements in health, income generation, agricultural practices and confidence/women's empowerment. This second phase of the evaluation involves fieldwork done in two of those countries, DRC and Uganda, chosen due to their longstanding relationships with ALEF and their consistent implementation of ALEF's method. This evaluation provides insights into how the program contributes to life improvements for participants by analyzing data on literacy, numeracy, and second language skills along with effects like empowerment, awareness of rights and poverty alleviation. We closely examine several aspects of the program that were identified in the first evaluation as being integral to ALEF's approach, including the relevance of lesson themes and the creation of savings and income generation groups. We provide a small-scale costing analysis for each setting, and we consider how issues experienced by the program may be addressed. Overall, we examine our findings in light of the larger question of whether literacy results in empowerment.

The data explored here include test results and survey reports collected by ALEF and partners as well as of study group observations, stakeholder interviews and group discussions. The field data were collected in collaboration with the implementing partners in August 2024 in Uganda and at the end of 2024 in DRC. In the case of Uganda, a member of the team was present and worked with CACI staff to observe study groups, conduct interviews with facilitators, and hold discussions with participants and coaches. In DRC, due to the conflict situation, we worked virtually with ACDC staff, who visited selected groups and recorded the same set of activities. In total we did 12 lesson observations, 12 facilitator/group leader interviews and 12 participant group discussions and held discussions with both sets of coaches. In Uganda we interviewed an ex-Level 3 participant and in DRC two MUSOs. Finally, we interviewed two partner staff from each country. All qualitative data were transcribed and translated for analysis and have been made available to ALEF for possible future use. We discussed preliminary findings and any questions in separate validation meetings with each partner organization and with ALEF staff before completing this report.

This report provides key stakeholder statements to support our findings in each section. The first set of findings relate to skills development. Regarding literacy in the home language (L1), we find evidence that the ALEF program successfully promotes reading and writing skills development in Mashi (DRC) and Luganda (Uganda), and that these skills are practical and applicable to participants' lives. The effectiveness and relevance of the approach are consistent with the testimonials analyzed in the first phase of the evaluation. Participants report being able to write their own names and those of their children, understand information sent from the school about their children, read passages from the Bible, write shopping lists, keep track of debts, read local signage, check medicine bottles, and gain knowledge from text. Simply holding a writing instrument is a source of pride. Some proudly mention that they read and reply to text messages on their phones. Regarding numeracy skills, participants report having gained a wide range of



numeracy skills and applications such as being able to count, do calculations, use a calculator, tell time, measure (e.g. fabric), plan budgets, keep records, verify payments (such as school fees) and balance books. Participants feel they can no longer be taken advantage of or cheated by others. They report being able to handle currency in large numbers, which is required in both countries because the equivalent of one USD is about 3,700 Ugandan shillings or 2,900 Congolese francs. Regarding L2 learning, participants in Uganda are excited to learn English for their businesses in sales, customer care, greeting, and dealing with non-Luganda speakers, while participants in DRC use Swahili to communicate orally with authorities and non-Mashi speakers, and in writing for banking, school communication and other official functions.

Alongside these successes we identify challenges and suggest ways to address them. A key challenge is how to deal with the approximately 10% in Uganda and closer to 20% in DRC who fail the literacy assessment in particular. ALEF and the partners are working to make the assessment and grading as fair as possible while considering options for helping those who lag behind without hurting those ready to move ahead. Improvements in methodology and checking the materials for appropriate sequencing may be called for in both literacy and mathematics.

The next set of findings relate to the larger effects that ALEF and its partners aim to generate for participants. We find strong evidence that empowerment, awareness of human rights and the potential for poverty alleviation are indeed outcomes for many participants. This is due in great part to the choice of lesson themes, which allow for new information about real problems faced by participants to be shared, discussed and applied. Regarding empowerment, participants are proud of their newfound confidence and ability to speak in front of others. At the end of 2024, 17% of Level 1 participants in Uganda and 41% in DRC report holding leadership positions in their communities. Group solidarity and awareness of women's rights are widely reported. Facilitators find that rights-related lesson themes are very important and feel committed to helping participants stand up for their rights. Women are reportedly defending their own rights at home, the rights of their girl children to go to school, and their rights to claim inheritance.

Regarding poverty alleviation, participants benefit both individually and collectively from the formation of savings or small business groups. Participants in the DRC appreciate lessons helping them with agricultural information and with forming savings groups known as *Mutuelles de solidarité* (MUSOs). In Uganda, significant lessons provide information on how to form Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) and the advantages of forming them. The MUSOs, VSLAs and CBOs provide a basis for participants to continue meeting and providing mutual support after they complete the three-level course cycle. In Uganda, market women report that their improved numeracy and L2 skills help them reach more customers using social media or the radio, count money, give people change and keep track of their debts and profits. In the DRC, participants find that the program has made them more proactive in growing and taking care of their crops, registering their children for school, improving their hygiene, and keeping track of important documents.

A simple costing analysis done for each setting shows that the cost per participant per year is approximately USD 39 (SEK 420) in Uganda and USD 60 (SEK 618) in DRC. These figures appear reasonable given the program quality and results reported by participants. An additional



calculation of the 2024 shows that the estimated savings generated by all 47 VSLAs in Uganda ranges from USD 5,310 to 26,550 (SEK 57,246 to 286,230), while that of all 59 MUSOs in DRC ranges from USD 27,600 to 41,400 (SEK 278,100 to 426,420). While individual participants can only access small-scale loans and profits from their own savings groups, this calculation shows that the overall contribution of these groups to local economies is significant.

Overall, the positive effects of the ALEF program are clearly evidenced in the data. The question of whether literacy leads to empowerment is given nuance by stakeholders; some list the many skills they have gained through the program, while others discuss the effects of these skills on their lives and the lives of their families and communities. Just as we noted in the first phase of the evaluation, participants talk to their spouses, family members, friends and community members about lesson topics and what they learn. Some mention proudly that they are now able to help others. The texts they create, especially at Level 3, are put up on community signboards for all to read and discuss. There is evidence that participants' sharing creates a demand, both for the literacy, numeracy and L2 skills and for the income generation and savings groups. Facilitators/group leaders and coaches also experience positive effects on their own lives.

Alongside the overall successes we explore strategies for monitoring and evaluation to collect information that could lead to strategies to address challenges. For example, logistical challenges like participant absenteeism or not passing end-of-year assessments may call for new activities like helping facilitators to keep better records or finding ways for participants to support each other. Methodological challenges like teacher-centered vs. learner-centered facilitation of lessons may call for further training and support. On the monitoring side, we suggest relevant survey questions and explore ways for coaches to gather more authentic reports from participants in the L1. Future monitoring and support of the savings and income-generation groups could provide important feedback on how they are created and sustained.

In sum, this evaluation explores the ways that ALEF brings about skills development and empowerment for participants, their families and their communities. We find strong evidence that ALEF's approach connects literacy and empowerment through lesson content and methodology as well as through opportunities for participants to form groups for savings and income generation. In ALEF's Empowerment Groups, when individuals share their experiences and feelings—for example, their shame at not being able to read prescription bottles, their experiences of being discriminated against, their difficulty in understanding children's school reports—they find common ground and gain strength. When they further interact with the themes of the lessons, sharing personal experiences related to life's challenges, they learn about their rights and see ways forward in improving their lives, both individually and collectively. It is unlikely that these discoveries would come about if lessons were simply about alphabets and mathematics processes. This evaluation finds clear evidence that ALEF's approach, and collaboration with its very committed partners to implement the approach, enables most participants in DRC and Uganda to improve their lives in ways that are significant to them.



1. Introduction

This report covers the second and final phase of a comprehensive external evaluation of the literacy program known as Empowerment Groups created and supported by ALEF, Adult Learning and Empowerment Facilitators, in collaboration with local partners who may be NGOs, churches or other entities. ALEF is a Swedish non-profit organization founded in 2010 that is religiously and politically unaffiliated. The ALEF program uses the home language or L1 as the basis for learning and discussion: Ifè in Togo and Benin, Luganda in Uganda, Mashi and Kikongo in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Oromo in Ethiopia, Maninka in Guinea, and Kurmanji in Iraq.

1.1 Scope of the evaluation

This Phase II report describes our 2024 mixed-methods evaluation of ALEF’s method, implementation and organizational support for adult empowerment and literacy. The Terms of Reference of this evaluation are found in **Annex A**. Field data was gathered in two countries—DRC and Uganda—due to their longstanding relationships with ALEF and consistent implementation of ALEF’s method. Our analysis builds on findings from Phase I, which analyzed patterns and trends from the 2023 dataset of testimonies from individual participants and groups in DRC, Uganda and Togo. That study alerted us to key contributions as well as issues and concerns that might be identified through interviews and discussions with stakeholders.

Phase I of the evaluation provided clear evidence that a number of changes in people’s lives could be attributed to participation in the ALEF program. In their testimonials, participants linked improvements in health, income generation, agricultural practices and confidence—particularly as women—to specific lesson content and discussions. They credited their facilitators (known as group leaders in Uganda) with advising and advocating for them as well as teaching. They also mentioned gaining support, confidence and knowledge from their groups.

With Phase II we wanted to further explore the mechanisms through which such reportedly positive results were achieved. Overall, Phase II of the evaluation was designed to:

- Provide insights into *how* the program contributes to improving/changing participants’ lives within and across sites and countries.
- Provide ALEF with systematic, valid and credible data on the *effects* and *impact* of the program for use in communication with members, partners, funders and stakeholders.
- Provide data and analysis for publication that will contribute to international research on L1-based adult literacy and empowerment, specifically *how* ALEF’s approach addresses participants’ needs for empowerment, autonomy, resilience and other development-related goals.

An additional goal of both phases of the evaluation is to provide publishable data and analyses that can contribute to international research on L1-based adult literacy and raise awareness of ALEF’s contributions. We therefore examine how ALEF’s program addresses issues in international development, pushing back against the portrayal of literacy as an either-or proposition or as a set



of discrete skills divorced from social and cultural conditions. We identify and describe specific aspects of ALEF's program to avoid the trap of development agencies that make claims about the positive outcomes of literacy without examining how they are brought about. Further, we examine empowerment as a communal or community process, going beyond individual outcomes. Phase I provided evidence that ALEF's approach and lesson topics contribute more to people's lives than simply teaching literacy and numeracy. Phase II provides more details and analysis about how the program works and what stakeholders think of it, responding to a detailed set of research questions.

1.2 Background on ALEF

The ALEF approach involves participants in reading a text, engaging in a discussion and then co-writing a text during each class meeting. Course content is designed to address themes relevant to participants' lives. Throughout three course levels, participants work on their literacy and numeracy skills and begin to learn an additional language like French or English. ALEF's overall goal is for people to gain knowledge, insights and skills to do the following:

- take control of their own finances and health and improve their own living conditions;
- understand and defend their rights and act to change the mechanisms of poverty, discrimination and oppression;
- gain access to decision-making processes, community services and shared platforms;
- use their mother tongue in writing for various purposes, thereby preserving their cultural heritage and identity.

This goal, expressed as an indicator of success, is:

Adults [will be] able to use reading, writing and numeracy to take charge of their lives, economically as well as socially, carry out income generating activities, claim their rights and fulfill their duties, and participate in decision-making processes in the family, in the local community and on a national level.¹

ALEF characterizes its programs as creating the conditions for change in people's lives as a "first step out of poverty, oppression and exclusion."² How this is done depends to some degree on the local NGO partners' organizational aims and an analysis of participants' wants and needs, which ALEF has taken into consideration for each collaboration.

ALEF has been providing financial and technical resources to the Empowerment Group programs in the DRC and Uganda since 2013. Following the ALEF approach, these partners co-construct with ALEF the course content, lesson plans and materials for their target groups. The local partner NGOs, both secular organizations, are the implementers; they train, employ and supervise personnel, organize and monitor the groups, buy and distribute course materials, and administer all aspects of the program. In both countries, a number of groups are run by sub-partners that are responsible for employing facilitators and enrolling participants. **Table 1** summarizes

¹ From *ALEF Strategy, Method and Approach* (n/d)

² See home page at <https://en.alef.org/>



characteristics of the partners and their country contexts, and is followed by a description of each context.

Table 1: Partner organizations involved in ALEF Empowerment Groups

Country	Partner	Organizational focus	Context	Plan post-Level 3
DRC South Kivu province	ACDC Association congolaise pour le développement communautaire (with five sub-partners)	Women’s empowerment and literacy, capacity building and economic autonomy in their communities. http://ascodeco.org/ https://en.alef.org/kongo-kinshasa-adeck	Mashi language Armed conflict, corruption, weak infrastructure	That all groups transition into independent savings coops after Level 3
Uganda Entebbe region	CACI Change African Child International (with three sub-partners)	Improving economic opportunities for women and girls; also doing vocational training https://cacinternational.org/services/adult-literacy/ https://en.alef.org/uganda-caci	Luganda language Urban and semi-urban	That ex-Level 3 groups continue to meet for study, in coops or as savings groups

The program in the Democratic Republic of Congo takes place in Kabare, South Kivu, where ALEF's partner ACDC (Association Congolaise pour le Développement Communautaire) organizes facilitators to conduct Level 1 through 3 courses in Mashi L1. Swahili L2 is introduced at Level 2 and expanded upon at Level 3. Mashi is spoken by just over a million Shi people, of which approximately 45% are illiterate. The conflict situation and rains sometimes make travel difficult, but the coaches try to visit the study groups monthly and provide monitoring input to ACDC using the Kobo Toolbox app on tablets.³ In 2024, there were 100 groups and 2,303 participants, with 59 groups and 1,341 participants supported directly by ACDC.⁴ In addition there are over 55 MUSOs (savings groups) that continue without hands-on support from ALEF but with minimal support from one designated coach.

The program in Uganda takes place in Kampala and Entebbe, where ALEF’s partner CACI (Change African Child International) builds livelihoods by offering education in crafts, entrepreneurship and social initiatives combined with ALEF’s literacy approach. CACI’s group leaders conduct Level 1 through 3 courses in Luganda L1, the widely spoken national language, and English L2 is introduced at Level 2. In 2024, there were 104 groups and 2,437 participants, including groups that are not directly supported by CACI. In addition, among the ex-Level 3 groups are 25 savings groups and a number of income-generating projects that continue with minimal support from the coaches in their areas.

³ ALEF has used Kobo in the DRC since the beginning of 2023 and in Uganda since the beginning of 2024. Kobo is also used for participant surveys conducted at the beginning and end of each year and, since the end of 2024, for end-of-level test results from both countries. <https://www.kobotoolbox.org/>

⁴ Numbers for ACDC’s own groups are according to the 2024 test data registered with ACDC. Numbers for ASBL sub-partners are based on the latest project report.



While the lesson topics may differ, the thematic areas covered by both programs are broadly the same: family, health, rights, equality, household economy, entrepreneurship/income generation, civic participation and community cooperation. Agricultural topics are covered in the DRC but not in Uganda, where most groups meet in relatively urban areas.

The program has three levels. Groups of 15 to 25 participants meet for two hours twice or three times per week—at times they choose—for a period of 7 or 8 months, after which there is a 4-month break. The first year, at Level 1, participants learn basic reading and writing in the L1 (Mashi in the DRC and Luganda in Uganda). The second year, at Level 2, participants learn the four basic mathematics operations and apply numeracy to daily life. Also at Level 2, the additional language or L2 is introduced through short oral dialogues (Swahili in the DRC and English in Uganda). In Level 3, participants read and write longer L1 texts, hold discussions on human rights, learn to read and write in the L2, work with common documents, and create an income-generating or savings association.

An essential aspect of the ALEF program is its use of people's home languages, or L1s, which allow people to make important connections between oral and written communication. There are other reasons that L1s are important. The ALEF program is designed for adults with no or low literacy and numeracy skills whose intersectionality⁵ has characterized their experience of discrimination and disadvantage across society, including how they access or attempt to access formal education. Intersectionality refers to overlapping individual and group characteristics such as language, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status and remote rural life. These adults speak non-dominant languages, or languages that are not always valued in formal settings, and they lack opportunities to learn high-status dominant languages like French or English.⁶ The ALEF program gives people the opportunity to express themselves freely and meaningfully, to see their own languages in written form, to understand that they have a right to learn in their own languages, and to develop pride, confidence and self-esteem through their own languages.

1.3 ALEF's distinctive approach in international literacy

In the context of international literacy philosophies and approaches, ALEF is both consistent with current thinking and distinctive. ALEF's program design is inspired by Paulo Freire (e.g. 1970)⁷ and the REFLECT⁸ method that grew out of his work, but it is distinctive in that it combines strategies linking phonemes and graphemes (known in Sweden as *ljudningsmetoden*) with whole language (*läsning på talets grund*) and text-based learning (*pédagogie des textes*). The linking of

⁵ Intersectionality is the interconnected nature of social factors pertaining to an individual or group that underlie discrimination or disadvantage. See Crenshaw, K. (2017). *On Intersectionality: Essential Writings*. The New Press.

⁶ We use the term non-dominant instead of "minority," as so-called minority languages are often spoken by millions of people. See Kosonen, K. & Benson, C. (2013). Introduction: Inclusive teaching and learning through the use of non-dominant languages and cultures (pp. 1-16). In Benson, C. & Kosonen, K. (Eds.), *Language Issues in Comparative Education: Inclusive teaching and learning in non-dominant languages and cultures*. Sense.

⁷ See Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Seabury Press.

⁸ REFLECT, or Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowerment and Community Techniques, uses facilitated group learning with components of discussion and action. See Dyer, C. & Choksi, A. (1998). The REFLECT Approach to Literacy: Some issues of method. *Compare* 28(1), 75–92.



sounds with letters allows learners to decode words from beginning to end to uncover their meaning, while whole-word or whole language methods encourage learners to recognize entire meaningful words and to guess the meaning of larger segments of text based on various clues. Lesson texts are grammatically complete sentences that carry deep meaning for learners. They are usually about someone facing a dilemma, problem or debate that is highly relevant to participants' own lives. The group facilitator, who has received a two-week intensive course in how to apply the method, learns not to lecture participants but rather to guide discussions so that they arrive at conclusions and make decisions as a group.

ALEF's approach reflects advances in the field of international literacy. Literacy was traditionally considered a set of discrete skills that allow people access to written communication. Freire's work in Brazil beginning in the 1960s challenged teacher-centered pedagogy by calling for facilitators to be in dialogue with group members, with the aim of empowering marginalized people to become active participants in their own awakening or *conscientização* that they could combat injustices. Later, a wave of New Literacy scholars like Street (1984)⁹ and Barton & Hamilton (1998)¹⁰ brought about a wider understanding of reading and writing as social practice, showing how literacy skills should be developed and assessed in the context of the users and their needs, with an emphasis on social justice and participatory learning. This perspective sees literacy as meaningful in a certain linguistic and cultural context, where the use of written communication becomes integrated into people's lives in the ways they need.

Similarly, ALEF's approach demonstrates an understanding of literacy as social practice, linking reading, writing and calculating to diverse dimensions of people's lives through dialogue and connection between facilitators (also known as group leaders) and participants. These dimensions of life may be *cognitive*, understanding one's social reality; *economic*, finding means to support oneself; *political*, gaining strategies for participating in decision-making; and *psychological*, feeling oneself capable and worthy of acting on behalf of oneself (Stromquist, 2009).¹¹ In our analysis of ALEF participants' testimonials in Phase I of the evaluation, we found examples of how social justice and moral values are brought into literacy lessons. The theme-based lesson structure provides opportunities for participants to engage with issues relevant to their lives and to share experiences and strategies for improving their situations. ALEF's approach creates group learning and trust, which appears to expand the *psychological* domain beyond the individual to feeling oneself capable and worthy of acting on behalf of one's family and one's group, an aspect we explore throughout this evaluation.

To address all of the dimensions of life just mentioned, ALEF uses the languages spoken and understood well by learners for learning and discussion. The home language or L1 is widely considered the most efficient language for connecting spoken and written meanings, particularly when literacy participants have little access to dominant languages (Robinson, 2016).¹² The L1 is

⁹ See Street, B. (1984). *Literacy in Theory and Practice*. Cambridge University Press

¹⁰ See Barton, D. & Hamilton, M. (1998). *Local Literacies: Reading and Writing in One Community*. Routledge.

¹¹ See Stromquist, N. (2009). *Literacy and Empowerment: A Contribution to the Debate*. Background study for the United Nations Literacy Decade, 12.

¹² See Robinson, C. (2016). Languages in adult literacy: Policies and practices in Education for All and beyond. *Prospects* 46(1), 73-91.



important for cultural identity and self-esteem, particularly for people from marginalized groups. Meanwhile, the ALEF program recognizes that participants living in multilingual contexts are likely to benefit from some instruction in additional languages (L2s) and literacies to address some aspects of their lives.

Finally, current thinking about literacy also takes technology into consideration. This statement by UNESCO acknowledges that while the skills associated with literacy and numeracy are linked to social and even virtual interaction:

Beyond its conventional concept as a set of reading, writing and counting skills, literacy is now understood as a means of identification, understanding, interpretation, creation, and communication in an increasingly digital, text-mediated, information-rich and fast-changing world.¹³

ALEF recognizes that even the vulnerable groups targeted by adult literacy programs are increasingly exposed to and may make use of digital communication, at least in the form of mobile phones. Participants' increasing use of technology for written communication and banking is indicated in ALEF surveys, and is an aspect explored in this evaluation.

1.4 Details of ALEF's philosophy and method

Hélène Boethius, founder of ALEF, designed the method based on years of experience working with adults in low-literate environments, including in rural Togo. She has found evidence that self-expression in group settings can lead to changed behavior, understanding one's situation and healing from life's challenges.¹⁴ The program materials are based on a set of texts, beginning with short sentences and gradually increasing in length and complexity over the three-year period. These texts, developed by NGO partners in participants' own languages, take up themes that are highly relevant to participants' lives. They describe challenging situations or questions related, for example, to health, crops, money, women's rights, children's schooling, or domestic abuse. One example is "Tamale's wedding may never take place because his fiancée wants him to first test himself for HIV."¹⁵

ALEF addresses the need for a scalable, easy-to-use method by adhering to a set of steps. The following are the steps for Level 1:

¹³ See UNESCO's literacy-related website updated in February 2025: <https://www.unesco.org/en/literacy/need-know#:~:text=Beyond%20its%20conventional%20concept%20as,rich%20and%20fast%2Dchanging%20world>.

¹⁴ See Boëthius, H. (2018). ALEF's Empowerment Groups – the transforming power of self-expression as a method for adult literacy. Paper presented at the World Literacy Summit 2018, Oxford UK.

¹⁵ See the description on the ALEF website <https://en.alef.org/metoden>



Step 1: Theme text	The group leader (GL) writes the text on the board while participants watch. Example: Abra's baby had diarrhoea for four days. Then he died. GL reads the text, pointing to the words. Then participants repeat the words after the GL several times, with GL pointing as they go.
Step 2: New letter/ grapheme	GL writes one word from the text below it and asks participants to find it in the text. GL isolates a letter/grapheme in the word, sounds it out and asks participants to find it throughout the text, making the sound of the letter as they underline it. GL asks participants to underline letters from previous lessons. For words with all letters underlined, GL calls attention to the letters/sounds and asks participants to read those words.
Step 3: Discussion	GL re-reads the whole text and leads a 15-20 minute discussion based on three questions: 1. Have you had a similar experience? What happened? 2. Why do you think this happens? 3. What can we do to change this situation?
Step 4: Writing practice	Participants practice writing the new letter/grapheme. (Later, they practice combining letters into new words, or writing whole sentences in small groups or on their own.)
Step 5: Co-creating a text	Participants decide what their own text should say. They dictate the text to the GL, who writes it on the board. GL reads it back to participants and improvements may be made.
Step 6: Underlining letters in their text	GL asks participants to underline known letters/graphemes and read them. GL and participants practice reading the text together.

According to Boëthius (2018), most Level 1 learners have begun to “crack the code” after two months. “After three months, many can read the whole text which they have created together. At the end of seven months, up to 80% of the learners can read an unknown text in the mother tongue with understanding.”¹⁶

Levels 2 and 3 adapt the method according to more advanced learners. One Level 2 text example is: “X’s mother sent her to buy 9 eggs in the market. On the way home, she started to play with the other children and broke 4 eggs. When she came home her mother beat her with a stick, and hurt her so badly that she had to take the child to the hospital.”¹⁷ The Level 2 steps are: Silent reading from the booklets; individuals read aloud; group discussion about the text; attention to the mathematics problem in the text; math exercises on the board and then in their notebooks; L2 text reading and practice. The final step is for participants to create their own text based on the discussion.

At Level 3, the first step is for participants to read silently, then in pairs, and then aloud to the group, taking turns by paragraph and giving everyone an opportunity to read. This is followed by the discussion and then a numeracy or L2 lesson. The next meeting day, participants re-read the

¹⁶ See Boëthius, 2018, p. 5.

¹⁷ From *ALEF Strategy, Method and Approach*, internal document, no date, p.5.



theme text; review points made in the discussion; create a text in small groups; create and edit a text in the whole group; and copy the text into their notebooks; this is followed by an L2 lesson.

The texts created by participants, particularly those in Level 3, are often used for additional reading practice and for reinforcing important discussion points. In both DRC and Uganda, efforts are made to post the finalized texts in public places so that they are shared with the community.

2. Key questions and methodology

The second phase of the evaluation is a mixed-methods study and analysis of ALEF's method, implementation and organizational support for adult empowerment and literacy. The primary source of data is a set of interviews, observations and group discussions conducted in each country. Due to security issues in DRC as well as budget constraints, we agreed with ALEF staff that a hybrid model of data collection would be used. This meant an in-person visit by one evaluator (Erina Iwasaki) to Uganda, followed by virtual work by both evaluators with ALEF's partners in DRC so that similar data could be collected. Other sources of data are: end-of-year surveys collected by coaches and reported in Kobo; reports from monthly coach monitoring visits that include testimonies and texts composed by empowerment groups; and documentation supplied by ALEF, such as assessment results and budget information.

This phase of the evaluation addressed questions of effectiveness and relevance of ALEF's approach and implementation in terms of:

- Skills: Literacy in L1, numeracy and L2 learning
- Effects: Empowerment, human rights and poverty alleviation

ALEF's approach makes an explicit effort to blend skills training with theme discussions and group activities to achieve the desired effects without leaving them to chance. To the degree possible, we looked at each of these skills and effects separately. Acknowledging that ALEF's program works for results in a holistic manner, we also looked at the compounded, synergistic aspects of the program.

2.1 Terminology

The individual stakeholders in ALEF's program are identified in this way:

Participant	Group member involved in ALEF's empowerment and literacy activities
Facilitator (DRC) Group leader (Uganda)	Person responsible for empowerment and literacy teaching and learning
Coach	Supervisor and resource person for multiple facilitators
Partner	Country-based organization implementing ALEF's program



To discuss the activities of groups during and after completing Level 3, the following terms are used:

DRC	Uganda
ASBL = <i>Association sans but lucratif</i> or non-profit organization MUSO = <i>Mutuelle de solidarité</i> or savings group	CBO = Community-based organization for income generation VSLA = Village Savings and Loan Association

For purposes of reporting the results of qualitative data while respecting the anonymity of those who spoke with us, the following shorthand is used:

KII	Key informant interview
FGD	Focus group discussion: Discussions held with entire groups
Obs	Observation of class
Valid	Validation meeting: Meetings to check our understandings of the data

Based on these short descriptions, we identify each source of information without using names or places, for example:

Obs Ug lev3b	Observation in Uganda of Level 3 group b
FGD Ug GL1	Discussion in Uganda, comment by group leader 1
KII DRC Prtnr2	Interview in DRC with partner 2
FGD DRC Coach5	Discussion in DRC, comment by coach 5

When we share quotations, it should be noted that some are in the first person and some in the third person, depending on how interpreters phrased what they heard. Where possible, especially in the case of the participants, we attempt to list whether the person is female or male.

2.2 Questions guiding the evaluation

ALEF's ultimate aim of empowerment and poverty alleviation can be broken down into a collection of desired outcomes based on course participation and the creation of cohesive groups of participants who remain together to help each other improve their life situations.

As mentioned above, the overall questions to be addressed by the evaluation were related to *skills* and to *effects* of participating in the Empowerment Groups:

1. How effective and relevant is ALEF's approach in terms of actual *literacy, numeracy and second language learning*?
2. How effective and relevant is ALEF's approach in terms of *empowerment, human rights and poverty alleviation*?



ALEF was also interested in whether a *cost-benefit analysis* could be determined for each of the two settings. In **Annex B** we link these main research questions to the types of data collection done for this evaluation.

Further, based on the findings of the first phase of the evaluation, we aimed to investigate some aspects of the program in more detail in an effort to see how they functioned and to determine whether possible improvements could be suggested. Such aspects of the program included:

Lesson themes: We aimed to look at lesson content, noting which themes are most appreciated/mentioned by participants, how gender and other cross-cutting issues are represented, how these themes are seen by partners to represent relevant issues in people's lives, and how regional differences are accommodated.

Group discussions: We planned to observe how discussions are facilitated in terms of the space given to individual participants, how safe they appear in sharing personal experiences and concerns, and how the facilitators use questions to steer the direction of discussions, to determine whether there are possible strategies for improving the empowering aspects of such discussions.

Group text production: We also wanted to look at the content of the texts produced by the groups following their discussions, how participants interpreted lesson themes, how their own experiences were incorporated, and how texts are used by participants and/or the public to promote exposure in the community.

Mutual support: It seemed useful to find out how groups may act to defend the rights of individuals and the community, how they perceive this as an outcome of participation in the program, how groups are formed for savings or income generation, and what they perceive as the conditions under which these groups function optimally.

Further questions we examined were raised by the Phase I analysis, including:

- *How are ALEF participants using IT, e.g. SMS, mobile money transfer and social media, and how do these uses call for or practice literacy and numeracy skills taught in the current curricula for each country?*
- *What are people writing in the L1? What is available to read in the L1 in each locale? What happens to the texts that the groups create?*
- *How much need do participants have for the L2, orally and in writing?*
- *How do participants develop critical thinking skills, the ability to state problems and discuss solutions, and ways to make group membership safe for sharing?*

We pursued all of these questions to the degree possible during this evaluation study. They appear in the overall list of questions designed for key informants in **Annex C**. Our findings are reported where applicable under the skill sections. Those meriting separate mention are described in **Section 5**, even in cases where we did not find conclusive answers.



2.3 How the fieldwork was conducted

As noted, the hybrid model adopted for this evaluation meant that Erina would conduct an in-person visit to ALEF’s partner organization CACI in Uganda, followed by virtual work by both evaluators with ACDC in DRC to guide the collection of similar data. What was originally conceived as capacity building with ACDC, who would be collecting the data, grew into a fruitful collaboration to determine how stakeholder consent would be requested and gained in the field and how observations, interviews and group discussions would be recorded, interpreted/translated and shared. ALEF staff kindly arranged for financial and logistical support in both countries and the hiring of a videographer in DRC so that recordings could be shared with us. The evaluators drew on the assistance of interns and volunteer research assistants to help with transcribing and organizing the data.

The timeline of the work was the following (see **Annex D** for details):

July 2024	Research/evaluation preparation
Aug	Erina’s fieldwork (4-11 Aug) with CACI, Uganda
Sept	Analysis and reporting of Uganda data
Oct	Zoom interviews and collaboration meetings with ACDC
Nov	Data collection by ACDC & analysis
Dec	Data analysis and fact-checking with both partners; survey data sharing with ALEF
Jan 2025	Validation meetings with partners and ALEF; write-up of final evaluation products
Feb	Final report completed and article drafted; final edits completed in Mar/Apr

The data collection in the field for both countries is summarized in **Table 2**. Overall, twelve study groups covering Levels 1, 2 and 3 were observed and participated in discussions; twelve facilitators/group leaders were interviewed and eight participated in a discussion. We spoke with seven coaches, four partner representatives and additional stakeholders. For details about the data gathered in each country see **Annexes D** and **E**.



Table 2: Field data collected for this evaluation

Country program	Uganda-CACI	DRC-ACDC	TL
Levels covered	1, 2, 3, Ex-lev3	1, 2, 3, MUSO	–
Class observations [Obs lev1-3]	7	5	12
Facilitator/Group leader interviews [KII facil/GL]	6	6	12
Facilitator/Group leader discussions [FGD facil/GL]	–	1 TL 8 F: 5 M: 3	1
Participant discussions [FGD lev1-3]	7 TL 120 F: 115 M: 5	5 TL 103 F: 96 M: 7	12 TL 223 F: 211 M: 12
Ex-participant interview [KII ex-part]	1	–	1
MUSO discussions [FGD MUSO]	–	2	2
Coach interview [KII coach]	1	–	1
Coach discussions [FGD coaches]	1 TL 6 F: 3 M: 3	1 TL 6 F: 2 M: 4	2
Program manager interview [KII prtnr]	1	1	2
Program coordinator interview [KII prtnr]	(Included in coach disc)	1	1

2.4 How the fieldwork data were handled and analyzed

In Uganda, we determined that the data collected by Erina and hosts in August would be audio recorded with the permission of the stakeholders. (It was determined that this would be the least disruptive method for recording the data we needed.) Those recordings were transcribed by playing them using Zoom’s AI function and then edited by Erina and two interns at MLE International. Because we wanted some more precise translations from Luganda, Erina identified six potentially important points made by stakeholders (two per level) and a Luganda-speaking volunteer transcribed them in Luganda and supplied translations in English.

In DRC, the two ACDC partner members who made the visits and coordinated the data gathering in November were accompanied by a videographer. Some of the orientations we gave the partners included where the videographer should stand to capture the blackboard and participants’ activities without disrupting the group; this was done as requested. Other orientations were given on requesting verbal consent from individuals and groups before talking to them and recording. We



also discussed how interviews and discussions could be conducted to include French interpretations so that we could capture what had been said on video. The classroom observations were not interpreted, but video close-ups were taken of the blackboard, books and individuals reading and writing.

In DRC, due to limited internet connectivity and the challenges of uploading videos so that we could access them, the videographer was instructed to record short representative parts of lesson observations, and interviews and discussions had to be divided into 5-minute segments. Understandably, some conversations were difficult to hear or got cut off, so we worked hard with the partners to organize the data and confirm that we received everything that was recorded.

For each country case, we created a matrix file listing each of the data sources and linking the audio or video recording, the AI transcript, the edited transcript and identification of the editor. We stored all files in a shared Google folder with controlled sharing privileges.

To analyze the qualitative data, we created a framework that organized the findings by research question. Then we copied and pasted main points, quotes and summaries from the data sources into the appropriate space in the framework, analyzing and synthesizing what we had learned. That formed the basis for the report writing, which follows the same format.

As a final step in the process, we carried out separate validation meetings with ACDC, CACI and ALEF staff before completing this report. The meetings allowed us to discuss our preliminary findings and get answers to questions that came up during data analysis.

2.5 Limitations of the field data

One limitation is that the qualitative data gathered in the field cannot necessarily be interpreted as representative because the sample of stakeholders was not random nor was it statistically chosen. However, in both countries we were able to gather data from at least two groups at each level as well as representatives from the fourth (post-course) level, including their facilitators who were available, all of the coaches, and key representatives of the partner organizations. In both cases we can be relatively confident that their points of view adequately reflect the range of experiences people have in the ALEF program, particularly since they are consistent with the findings of the Phase I testimonials study that covered all participants from the year before.

In terms of our observations in both countries, we saw a range of interactions but only short discussions of lesson themes (in Uganda) and some collaborative group writing of texts at Level 2. This was partially due to the short time available to observe and interview stakeholders, as we understand that discussions normally take up the whole second hour of a lesson. In DRC, the observations were done in November when groups were reviewing. This may explain why we saw more book-related interaction, very few open discussions and no text production, unfortunately, so we are forced to rely on stakeholder accounts of those activities.

It might be considered a limitation that the DRC data were collected by the partners without the evaluators' direct participation; however, we would have relied on the partners for the same help—



and did so in Uganda—because we do not speak Luganda or Mashi. We did prepare the partners to observe evaluation protocols (like obtaining consent), use appropriate languages and phrasing to ask the questions, and interpret the responses into French in the video recordings. It is certainly a limitation in both countries that due to time most interpreting was done for us quickly and perhaps by paraphrasing or finding rough equivalents for what was said. We attempted to compensate by identifying five key statements from each country to have transcribed into the L1s and then closely translated, which not only gives the evaluation some reliable quotes but also demonstrates the value of good interpretation and translation when practicable for future monitoring and evaluation.

2.6 Additional data collected and analyzed

In addition to the field data, a major source of information both for ALEF and for this evaluation is the survey conducted by coaches in both countries at the beginning and end of each year with approximately 100 randomly selected participants per level. ALEF had reviewed the 2023 survey and removed some questions deemed inappropriate such as household infant mortality. ALEF shared the 2024 baseline data so we could compare the beginning- and end-of-year results. We sent some suggestions for survey items (see complete list in **Annex F**) based on findings of the Phase I evaluation, and ALEF was able to incorporate some of them into the endline survey conducted in November of 2024, including the following:

Skills:	Do you know how to use a cell phone to transfer money?
	Do you know how to use a cell phone to send text messages?
	Do you read for pleasure in your free time? What do you read?
Self-esteem:	Do you hold a position of responsibility in your community?
Final question:	Which lesson(s) were most useful to you? Why?

We were also able to access all monitoring data that coaches input into **Kobo**, including **attendance, assessment results, texts written by groups, and testimonials** gathered during their monthly visits over the year. We relied mainly on ALEF’s analysis of statistical information, but did our own analyses of the favorite lesson themes, texts and testimonials. We also reviewed the list of **lesson themes** by level for each country, and juxtaposed these with the “most useful lessons” data collected in the endline survey. We had considered creating our own assessments but decided to review the ALEF assessments and results as the best way to look at how participants are assessed and the passing rates.

3. Findings: ALEF’s approach to literacy, numeracy and L2 learning

This section reports on the evaluation findings related to the skills that are taught and learned in the ALEF Empowerment Groups in DRC and Uganda. The main source of information is the qualitative data gathered in each country, which consists of statements made by stakeholders, including the participants themselves, former participants, facilitators (known as group leaders in



Uganda), coaches and members of partner organizations. When relevant, we triangulate this information with class observations as well as with data generated by ALEF, including assessment results and KOBO reports. We also cross-reference findings with the results of our Phase I study of participants' testimonials.

Overall, we find strong evidence in both countries that ALEF's program is effective and relevant in teaching literacy in the home language (L1), numeracy and L2 skills over the three course levels. Further, there are clear indications that there are indeed positive effects that go beyond simple skills toward improving people's lives and livelihoods, as we will report in **Sections 4, 5 and 6**.

There are three subsections for each skill, alternating between the qualitative findings supporting the learning of that skill, the 2024 assessment results in both countries, and any challenges or concerns we have noted. All findings are marked with bullet points, substantiated by key quotes from the field data (in text boxes). **Where there are additional supporting quotes, we indicate with the symbol ⊕ that they are provided in Annex H.**

Regarding any challenges or concerns, we note that many have already been identified by and/or discussed with ALEF, so they are here mainly for documentation purposes. We will pick them up again in the implications and recommendations in **Section 7**. In general, we find that they are relatively minor and do not detract from the strong positive results we see across the board in terms of skills development.

3.1 Effectiveness and relevance of literacy

There is no doubt that the ALEF study groups known as Empowerment Groups in both countries promote reading and writing skills development, and that these skills are practical and applicable to participants' lives. The effectiveness and relevance of the approach are consistent with the testimonials and evident in the data reported in this section.

- **Participants report significant changes in their lives related specifically to reading and writing.**

Before attending the study groups, some mention feeling shame that they could not help their children with their homework, while others mention having been mocked or cheated by others. Written communication is seen to open many doors. Some skills that participants appreciate include writing their own names and those of their children, understanding information sent from the school about their children, reading passages from the Bible, writing shopping lists, keeping track of debts, reading local signage, checking medicine bottles, and gaining knowledge from text. Simply holding a writing instrument can be a source of pride. Some proudly mention that they read and reply to text messages on their phones.

Reading and writing are usually mentioned by participants as the first thing they wanted to learn and the first thing they are happy about learning. Literacy and numeracy skills are often mentioned together and associated with bettering one's own life and the lives of one's children. For example, participants in Uganda mentioned using their newfound skills to market their vegetables: one now



writes advertisements for her produce for the radio announcer, another lets clients know via WhatsApp what produce she has available.

She's grateful. She didn't know how to write her name. First of all, through the learning, she has learned even how to write her own and her children's names. She has learned public speech. She was too shy and used to be very good. Now that she can even stand and share ideas, she's happy. She says she has learnt how to manage her business and knows how to even pay herself. [Female participant, FGD Ug lev3b]

La lecture [est la chose la plus importante que nous ayons apprise]. La plupart d'entre nous avons des maris qui voyagent beaucoup en dehors de notre village et pour nous contacter ils écrivent des messages. Auparavant, elle devait aller chercher quelqu'un pour lui lire le message que son mari lui avait envoyé. Mais à partir de ces instructions, elle peut maintenant lire ces messages malgré qu'elle ne soit pas tout à fait (inaudible...) Savoir déchiffrer ces messages nous a beaucoup aidé.

[Reading [is the most important thing we've learned]. Most of us have husbands who travel a lot outside our village and to contact us they write messages. In the past, she had to fetch someone to read the message her husband had sent her. But with these instructions, she can now read these messages even though she's not quite (inaudible...) Knowing how to decipher these messages has helped us a lot.] [Female participant, FGD DRC lev1b]



- **Participants are happy and enthusiastic about developing their literacy skills.**

Participants' satisfaction with the program is reported by themselves and by many facilitators/group leaders and coaches. Facilitators especially notice the involvement of participants in their lessons and hear what they say about the usefulness of their new skills.

But right now she can write her name, she can read some sentences, some words. She's happy. [Female participant, FGD Ug lev1a]

D'abord dans la classe, je vois l'engouement des gens qui veulent aller au tableau et je regarde ce que chacun fait ce que chacun écrit et la lecture qu'ils font, et aussi en dehors de la salle, je me tiens beaucoup plus au témoignage des participants. Il y en a qui me disent que maintenant ils sont en mesure de lire des panneaux. D'autres disent qu'ils peuvent suivre la situation de leurs enfants à l'école en lisant ce qu'on appelle ici les cahiers de communication.

[Firstly, in the classroom, I see the enthusiasm of people who want to go to the board and I watch what everyone does, what everyone writes and what they read, and also outside the room, I rely much more on the testimony of the participants. Some of them tell me that they can now read signs. Others say they can keep track of their children's progress at school by reading what we call communication notebooks.] [KII DRC facil lev3b]





- **Participants recognize letters and words, read from the ALEF books, and write letters, words and sentences on the board, depending on their levels.**

Observations in both countries indicate that participants in all three levels are involved in the lessons, that they consistently raise their hands to answer, and that they are ready when called upon by the facilitators to go to the board to read, write or underline a syllable, or to answer the questions asked. When seated, they follow in their books, sometimes using their fingers or a bookmark in Level 1 to guide their reading. They sometimes share books and help each other.

We also observed Level 3 participants reading silently [e.g., Obs Ug lev3b].

Members read on their own but they can't fully do so. Group leader says/reads and with her help, they are able to read. [Obs Ug lev1b]

- **The L1 is an important aspect of literacy learning.**

The home language (L1) is necessary and helpful; there is no question about its importance for the ALEF program. Even if younger people in both countries mention their interest in an L2, and possibly losing some ability in the L1, the program itself is unwavering in its investment in learning through the L1. We understand that in Uganda some people from other language groups want to use the program to learn Luganda [KII Ug coach1], but the program avoids that kind of teaching except for occasional participants with languages that are linguistically very close [Ug Valid Prtnr1]. Some comments indicate an understanding of the importance of protecting the L1 and developing skills in the L1 that will later be useful in the L2.

Luganda is very helpful... Today [we] did the days of the week, but some of them didn't know the Luganda version so that also is helping them to understand. Some of them had no idea about it. [KII Ug GL lev2a]

La première langue, le Mashi, qui est la langue maternelle, permet de transmettre la matière car tout le monde connaît la langue. Alors c'est plus facile. C'est pratique aussi pour les participants pour comprendre les instructions que nous donnons dans la langue.

[The first language, Mashi, which is the mother tongue, makes it easier to pass on the material, because everyone knows the language. So it's easier. It's also convenient for the participants to understand the instructions we give in the language.] [FGD DRC Coach2]



- **The facilitators are aware of the progress being made by their group participants.**

There is evidence from DRC that the facilitators are finding ways to check for understanding of reading and writing on the part of learners.

Je tiens beaucoup sur les écritures et les discussions. C'est ceci qui motive les groupes ... Chaque fois que je commence une leçon, je mets par exemple les mots au tableau, et je demande aux gens de lire et écrire, et je sais détecter qui n'a pas appris le mot. Je fais beaucoup d'exercices dans ce sens et c'est comme ça que je détecte là où il faut revenir là où il faut passer.



[I put a lot of emphasis on writing exercises and discussion. This is what motivates the groups... Every time I start a lesson, I put the words on the board, for example, and ask people to read and write, and I can detect who has not learned the word. I do a lot of exercises along those lines, and that is how I detect where we need to come back, [and] where we need to move on.] [KII DRC facil lev1c]

En tant que facilitatrice, j'insiste beaucoup sur les lettres et le fait de savoir lire et écrire, pour le premier niveau ici. Et aussi le comptage... Je m'assure que les participants ont acquis des compétences en écriture en lecture et en calcul quand je donne des applications pendant la leçon pour m'assurer que tout le monde est en train d'écrire; mais aussi je suis les mouvements de ce qu'il se passe au tableau pour voir si ils maîtrisent correctement ce qui a été dit.
[As a facilitator, I really insist on letters and being able to read and write, for the first level here. And also counting... I make sure participants have acquired literacy and numeracy skills when I give applications during the lesson to make sure everyone is writing; but also I follow the movements of what is happening on the board to see if they have mastered what has been said correctly.] [KII DRC facil lev1a]

3.2 Literacy assessment results

The 2024 end-of-year results for literacy are broken down into reading and writing. As shown in **Tables 3** and **4**, it appears that results are generally higher for Uganda, with 90 to 93% passing each assessment, while in the DRC the success rates are wider ranging and between 81 and 88%. The differences in results are explored in the next section with regard to those who are not successfully demonstrating literacy skills.

Table 3: Uganda 2024 Results of reading and writing assessments in Luganda

Level	READING				WRITING				Total tested
	Fail N	Fail %	Pass N	Pass %	Fail N	Fail %	Pass N	Pass %	
1	70	10	600	90	60	9	610	91	670
2	47	7	606	93	57	9	596	91	653
3	31	8	356	92	39	10	348	90	387
Total	148		1,562		156		1,554		1,710

Table 4: DRC 2024 Results of reading and writing assessment in Mashii

Level	READING				WRITING				Total tested
	Fail N	Fail %	Pass N	Pass %	Fail N	Fail %	Pass N	Pass %	
1	87	15	477	85	68	12	496	88	564
2	75	18	352	82	57	13	370	87	427
3	39	14	231	86	50	19	220	81	270
Total	201		1,060		175		1,086		1,261

We did not include the results of the sub-partner NGOs because ALEF has little influence over their activities.



3.3 Challenges with regard to literacy

We had no real concerns with literacy-related aspects of the program, but we did notice areas that might be addressed if there are future opportunities. We have already discussed some of these with stakeholders, but mention them here so they can be kept in mind.

- **Facilitators/group leaders may have challenges implementing the ALEF method.**

We were only able to observe short parts of lessons in each country; these lessons were observed mid-year in Uganda and at the end of the year in DRC. In one way, facilitators appeared to adhere too much to the method, especially with regard to repetitive activities that become less necessary as participants develop literacy skills. In another way, facilitators appeared not to have adapted completely to the method, in that they relied on teacher-centered strategies. This was especially noticeable at Level 1.

In both countries, we found that lessons tended to be conducted in a friendly but traditional, teacher-centered manner. For example, when a question was asked, participants raised their hands and waited to be called on. In some Level 1 classes, we saw teachers reading first and participants repeating, which is indeed a step in the method (see **Section 1.4** above) but should not be necessary at the mid-point of the year or later, because the participants are already reading/decoding in their own language. In one Level 1 class in Uganda (in August), the group leader read the text twice aloud, then all read together three times; following this, there was a discussion dominated by five participants [Obs Ug lev1a]. Even if the text is too advanced for participants to read on their own, we would expect some practice in decoding rather than simple repetition. We would also expect participants to be accustomed to sharing the floor with the whole group.

We did see Level 1 facilitators in DRC (at the end of the year) calling on different participants by name and giving many opportunities to come to the board to underline letters. Again, the underlining of letters is a step in the method, but this part of the method seemed overly repetitive and unnecessary by this stage of the year. In Uganda, Level 1 study groups seemed particularly mechanical and controlled, but we understand this may be a symptom of having new group leaders at these levels, whereas Levels 2 and 3 usually have experienced ones. We also understand that there may be pedagogical traditions in post-colonial settings that are difficult to overcome, so even if the ALEF methodology appears mechanical and repetitive, especially in the Level 1 DRC class observations, it does result in successful literacy learning. In **Section 7** below regarding the implications of our findings, we revisit this question and suggest a two-track approach to help facilitators/group leaders to think of literacy content in terms of whether the aim is accuracy or meaning-making.

The only challenge that group leaders do face now is to find themselves to implement the methodology, practicability. Especially Level 1s who are beginning. It's not so easy for them to really apply what you want on the ground. [FGD Ug coach 23:18]

We acknowledge that different facilitators may integrate the method into their practice in different ways, even if they are all trained at the beginning. ALEF may wish to review the Level 1 method to help teachers adapt the steps when participants have gained enough literacy skills.



- **We wonder if there is an abrupt increase in difficulty between the levels.**

When observing people using the Level 2 and 3 books, the print seemed very small and paragraphs seemed long, considering that most participants are newly literate. We understand that the typeface and size of the books change at Level 3. According to ALEF staff, this is to prepare participants to read ordinary printed material. However, they have had difficulties in the past with printers reducing the size of the page or altering layout. This year there is a new printer in Bukavu and they are hoping for better quality at a lower cost.

We defer to ALEF and the partners to check on the situation. One partner in DRC mentioned that some participants have vision problems, so it may be important to follow up.

- **Not all participants are successful in their literacy learning.**

We understand from facilitators/group learners that there are participants who have limited success in learning to read and write. Erina noticed some Level 3 participants who did not seem to be writing texts during an observation. The 2024 assessment results reported above show that a significant percentage of participants do not pass the literacy assessment: in Uganda those figures are 10% in reading and 10% in writing, while in DRC they are 19% in reading and 18% in writing. We consider this a normal challenge for any educational program, but also a situation to be monitored in the search for opportunities to improve the success rate. The statements in the text boxes describe the situation. Participants may be prevented from attending regularly due to illness, child caregiving, work or other commitments. In some places, the instability of the meeting place (or its double use for church or community events) may cause missed lessons that compound the problem for some participants.

Some quit, some come back, some stay and persevere. [KII Ug GL lev2a]

Les changements, déjà, c'est qu'ils savent lire et écrire. Mais il y en a qui finissent le programme sans savoir lire et écrire, ils passent trois ans sans apprendre à lire et écrire... Des mots, des phrases et des paragraphes, au moins 60 %, 70 % peuvent le faire. Et le reste c'est difficile un peu.

[The first change is that they know how to read and write. But there are some who finish the program without knowing how to read and write, they spend three years without learning to read and write... Words, sentences and paragraphs, at least 60%, 70% can do it. And the rest is a bit difficult.] [KII DRC facil lev2a]

The partners acknowledge the challenge. A Uganda partner pointed out that people learn at different paces, and that the “slow runners” may contribute richly to the discussions. A DRC partner mentioned a few challenges of the low-literacy environment: competing programs, people wanting to join a MUSO without learning literacy, social constraints, elderly participants and, again, absenteeism. Partners in both places acknowledge that there are people who are more motivated to join the savings groups than to master the skills.

Not everyone grasps everything at the same time. There are those who we call slow runners.



They are there, but at the end of the seven months ... they learn something, and some of those run through discussions. They may not write perfectly, but they are good in other [things]. Like, when they are discussing, they contribute a lot, they share their life experiences, and they help the other ones to come up...Yeah, they are there, but they are very few. That's why some fail, and do not join the CBO. [Ug Valid Prtnr2]

Pourquoi il y a des échecs ? ...On a trouvé qu'il y a beaucoup de conflits d'intérêts entre certains programmes dans la communauté et les heures de, par exemple, de pendant lesquels ils apprennent, quand il y a rencontre des groupes... Mais ici aussi... comme ce sont des personnes âgées, ils sont souvent malades. Bon, il y a beaucoup de défis comme ça qui font que finalement ils ne viennent pas régulièrement, et ça joue grandement sur leur capacité d'apprendre, parce que quand ils viennent une semaine après ou deux jours après ils ont raté deux trois rencontres. Parfois, ça peut être difficile de rattraper l'évolution normale des autres.

[Why are there failures? ...We have found that there are a lot of conflicts of interest between certain programs in the community and, for example, the hours during which they learn, when the groups meet... But here too... as they are elderly people, they're often ill. So there are a lot of challenges like that that mean they do not come regularly, and that has a big impact on their ability to learn, because when they come a week or two later, they have missed two or three meetings. Sometimes, it can be difficult to catch up with the normal evolution of the others.]

[DRC Valid Prtnr1]



ALEF staff report that the passing rates have been a constant concern. Uganda normally has over 90% passing rate, while DRC has had uneven results around 70%, so the local context clearly plays a role. There are many other factors that could explain the rates– course content, course delivery, the assessment itself or grading– and ALEF’s best guess is that all of these factors are involved [Valid ALEF1]. ALEF has worked with ACDC to revise the assessment and “lighten” the approach to grading, which may be overly strict, as it seems to be with other countries that share French colonial heritage.

ALEF staff also report working with partners on a “second chance” option, where participants who do not pass the test would have another opportunity [Valid ALEF2]. If they still do not pass, they could technically repeat the level, join another group. However, both of these options are challenging in the field, as there might not be time for re-assessment and there might not be available groups to take in repeaters. ALEF and ACDC have discussed this, as the participants who have not passed have been allowed to stay in their groups to be part of the MUSO later. In Uganda, CACI has reportedly been more systematic with support, asking facilitators to work extra with those who have not passed, or finding them new groups.

However, we share the concern of ALEF staff that there should not be too many participants progressing to Levels 2 and 3 who have not “mastered the basics” as this might hurt learning outcomes for others in Level 3 activities, for example, where they are asked to read a text and write something about it [Valid ALEF1]. There are minimal criteria to be met, but it is the partners who make the final decision.



- **Opportunities for people to read and write the L1**

One of the areas we had hoped to explore in the field is what people are writing in the L1 and what is available to read in the L1 in each locale. Participants are quoted above talking about all of the practical uses of L1 reading and writing, but we did not find much evidence of reading material like brochures or books. This makes it very important to think about ways that materials can be created and shared. We are aware that small books have been created by the ALEF program that can be borrowed and shared. We will discuss the creation of materials further in **Section 7** regarding implications.

Bon, ce sont des livrets qu'on a créés pour eux quand on a fait l'inventaire de tout ce que les gens peuvent lire dans la L1. On a trouvé qu'il n'y a pas suffisamment de choses à lire, c'est pour cela qu'on avait créé uniquement ces quatre livrets: Livrets de lecture supplémentaires.
[Well, these are booklets we created for them when we made an inventory of everything people can read in L1. We found that there wasn't enough to read, which is why we only created these four booklets: Livrets de lecture supplémentaires.] [DRC Valid Prtnr2]

3.4 Effectiveness and relevance of numeracy

Just as participants report very positive changes in their lives with regard to literacy skills, they report important steps forward with regard to learning to write and understand numbers. They mention having gained a wide range of numeracy skills and applications: being able to count, do calculations, use a calculator, tell time, measure (e.g. fabric), plan budgets, keep records, verify payments (e.g. those made to schools for their children) and balance books. We note that there are many facets of numeracy, from simply being able to write down numbers like prices or telephone numbers to more complex understandings of how mathematical calculations relate to life situations. The skills they gain include written and digital literacy, depending on their contexts. Stakeholders give many reasons why these skills are important.

- **Participants can no longer be cheated.**

Like one woman in the Phase I study who learned she had been cheated by her own husband, participants in both countries talked about gaining the ability to keep track of costs, what they earn and debts so that they cannot be cheated. “She can now count money accurately” [KII Ug GL lev2b] is more than a surface-level skill; it prevents participants from being vulnerable, even to people or institutions they should be able to trust.

Sur le plan des droits aussi, ils ont appris comment on procède pour, par exemple, quand un responsable de l'école, il donne à l'enfant quelque chose pour se faire payer [par les parents]. Maintenant, quand on lui amène des reçus [comme preuve de paiement], il doit vérifier. Ça ne se faisait pas avant. Il disait avant 'Bon, j'ai envoyé de l'argent à l'école, c'est fini'. Maintenant ils ont commencé à vérifier si le montant qu'il a donné ce n'est pas celui qui figure sur le reçu, il doit aller à l'école. Même les enfants ont appris que peut-être il ne peut plus tricher un parent dans ce sens-là.

[In terms of rights too, they've learned how to go about it, for example, when a school official



gives a child something to get paid {by the parents}. Now, when we bring him receipts [as proof of payment], he has to check them. That was not done before. He used to say, 'Well, I have sent money to the school, it's over.' Now they've started to check whether the amount he has given is not what is on the receipt, he has to go to the school. Even the kids have learned that maybe he cannot cheat a parent in that sense anymore.] [KII DRC prtnr2]

- **Participants have learned to handle currency in large numbers.**

Because the currency in both countries suffers from inflation, the equivalent of one USD is about 3,700 Ugandan shillings or 2,900 Congolese francs. Even if participants are familiar with the values, it is important for them to be able to read (interpret) and write down amounts in the tens and hundred thousands and even millions. According to a group leader in Uganda, “At first, they didn't know how to write the big amounts like in the million and they didn't know how to read them” but now “when they go back to their businesses, they don't make losses again” [KII Ug GL lev2b]. In the DRC, participants not only learn to understand francs but also be able to convert to USD, which is also in circulation. Facilitators in both countries stress that this aspect of numeracy is making a difference to participants.

Mon intention est que les participants changent leur vie, améliorent leur vie. J'ai prêté mon attention sur le fait que les participants devaient savoir faire les transactions de monnaie des dollars en francs...les francs en dollars. Si ils savent faire ça quand ils ont des marchandises, ça va changer autant du jour pour éviter des pertes.

[My intention is that participants change their lives, improve their lives. I paid attention to the fact that participants should know how to do currency transactions from dollars to francs...francs to dollars. If they know how to do that when they have goods, it will very much change the day to avoid losses.] [KII DRC facil lev2a]

- **Participants are able to start up and run small businesses.**

According to stakeholders in Uganda, particularly in a market town, an important reason people joined the Empowerment Groups was that “they were lacking in records keeping and business accounting... so that's why they joined and now they have learnt how to do that” [FGD Ug lev3b]. A woman in another group “can now count, work on her business, and count the profits and plan for it” [KII Ug GL lev2b]. Participants also have skills to run their households.

She can now budget for her family. She knows how much she spends in a day. She knows what she's going to save for the future. She has learnt a lot. They have gained a lot of knowledge. She is serious. She is really serious. [FGD Ug lev3a]

Connaissances [importantes]: La mathématique des gens qui commencent à faire des petits bilans chez eux, à la maison où vous voyez ils ont une colonne des gens qui sont endettés, une colonne de combien ils ont gagné, ce genre de choses.

[Important skills: The mathematics of people who are starting to do little balance sheets at home, where you see they have a column of people who are in debt, a column of how much



they have earned, that sort of thing.] [KII DRC Prtnr1]



3.5 Numeracy assessment results

The 2024 end-of-year results for numeracy are presented in **Tables 5 and 6**. As for the literacy data, we did not include the results of the sub-partner NGOs. In this case, participants from the two countries have similar success rates, even while DRC rates are lower overall. Both countries have much lower results for numeracy than for literacy.

Table 5: Uganda 2024 Results of numeracy assessment

Level	NUMERACY				Total tested
	Fail N	Fail %	Pass N	Pass %	
1	104	16	566	84	670
2	148	23	505	77	653
3	58	15	329	85	387
Total	310		1,400		1,710

Table 6: DRC 2024 Results of numeracy assessment

Level	NUMERACY				Total tested
	Fail N	Fail %	Pass N	Pass %	
1	111	20	453	80	564
2	88	21	339	79	427
3	61	23	209	77	270
Total	260		1,001		1,261

3.6 Challenges with regard to numeracy

As with literacy, we had no real concerns with numeracy-related aspects of the program, but we did notice areas that might be addressed if there are future opportunities. We have also discussed these with stakeholders, as demonstrated with quotes.

- **There is a possible jump in difficulty between levels 1 and 2.**

While observing groups in Uganda, Erina noticed that the size of the numbers in Level 1 (two- and three-digit) increased rapidly in Level 2, which seemed quite mathematics-heavy, and we noticed in DRC that the mathematical processes seemed quite challenging. The partners agreed that the numeracy work at Level 2 is challenging; however, in Uganda they thought the sequence was gradual enough, and in DRC they thought the level could be managed with good teaching. One partner suggested that more pedagogical tools like calculators could be used to make numeracy more attractive, because it is important for empowerment [DRC Valid Prtnr1].



Yes, [there is] more of math [at Level 2] because the women are in economic areas, business areas, so subtracting and giving balances in terms of money, it's completely hectic for them, using a calculator to add a lot of commodities you are selling off. It's not easy for this person... making the budgets for your things you are to buy. It's not easy for these people here, so they are trying to introduce it in their daily lives and make use of it. So I think it's not a difficult thing, but still it is the process that goes on. You are adding from what you stopped on Level 1. Then here you are, adding a bit of it as you go ahead. [Ug Valid Prtnr1]

Oui, c'est vraiment réel, cette difficulté-là. Au niveau un, c'est bon, ce sont des petits nombres, mais quand ça devient niveau deux, ça devient un peu des gros montants. Bon, tout dépend de la capacité du facilitateur, puisque s'il a montré comment on passe de deux chiffres à trois, par exemple 2000. Donc, si le facilitateur a bien maîtrisé la façon d'enseigner, ce n'est pas très compliqué, donc à ce stade, ici, tout tourne autour du facilitateur et comment il a expliqué les montants comment on y arrive.

[Yes, that is a real difficulty. At level one, it's okay, they are small numbers, but when it gets to level two, they get a bit big. Well, it all depends on the facilitator's ability, because if he's shown how to go from two numbers to three, for example 2000. So, if the facilitator has mastered the way of teaching, it's not very complicated, so at this stage, here, it's all about the facilitator and how he has explained the amounts how we get there.] [DRC Valid Prtnr2]

- **The teaching methodology used for mathematics processes like multiplication and division may be unnecessarily complicated.**

Possibly complicating any jump in difficulty is the way multiplication and division are taught by facilitators/group leaders. From observations in both countries, we thought that these processes could have been taught in a more straightforward manner.

In discussing the question with ALEF, we learned that the lessons have been developed to “create an intuitive link” between abstract mathematics and real situations by starting with a story, for example one that relates a mathematical problem to the inheritance of cows when the husband died. The methodology is meant to be straightforward [Valid ALEF1]. However, once lessons reach more advanced levels, they rely on facilitators/group leaders and their own mathematical backgrounds to teach in the ways they know. Colonial heritage and other factors probably apply.

Peut-être, si on utilisait beaucoup plus les calculatrices ou quelque chose comme ça de matériel pour éviter ces histoires de la procédure de soustraction, de multiplication. Parfois c'est embêtant pour eux. Peut-être si on mettait plus des outils didactiques, ça faciliterait la tâche, mais j'ai l'impression que c'est très important parce que finalement, quand on parle d'autonomisation là, il y a beaucoup plus de chiffres que de lettres à un certain moment, donc il faut que les chiffres restent, il faut peut être trouver un moyen de les rendre plus attrayants.

[Maybe, if we used calculators a lot more or something like that to avoid these stories of the subtraction procedure, multiplication. Sometimes it's annoying for them. Maybe if we used more instructional tools, it would make the task easier, but I have the impression that it's very important because, in the end, when we talk about empowerment, there are far more numbers



than letters at a certain point, so the numbers have to stay, maybe we have to find a way to make them more attractive.] [DRC Valid Prtnr1]

- **Passing rates are also a concern for numeracy.**

The question of participants who do poorly on the numeracy assessment is similar to that discussed in **Section 3.3** regarding the literacy assessment. While not as acute as the need for reading and writing to go on to the upper levels, numeracy may also be a factor in how the savings or income-generating groups function. ALEF is aware of this but feels some of the strictness, particularly in countries with francophone influence like the DRC, should be tempered with practicality.

In Level 2 when they do the mathematics skills... And I say, well, look, if someone has understood that this is a multiplication problem and tried to do a multiplication problem... And then they've mixed up... But the question is, do they understand? Have they learned how to do this thing? And so they [in DRC] are just trying to get away a little bit from the sort of school exam approach. [Valid ALEF1]

This point has implications for the way numeracy—particularly mathematical processes—are taught, so we will raise it again in **Section 7**.

3.7 Effectiveness and relevance of L2

There is an expressed need for the chosen L2s, and high motivation to learn it. In Uganda, where the L2 is English, participants were observed enjoying the lessons, and reported being excited to learn. They feel they have a great need for English for their businesses in sales, customer care, greeting, and dealing with non-Luganda speakers. In the DRC, where the L2 is Swahili, participants also need it for communicating orally with authorities and non-Mashi speakers, and in writing for banking, school communication and other official functions. While many speak some Swahili, they appreciate being able to fill out forms and read signage.

So she says she learned how to talk to customers, the English part of it... She says she didn't know how they would ask you 'How much is this?' We have so many non-Luganda speaking people. We have refugees, many from Sudan, from Congo, from Rwanda, and then the whites. The influx is a bit high, so she wouldn't know what they are telling her. But through the learning of English learnt together with them, because we do practical... you learn what is applicable in the market. [FGD Ug lev3b]

Le swahili aide les gens des fois, les gens qui ne sont pas de la communauté viennent quand il fait l'échange alors il faut savoir communiquer au chef ou directeur ou responsable en swahili... Certains participants ont déjà écrit en swahili comme des lettres adressés aux mairies.

[Swahili helps people sometimes, people who are not from the community come when he does the exchange so you have to know how to communicate to the chief or director or person in



charge in Swahili...Some participants have already written in Swahili like letters to town leaders.] [KII DRC facil lev2a]



3.8 L2 assessment results

The 2024 end-of-year results on the L2 assessments are presented in **Tables 7 and 8**. As with the literacy and numeracy data, we did not include the results of the sub-partner NGOs. Participants in Uganda had higher success rates than DRC, but both countries have significantly lower results for L2 than for initial literacy in the L1. We believe that L2 skills development is somewhat different than L1 or numeracy skills in that it relies not only on lessons but also on exposure to the language in one’s environment. In this case, the differences between the two contexts– one relatively urban, the other relatively more remote– may explain the gap; however, it is likely that high expectations in assessment grading may still be a factor in the DRC.

Table 7: Uganda 2024 Results of L2 English assessment

Level	L2 ENGLISH				Total tested
	Fail N	Fail %	Pass N	Pass %	
2	101	15	552	85	653
3	63	16	324	84	387
Total	164		876		1,040

Table 8: DRC 2024 Results of L2 Swahili assessment

Level	L2 SWAHILI				Total tested
	Fail N	Fail %	Pass N	Pass %	
2	80	19	347	81	427
3	69	26	201	74	270
Total	149		548		697

Another factor may be the facilitators/group leaders and their own exposure to the L2; however, we believe their L2 skills are sufficient as they used the L2 with field researchers during data collection. The results here raise questions about the L2 proficiency expected by the curriculum and/or by the assessment.

3.9 Challenges with regard to L2

As with the other skills, we had no real concerns with L2-related aspects of the program, but we again mention possible issues to keep in mind. We have also discussed these with stakeholders. We note from the Phase I evaluation that participants in Uganda were particularly interested in L2 acquisition because it expands their access to English-speaking clientele for their small businesses. In the DRC the need does not seem as acute, but people do aspire to L2 learning.



- **There seems to be a demand for more time spent working on the L2.**

This may be a perennial issue, where ALEF and the partners recognize that the demand for L2 needs to be balanced with solid investment in L1 language and literacy. We support ALEF's strong position on the importance of the L1, while recognizing that participants want to improve their lives by adding one or more languages.

Par rapport à cette question, je crois qu'il y a des aspects à améliorer pour la deuxième langue, quand même j'ai l'impression qu'on y consacre trop peu de temps, donc on ne forme pas suffisamment beaucoup de textes dans cette langue. Et donc si on peut en commençant d'abord parce qu'il y en a qui souhaitent même une troisième. Donc si on peut déjà augmenter le nombre d'heures qu'on consacre à cette langue, ça pourrait améliorer les choses.
[In relation to this question, I think that there are aspects to be improved for the second language, but I have the impression that too little time is devoted to it, so we don't form enough texts in this language. and so if we can, starting first because there are some who even wanted a third. So if we can already increase the number of hours devoted to this language, that could improve things.] [DRC Valid Prtnr1]

- **Young people reportedly ask for more L2 (in Uganda) and even L3, L4 (in DRC).**

We report this only to recognize that the demand exists; we support ALEF's position, which is to stick with one L2 and only introduce it in Level 2. The demand is particularly great in Uganda, where participants live in more urban settings and L2 skills might help them get work [KII Valid ALEF2]. However, those who want to join the study groups only for the L2 are directed elsewhere for good reason [Valid Ug1]. In DRC, the coaches expressed some desire for French and even English [proposed while laughing] [FGD DRC Coach3] but there was no question about Swahili being most useful for participants.

Nous enseignons en langue Mashi et un peu en Swahili, ce sont les langues qui intéressent beaucoup plus les participants et la communauté. Mais peut-être qu'il serait pertinent de regarder les niveau 3 avant d'aller au MUSOs pour l'enseignement de la langue française quand on fait aussi des échanges, cela pourrait être intéressant pour la communauté.
[We teach in Mashi and a little Swahili, these are the languages that interest participants and the community the most. But maybe it would be a good idea to look at Level 3 before going to MUSOs for French language teaching when we're also doing exchanges; it could be interesting for the community.] [FGD DRC Coach6]



- **Participants might benefit from more comparison/contrast between L1 and L2.**

Related to the question about the level and amount of L2 in Uganda, Erina noticed that the L2 curriculum mainly involves communicative functions, which makes sense given the immediate needs of small business owners. However, what we know from the field of multilingual education is that learners can transfer literacy skills from L1 to L2, and facilitators can assist by calling attention to similarities and differences between the languages. When we spoke with ALEF about this, it was explained that there is some comparison/contrast for orthography and spelling but



possibly more could be done in terms of sentence structure and other aspects of the languages [Valid ALEF1].

4. Findings: Empowerment, human rights and poverty alleviation

This section discusses the larger effects that ALEF and its partners aim to generate for participants in the Empowerment Groups who are developing their literacy, numeracy and L2 skills. One overarching question of this evaluation, which we explore here, is whether or not empowerment is an automatic result of literacy. The development discourse tends to assume that literacy programs cause participants to become empowered, while scholars question the idea that learning to read and write directly results in empowerment. Both phases of this evaluation aim to provide documentation of how positive outcomes can be brought about and how they can potentially spread to a whole group or community.

Based on the data collected for this evaluation, we find many indications that empowerment, awareness of human rights and the potential for poverty alleviation are indeed outcomes of participation in this program, at least for many participants. As discussed in the Phase I evaluation, this is due in no small part to the lesson themes, which create a positive situation where information about real problems faced by participants is shared, discussed and applied. In addition, the formation of savings or small business groups provides a basis for groups to continue meeting and providing mutual support even after participants complete the three-level course cycle.

This section focuses on what stakeholders say about each of the effects of ALEF's program that they experience or observe in their lives. At the end of this section, we take up the important question of whether empowerment can be seen as a result of literacy learning.

4.1 Evidence of empowerment

ALEF's aim, as stated in the introduction, is for participants to gain access to decision-making processes, community services and shared platforms. The testimonials by participants analyzed in the Phase I evaluation revealed that empowerment takes many forms, including not only increased self-esteem and confidence but also standing up for their rights. Many linked these positive effects to the lesson themes.

These people, after improving, even the men, they are no longer [being looked down upon]. Because these are the people, you know, someone who is learning. At any level, there is a change in the setting of the home. They are learning things. Improves themselves, empowers. Yeah. If it is cleanliness, if it is organizing, if it is not spending their money anyhow. Yes. So... That's the best education. In fact, your education is related to your life. [KII Ug prtnr1]

Stakeholders in this phase of the study also expressed their empowerment in many forms. They often mention reading and writing alongside other aspects of life like better managing the health and/or economy of their families. Many mention having the confidence to do things they were afraid or ashamed to do before, often because they learned something in a lesson. It appears that



when individuals talk about their shame, their guilt or their fears in their groups, they realize that others have similar experiences—and then the lesson topics give them access to new information that may show them a way forward. They also develop solidarity within their groups, which may have to do with sharing but also may be connected to re-constructing their lives together. The following are some categories of empowerment that stakeholders mention.

- **Participants are proud of their newfound confidence and ability to speak in front of others.**

They often contrast current self-confidence with previous shame or shyness. For example, a female participant was reported to have said that when they first started, she couldn't speak before people, but now she can speak [FGD Ug lev2a]. One group discussion with a Level 2 group in Uganda began with positive comments about feeling confident: “Everyone's feeling good. Anyone feel confident? Okay, good” [FGD Ug lev2b]. In the DRC there were many mentions of being able to speak and communicate better and without shame [e.g. FGD DRC lev1b]. Some connect it directly to being able to read and write. Another factor may be active participation in the groups themselves, since sharing personal experiences and discussing the lesson themes are part of every lesson.

Nani agandi makwanane bulya kuba neci nkoko bacimala barhubwira oku bunguke rhwapatire, nirhu burhanzi rhwakagika yoboha bulya rhunashangire omu kanisa k' amashi. Hali akasanzi baderha oku ka ntabo bakazi karhusomera, rhwehe bulya rhurhamarigi bici, rhwanabera rhuli rhwalikira omu murhima gwirhu. Lero erhi rhuja mweci cigusho cirhu cibanka carhuyugula amasu, nirhu rhukala rhucihana kugerera okusoma omu service n'okuyunva oku rhukala rhuhere e fière...

[L'autre avantage est qu'avant moi j'avais peur car dans mon église on lit en langue Mashi. Souvent on demandait s'il n'y a personne qui pouvait aider à lire. Moi comme je ne savais pas lire, je sentais une blessure intérieure. Maintenant, après avoir appris à lire, je me porte déjà comme volontaire pour ce service et je me sens fière de me tenir devant.]

[The other advantage is that before I was afraid because in my church we read in the Mashi language. People often asked if there was anyone who could help them read. As I didn't know how to read, I felt wounded inside. Now, having learned to read, I'm already volunteering for this service and I feel proud to stand in front of it.] [FGD DRC lev3b]¹⁸



- **Participants have taken leadership roles in their communities.**

Participants often mention being able to read, write and speak as important in their being chosen as leaders of parent groups, church groups and other roles in their communities. Some also mention standing up to bullies or authorities. In the DRC there was also mention of a male participant who won a local election.

¹⁸ Note that this is one of seven quotes done using transcription of Mashi and then translation into French and English, allowing for a closer translation of what the stakeholder actually said.



Je suis tellement ravi de savoir lire et écrire, puisqu'on m'a choisi dans une CV (communauté vivante de l'église catholique) être présidente de nos mamans. Alors dans ce CV, je commence à lire la Bible ...même dans une grande assemblée, puis participant dans notre CV puisque je connais lire et écrire. Et on m'a élue présidente de nos mamans qui se trouvent dans ce CV.

[I'm so thrilled to know how to read and write, since I've been chosen in a CV (living community of the Catholic Church) to be president of our moms. So in this CV, I begin to read the Bible...even in a large assembly, then participating in our CV since I know how to read and write. And I've been elected president of our moms in this CV.] [FGD DRC lev3b]

Well, her testimony is a big one. First of all, she learned how to stand up for her rights as a woman, because we had a lesson that talks about that harassment and stuff like that. So she has learned how to fight that. Then through the learning level one and level two, she has learned how to stand as a woman in leadership. She has participated before. Yeah, she learnt how to read and write. She's one of the people who didn't know at all. And she testifies that she learnt and was able to sign with the Minister of Local Government. She was taken to sign something with the Minister of Local Government. And she testifies all that from the ALEF program.

[FGD Ug lev3b]



- **Group solidarity is a factor in confidence and self-esteem.**

As a group, participants reportedly gain a sense of community and the ability to resolve conflicts that accompanies an improvement in their self-esteem.

On a une impression qu'il y a une certaine confiance qui émane dans les groupes, on sent qu'il y a un peu d'estime de soi aussi. Pourquoi j'ai dit ça, je me souviens qu'on nous pose même des questions, les gens [demandent] 'Pourquoi vous vous ne donnez pas des cadeaux alors que les autres en ont aussi' alors qu'avant, euh non, ils ne pouvaient pas poser ce genre de questions.

Donc on sent qu'il y a un peu de cette attitude et estime de soi. Il y a aussi une attitude que j'aime bien, c'est un peu l'engagement communautaire. J'ai l'impression que plus ils sont dans les groupes, ils prennent des décisions pour le groupes, alors les groupes s'engagent vraiment pour la communauté...Et puis il y a une autre, je ne sais pas si je pouvais mettre ça dans la catégorie des compétences mais la capacité d'un groupe à résoudre un conflit.

[You get the impression that there's a certain amount of confidence in the groups, that there's a bit of self-esteem too. Why I said that, I remember people even asking us questions, people [asking] 'Why don't you give gifts when the others have them too' whereas before, uh no, they couldn't ask that kind of question. So you can feel that there's a bit of this attitude and self-esteem. There's also an attitude that I like, it is a bit of community involvement. I get the impression that the more they're in the groups, they are making decisions for the groups, so the groups are really getting involved for the community... And then there's another, I don't know if I could put this in the skills category, but the ability of a group to resolve conflict.]

[KII DRC Prtnr1]





- **Female participants feel empowered as women and recognize their common issues.**

Related to the group solidarity just mentioned is the participants' feeling of having common problems as women, such as standing up to bullies and defending themselves against injustices.

Nze okusoma.. Nasinga okuyigamu level bili, eyasoka ne eyokubili. Yenasinga okuyigamu nadala ogwo gwokubili okumanya edembe lyo nga omukyala, kubanga twasomanga tekubaganya wamu ne milamwa nga omukyala. Twasomako no mukyala eya atulunyizigibwa naye ne mu katale twagenda okulaba nga ela byebimu byebyo. Olusi oyinza okuba oli ku mu dala gwo nga neighbors, nebakuyigiliza oba neighbor najja nakumalako emilembe. Netuyigilizibwa nokuba namanyi nti wade muno aba akutugunyiliza osobola kuba ne edobozi, osobora okweyogelako nokwekubila endulu.

[As for my education, I learned the most from two levels, the first and the second levels. In the second level, I learned about my rights as a woman because we were taught not only general knowledge but also topics specific to women. We learned from a woman who was oppressed, but also in the marketplace, we see similar issues. Sometimes, you find yourself on your market stand where neighbors come and bully you or a neighbor comes and makes you uncomfortable. It taught us to be aware that even if someone oppresses you, you can still have a voice, speak up for yourself, and scream for help.] [FGD Ug lev3b]



4.2 Evidence of human rights awareness

ALEF's aim, as stated in the introduction, is for participants to understand and defend their rights and act to change the mechanisms of poverty, discrimination and oppression. In the Phase I evaluation, participants gave examples of having learned about their rights through raised political consciousness, challenging patriarchal deceit, and reporting sexual abuse, and many related their understandings to specific lesson topics. The following are findings regarding human rights.

- **Stakeholders recognize the importance of lessons that raise awareness of human rights.**

Facilitators see how important human rights-related lesson themes are, and feel committed to helping participants stand up for their rights. This is particularly noted in the DRC.

En tant que facilitatrice, je prête attention à ce qui fait que l'homme ou la femme se prenne en charge, qu'elle aide sa famille, et qu'elle soit en mesure de défendre ses droits.

[As a facilitator, I pay attention to what makes the man or woman take charge of themselves, help their family and stand up for their rights.] [KII DRC facil lev3b]

There's a lesson about child abuse, yes, yes. And when they learnt about it in class, they learnt a lot about how to handle the cases, how to avoid it, or how to report it. So she says, as an individual, even if she finds it happening in the community, she's now bold to enter, to intercede and come and maybe report or help her child and find a way of reporting, even if it's a fellow woman who is being abused in their home. [FGD Ug lev3b]



- **Participants learn useful skills to act on and improve their environments.**

Participants mention what they have learned, and there is evidence that it is making a difference. Women are defending their rights at home, the rights of their girl children to go to school, and their rights to claim inheritance. As a result, a DRC partner said, “*Beaucoup commencent à faire des testaments*” [“Many have begun to write their wills”] [DRC Valid Prtnr1]. One female facilitator said proudly, “*Les gens savent se plaindre*” [People know how to complain], meaning that they have learned how to defend themselves against injustices [KII DRC facil lev2a].

Mon mari est un vendeur ambulante. Avant quand il me laissait à la maison, les gens m'intimidaient et me ravissaient mes biens. Maintenant je parviens à me défendre et personne ne peut plus me ravir mon droit. Merci à Dieu car maintenant je peux rencontrer le chef et réclamer mon droit mais avant j'avais peur de faire rapport chez le chef de peur qu'il me traite comme son ennemi. Maintenant, je me défends moi même même en l'absence de mon mari.

[My husband is a street vendor. Before, when he left me at home, people would intimidate me and take away my goods. Now I can defend myself and no one can take away my right. I thank God that now I can meet the chief and claim my right, but before I was afraid to report to the chief for fear that he would treat me as his enemy. Now I can defend myself even in my husband's absence.] [FDG DRC lev2a]



4.3 Evidence of poverty alleviation

ALEF's aim, as stated in the introduction, is for participants to take control of their own finances and health and improve their own living conditions. Factors in poverty alleviation include diversification of household income, improvement of finances and better employment opportunities.

The testimonials by participants analyzed in the Phase I evaluation provided strong evidence that information from the lessons supported improved health and agricultural knowledge, as well as knowledge that helps them create income-generating projects and form savings groups. Phase I found evidence that just becoming a group member is likely to empower participants to use their new skills, organize themselves, think creatively about how to earn income in their communities, and keep records to support their projects.

The Phase II data provides more detail regarding how participants benefit both individually and collectively from their involvement in the Empowerment Groups. In Uganda, market women report that their improved numeracy and L2 skills help them reach more customers using social media or the radio, count money, give people change and keep track of their debts and profits. In the DRC, some remark that their participation has taken them out of a state of “laziness” and taught them to take care of their crops, register their children for school, improve their hygiene, keep track of important documents, and generally improve other aspects of life.



We wondered why participants would call themselves “lazy,” hoping they have not internalized some stereotype about “illiterate” people. In fact, we noticed that the theme of Level 1 Lesson 7 is “Laziness,” so we wondered if the French/English translation from Mashi was not exactly their meaning. ALEF staff suggest that “idleness” or “indolence” may better capture the idea of lack of initiative or ambition [Feedback ALEF1]. In a WhatsApp communication, we learned that participants say they did not know that by working they could acquire “the goods of their dreams,” and that before they were “distracted” [ACDC prtnr2]. *This is a potentially interesting theme to explore in the future, as it raises questions about self-improvement and ambition. We also wonder if the concept of capitalism inherent in small-scale income generation– and an important element of the Empowerment Groups– is culturally foreign to participants.* However, other ALEF staff suggest that “laziness” may actually represent depression or fear of taking action due to the repeated intimidation or power abuse common in settings of protracted conflict.

Based on stakeholder reports, it seems clear that ALEF’s program addresses issues associated with poverty by creating opportunities for participants (and often for their facilitators/group leaders) to generate income, at least on a small scale, and/or to participate in savings and loan associations. Participants in the DRC spoke a lot about the lessons helping them with agricultural information and with forming savings groups known as MUSOs (*Mutuelles de solidarité*). Similarly, in Uganda, lessons include information on how to form VSLAs (Village Savings and Loan Associations) and community-based organizations (CBOs) and the advantages of forming these groups. These support mechanisms have a reported impact on individual and collective poverty alleviation. The collective savings group supports individual growth, where a person in the group is able to take a loan to start their own business. The following are some of the findings, beginning with evidence of self-respect.

- **Participants gain self-respect through cleanliness and taking care of themselves.**

Behavioral changes are reported as a result of participation in the Empowerment Groups.

A voir comment je vivais dans la pauvreté. Je n’avais qu’un seul habit. Maintenant, j’en ai plus... J’étais paresseuse et je passais mes journées sans rien faire, seulement garder mes mains propres. Maintenant aujourd’hui je fais les travaux champêtres et je produis et je trouve ainsi de quoi nourrir mon ménage. Je suis vivement contente.

[To see how I lived in poverty. I only had one set of clothes. Now I have more... I used to be lazy and spend my days doing nothing, just keeping my hands clean. Now I do field work and produce, so I have enough to feed my household. I'm very happy.] [FGD DRC lev1a]



- **Participants are proud of working to support themselves and their families.**

They report a range of benefits, including the diversification of income. Individuals in a Level 1 group in Uganda mentioned chicken farming, raising goats, growing vegetables, tailoring, selling clothes, making key holders, braiding hair, weaving straw and selling eggs [FGD Ug lev1a]. In DRC participants have learned to fertilize and fight erosion, knowledge that helps the whole community [KII DRC Prtnr2].



Auparavant, elle restait à la maison sans travail. Elle ne savait qu'on pouvait se débrouiller pour aller chercher du travail. Mais à partir de ces instructions, parler avec les autres...elle sait qu'elle peut se débrouiller pour aller chercher du travail pour apporter quelque chose à sa famille.

[She used to stay at home without a job. She didn't know she could go out and look for work. But with these instructions, talking with others...she knows she can manage to go out and look for work to bring something back to her family.] [FGD DRC lev1b]



5. Additional program features explored in this evaluation

This section examines other aspects of the program that we aimed to cover based on the findings from Phase I.

5.1 Findings regarding the use of mobile phones

Because we saw some references to mobile phones in the Phase I testimonials, we wanted to find out more about the degree to which people use them, since phones involve the use of reading, writing and numeracy skills and give access to social media, as well as mobile banking and other applications. We did find evidence that as reading and writing skills develop there is increased confidence and ability to use phones. Participants talk about being able to read and reply to messages (some in L2), register someone's telephone number, and use the calculator function.

In Uganda there are more cell phones overall than in DRC, and according to one coach 10 to 15 percent of participants in Uganda have smartphones. Participants at a market town said they use WhatsApp for advertising the products they have for sale. They have even learned some ways to bypass literacy and numeracy, such as taking photos of lists.

Before she had a phone, but she was only receiving when they call. But right now she can read the message. She can use it in other ways. [FGD Ug lev1a]

She can now read, the phone is in English, she can read the word and put it in Luganda and understand. [FGD Ug lev3a]

That she has learned how to send, to use mobile money, to send money to people. Very, very important too. [FGD Ug lev3a]





In the DRC there are fewer mobile phones overall, and most are not smartphones. Very few participants have access, and not even all facilitators. According to ACDC this is a factor in absenteeism, because if facilitators could be in touch with participants they could re-schedule group meetings that must be cancelled, for example. [DRC Valid Prtnr1]. This situation makes communication difficult between facilitators and coaches as well.

Lorsque le facilitateur n'est pas joignable, parfois ils [les coachs] arrivent sur le terrain pour les rencontres, que les facilitateurs et soit malade ou il est empêché. Lui, il a fait de longs trajets pour venir visiter le groupe, mais tellement qu'il n'y a pas de communication entre les coachs et les facilitateurs. Il y a souvent des situations comme ça, là où il fait des déplacements inutiles.

[When the facilitator can't be reached, sometimes they {the coaches} arrive in the field for meetings, and the facilitator is either ill or unable to attend. He has travelled a long way to visit the group, but so much so that there is no communication between the coaches and the facilitators. There are often situations like this, where he makes unnecessary trips.]

[DRC Valid Prtnr2]

5.2 Lesson themes and their relevance

In Phase I of the evaluation, participants clearly linked specific lessons to positive changes in their lives. For example, health benefits were reported, including gaining understanding of how medications should be taken and how to access legitimate healthcare providers. Other examples were children's schooling, rights to inheritance, and improved farming techniques. Because many of the testimonials in the Phase I study mentioned specific lesson themes, we agreed with ALEF to add a question to the year-end survey in November 2024 about the lessons participants thought were most useful for them. Interestingly, participants and facilitators/group leaders in the Phase II field data often mentioned specific themes as well.

While we did not find many comments about the discussions themselves, participants did talk about sharing their own experiences in class. In addition, some stakeholders pointed out that the way themes are discussed and integrated into participants' lives works well. Put simply by one coach, "The methodology is so good" [FGD Ug coach]. One female facilitator even commented on the freedom she has to develop lessons: "La méthode ALEF inclut vraiment un esprit de créativité" [The ALEF method really includes a spirit of creativity] [KII DRC facil lev2a]. We believe they are referring to the relevance of the themes and the discussions of them, as well as the creation of their own texts.

In this section we first review the field data collected on lesson themes and their relevance. We then analyze the survey data based on the themes most often mentioned and the patterns we could see by country.

- **The lesson themes are highly relevant and applicable to participants' daily lives.**

In Uganda, for example, we heard many mentions of learning to boil drinking water [FGD Ug lev1b; FGD Ug lev2b]. In DRC, we heard mentions of taking medication properly and combating



sorcery [KII DRC Prtnr1]. Many other lesson themes were raised as exemplified by the following quotes.

Je pense que les rencontres soutiennent les participants pour une seule raison que les leçons traitent [de] ce que les gens vivent au quotidien. Dans chaque leçon il y a toujours une application ici au niveau de la communauté. Pour les attitudes, le fait de voir que les gens peuvent lire même sans la présence de la facilitatrice, comme les livrets à la maison le soir, en train de prendre des dossiers en train de lire, les gens commencent à faire un peu de lecture dans les activités de chaque jour, on sent l'idée d'améliorer le vécu quotidien.

[I think the meetings support the participants for one reason only: the lessons deal [with] what people experience on a daily basis. In every lesson there's always an application here at the community level. For attitudes, seeing that people can read even without the facilitator being present, like the booklets at home in the evening, picking up files reading, people are starting to do a bit of reading in the activities of each day, you feel the idea of improving everyday life.] [KII DRC facil lev1a]

If you get down and look into the lesson planning of ALEF International you realize they teach the basics right. There is no other organization that does that. The content. Very relevant. Very, very relevant to the core that it answers the primary question of the lowest hassle...I've seen people who say that it's not useful. When you invite them, no, come on you can sit in one of my classes. And when they come to your class, oh my god, why didn't I join in the first place...And you find that people book the next year. The class is taken up and they try to go for next year. [KII Ug GL lev3b]



- **Participants apply lessons learned.**

Participants and facilitators see that they apply the new knowledge from their lessons.

A part lire et écrire, ici, nous venons puiser des conseils car chaque leçon on dirait s'adresse à nous.

[Apart from reading and writing, we come here for advice, because every lesson we say is aimed at us.] [FGD DRC lev3a]

The program was well designed to know that it is for adults. They can spend two hours here and learn something new. Instead of staying at home to gossip with others, you can come here with friends. They discuss and go back with some knowledge. [FGD Ug lev1a]



- **The survey data from Uganda indicated most useful lessons from Level 1 only.**

Interestingly, as shown in **Table 9**, the first lessons of the book were considered most useful by participants. We share some quotes about the themes mentioned most: Lesson 1 on family planning and Lesson 2 on using mosquito nets when sleeping.



Table 9: Most useful lessons – CACI Uganda Level 1

Mentions	Lesson	Topic
11	1	Family planning
9	2	Bed nets
7	10	Expired drugs
6	7	Diarrhea
6	34	Saving money
5	27	Sexual harassment

Support for choosing Level 1 lesson 1 [from CACI endline survey 2024]:

- It's from this lesson that I learnt the value of planning for the family by using family planning in order to give birth to those children that we can care for well.
- Family planning was so good a lesson to me. In church, we were told that family planning is evil and satanic and that as many as use it, they will go to hell. My understanding changed through the training.
- Family planning was my life changing lesson. I always thought of two methods which also had effects on me. After the lesson, there were too many more options to choose from.
- Despite already having four children, my husband and mother-in-law pressured me to have more, aiming for a family of eight. Lesson 1, which focused on family planning, was particularly helpful. While I was familiar with the basics from midwives, my husband was resistant to the idea of family limitation. When I brought home the participant booklet, he stumbled upon Lesson 1 and became curious. After discussing the topic with him, he began to reconsider our family planning goals. We sought further advice from healthcare professionals, who confirmed that our family was already complete. To my surprise, my husband agreed with their assessment. I was overjoyed that he was not only open to family planning but also actively involved in choosing a suitable method. Lesson 1 truly was a life-changing experience for our family.

Support for choosing Level 1 lesson 2 [from CACI endline survey 2024]:

- Sleeping under the mosquito nets has helped me greatly to save money which I would have spent on medications as it used to be in the past.
- It taught me the dangers of not sleeping in a mosquito net, which include getting sick with malaria and this requires money for treatment... This lesson still showed me that children sleep well in the night without disturbances and also don't get sick. I loved this lesson and made sure to line up at the local council office where I managed to get two mosquito nets donated by government for my family that we currently share at home.
- I learnt that sleeping in the mosquito net doesn't only save you from malaria but also from dangerous insects, and harmful snakes.
- I have bought a mosquito net, I now sleep in it with my family, we are free from malaria as learnt.
- As a mother of two young children, I immediately shared this information with my husband. Together, we purchased two mosquito nets to protect our family. We're now sleeping soundly, knowing that we're reducing our risk of malaria and ensuring a healthier



future for our children.¹⁹

Based on the comments from Level 1 participants surveyed in Uganda, they were particularly interested in topics that centered around health. Regardless of the lesson material, participants reported how learning the material will impact the lives of their children and the greater community. Many noted how the personal accounts of their classmates helped them. Lessons that challenge cultural and gender norms were reported as well, with some sharing that the scenarios in the lessons combined with the personal experiences shared by those in the group have altered their thinking (about family planning, domestic violence and sexual harassment). Additionally, some participants reported sharing what they have learned in the classroom, encouraging their friends or neighbors to do the same (pit latrines, hand washing). Descriptions of feelings such as courage, healing, forgiveness, excitement, and relief emerged in the comments.

- **The survey data from DRC indicated the most useful lessons from all three levels.**

The survey data are summarized by level, including only those lessons most often mentioned, with the total number of respondents at the bottom. Those in Level 1 most frequently mentioned lessons focusing on hygiene (food and body), agricultural productivity, girls' schooling and healthcare. Social themes such as illiteracy, elections and the sharing of household chores were also mentioned, as shown in **Table 10**.

Table 10: Most useful lessons – ACDC DRC Level 1

Mentionnée	Leçon	Thème	
4	2	Hygiène alimentaire	Food hygiene
4	7	Paresse	Laziness
4	22	Productivité agricole	Agricultural productivity
3	15	Soins de santé	Health care
2	8	Analphabétisme; élections	Illiteracy; elections
2	10	Planification agricole	Agricultural planning
29			

Participants in Level 2 most frequently mentioned lessons on raising chickens and guinea pigs as well as agricultural planning. They benefited from information on their concerns such as bad merchandise, classroom overcrowding and electoral corruption, as shown in **Table 11**.

Table 11: Most useful lessons – ACDC DRC Level 2

Mentionnée	Leçon	Thème	
3	2	L'élevage de poules	Chicken farming
3	21	Mauvaise marchandise	Bad merchandise
2	12	Trop d'élèves dans la classe	Too many pupils in class
2	24	Cultivage de manioc	Cassava growing
17			

¹⁹ It seems clear from the language used here that coaches may be putting words in people's mouths rather than capturing authentic speech; the register of these quotations is very formal and probably not exactly what participants said. This is another reason for doing accurate transcriptions of people's statements in the L1 first, at least whenever possible, and not relying on paraphrasing.



Those in Level 3 mentioned finding use in a greater diversity of topics, with a strong emphasis on savings (MUSO and within the family) and household projects like raising guinea pigs, sewing and making a mattress. Human rights were also mentioned, as shown in **Table 12**.

Table 12: Most useful lessons – ACDC DRC Level 3

Mentionnée	Leçon	Thème	
6	9	Elevage des cobayes	Raising guinea pigs
6	20	MUSO: organiser l'épargne	MUSO: organizing savings
5	3	Fabrication d'un matelas	Making a mattress
5	2	La coupe et couture	Cutting and sewing
4	12	Droits humains	Human rights
4	19	MUSO: c'est quoi	MUSO: what it is
51			

It is interesting to know which lessons are most useful to participants, including those mentioned that we did not include here. Their justifications provide rich evidence that the lesson themes resonate with participants and often lead to positive changes in their lives. A separate study of these justifications could be as useful as participants' testimonials. Their comments show that positive changes are related to different aspects of income generation and empowerment, and that participants share information with their partners, families, friends and neighbors.

5.3 Findings regarding the savings and income generation groups

As we understand it, Empowerment Group participants start learning about savings groups and income-generating projects through lessons in Levels 1 and 2, and many have already organized themselves by Level 3. In Uganda the group leaders are not allowed to join, but they provide support; in the DRC, facilitators may participate along with their learners. We did not pursue questions about this, but it is an interesting feature and may be related to group solidarity, which we discuss below as a real asset of the program.

We also understand that ALEF and the partners have put a lot of thought and effort into supporting participants who complete the three levels (ex-Level 3s) to maximize the benefit of having participated in the courses. We learned that ACDC came up with the original idea for groups to continue as MUSOs, which was a form of organization that was known in DRC, and ALEF spread the idea to Uganda [KII Valid ALEF2]. There was a demand from participants for something more, and in our fieldwork we heard about people joining the courses expressly because they are interested in joining a MUSO. By 2021 the MUSOs have been formalized in DRC, and since 2022 ACDC has paid a coach to support only the MUSOs, which according to ALEF makes a positive difference for the groups. In 2025 CACI plans to hire a coach just for the ex-Level 3s.

- **Effectiveness of the MUSOs**

The DRC partners are rightfully very proud of the MUSOs and their contributions to empowerment and poverty alleviation. The Uganda partners are beginning to see similar results, but this comment from a DRC partner reveals some of the benefits for participants.



Nous, on a pu survivre sans rien donner, et nous avons pu rester dans cet environnement-là, alors nous sommes fiers de ça... Quand nous sommes sur terrain, quand on voit les participants disent 'Oui, au moins vous vous nous avez appris à pêcher plutôt que de nous amener les poissons'. Ils sont fiers aussi de ça, oui. Et quand nous voyons nos MUSOs qui viennent apprendre. et ce qu'ils ont dans leur caisse, on s'est dit, mais waouh, ça, c'est une bonne chose. Les gens qui pensaient que 'Parce que nous sommes pauvres, on ne peut rien avoir' mais déjà à partir de leurs efforts on voit que dans les villages les gens ont commencé à venir vers eux [les apprenants ALEF] pour obtenir de l'aide quand ils sont dans l'urgence \$20 - 30. Là, ils savent qu'on peut recourir dans les groupes [dans les MUSO] quelque chose comme ça. Donc là, nous sommes fiers vraiment de ça. Donc quand on commençait, ce sont les participants qui nous ont demandé [des choses]. Actuellement, quand nous venons sur terrain, parfois il ne nous demande même plus parfois ce sont eux qui nous font des avances, nous on refuse mais on comprend que quand même par rapport au débit et là où nous sommes aujourd'hui, il y a une grande différence, donc les gens ne sont plus très dépendant de nous.

We've been able to survive without giving anything, and we've been able to stay in this environment, so we're proud of that... When we're out in the field, when we see the participants say 'Yes, at least you've taught us how to fish rather than bringing us the fish.' They're proud of that too, yes. And when we see our MUSOs coming to learn, and what they have in their tills, we say to ourselves, wow, that's a good thing. People used to think that 'Because we're poor, we can't have anything', but already from their efforts we see that in the villages people have started to come to them [ALEF learners] for help when they're in an emergency \$20 - 30. Now they know we can turn to the groups [in the MUSO] for something like that, so we're really proud of that. So when we started out, it was the participants who asked us [for things]. Nowadays, when we go out into the field, sometimes they don't even ask us anymore, sometimes it's them who make advances, we refuse, but we understand that compared to the flow and where we are today, there's a big difference, so people aren't very dependent on us anymore. [KII DRC Prtrnr2]

- **The survey revealed general interest in the group activities.**

Participants were asked to respond to the question “Are you a member of any organization?” While the survey was done with less than 10% of the total number of participants, the sample was as random as possible, providing some idea of their interest in savings or income-generating groups, as shown in **Table 13**.

Table 13: Participant involvement in savings organizations - DRC 2024

	Level 1 baseline	Level 1 endline	Level 1 change	Level 2	Level 3
MUSO	8%	0%	-8	15%	28%
AVEC	33%	51%	+18	38%	49%
None	59%	42%	-17	37%	32%

For DRC we have access to endline responses from all three levels, and for Level 1 we also have the baseline responses for comparison. We would expect the number of MUSOs to go up during Level 1; oddly, there is a negative change in MUSO involvement. We wonder if this is a



terminology issue, since there is a large increase in AVEC involvement, and fewer people responded “none.” About one-third of Level 2 and 3 participants say they belong to a MUSO or AVEC, and we believe that this will increase following Level 3.

According to the coaches in DRC, the MUSOs do not need facilitators in the same way that Levels 1 to 3 do, since they have their own *comités de gestion* (management committees). However, they do reportedly need support in formalizing their organizations and resolving issues. The ACDC coach who exclusively supports the MUSOs was responsible for 59 in 2024 [FGD DRC Coach2]. Almost 20 groups completed Level 3 in 2024, which would bring the total number of MUSOs to almost 70 in 2025 [FGD DRC Coach6]. We will discuss this issue below in **Section 7** regarding implications.

For Uganda we have access to baseline and endline for Level 1 only. As shown in **Table 14**, these figures indicate that participants increased their participation in all types of organizations over the first year of the course.

Table 14: Participant involvement in savings organizations - Uganda 2024

	Level 1 baseline	Level 1 endline	Level 1 change
CSO	9%	17%	+8
VSLA	17%	51%	+34
Other	0%	12%	+12
None	75%	20%	-55

We understand from the CACI partners that the CBOs are quite successful in making liquid soap or crafts to sell, for example, and even “do other charity work around their community so that their voice is being heard as a team” [Ug Valid CACI1]. Registering themselves as an entity at the local level is important if they are going to look for youth or women’s group funds. These organizations can overlap with the savings and loan groups (VSLAs), which are the Ugandan equivalent of DRC’s MUSOs. CACI is very enthusiastic about spreading the savings groups because they see the potential for financial empowerment, and they have budgeted in 2025 to hire a coach to specialize in supporting them.

● **The group activities that follow Level 3 are reportedly appreciated and successful.**

From the fieldwork data we have quite a few comments about how these organizations contribute to self-sufficiency and group solidarity. There is also evidence that the positive effects go beyond the groups themselves.

J'ai l'impression qu'il y a quand même beaucoup de choses qui fonctionnent. Par exemple, il y a ce matin, même un groupe qui m'a envoyé un échantillon de savon qu'ils ont fabriqué grâce à une petite formation que nous avons réalisée dans leur monceau il y a pas longtemps. alors moi, je me suis dit 'Waouh, donc ça fonctionne' et donc comme ça, je trouve qu'il y a des petites réalisations qui font vraiment beaucoup de différence et qui viennent parce qu'il y a ce programme ici... Autre chose, je parle, toujours des MUSOs... j'ai vu qu'ils ont demandé qu'ils



soient mis en réseau comme ça, ils peuvent avoir accès à beaucoup plus de crédit. ça veut dire un monceau qui est à 50 kilomètres à l'ouest, peut demander de l'argent à un monceau qui est à 50 kilomètres à l'est parce qu'il y a ce programme ici, donc à travers ACDC. et je trouve que c'est vraiment très important si la solidarité peut dépasser les villages et atteindre les territoires entiers.

[I have the impression that there are a lot of things that work. For example, this morning, a group sent me a sample of soap they had made thanks to a little training we did in their hut not long ago. So I thought 'Wow, so it works' and so I find that there are little achievements that really make a lot of difference and that comes because there is this program here... Another thing, I am still talking about MUSOs... I have seen that they have asked to be networked so that they can have access to much more credit. This means that a cluster 50 kilometers to the west can ask for money from a cluster 50 kilometers to the east because there is this program here, through ACDC. And I think it's really important if solidarity can go beyond villages and reach entire territories.] [KII DRC Prtnr1]



- **The supplementary reading materials for ex-Level 3s are appreciated.**

Participants who appreciate the ex-Level 3 organizations also appreciate the reading materials that have been provided. Being able to borrow books to read in the L1 is important for maintaining literacy skills, especially in the DRC, where four small books are available. These may also have a multiplier effect in terms of being shared beyond the group.

Et puis, dans les MUSO, pour augmenter la lecture, nous avons des livrets supplémentaires pour la lecture.

[And then, in the MUSO, to increase reading, we have extra booklets for reading.]

[DRC Valid Prtnr2]

Dans les livres de lecture supplémentaires des MUSO, il y a beaucoup de thèmes qui sont développés là. Et après la lecture, on peut discuter ça en famille, et on peut discuter avec les amis. Et ça permet aux participants de se sentir bien intégré dans la société. Ce qui nous revient souvent, on dit que bon, comme ils part avec les livrets à la maison, on peut discuter avec les maris, avec les voisins, c'est tout le village qui lisent ce que nous faisons, alors ça, on pense que ça soutient beaucoup plus les participants dans ce sens là.

[In the MUSO supplementary reading books, there are a lot of themes that are developed there. And after the reading, you can discuss it with your family, and you can discuss it with your friends. And that helps participants feel well integrated into society. What we often hear, we say that well, as they leave with the booklets for home, one can discuss with husbands, with neighbors, it is the whole village that reads what we do, so that, we think it supports participants much more in that sense.] [KII DRC prtnr2]



In Uganda, those who complete Level 3 also have access to books. There is evidence from a former participant, interviewed eight years after completing the program, that post-Level 3 activities are useful:

He completed all the three levels. Ex-level 3, we give them books to read... [Eight years] after the third level, he can now read the bible and he started the church... Then after starting the church, he got a vision of starting a school. That's why you see these kids here. These are the teachers. Yes. Doing the good work. He's even into pig rearing. How many pigs? Two.
[KII Ug former3]

● **Some participants express a desire for more after completing Level 3.**

In Uganda, Level 3 participants expressed the desire to stay together, to receive more books, and to learn more [FGD Ug lev3b].

Four female participants [FGD Ug lev3a]:

- She feels good 'cause she has gained knowledge through discussions. She has gained a lot. She hopes in the future she will get more...
- She feels good and she's requesting for another year. [I'm telling them that we usually give out books for reading. Yes, I think I have some in the car. Oh, one, two, three.]
- She feels good and she would like to thank everyone who participated in bringing this program to them and she is requesting for more.
- She is happy because she has learnt more through the group members. They have learnt some skills. And now she can, like, distribute [pass on the knowledge].

Three ex-Level 3 participants [FGD Ug exlev3]:

- But what I discovered, when you are working together, you can advise each other. Although we've been finding difficulties, you will find that because of their wisdom and encouragement which you get from your fellow brothers and sisters, you find that you've come home.
- There's that relationship and knowing different things together.
- We find someone who is lacking something so we can support them. We can help.

5.4 Texts written by participants

We did not do a large-scale analysis of the texts written by participants, but this would be an interesting dataset for a study if any interns or students are interested in contributing to ALEF's work. From a scan of the 187 CACI texts in Luganda (translated into English) from Levels 1 and 3, we saw evidence that the texts demonstrate participants' understanding. Many Level 1 texts are action-oriented, specifying what the group will do with the new information, while Level 3 participants write very detailed texts about the lesson theme and their experiences. There is a definite progression in how the texts develop over the year. We also noticed interesting differences in how the groups interpreted the texts (e.g. a lesson on family planning that elicited different



conclusions about abortion). All of these aspects of the texts would be useful to explore in greater detail in the future, especially with regard to how critical thinking develops in the groups. The remaining findings we can discuss here were our observations and any references made by stakeholders to the texts written by participants.

- **We were not able to observe authentic, free discussions preceding text writing.**

One concern we had about the discussions leading to text production, at least at Level 1, is that facilitators/group leaders may not be fully incorporating inclusive methodology when facilitating participant discussions about the lesson themes. As mentioned in **Section 2** regarding the sometimes mechanical methodology we observed for literacy teaching, we were mildly concerned when observing group discussions that there was a lot of teacher control and hand-raising. In both countries, it seemed there was a tradition of individuals standing up when they were speaking, which seems to challenge the idea of a group discussion. We did hear that many discussions go long, and that participants continue to talk about the theme beyond the group meeting time.

We did see facilitators, as they were trained, calling on different participants by name and trying to be sure that each had an opportunity. However, in Uganda, Erina found the level 1 group leaders' methods a bit mechanical, and in DRC, the only times people seemed free to speak were when the researchers were asking the groups our questions. One lesson was described this way:

GL asks the group to compose a text based on the previous question.
GL writes on the board what the participants tell her.
GL reads out aloud what they wrote.
They all read what they composed. [Obs Ug lev1a]

While this is the prescribed method for the group leader, in this case, the text was elicited without any real discussion, which would give participants an opportunity to hear about each other's experiences and how they are thinking about the lesson theme. We would have hoped for a more authentic and critical discussion.

We realize this concern may be unwarranted. It is possible that Level 1 instruction needs to be controlled until participants (and facilitators) get used to each other; however, our observations took place at the end of the year, so all groups would have already met for many months. We also realize this type of lesson interaction may be beyond the control of ALEF or its partners. As discussed with ALEF, it is likely that teacher-centeredness has a colonial heritage, and that facilitators might fall back on how they were taught as children. Participants may even be looking for a classroom learning experience that they did not have earlier in life. We suggest that this question be taken up in facilitator training and monitoring by coaches and partners.

- **The texts written by participants are a source of pride and contribute to community knowledge, in contexts where there is little to read in the L1.**

ALEF's aim, as stated in the introduction, is for participants to use their mother tongue in writing for various purposes, thereby preserving their cultural heritage and identity. In both countries, there is an effort to display the texts created by the groups related to lesson themes. This is done in both Uganda and DRC, particularly with Level 3 texts, and they reportedly attract attention from



community members. We find this practice extremely positive for several reasons: for demonstrating what participants have learned, for promoting self-esteem among participants, for exposing the community to new information that is relevant to people's lives, for encouraging discussion about relevant topics, and for providing the community with opportunities to read the L1. We can imagine that these texts are prized, particularly in the DRC, where there is very little to read in Mashi. Posting the texts may also be an effective way to recruit new participants.

What happens to that Level 1 text that the groups create? That's where the empowerment comes out from. Once you create a text, it has first to work on yourself by reading it and interpreting it and analyzing it. Then you end up implementing it. I'm imagining, like a text on garbage collection. This will make sure you become a leader in your surrounding to make sure that this garbage is collected, that you have been watching it littering around the place. So the text completely changes. The owner then goes out and share it with these people, implement it. So that is what happens if it's around Level 3 where they hang it in the station for other people to read, because now they will have written a good paragraph for themselves and showing people. Please read here. This is what we wrote, and we feel it can change the community... [KII Ug Valid Prtnr1]

Quand on les affiche, on voit que beaucoup de gens viennent. Ils commencent souvent à trouver ces textes très intéressants. Et le même jour, c'est tout le village. S'il y a 10 personnes autour, ils commencent à commenter là. Alors il arrive souvent que si on met, on fait, par exemple trois semaines sans afficher, les gens commencent à se lamenter 'Ces gens n'ont pas mené d'autres nouveaux textes pour qu'on puisse lire' et donc c'est ça. Mais c'est surtout les commentaires qui nous viennent, c'est surtout les gens qui ne sont pas dans les groupes, donc les autres membres de la communauté qui viennent, vous voyez. Et parfois certains nous appellent au téléphone pour nous dire 'Ah, c'est que vous avez affiché là, c'est très intéressant, vraiment.'

[When {the texts} are put up, we see that a lot of people come. They often begin to find these texts very interesting. And on the same day, it's the whole village. If there are 10 people around, they start commenting there. So it often happens that if we go, for example, three weeks without posting, the people begin to lament 'These people haven't put up any new texts for us to read' and so that's that. But it's mostly comments that come to us, it's mostly people who aren't in the groups, so the other community members who come, you know. And sometimes some people call us on the phone to say 'Ah, you've posted there, it's very interesting, really.'] [DRC Valid Prtnr2]



5.5 Costing analysis for each setting

The original task was to conduct a cost-benefit analysis of the programs. However, looking at the benefits through an economic lens would require estimates of increased productivity and income in each setting, as well as estimates of the savings to health and social service providers based on improved health and self-sufficiency of program participants. Lacking this type of information, we make the assumption based on evidence from this evaluation that the program offers significant



benefits to participants by providing skills in literacy, numeracy and L2 and effectively addressing empowerment, awareness of one's rights and alleviation of poverty.

We therefore looked only at the costs of the program in each setting. A simple calculation was done to determine what the Empowerment Group program costs per group and per participant annually and monthly. This type of estimate could be useful for fundraising both internationally and locally. This costing analysis was calculated based on the 2024 annual budget for each setting.

Two assumptions are made in the following analysis:

1. When calculating the cost per month at the both the group and participant level, we calculated on the basis of 10 months of activities in a year.
2. Regarding participant cost, we have used the total number of participants, which is inclusive of those who have failed or dropped out from the program based on the assumption that whether a participant drops out or fails, he/she has been accounted for in the activities at some point.

Additionally, we do not measure economic return on investment, as such measurement would require a standalone study and would need to take into account a variety of factors (e.g., employment rates, household cost) for which we do not have data. Instead, we only show an estimation of the participants' ability to save and access financial credit based on their participation in the MUSOs and VSLAs.

- **Costing analysis for CACI Uganda 2024**

As shown in **Table 15**, in Uganda, the total budget for 2024 was USD 75,330, which equates to UGX 288,907,640 or SEK 812,114.²⁰ The cost for one CACI group per year in 2024 was USD 918, which equates to UGX 3,415,177 or SEK 9,904. These figures are shown in USD only in **Table 15**. The cost for one group each month was USD 92, equivalent to UGX 341,512 or SEK 990. If we then calculate the cost at the participant level, one individual's participation only costs USD 39 per year, equivalent to UGX 144,948 or SEK 420. The cost per participant per month is USD 4, equivalent to UGX 14,948 or SEK 42.

Table 15: Costing estimate for CACI Uganda 2024 in USD

Annual budget		Cost per group per year	Cost per group per month*	Cost per partic per year	Cost per partic per month*
82 CACI groups (1932 partic)	75,330	918	92	39	4
22 CBO groups (505 partic)	2,386	108	11	5	0.50
Total budget	77,716				

*calculated on the basis of 10 months.

²⁰ For consistency, USD and SEK equivalences were calculated based on the 19 October 2023 exchange rate used by ALEF in their 2024 program budget (1 UGX = 0.0029 SEK; 1 UGX = 0.000269 USD).



Regarding the cost for CBO groups (groups that are not monitored by CACI), the only cost covered by ALEF is the initial group leader training and the booklets. The cost for a CBO group per year in 2024 was USD 108, which equates to UGX 403,090.91 or SEK 1,169. Assuming that the groups run for 10 months, the cost for a group per month was USD 11, equivalent to UGX 40,309 or SEK 117. If we then calculate the cost at the participant level, one individual’s participation costs USD 5 per year, equivalent to UGX 17,560 and SEK 51. Assuming that the program runs over 10 months, the cost per participant per month is USD 0.50, equivalent to UGX 1,756 or SEK 5.

- **Savings generated by Village Savings & Loan Associations in Uganda**

As shown in **Table 16**, there are currently 25 Village Savings & Loan Associations (VSLAs) created as a direct result of the ALEF Empowerment Group program, since this element has been added based on ACDC’s experience in DRC. This year, an additional 22 have been created. CACI estimates that a VSLA participant can save from USD 8 to 388, the equivalent of UGX 28,000 to 140,000 or SEK 81 to 406 during the 10 months of the program. We can thus estimate that one group (based on 15 participants) makes from USD 113 to 565, the equivalent of UGX 420,000 to 2,100,000 or SEK 1,218 to 6,090.²¹

Participants can either cash out their savings at the end of the 10 months or decide to carry over their savings to the following year. They can also apply for credit for larger amounts needed. In the case of Uganda, group leaders facilitate but are not participants of saving groups.

Table 16: Estimated savings generated by VSLAs in 2024 in USD

Current VSLAs + new level-3s	Min savings per group (based on 15 partic.)	Max savings per group (based on 15 partic.)	Min savings total 2024 (47 groups)	Max savings total 2024 (47 groups)
25 + 22 = 47	113	565	5,310	26,550

In total, for the year 2024, we estimate that 47 groups generated some savings. The 47 groups account for the 22 groups that started their savings group mid-level 3 and the 25 existing ones from previous years. Collectively, we estimate that they saved from USD 5,310 to 26,550, equivalent to UGX 19,740,000 to 98,700,000 or SEK 57,246 to 286,230. CACI partners report that participants use these savings to pay for their children’s school fees and related costs or to apply for credit to start a small business (e.g. vegetable stall by the road).

Should CACI continue to onboard more VSLAs, based on the assumption that approximately 22 groups are created every year, that would equate to yearly additional savings of USD 2,486 to 12,430, equivalent to UGX 9,240,000 to 46,200,000 or SEK 26,796 to 133,980. For 2024, this represented a 47% increase compared to last year, assuming that there were 25 active groups last year.

²¹ We acknowledge that the range is inexact. ALEF and partners may wish to collect this information as part of future M&E activities for a more precise calculation.



- **Costing analysis for ACDC DRC 2024**

In DRC, the total budget for 2024 was USD 82,015 or SEK 844,754.²² As shown in **Table 17**, the cost for one ACDC group per year in 2024 was USD 1,336, which equates to SEK 13,761. The cost for one group each month was USD 134 or SEK 1,380. If we then calculate the cost at the participant level, one individual's participation only costs USD 60 per year, equivalent to SEK 618. The cost per participant per month is USD 6 or SEK 62. These figures are shown in USD only in **Table 17**.

Table 17: Costing estimate for ACDC DRC 2024 in USD

Annual budget (USD)		Cost per group per year	Cost per group per month*	Cost per partic per year	Cost per partic per month*
55 ACDC groups (1231 partic.)	73,481	1,336	134	60	6
45 ASBL groups (961 partic.)	8,534	190	19	9	0.9
Total budget	82,015				

*calculated on the basis of 10 months.

Regarding the cost for ASBL groups (groups that are not monitored by ACDC), the only cost covered by ALEF is the initial group leader training, the booklets, and some yearly honorarium for the facilitators. The cost for an ASBL group per year in 2024 was USD 190, which equates to SEK 1,957. Assuming that the groups run for 10 months, the cost per group per month was USD 19 or SEK 196. If we then calculate the cost at the participant level, one individual's participation costs USD 9 or SEK 93 per year. Assuming that the program runs over 10 months, the cost per participant per month is USD 0.90 or SEK 9.

- **Savings generated by MUSOs in DRC**

There are currently 69 MUSOs created as a direct result of the ALEF Empowerment Group program. In addition, 28 others were created under other ASBL, but because they are not monitored by ACDC we do not include them in calculating the MUSO total savings generated. Participants can either cash out their savings at the end of the 10 months or decide to carry over their savings to the following year. They can also apply for credit for larger amounts needed. In the case of DRC, group leaders are also participants of saving groups.

As shown in **Table 18**, an additional 20 MUSOs have been created this year. ACDC estimates that one MUSO (20-30 people) makes USD 400 to 600 or SEK 4,120 to 6,180 over 10 months.

Table 18: Estimated savings generated by MUSOs in 2024 in USD

Current ACDC MUSO + new level-3s	Min savings per group	Max savings per group	Min savings total 2024 (69 groups)	Max savings total 2024 (69 groups)
59 + 10 = 69	400	600	27,600	41,400

²² For consistency, the exchange rate used is 1 USD = 10,3 SEK as stated in ALEF's 2024 program budget.



In total, for the year 2024, we estimate that 69 groups generated some savings. The 69 groups account for the 10 groups that started their savings group mid-level (as reported by ACDC partners) and the 59 existing ones from previous years. Collectively, we estimate that they made between USD 27,600 or SEK 278,100 and USD 41,400 or SEK 426,420. ACDC partners report that participants use these savings or apply for credit to buy land collectively to start a farm together.

Should ACDC continue to onboard more MUSOs, on the assumption that approximately 10 groups are created every year, that would equate to yearly additional savings between USD 8,000 or SEK 82,400 and USD 12,000 or SEK 123,600. For 2024, this represented a 29% increase compared to last year, assuming that there were 59 active groups last year.

5.6 Assessment results overall

In Uganda, of a total of 1,904 participants in Levels 1 through 3 in CACI groups, about 10% were absent for the assessment. Pass and fail percentages are therefore calculated based on the 1,710 who took the test, as shown in **Table 19**.

Table 19: Uganda 2024 Overall passing rates

Level	Fail N	Fail %	Pass N	Pass %	N tested
1	68	10	602	90	670
2	66	10	587	90	653
3	32	8	355	92	387
Total	166		1,544		1,710

In DRC, of a total of 1,261 participants from Levels 1 through 3 in ACDC groups, about 6% were absent for the assessment. Pass and fail percentages are therefore calculated based on the 1,261 who took the test, as shown in **Table 20**.

Table 20: DRC 2024 Overall passing rates

Level	Fail N	Fail %	Pass N	Pass % t	N tested
1	71	13	493	87	564
2	44	10	383	90	427
3	40	15	230	85	270
Total	155		1,106		1,261

As with the assessment results broken down by skill, the overall pass rates from DRC are lower than those from Uganda. Using these two countries to make a general observation, it seems that from 85 to 90 percent of participants pass their level and move ahead. That means there are 10 to 15 percent of participants who we need more information about to see if there are strategies for helping them learn the basics.



6. Overall findings regarding the ALEF program

6.1 Positive results for participants as individuals and as groups

Some stakeholders who answered our questions told us positive things about the many aspects that make up the ALEF program. We present their statements here to demonstrate that reading and writing are part of a larger package that provides opportunities for participants to improve their lives. As noted above when we described ALEF's approach, stakeholders provide evidence that the psychological domain of feeling oneself capable and worthy of acting on behalf of oneself is extended to acting on behalf of one's family, one's empowerment or savings group, and one's community.

I remember when we started that program was called ALEF program. Then later it was changed into Empowerment Group program... And it makes sense because we are empowering participants in communities. [FGD Ug coach1-6 10:22]

When you reach them, it's a small thing, but it is mastered in a communal way... Where there is a challenge... you face it as a team. [KII Ug GL lev3b]

Les principaux changements que je peux reporter sont d'abord savoir lire et écrire, beaucoup de gens viennent témoigner que maintenant, je suis en mesure de lire et écrire. Le deuxième changement, c'est l'estime de soi, beaucoup de gens considèrent qu'ils ont maintenant chassé la peur, ils peuvent prendre la parole dans le public., et troisième changement, tout le monde a envie de chasser la pauvreté et donc beaucoup de participants [font] des activités supplémentaires par rapport à ce qu'ils faisaient avant. Ils utilisent aussi le téléphone.

[The main changes I can report are, firstly, being able to read and write. Many people come to testify that 'now I can now read and write.' The second change is self-esteem, a lot of people consider that they have now overcome fear, they can speak out in public, and the third change is that everyone wants to overcome poverty, so a lot of participants [do] extra activities compared to what they did before. They also use the telephone.] [KII DRC facil lev3b]

- **Empowerment through skills and knowledge**

Some stakeholders list the many skills they have gained through the program, while others talk about the effects of these skills on their lives and the lives of their families and communities.

Certaines écrivent des notes comme les courses de marché à faire, de petites lettres, des indications aux enfants et aux maris lorsqu'elles sont absentes de la maison. Beaucoup manient les téléphones avec beaucoup plus d'assurances car elles savent chercher les correspondants, lire les messages, etc... Les rencontres nous aident beaucoup. Nous pouvons lire certains panneaux d'affichage et suivre la scolarisation des enfants. A part lire et écrire, ici, nous venons puiser des conseils car chaque leçon on dirait s'adresse à nous.



[Some write notes such as market errands to be done, short letters, directions to children and husbands when away from home. Many of them handle the telephone with much greater confidence, as they know how to look for correspondents, read messages, etc... The meetings help us a lot. We can read some of the notice boards and follow the children's schooling. Apart from reading and writing, we come here for advice, because every lesson we say is aimed at us.] [FGD DRC lev3a]

I'm happy that when I come here, I leave with different knowledge. At home, they mock us, but now we also teach them what they couldn't teach us. Now, every time I come here, I feel happy because I keep gaining more knowledge every time and I despise what they used to call us. [FGD Ug lev1a]



6.2 Results going beyond the participants themselves

- **There is evidence of a multiplier effect because participants share their knowledge.**

The testimonials analyzed in Phase I of the evaluation indicated that participants were talking to their spouses, family members, friends and community members about certain lessons. Many of the comments already quoted in this report refer to the same kinds of sharing of information, including the income generation and savings groups. Some even mention that now they are able to help others. The partners feel that it is often the participants themselves who recruit the next group to begin Level 1. They are well aware and proud of the potential of this program to go beyond the actual group participants.

Au second niveau, donc, il y a des participants qui commencent eux-mêmes à participer dans le processus de recrutement des nouveaux tellement ils ont été convaincus, ils voient la vision, ils voient ce qui se passe, et ils sont contents... Il y a même une facilitatrice qui enseigne sa propre maman parce que la maman, déjà dans la société, C'est presque impensable, mais tellement qu'ils ont compris les bienfaits, alors la maman est devenue participante, donc sa propre fille est devenue entre guillemets son enseignante quoi pour moi il y a beaucoup de témoignages comme ça qui montrent cet effet multiplicateur.

[At the second level, there are participants who themselves are starting to take part in the process of recruiting new people, because they've been convinced, they see the vision, they see what's happening, and they're happy... There's even a facilitator who teaches her own mother, because the mother, already in the company, it's almost unthinkable, but so much so that they've understood the benefits, so the mother has become a participant, so her own daughter has become her teacher, in quotation marks, so for me there are a lot of testimonials like that that show this multiplier effect.] [DRC Valid Prtnr1]

Whenever she comes here, she learns something new, which she takes there, the new knowledge, and shares with the colleagues in the community. [FGD Ug lev1a]



- **Facilitators/group leaders and coaches are committed to and rewarded by their work.**

Some feel it is their calling. Many love their work and are inspired by the group participants. In the DRC, all but one coach have been facilitators before becoming coaches. This leads to a feeling of solidarity between coaches and facilitators. In Uganda, Erina was struck by the sense of solidarity of the coaches and group leaders; for example, one group leader who had experienced many deaths in the family got help from her colleagues and members in processing her grief.

L'engouement, les participants ont, ils sont intéressés et ils ne veulent pas que ça s'arrête, et il y a des nouveaux qui sont intéressés qui demandent s'il y a un nouveau cycle qui va commencer. Donc moi je vois cette motivation des participants, ça me pousse à revenir chaque fois et continuer et ça soutient un peu le travail de facilitateur que je fais.

[The enthusiasm, the participants have, they're interested and they don't want it to stop, and there are new people who are interested who ask if there's a new cycle about to start. So I see this motivation from the participants, it pushes me to come back every time and keep going, and it supports my work as a facilitator.] [KII DRC facil lev3b]

People in the community [are] in need... That's why I really felt good to join this because it's touching the people's souls to see that they are changing from a certain situation to another situation. And as we are hearing from them, we learn from them as they are doing the experience sharing. And we also help. For them to be empowered to see that things... are possible if they really change their attitude. Yes... So that makes me really feel good that we are really empowering people and hearing people testifying that they are what they are because of our efforts. So empowerment, we are enjoying it. [FGD Ug coach1-6 13:50]



- **The lives of facilitators and coaches are also improved.**

Partners, coaches and facilitators/group leaders themselves confirm that their lives are also improved through their involvement in the ALEF program. They appear to gain status and self-esteem, the reward of helping others, friendship and the respect of the community.

Yes, they [group leaders] do gain a lot. First of all, even the recognition in the community. This person will pass, and they will say, Please, this is my teacher. This is my teacher. He's the one who made me change like this. So it is almost that bond that a person will benefit [from], and also coming to get many friends from this community. People by lacking to go to school doesn't mean they are powerless. So sometimes they are supportive in other areas. So group leaders will need it. [Ug Valid Prtnr1]

La vie des participants a beaucoup changé, chez les facilitateurs aussi et chez les coaches aussi car nous avons aussi amélioré notre vie car nous sommes motivés et payés.

[The lives of the participants have changed a lot, for the facilitators too, and for the coaches



too, because we've also improved our lives because we're motivated and paid.]
[FGD DRC Coach5]



6.3 Survey results: Participants' functional skills and program effects

Along with all of the qualitative evidence of participants' skills and program effects, we have the results of the survey conducted at the beginning and end of the year. As shown in **Tables 21** and **22**, significant proportions of Level 1 participants report increases in their functional literacy and numeracy skills over the year, and there is no doubt that the ALEF program is responsible. Regarding the skills we added to the end-of-year questionnaire, three-quarters of participants in Uganda reported being able to use them, and about half of DRC participants. The skills that still elude many participants in both countries relate to reading school reports and labels, but there is evidence of progress.

Table 21: Uganda 2024 survey results on functional literacy and numeracy

Can you do the following:	Level 1 (start) %age	Level 1 (end) %age
Identify/enter telephone numbers	66	99
Read your children's school reports	2	28
Read labels on food/medicine	3	47
Calculate change at the market	58	90
Use a mobile phone for money transfer	-	74
Send text messages	-	75
Read for pleasure	-	78

Table 22: DRC 2024 survey results on functional literacy and numeracy

Can you do the following:	Level 1 (start) %age	Level 1 (end) %age
Identify/enter telephone numbers	10	62
Read your children's school reports	5	19
Read labels on food/medicine	3	19
Calculate change at the market	-	96
Use a mobile phone for money transfer	-	41
Send text messages	-	48
Read for pleasure	-	59

Significant gains are also reported on questions about the effects of the Empowerment Groups on participants' experiences of respect and optimism. As shown in **Tables 23** and **24**, there are large gains on all measures in both countries. The new question about holding a leadership position will be interesting to continue checking when these participants are in Levels 2 and 3.



Table 23: Uganda 2024 survey results on program effects

Effects of literacy/numeracy	Level 1 (start) %age	Level 1 (end) %age
I feel optimistic about the future	56	97
People in my community respect me and listen to my opinion	13	51
I know my rights and can stand up for myself	4	45
My husband/wife listens to me and respects my opinion	29	58
I have a leadership position in my community.	-	17

Table 24: DRC 2024 survey results on program effects

Effects of literacy/numeracy	Level 1 (start) %age	Level 1 (end) %age
I feel optimistic about the future	90	100
People in my community respect me and listen to my opinion	69	91
I know my rights and can stand up for myself	18	79
My husband/wife listens to me and respects my opinion	77	83
I have a leadership position in my community.	-	41

There are survey results for Levels 2 and 3 in the DRC, but as they are relatively high for both skills and effects, we focused on Level 1 here to show the dramatic growth over the year.

6.4 Does literacy result in empowerment?

The qualitative data collected for this Phase II evaluation are consistent with evidence from Phase I, that literacy skills (along with numeracy and L2) are useful but do not guarantee empowerment of participants, while the content and methodology of the course appear to contribute to significant change in participants' lives. The discussions we held with partners and ALEF staff to discuss our preliminary findings were quite enlightening on this theme, so we share their perspectives in this section.

- **The DRC partners see literacy and empowerment as linked, but feel that empowerment requires more.**

The ACDC partners feel that literacy and other skills are tools that make empowerment possible. With these skills people may or may not become somewhat enlightened, but social and economic empowerment depend on participation in the groups and access to opportunities.

Alors personnellement je pense que l'autonomisation et l'alphabétisation sont étroitement liées mais l'un ne peut pas garantir automatiquement l'autre... Tout ce que je sais que, par exemple, pour l'alphabétisation, on apprend à lire, à écrire, à calculer. C'est une bonne base. Ça ouvre en fait des portes. Ça vous donne l'accès à l'information, à des connaissances et puis des possibilités de participer en groupes ou à des situations collectivement. L'autonomisation



implique quant à elle la capacité, euh, pour prendre des décisions, par exemple, éclairées. Ça nécessite en fait d'autres d'autres facteurs, en plus par exemple les opportunités, l'accès donc des opportunités économiques. Si je dois me limiter seulement à l'économie. Donc c'est bon, et quand on fait l'alpha, disons, l'alphabétisation on est sur la bonne voie pour l'autonomisation, mais ce n'est pas que directement, on sera autonomisé, ça demande qu'il y a d'autres facteurs en plus pour la y arriver.

Maintenant qu'est ce que je vois sur le terrain? L'autonomisation. En fait, a plusieurs facettes... Il y a des cas où c'est un fait automatique. Il y a des cas où ça demande un peu pour ce qui est socio économique... Par exemple, il y a des cas où vous trouvez que le fait seulement de participer aux cours ça rendait les gens un peu libre, ça rendait les gens un peu plus éclairés automatiquement. Mais quand il faut parler d'autonomisation économique, ça, ça demande un peu plus de temps, ça demande qu'il y ait un peu d'opportunités et donc c'est ça qui me fait penser que c'est vraiment lié, mais ce n'est pas tous les aspects de l'autonomisation qui viennent directement avec l'alphabétisation.

[So personally I think empowerment and literacy are closely linked, but one cannot automatically guarantee the other... All I know is that, for example, for literacy, you learn to read, write, calculate. That's a good basis. It actually opens doors. It gives you access to information, knowledge and then opportunities to participate in groups or situations collectively. Empowerment, on the other hand, implies the ability to, uh, make informed decisions, for example. It requires other factors, in addition to, for example, opportunities, access to economic opportunities. If I have to limit myself to economics alone. So it's good, and when we do the alpha, let's say, literacy we're on the right track to empowerment, but it's not that directly, we'll be empowered, it requires that there are other factors in addition to it to get there.

Now what do I see in the field? Empowerment. In fact, it has several facets... There are cases where it is automatic. For example, there are cases where you find that the mere fact of taking part in the courses makes people a little free, automatically makes them a little more enlightened. But when it comes to economic empowerment, that requires a bit more time, it requires a bit more opportunity, and that's what makes me think it's really linked, but it's not all aspects of empowerment that come directly with literacy.] [DRC Valid Prtnr1]

Oui, bon, à mon avis je dirais que c'est pas vraiment automatique quand on est alphabétisé, on était automatiquement autonome. Bon puisque selon ce qu'on a constaté l'alphabétisation ça consiste à donner des outils, des compétences, bon peut-être, les petits calculs et tout cons. Mais on a constaté qu'il y a des participants une fois, ils ont déjà tous ces outils, bon, ils ne les utilise pas comme on s'y attendait donc parfois, même après avoir suivi les trois niveaux, vous sentez que la personne n'est pas toujours autonome sur le plan économique, social et tout consort. Donc, à mon avis, je ne crois pas que l'autonomisation soit un résultat automatique de l'alphabétisation. Tout dépend de la façon dont les participants ou la personne a accueilli l'alphabétisation. Bon dans la société, on a vu des gens qui sont de là même des et la famille, ils ont fini les cours le secondaire et même l'université, mais vous voyez que ces compétences ne servent à rien, donc c'est un peu ça. Les compétences qu'on donne à la personne.

[Yes, well, in my opinion I'd say it's not really automatic when you're literate, you're automatically autonomous. Well, according to what we've seen, literacy consists in giving you



tools, skills, well maybe, small calculations and so on. But we've noticed that some participants, once they've already got all these tools, well, they don't use them as we expected, so sometimes, even after completing the three levels, you feel that the person isn't always autonomous economically, socially and so on. So, in my opinion, I don't think empowerment is an automatic result of literacy. It all depends on how the participants or the individual has received literacy. Well, in society, we've seen people who are from the same family, they've finished high school and even university, but you see that these skills are useless, so that's a bit of it. The skills we give the person.] [DRC Valid Prtnr2]

- **The Uganda partners feel that empowerment is indeed an outcome of literacy.**

Unlike the DRC partners, the CACI partners did not problematize the relationship between literacy and empowerment. They see a clear relationship between literacy and empowerment, and find that participants come out of the experience with more confidence to make decisions. There are indications that they are talking about ALEF and not any other literacy program, as indicated in the second quote about “this empowerment kind of reading and writing and counting.”

Okay, yes, I can say, yes. Empowerment is widely considered an outcome of literacy. Because participants gain skills which provides individuals with the knowledge and confidence. Actually they come out when they are confident, and that allows them to participate in the community. They make formal decisions. They improve their lives ... really interesting the empowerment. It is part of it. [Ug Valid Prtnr2]

I think it's almost that same. But it's almost like building confidence, and the self-esteem that comes out of literacy. You know, it reduces the sharing out. So if you join this empowerment kind of reading and writing and counting, then we feel we have empowered you enough. So almost it is automatic...If one doesn't gain from it, then he loses it all. So it is. Yeah, it is automatic. Yeah, it is automatic. [Ug Valid Prtnr1]

- **ALEF staff link literacy and empowerment to people's needs and improving their lives**

ALEF staff members have thought a lot about this question and had exchanges with partners about it, as well as raising it during coach trainings. They feel that the differences between the partners could be partly due to their different local contexts, but also possibly to differences in their definitions of empowerment.

But if the type of empowerment is... self-respect, and feeling like you are somebody, then often for a lot of people, actually, yes [it is automatic], like literacy and the feeling of being a literate person and knowing that you can write a few sentences, it does make a difference. People tell us this all the time... and I don't think that's... an unworthy outcome. [Valid ALEF1]

The ALEF program clearly goes beyond skill development, aiming for the effects discussed in this section as related to opportunities for improving one's life, such as income generation and standing



up for one's rights. As we discussed with ALEF, even the translation of the term in French as *autonomisation* invokes a more practical set of effects related to self-sufficiency than is suggested by the English term *empowerment*. We note that Freire's concept of *conscientização* has another connotation, that of becoming conscious or aware of injustices. Fortunately, there is evidence that all of these definitions can be linked to themes discussed in the ALEF curriculum. Interestingly, there were no specific mentions of lesson themes during this discussion, but we find throughout this report that lesson themes are a key factor in ALEF's success.

I try to emphasize a lot when we're doing trainings that... we think about the literacy people can use and giving them the skills and the sort of courage and the know-how to use it... How are these people able to use their literacy to put it to use, whether it's for their kids' schooling, or for their small business, or in accessing healthcare. It's come up a bit when we've been working with the testing this year, even the skills testing to try and adapt those a bit more to test sort of skills that are nearer you know, everyday use rather than sort of school exercises. [Valid ALEF1]

From what I've seen in our projects is **no**, but it can be kind of a **yes**. But you know, yeah, it's it's very tricky, actually... Many of our participants that they are often talking about like 'Oh, before I was no one. Now I'm somebody, and that's because I can read.' So they draw that connection quite often, the participants. But then I would also say, there's a lot of participants that have like failed the rest, like the tests, and are not very literate that are still very empowered. And I know that's something. I've discussed a lot with [ACDC partner2] because they tend to get the participants going in the higher levels even though they have not passed the test, which is not according to what we suggest. And they're like 'But they still are very empowered, and they make a lot of big changes, even though they didn't pass the test.' And so for the case of our project definitely. It's like the combination of empowerment and literacy. And I would also say, there's a lot of literate people that are not empowered in their context as well. So there have been different answers to it. But to just learn how to read and write without... starting to think about how the world is, and why it's like that, I would say, would not automatically lead to empowerment. [Valid ALEF2]

As a final note, we would like to highlight ALEF's responsiveness to the needs of the field, ALEF's willingness to continue discussing important topics like empowerment with the partners, and the degree to which the program compromises in appropriate ways with practical constraints in each context. It may be that keeping groups together, even if certain skills have not been mastered by certain individuals, is actually an effective way to promote empowerment— particularly in societies where collectivity and cohesiveness are valued more than individuality.



7. Issues and implications for the Empowerment Groups

In this section we bring back some of the challenges or concerns mentioned above, and we add any remaining issues we noticed in this evaluation. In each case, even if we have already discussed an issue with ALEF and/or the partners, we try to think through the implications of that issue and consider possible ways to address it.

7.1 Logistical issues

We understand that ALEF and the partners need to respond to a range of logistical issues, and that compromises are necessary. In this section we offer our perspectives, with the understanding that some may just be acceptable challenges of each context.

- **Printing and distribution of books**

We heard in Uganda that group leaders were collecting the books at the end of class, and we were concerned that participants would need their books to be able to practice and study.

[Regarding how some participants quit, some return, some stay and persevere] And they fear, because they knew that they would go with their books, but they have to leave their books to you. And so it was such a learning that they wanted to take them maybe they should be helping their kids at home, but they have to leave the books here. [KII Ug GL lev2a]

In Uganda, Erina understood that Level 1 and 2 books were returned to the group leaders to keep safe, and in Level 3 some group leaders kept them and some participants brought them home. There may be good reasons learned from experience, as perhaps participants do not have safe places to keep the books. We believe there are enough books printed each year. However, the implication is that participants cannot easily practice, get help, or share with others outside the group meetings, nor can they practice during the few months' break between levels.

In the DRC, we saw participants sharing books in class, but the partners said there should be enough books for everyone.

Based on Erina's earlier report, ALEF has already planned with CACI for each participant to have her or his own book to take home in 2025. In addition, we might suggest looking at ways to make books more wear-resistant or teaching people how to care for and store them. Perhaps facilitators/group leaders could find ways to encourage participants to use their books outside class, e.g. by assigning simple homework and/or tasks like "Read this week's text to someone in your family and talk about it."

- **Finding a stable place to hold study group meetings**

In both countries, we understand that the groups set their own times, and that there are challenges related to where meetings will be held, mainly because good locations are in demand by communities, churches and schools, and special events may cause lesson cancellations. In DRC,



most groups reportedly meet in churches because churches support literacy. Other locations are schools or private homes, depending on the situation in each community. Many of the observations in Uganda were done outside with the blackboard propped against a tree, which would be difficult during the rainy season. Some observation videos taken in DRC were difficult to hear because of construction nearby.

We realize that these challenges may always be present, and that people try to find good places for the study groups in their communities. The implications of not finding a stable place for class include losing participants, missing study group meetings, and excluding participants with hearing or sight limitations. If they do not already do so, facilitators/group leaders might brainstorm and share possible solutions during training sessions. Perhaps the partners could lend official support in the form of letters to the communities to raise the status of the group. Another possibility would be to create a lesson theme for Level 1 that encourages groups to empower themselves to request better learning spaces.

- **Absenteeism**

The fact that ALEF groups meet two or three times per week for most of the year, and then over a three-year period, is fairly impressive. However, both countries report that absenteeism is an issue and that it may help explain the failures of 10 to 15 percent of participants on the end-of-year assessments. There were even significant percentages of absentees for those assessments, which makes us wonder if there are any ways to help people participate more regularly— or at least to get more data about why they have to be absent.

Il y a aussi les absences des participants. Oui, bon, ils ont beaucoup de problèmes à résoudre, à manger, les frais tout ça. Alors, au lieu de venir à la rencontre, peut-être le matin, ils partent d'abord pour chercher ceci cela, pour chercher la marchandise, tout ça. Maintenant vous sentez que le poids du coût de la vie par rapport au projet, parfois ça complique la mise en œuvre.

[There are also the absences of participants. Yes, well, they have a lot of problems to solve, food, expenses and so on. So, instead of coming to the meeting, maybe in the morning, they leave first to look for this and that, to look for the merchandise, all that. Now you feel that the weight of the cost of living in relation to the project, sometimes that complicates the implementation. [KII DRC prtnr2]

It is a challenge and sometimes they miss our lessons and a group leader has to fix a [new lesson] to catch up. [FGD Ug Coaches]

Coaches in Uganda explained that when participants are absent for longer periods, they have a two-pronged approach. First, the group leaders try to resolve any issues, and if that does not work, coaches follow up. It may even go to Irene or Edith, the most senior coaches. They usually call the participants and try to understand their situation, or visit them and encourage them to come back to class [FGD Ug Coaches].



Partners shared that actual attendance records are not regularly kept by all facilitators. We wonder if there could be a system of sign-in for participants, e.g. check or color next to their names (once they recognize them), and if facilitators/group leaders could be asked to note the reason next to the person's name (if they are made aware by that person or the others). Strategies might be developed in collaboration with the facilitators to follow up with those who miss more than a certain number of lessons. Another strategy could be to create a buddy system with 2-3 people who live close by to one another. Should some participants fail to come to the meetings, their buddies could relay what they have learned and help their friend go over the lesson. However, we understand that people attend voluntarily and this may not be feasible.

- **Challenge of travel for coaches**

All of the coaches experience challenges getting out to the groups, especially in the rainy season. CACI staff reported sometimes driving coaches out to their areas to prevent difficulties with motorbike rides and being covered with dust. In the DRC there are similar difficulties but more pronounced.

J'ai une moto, qui me facilite les déplacements mais pendant la saison des pluies si il y a de la boue, je consomme beaucoup [plus] de carburant que pendant la saison sèche. Il me faut aussi quelques fois passer la nuit là où je suis en visite car il y a des groupes qui fonctionnent très tôt à 6h du matin ou plus tôt. Alors je suis obligé pour atteindre ces groupes à 5h30. Je suis obligé de passer la nuit là-bas. Surtout quand pendant la nuit il y a des risques sur la route. Aussi je vois que le carburant c'est très cher et au village, le carburant est très cher et la vie aussi est très chère.

[I have a motorcycle, which makes it easier for me to get around, but during the rainy season if there's mud, I use a lot more fuel than during the dry season. I also sometimes have to spend the night where I am visiting because there are groups that meet very early, at 6am or earlier. So I have to reach these groups at 5:30am. I have to spend the night there. Especially when there are risks on the road at night. I also see that fuel is very expensive and in the village, fuel is very expensive and life is also very expensive.] [FGD DRC Coach6]

The idea in both countries is that coaches do not necessarily tell people when they are coming; however, realistically speaking, it is important for coaches and facilitators to communicate to be sure that the study groups are meeting on the visit days. In this regard, coaches in the DRC have a particular difficulty communicating with the field, as there are even some facilitators who do not have cell phones. One coach thought that supplying one cell phone per group, possibly with the facilitator, would be very helpful.

En ce qui concerne la communication, dans la vie quotidienne, il y a les naissances, il y a aussi les blessés maintenant nos groupes qu'on accompagne on enseigne comment utiliser le téléphone, mais on trouve qu'il y a une insuffisance de ces moyens de communication. On pourrait mettre au moins un téléphone dans le groupe pour les aider à utiliser la communication pour aider aussi à l'organisation. Tout cela pourrait nous aider. Par exemple, les bénéficiaires pourraient avoir directement les messages quand on a pas programmé de visiter.



[As far as communication is concerned, in everyday life, there are births, there are also the wounded, now our groups that we accompany are taught how to use the telephone, but we find that there is an insufficiency of these means of communication. We could put at least one telephone in the group to help them use communication to also help with organization. All this could help us. For example, beneficiaries could receive messages directly when we haven't scheduled a visit.] [FGD DRC Coach1]

We discussed this issue with the ACDC partners and they thought it might be feasible to supply a cell phone to each facilitator to improve communications– and thus efficiency of the project. We understand that there would need to be a budget, but we think this might be worthwhile.

Si tous les facilitateurs étaient, disons connectés, donc il y a des informations et une formation qu'on paye ou une remise à niveau qu'on comptait programmer par exemple dans un groupe WhatsApp et que ça arrive au facilitateur facilement. Le partage dans les groupes et les formations arrivent rapidement.

[If all the facilitators were, let's say. connected, so there's information and training that you pay for or a refresher that you were planning to schedule for example in a WhatsApp group and it gets to the facilitator easily. Sharing in groups and training courses happens quickly.]

[DRC Valid Prtnr2]

- **Competition from other projects bearing gifts (DRC)**

In both countries but perhaps more prevalent in DRC, the Empowerment Groups compete with other literacy projects that pay people or “give gifts” to entice them to participate in their projects. In a conversation with one of the Ugandan coaches, she reported that this type of practice is common amongst the organizations that work at Freedom Market. She explained that she had to build a lot of relationships with the participants to convince them to participate in the Empowerment Group program. Likewise in DRC, there are many literacy projects (often from Kinshasa) that pay for people’s participation, often during electoral campaigns to gain the votes of the people. These projects are usually short-lived and similarly to the Ugandan coaches, the ACDC partners report that it takes some time for participants to become convinced of the advantages of the Empowerment Groups. In both contexts, participants who chose to join the Empowerment Groups are its biggest advocates and see its long-term format and benefits once they experience learning and understand that their efforts and own motivation matter.



Participants are involved in their own learning from the beginning in the Empowerment Groups vs. other projects that give handouts:

Il y a ce que nous appelons une certaine conscientisation de ceux qui doivent participer dans les groupes. Vous voyez que le participant au départ, il sait qu'il a besoin d'être alphabétisé, donc il sait qu'il a besoin d'apprendre à lire, à écrire à calculer. Alors il se mobilise un peu pour acquérir ces connaissances là, parce que finalement vous avez vu que tous sont impliqués dans la recherche d'un temps. Ils sont impliqués dans la recherche de cet espace et du temps.



donc il y a un certain engagement de l'individu au départ, alors dans les autres cas, ils viennent souvent, ils ont déjà des maisons, ils ont un facilitateur, ils ont un salaire, ils ont même des kits de réinsertion. Déjà, quand les gens viennent pendant une semaine, ils finissent, et ils sont partis.

[There's what we call a certain conscientization of those who have to participate in the groups. You see, at the outset, the participant knows that he needs to be literate, so he knows that he needs to learn to read, write and calculate. So he mobilizes himself a little to acquire this knowledge, because ultimately you've seen that everyone is involved in the search for a time [to meet]. So there's a certain commitment on the part of the individual at the outset, whereas in other cases, they often already have houses, they have a facilitator, they have a salary, they even have reintegration kits. Already, when people come for a week and they finish, and they're gone.] [KII DRC Prtnr1]

ACDC partners find the ALEF method more sustainable than the other programs:

Nous avons l'impression aussi que nous sommes plus durables que les autres, parce que les autres vous avez l'impression aussi qu'ils sont là pour un objectif. ...vous voyez que ACDC et la méthode ALEF est quelque chose pour la vie, donc qui est là pour les participants, pas pour un [événement]. Alors nous savons que plus nous sommes là, plus nous les accompagnons, et on a l'impression qu'ils ont besoin de cet accompagnement et donc dans les provinces ils s'améliorent dès la première année, la deuxième et la troisième. Les autres, ils sont déjà, je crois à plusieurs cycles pendant ces trois ans là, et nous, on a qu'un seul groupe, donc je trouve que c'est plus durable. Les participants il est lui-même à la base de sa formation, et après on a l'impression que, en tout cas, c'est plus fonctionnel.

[We also have the impression that we are more durable than the others, because the others also have the impression that they are there for an objective. ...you see that ACDC and the ALEF method is something for life, so it's there for the participants, not for an [event]. So we know that the more we are there, the more we accompany them, and we have the impression that they need this accompaniment and so in the provinces they improve from the first year, the second and the third. The others are already, I think, in several cycles over the three years, and we only have one group, so I think it's more sustainable. The participants themselves form the basis of their training, and afterwards we have the impression that, in any case, it's more functional.] [KII DRC Prtnr1]



- **Difficulty in retaining group leaders (Uganda)**

Uganda in particular tends to experience a high turnover rate when it comes to group leaders, particularly with some female group leaders. When they marry, they often have to move to another location and would then have to part ways with their group. Additionally, there are more work options for group leaders, and/or that the low payment is not enough to keep them in service. CACI then will need to look for a replacement, which is not always easy to do based on the absence of trained group leaders on hold, and the capacity of other group leaders to take on another group than the one(s) they are already facilitating. If the group leaders do not drop out and they stay for all three years, they tend to stop after Level 3. There seem to be more work options for them. We fully understand CACI's philosophy to get committed group leaders, but if a slightly higher stipend



would keep the good group leaders in service, a cost-benefit analysis may convince them. The groups would have more continuity, needing less training, and less support from the coaches. In the DRC, facilitators tend to stay longer, to teach a few cycles and later to become coaches. In Uganda, most coaches are former group leaders who were promoted based on their experience, quality of work, and commitment.

7.2 Meeting the needs of all participants

The ALEF program is designed for people in low-income, low-literacy contexts, and many lesson themes are appropriately designed to help women recognize their rights and learn skills to support themselves. ALEF and its partners are aware of the challenges mentioned here in meeting the needs of all participants, but we wanted to document them to encourage continued discussion.

- **Male participants in groups of mostly women**

The Empowerment Groups in both countries are ostensibly inclusive, accepting men as well as women. Older men are reportedly those most likely to attend, perhaps because they have the time and wish, like the women, to learn skills they were not able to learn earlier in life and to avoid being cheated. Men also join because they are interested in the savings groups. According to stakeholders, men may be very positively influenced by what they learn about women's issues. At the same time, they may not be well treated by other men who mock them for attending "women's groups," as reported by coaches in Uganda in a conversation, which is something to consider.

Au niveau de l'individu lui-même, il y a aussi des défis. Par exemple, pour les hommes, qu'est ce que je constate: si un homme s'inscrit, vous voyez les critiques 'Ah, c'est vieux, donc ne savaient pas lire, écrire avant, il faisait quoi'. Ils vont aller dans le groupe de femmes, ça doit être un vieux visage, donc vous savez, certaines stigmatisation derrière. Et parfois il le décourage, il peut abandonner.

[At the level of the individual himself, there are also challenges. For example, for men, what I find is: if a man signs up, you see the criticism 'Ah, he is old, so he couldn't read, write before, what was he doing.' They will go to the women's group, it must be an old face, so you know, some stigma behind it. And sometimes it discourages him, he may give up. [KII DRC Prtnr1]

Similar issues were also reported for DRC. This is a shame, because some sincerely want to learn.

Ce qui m'a poussé à venir s'inscrire dans ce groupe, pour les calculs, auparavant, on était en train de nous faire escroquer notre argent, parce qu'on ne savait ni lire ni écrire. Et ça m'a poussé à m'inscrire dans ce groupe.

[What pushed me to join this group was that, for the calculations, before, we were being cheated out of our money, because we couldn't read or write. And that's what pushed me to join this group.] [Male participant, FGD DRC lev3b]

A further consideration is that male participants in both countries were observed dominating discussions alongside elders, to whom the group also often defers. Men are sometimes reported to lack genuine interest in learning and discussing, being more interested in making money.



L'autre aspect aussi, lorsque les MUSO ont commencé à fonctionner normalement, c'est maintenant quand ils viennent pour adhérer, on leur dit: Allez d'abord commencer par le niveau 1, niveau 2, niveau 3. C'est comme ça que nous avons commencé à voir quelques hommes intégrer aussi les groupes.

[The other thing, too, is that when the MUSO started operating normally, now when they come to join, they're told: Go and start with Level 1, Level 2, Level 3. That's how we started to see some men joining the groups too.] [DRC Valid Prtnr2]

Il y a aussi un autre aspect. C'est peut être pas très répandu, mais j'ai déjà constaté cela. Alors les hommes, eux, sont trop calculateurs aussi. Et ils voient l'intérêt immédiat. Parfois, ils vous disent : 'Je ne peux pas passer toute une journée en train de lire et écrire et rentrer à la maison sans rien.' Chaque fois qu'ils voient un bénéfice directement, ils s'inscrivent, quelle que soit la stigmatisation derrière cette peine, de voir que parfois les effets vraiment du temps pour être visibles se découragent trop rapidement, aussi.

[There is also another aspect. It may not be very widespread, but I have already noticed it. So men are too calculating too. And they see the immediate benefit. Sometimes they'll say to you: 'I can't spend all day reading and writing and go home with nothing.' Whenever they see a direct benefit, they sign up, regardless of the stigma behind this pain, seeing that sometimes the effects really take too long to become visible and they get discouraged too quickly.]

[DRC Valid Prtnr1]



In sum, the participation of men has mixed results. The partners are aware of the issues but seem to have left the groups and facilitators to organically deal with them. As the DRC partners shared, men who really wish to learn will naturally overcome their humiliation and stay or come back to the groups. The Empowerment Group approach does not need to adjust to integrate men with negative behaviors.

Ah oui, si on peut voir même les effectifs, il y a lieu de constater que c'est autour de ça, donc il y a de cela qui de ces hommes-là bon ils dépassent cette humiliation-là et se disent bon, même si on m'humilie je vais rester dans le groupe, pourvu que je parvienne à savoir lire et écrire y en a comme ça, mais il y a d'autres qui vraiment ils ont du mal à intégrer le groupe.

[Ah yes, if we can even see the numbers, we can see that it's all about that, so there are some of these men who overcome this humiliation and say to themselves, well, even if I'm humiliated, I'm going to stay in the group, as long as I can read and write, there are some like that, but there are others who really find it hard to fit in.] [DRC Valid Prtnr2]

Oui mais moi, parce que déjà la philosophie du projet ne peut pas malheureusement être changée pour intégrer ce genre de comportement. Dans le long terme, mais lorsqu'ils verront que ça a fonctionné, il y en a qui reviendront quand même.



[Yes but me, the philosophy of the project unfortunately cannot be changed to integrate these types of behavior. In the long term, when they will see that it is working, some of them will come back anyway.] [DRC Valid Prtnr1]

- **What to do with those who fail the assessment**

As documented in **Sections 3** and **5**, not all participants pass the year-end test. Many of the reasons for this are not possible for ALEF or the partners to change. One possible factor to influence, as ALEF has already tried to do, is the overarching philosophy of participation and assessment. Is the goal that every participant will succeed in acquiring skills, however basic? And is the goal of assessment to document progress and organize teaching and learning, rather than to filter out learners?

One aspect of assessment that might help is to design items that allow for partial demonstration of skills, even with errors. Reading and writing are examples of opportunities to assess based on a rubric or set of criteria rather than to expect complete accuracy. In mathematics, as already pointed out by ALEF staff [Valid ALEF1], if participants can demonstrate an understanding of which process is needed and why, that may be a useful skill to assess, rather than simply looking for a correct calculation. We know this may be difficult to put into practice, but it might be worth the effort.

We learned that in DRC since 2022, facilitators work as volunteers to give extra instruction to participants who do not pass the test [KII DRC prtnr2] so that they can continue with their groups. Their commitment is admirable, and perhaps there are ways to provide supplementary materials or ideas in the facilitator guide to support that extra work. Another possibility is for the facilitator/group leader to pair a weak learner with a stronger one to create a mentoring or “buddy” system, which might help make the whole group feel responsible for its members’ learning.

It is certainly possible that 10 to 15 percent of participants will continue to have difficulty passing the test. This might be considered acceptable if it does not slow others down in the upper levels, in light of group solidarity and the reality that community members will always help each other.

We find someone who is lacking something so we can support them. We can help.
[FGD Ug exlev3]

- **Demand for another L1**

We did not hear requests for other L1s in the DRC, but in Uganda Erina learned that speakers of other languages want to join the groups. As one group leader explained, there are “some who are not Luganda, but as they live in this area, they try to pop up” [KII Ug GL lev2b]. Another part of the demand, as mentioned in **Section 3.3**, is that some want to learn Luganda [KII Ug coach1]. The partners explained that they try to save spots for Luganda speakers, but that there is a demand and they would like to expand the Empowerment Group program to other languages [Ug Valid Prtnr1]. CACI is a highly capable partner and we imagine that ALEF would be open to this idea.



Expansion might begin with languages that are linguistically close to Luganda so that existing materials could easily be adapted. It is still a big step to find language specialists and group leaders proficient in the new language(s).

- **Demand for more or another L2**

As reported in **Section 3.9**, there are requests for more English L2 in Uganda and for additional L2s like French or English in the DRC. The partners and ALEF are clear that the program is additive in that the real investment is in L1-based literacy, numeracy and content discussions that promote empowerment. We detected no question regarding the choice of L2s, so the program may be doing what it can in the time allotted. We might suggest that if there is more teaching for transfer, including more lessons that compare and contrast the L1 and L2, perhaps people will develop more strategies for developing their L2 skills outside the program.

- **Vacation is too long for some (DRC)**

In DRC, some coaches reported that the four-month vacation was possibly too long, especially between levels 1 and 2. They feel that some participants forget what they have learned over the vacation period. Additionally, there is no vacation needed with the MUSOs or CBOs, where year-long continuous programming is more fitting with the nature of their activities. If possible, ALEF and the partners could consider extending the program by a month, even if it needs to be done without supervision. This could be done on a pilot basis and monitored to see how it affects the absenteeism rate.

Nous avons des personnes en phase terminale et niveau un. On fait presque quatre mois avant de commencer le niveau deux. Alors avec les villageois, quelqu'un qui a fait sept mois, après sept mois, il termine quatre mois de vacances. À la maison, il risque d'oublier tout ce qu'il avait déjà appris en recommençant le niveau deux. C'est comme s'il recommençait du début. Si c'est possible vraiment, ce serait mieux qu'on diminue les vacances.

[We have people who are in the last level and also in level 1. We stop almost four months before beginning level 2. So, with the villagers, someone who did seven months, after seven months, he finishes [the level], four months of vacation. At home, he risks forgetting what he learned when he starts level 2. It's as if he had to start all over again. If it is possible, it would be better to reduce the vacation period.] [FGD DRC Coach5]

Trois ou quatre mois de vacances ne contribuent pas positivement à nos groupes des MUSO. J'accompagne les groupes 7 à 8 mois et pendant 3, 4 mois, ils se sentent abandonnés. Alors qu'ils auraient besoin de notre accompagnement régulier puisqu'ils ont aussi des difficultés, ils ont aussi à nous demander des conseils, ils ont besoin de notre appui, il faut qu'il soit accompagné régulièrement toute l'année et qu'ils se sentent accompagnés.

[Three or four months of vacation do not positively contribute to our MUSO groups. I accompany the groups for 7 to 8 months and during 3, 4 months, they feel abandoned. What they need is our regular monitoring because they also have hardships. They need to ask for advice, they need our support. They need to be regularly guided throughout the year and feel that they are being supported.] [FGD DRC Coach2]



Recognizing that the coaches need a break, perhaps there are ways to plan activities that groups can undertake themselves without supervision. These could be exercises in workbooks, story books to share, or other literacy-related projects. The groups themselves could continue meeting, for example, once per week to review the past lessons. In locations where there are Level 3 or ex-Level 3 participants, individuals might look in on the Level 1 finishers to answer questions. This kind of responsibility for their own literacy practice might help them become more autonomous later, even if their relationship with their facilitator/group leader is still close.

- **Need for L1 (and bilingual) reading materials**

ALEF and the partners have already developed books that can be shared among ex-Level 3 participants, but given the lack of materials and environmental print in the L1, we wonder if ALEF could encourage the partners to consider self-made materials. We believe that there is already an idea to digitalize the texts developed by the groups to make them into small printed or even photocopied booklets, which could have benefits beyond reading practice, such as documenting their discussions and reminding participants of the lessons learned. Perhaps facilitators/group leaders and coaches could be encouraged to put these or other self-made materials together and even to make them bilingual, which would provide practice in L2 reading as well as offering more opportunities for comparison/contrast of the languages.

Another possibility would be to have assignments at Level 3 for participants to collect traditional stories, or even a story-telling, story-writing workshop to inspire the development of self-made materials. The past work of World Comics Finland²³ might offer some inspiration; they worked with community members to identify key issues and think about four-panel wall posters (drawings of people with speech bubbles) to promote discussion. Since these are the kinds of discussions that ALEF lessons promote, this kind of literacy might be appealing to participants.

7.3 Methodological issues

As mentioned throughout **Section 3**, there are minor concerns about teacher-centered lessons and about how facilitators/group leaders conduct lessons. We recognize the challenges of facilitators (particularly those in Level 1) who may have limited exposure to quality education themselves, and we appreciate what ALEF and the partners already do to give them the skills they need to work with participants. The following are just a few suggestions and resources in case they are useful.

- **Methodology of L1 literacy teaching and discussions**

We appreciate the routines for literacy teaching established by the ALEF method and would not recommend any big changes. They can be very repetitive, which has pros and cons, but they may also provide stability and confidence for both participants and facilitators.

With regard to thematic discussions, however, we were mildly concerned with the teacher-centered pedagogy observed in lessons, particularly at Level 1. Unfortunately, we were not able to see full

²³ See e.g. <https://comminit.com/health/content/grassroots-comics-development-communication-tool>. It seems their website is no longer active, but Carol can share some of their pdfs if they cannot be accessed through these links.



discussions in either country; we understand that lessons were shortened for visitors, and that normally discussions take up the second hour of a lesson. However, we wonder if participants are discussing lesson themes in a Freirean, open and democratic manner, perhaps in a circle– or if some facilitators/group learners maintain a formal situation where participants raise their hands. This is a familiar challenge in similar contexts due to the gap between cultural concepts of teaching and innovations like learner-centeredness.²⁴ We suggest that further monitoring be undertaken, even using virtual means like partners or coaches recording observations and sharing them with ALEF, to determine whether facilitators/group leaders are learning to create open, sharing environments for learning.

We also wonder if facilitators/group leaders would benefit from having a framework to think about literacy skills of two types: those that rely on accuracy (e.g. matching the letter and sound) and those that rely on meaning-making (e.g. inferring meaning from a sentence or sharing opinions about a text). The Two-Track Approach (Malone & Malone, 2013)²⁵ has been well received by primary teachers because it helps them know when to look for correct answers and when to encourage all opinions without judgement; this could have some applications to literacy teaching in the L1. The Two-Track Approach helps teachers think about what they are doing and why, rather than just following a procedure. It might help them ask open questions that generate discussion in more inclusive ways.

● **Methodology of mathematics lessons**

As discussed in **Section 3.6**, there may be a need to look at facilitator/group leader training and even coach training on mathematical processes and simplified ways of teaching them. As mentioned in **Section 7.2** with regard to assessment, there might be better ways to teach and assess participants' ability to identify which process to use in which situation. It might also be useful to help facilitators focus on the metacognitive aspects of calculations, explaining why they choose a process and how they do the calculations. Understanding basic processes would be useful even if participants use calculators to do the actual calculation.

7.4 Considerations with regard to cost and sustainability

Our simple analysis in **Section 5.5** an aspect of the program's cost-effectiveness. We have calculated the cost per group on both an annual and monthly basis, as well as the cost per participant, also on an annual and monthly basis. These calculations and framing could help ALEF and its partners with fundraising efforts both internationally and locally, diversifying their funding sources.

Given the program's design, which is based on group facilitation, the cost of onboarding additional participants is minimal (USD 4 or SEK 42 per participant per month in Uganda, and USD 6 or SEK 62 per participant per month in DRC). The annual cost per group in Uganda is USD 918 or SEK 9,904, and in DRC, it is USD 1,336 or SEK 13,761. The monthly cost per group in Uganda

²⁴ Bartlett, L. & Mogusu, E. (2013). Teachers' understandings and implementation of learner-centered pedagogy. In Vavrus, F. & Bartlett, L. (Eds.), *Teaching in Tension: International pedagogies, national policies, and teachers' practices in Tanzania*, 61-74. Rotterdam: Sense.

²⁵ https://www.sil.org/sites/default/files/files/2-track_method_teachers_trainers_guide_2013.pdf



is USD 92 or SEK 990, and in DRC, it is USD 134 or SEK 1,380. Breaking down costs in this way may help CACI and ALEF secure local support and fundraising, enabling them to share some of the expenses at a group or participant level.

In terms of assessing the economic contribution generated by Empowerment Groups, ALEF and partners may wish to collect more information regarding the ex-Level 3 groups, VSLAs, and MUSOs, particularly related to the amounts that each group saves and provide credit to their fellow members.

- **Considering ways the program could support the MUSOs/VSLAs**

The program contributes by having a coach that follows up with the MUSOs in the DRC, and CACI will be hiring a coach to do the same with their ex-Level 3 groups. We did not get any reports of the groups needing more support, though we did understand that the coach in the DRC may soon have too many groups to follow up with. This may mean developing different strategies, such as having the groups report in to the coaches. Another possibility depending on people's connectivity could be creating a WhatsApp group in each country so that coaches can post information, and so that groups can consult each other with problems or share their successes. That would be an effective way for the partners and ALEF to document progress as well, and could contribute to M&E.

- **Considering ways the MUSOs/VSLAs could contribute back to the program**

We know that participants are grateful, and that their groups are able to generate some income for participants. It could be a source of pride for the groups to give back to the program so that others can benefit and the program could become more sustainable. With that in mind, we wonder if VSLAs and MUSOs could be encouraged to contribute to the program, even with a small symbolic contribution (USD 1-5), as a way of showing gratitude and ensuring its continued impact.

7.5 Implications for monitoring and evaluation

We find ALEF's existing methods of monitoring and evaluation to be highly informative and reflexive, so our suggestions here are attempts to improve what already seems to be an effective means of gathering data on the functioning of the Empowerment Groups. We also recognize that data gathering methods need to be realistic given the many tasks of the partners and coaches, and that some of the requests for translations are only for our benefit and not needed by those following implementation most closely. In this section we consider the possibilities for gathering M&E data that can provide useful feedback to the program.

- **Baseline and endline survey questions and analysis**

Because it is collected at the beginning and end of each year, the survey has the potential to measure the effects of the Empowerment Groups in terms of empowerment, awareness of human rights and poverty alleviation. We understand that ALEF has experimented with questions and that some have been found to be inappropriate or embarrassing according to feedback from the coaches. There are also questions that have not yielded useful data. We support this process and encourage ALEF and the partners to add questions that may give us the most useful data. Other than the questions we shared at the end of 2024, some of which were already incorporated into the endline



survey, we have no other suggestions. However, we did find a resource that reviewed research on individual and collective empowerment through literacy and developed a set of indicators (Soler et al., 2014). These indicators are presented in **Annex G** to inspire further thinking about questions for the survey and monitoring and evaluation procedures.

One spillover effect of conducting baseline and endline survey questions is the building of M&E capacity at the partner level. The Ugandan partner shares how CACI through this process is learning about the importance of collecting data and is interested in learning how to analyze and interpret the data within their organization as well. The DRC partner shares how he supplements KOBO data by visiting the field. In both cases, ALEF makes a significant contribution in inspiring evidence-based implementation, and partners in both countries are interested in doing more analysis.

But I must say, I was quite impressed because of, I mean, of course, ALEF supports the KOBO kind of data collection... If organizations have regular data that they are monitoring and it's recorded. Then if somebody like me comes, I can take that and then I can see, okay, in five years CACI touched this number of people. This percentage was like this and like and so I think it's a good beginning. I think in your recommendation it will be there... Because now KOBO is [very] analytical. It's not just putting data and pilot there. Data has to make use... And some of... the coaches said 'I'm very interested, I would like to know how to analyze or understand it,' at least, to be able to produce some kind of findings, you know. [KII Ug prtnr1]

Et après, chaque trois mois, donc deux fois pendant le cycle, les facilitateurs viennent également au bureau, alors on confronte comme ça ce que les coachs disent avec ce que les facilitateurs a dit. Même si moi aussi j'ai des missions par ci par là, je peux aussi aller sur le terrains, voir ce qu'il se passe ne pas entendre que seulement les histoires des KOBO parce que ce sont des chiffres, il faut les marier avec la réalité.

[And then, every three months, so twice during the cycle, the facilitators also come to the office, so we compare what the coaches say with what the facilitators have said. Even if I'm on assignment here and there, I can also go out into the field and see what's going on, and not just hear the KOBO stories, because these are figures, and you have to marry them with reality.] [KII DRC Prtnr1]

- **Other monitoring by coaches**

In Uganda, Erina met with the seven coaches responsible for monitoring and data collection and discussed the importance of first-person testimony. There was some reticence in collecting them in Luganda and translating them into English, which causes them more work; their preference is to input them into Kobo directly in English, which requires paraphrasing quickly. However, there is evidence that coaches are not always capturing authentic speech; see e.g. the example that is footnoted in **Section 5.2**. We also worked with the DRC partners to translate statements in the first-person as much as possible, and ALEF has already requested this. As demonstrated by our use of L1 quotes in this report, the data is much more precise and provides more first-person documentation of what people say. (Just as a reminder, we flagged points in the recordings that seemed to have key quotes and got help from our Luganda-speaking friend and from the DRC



partners to transcribe in L1 and then translate into English or French.) If this requires too much time on the part of the coaches, there are a few options:

1. Coaches could input the comments into Kobo in the L1 and they could be translated later by themselves or a designated translator. This might be worth a little extra funding from ALEF, as it would not be very expensive and it would provide extra income for someone.
2. Coaches could input (randomly?) selected comments into Kobo in the L1, such as a designated number of testimonials, so that it would be less of a translating burden for them.
3. Coaches could continue inputting comments in English or French but also record certain data so that others could re-listen if more precise translations are warranted.

- **Monitoring of the ex-Level 3s/MUSOs/VSLAs**

To our knowledge, coaches are not yet collecting any data on the ex-Level 3 participants in either country, though there are informal reports and the partners seem to be aware of their activities. Doing some M&E on those who have completed the program seems to be an excellent way to document how they are using their skills and if they demonstrate desired effects like poverty alleviation. It would be useful to gather more details on the organized groups, e.g. how their composition may have changed since the course, how members are using their literacy and numeracy skills, what further skills they might need and how they plan to develop them, and so on. M&E should not be too difficult if the groups remain cohesive, which seems to be the case.

The most efficient means of following up with these groups, if the coaches can manage it, would seem to be to develop a Kobo questionnaire tailored to the savings and/or income-generating activities of these groups. However, we are aware that there is just one coach following over 59 MUSOs in the DRC, and just one about to be hired in Uganda, so coverage could be challenging. Perhaps this questionnaire could be applied throughout the year, whenever the coach visits a group.

The interview that Erina conducted with a single ex-Level 3 man in Uganda was useful, so ALEF might also consider having all coaches use a short Kobo questionnaire whenever they encounter a former participant in the communities they visit. That could also be done throughout the year so that it does not put unnecessary strain on the coaches' time.

Another possibility for data collection could be to ask the MUSOs/VSLAs to report to the partners once or twice a year via WhatsApp. It might be possible for coaches to collect contact information from the management committee members so that there is a way to communicate with them. A brief questionnaire could be sent via WhatsApp as well.

- **Raising the partners' capacity for ethical data collection**

In working with the partners, we reviewed the following procedures when arriving in the field: Self-introduction, description of the purpose of the visit, request for observation and/or meetings, asking for consent, reviewing their right not to participate, and being sure people respond. We believe that our DRC partners did do this in the field, but we do not know if this will be done by coaches whenever data is collected. Perhaps this means that coach training should include principles of ethical research.



8. Final analysis and conclusions

In the Phase I evaluation based on individual and group testimonials from Uganda and the DRC as well as Togo, we were able to attribute a number of changes in people's lives to the ALEF program. Participants referred to positive changes related to health, income generation, agricultural practices and confidence/women's empowerment, and they linked these changes to specific lesson content and discussions. There were also many comments about group membership contributing to support, confidence and learning.

In this second phase of the evaluation, our findings support and go well beyond those early findings, providing many more details of the successes despite the challenges. We reveal the perspectives of all stakeholders, including the participants, their facilitators/group leaders, the coaches and the partners as well as ALEF staff. The results are very positive and offer insights into the benefits of combining literacy and numeracy skills training with theme-based discussions relevant to participants' lives, topped off with group organizing for income generation and savings.

8.1 How ALEF connects literacy and empowerment

While Phase I evaluation found evidence that participants felt empowered, Phase II explored how ALEF makes empowerment happen. We have shown in this report how ALEF's approach connects literacy and empowerment through lesson content and methodology as well as through opportunities for participants to form savings groups and small income-generating projects. As explained in **Section 3**, there is evidence that when individuals share their experiences and feelings—for example, their shame at not being able to read prescription bottles, their experiences of being discriminated against or taken advantage of, their difficulty in understanding children's school reports—they find common ground and gain strength. When they further interact with the themes of the lessons, again sharing personal experiences related to life's challenges, they learn about their rights and see ways forward in improving their lives. The discussion about “laziness,” for example, reveals that the ALEF program opens participants' eyes to the fact that they can take charge of their own lives and improve them through income-generating projects and the use of small amounts of capital generated through savings groups. These discoveries would not automatically happen if the lessons were simply about alphabets and mathematics processes.

Bweteyongeleza neno group mu maso, tulaba nga no obwongo bugaziwa, ela nga tutegela nebyetubade tetumanyi. Kwekolela netusobola nokibuvunila, ela netwoyongelayo.

[When we engage with this group, we see that our minds broaden, and we understand things we did not know before. We become self-reliant, responsible. We can translate it and continue to grow.] [FGD Ug lev3a]

With ALEF's permission and support, we explore these findings further in relation to current adult literacy scholarship in our planned scholarly article that will be submitted for publication. According to our research, the Empowerment Groups program incorporates several key elements of successful programs and does not assume that literacy automatically empowers.



8.2 Program effectiveness lies in the formation of groups

The participants' solidarity within their groups is reinforced by the organizing of their small businesses and/or savings and loan groups, which in many cases last well beyond the third and final course level and give them reasons to read, write and calculate. Whatever weaknesses some people may continue to have in their literacy and numeracy skills may be compensated for within their groups, as they ask not only their facilitators but more importantly each other for help or advice. Many talk about how they have made “good friends” in their groups, but there is evidence that the value of these friendships goes well beyond mutual enjoyment to the re-construction of their lives together.

But what I discovered, when you are working together, you can advise each other... Although we've been finding difficulties, you will find that because of their wisdom and encouragement which you get from your fellow brothers and sisters, you find that you've come home... There's that relationship and knowing different things together... We find someone who is lacking something so we can support them. We can help. [FGD Ug exlev3]

One group leader in Uganda spoke about ALEF as “cultural relevance” in how the groups build consensus with women at the forefront [KII Ug GL lev3b]. The program is consistent with the values of communal cultures such as interdependence, close relationships, loyalty and teamwork rather than individual accomplishments. This may be the reason that stakeholders do not want to lose participants who are not able to pass the end-of-year tests— and a reason for ALEF and its partners to find further ways to address this issue. The Empowerment Groups promote community literacy development, where individual literacy and numeracy skills make up part of a larger, shared experience that improves people's lives.

8.3 Sustainability of the skills and effects of the program

The idea that ALEF contributes to community literacy and life improvements is supported by evidence from this evaluation that participants are helping each other with life's challenges, recruiting new participants to the program, and telling family members, friends and community members what they learn. Texts created by Level 3 participants are often shared in public spaces, creating a multiplier effect in their communities that has the potential to last well beyond the three years of the course.

The best evidence of sustained group cohesion is the fact that MUSOs, VSLAs and CBOs are functioning for some time after the groups complete Level 3. With the presence of at least one designated coach in each country to follow up with these groups, it should be possible to gather more details on their members and how the groups are functioning. This would help ALEF understand which elements of the program are sustained and how, and it would lend even more support to the overall success of the program in terms of both skills and effects.

People are the knowledge and people are the office... They show stability of the project. They



show stability of the work you are going to do. [KII Ug prtnr1]

8.4 Responsiveness of ALEF staff to the needs of the field

The small but very committed ALEF staff are highly reflective regarding all aspects of the program. They demonstrate a great degree of responsiveness to the partners' needs in the particular contexts where they work, and they share lessons learned across contexts so that partners can learn from each other. ALEF staff's willingness to continue discussing important topics like empowerment with the partners, and the degree to which the program compromises in appropriate ways to deal with practical constraints in each context, make the program highly adaptable while maintaining its core principles. Introducing innovations such as Kobo for M&E gives the ALEF program flexibility, allowing it to adapt and modernize.

8.5 Commitment and collaboration of ALEF's partners

ALEF considers that one of its greatest strengths of the program lies in direct partnership with local NGOs that are familiar with local cultures and languages and have a passion for social justice and poverty alleviation. ALEF's main role, apart from fundraising support, is to provide expertise in adult literacy and empowerment, assist in developing course plans and materials, and train the local NGOs to carry out the program. Both ACDC in DRC and CACI in Uganda have joined forces with ALEF to produce learning materials, conduct trainings of coaches and facilitators/group leaders, and supervise, monitor and evaluate the Empowerment Groups. Both organizations also share the materials and method with other organizations.

Both partners' clarity about the aims of the Empowerment Groups and dedication to the program were apparent to us from the beginning of this evaluation. Based on our interactions with two leaders from each of the organizations, we can attest to their deep commitment to this work. The following apply to all four leaders:

- They know the program in detail and are its biggest advocates, convinced of its daily impact as reported by participants.
- They are close to the participants, facilitators/group leaders and coaches and understand their realities.
- They often describe the differences between this program and others, even others they themselves have worked on, and how they are most proud of working with ALEF.
- They talk about collaborating with ALEF staff and what they try to do to address challenges or issues.
- They earnestly cooperated with this study, going beyond what was asked of them.
- They are committed to ALEF's data collection and possibly involving coaches in monitoring and evaluation activities.

Franchement, moi, je suis personnellement fier de ce programme. Quand on commençait nous mêmes on venait, comme les participants, on savait que les autres programmes donnaient de l'argent, beaucoup de choses là beaucoup. Mais au fur et à mesure qu'on participait, on a



compris le mot “autonomisation.” Lorsqu'on parle aux gens qu'ils doivent chercher des solutions à leurs problèmes... Mais les gens commencent à comprendre pour résoudre leurs problèmes. Plus de 90% des solutions doivent provenir d'eux. Donc dans cet esprit là, pour résoudre les grands problèmes de leur vie, il faut que la personne fasse des efforts....On comprend que quand même par rapport au départ et là où nous sommes aujourd'hui, il y a une grande différence, donc les gens ne sont plus très dépendant de nous.

[Frankly, I am personally proud of this program. When we started out, we were like the participants, we knew that the other programs gave money, a lot of things there, a lot. But as we participated, we understood the word empowerment. When you talk to people, they have to look for solutions to their problems... But people are beginning to understand how to solve their problems. More than 90% of the solutions must come from them. So in that spirit, to solve the big problems in their lives, the person has to make an effort....We understand that there is a big difference between the beginning and where we are today, so people are no longer very dependent on us.] [KII DRC Prtnr1]

8.6 Concluding thoughts

This evaluation has explored the many ways ALEF brings about empowerment for participants, their families and their communities. We find no reason to question the program's philosophy, its approach and its aims based on the testimonies, statements and actions of stakeholders; in fact, the program seems to be exemplary in many ways, particularly in its combination of skills training with theme-based lesson texts and discussions that address authentic life problems faced by participants. The fact that they report improvements in functional, context-based literacy and numeracy in the first year, along with the fact that Level 2 and 3 participants want to continue using their skills and developing their savings groups, demonstrates the strength of the entire approach.

Referring to the indicators of empowerment (Soler et al., 2014) shown in **Annex G**, we can see that throughout this report we have captured instances of exactly these behaviors and beliefs. For example, we have comments about self-esteem: overcoming shyness and believing in oneself. There are multiple examples of learning skills and applying them to one's life, as well as sharing them with others. We have seen that participants are willing to assume leadership roles. There is clear evidence of teamwork, where members communicate with each other and play active roles. Finally, there is a feeling of community and of welcoming others to share skills and knowledge. Again, it is apparent that this would not happen if the ALEF program only taught literacy and numeracy skills. The Empowerment Group approach can be credited with achieving all of these aims on behalf of participants. Even if not every participant achieves every skill or gains from every effect, our findings show that benefits accrue to groups and communities. Put another way, the positive contributions of the program expand, multiply and are sustained well beyond any single learning group.



ANNEX A: Terms of Reference

Evaluation Phase Two: Evaluation of ALEF programs in DRC and Uganda

These ToR describe the tasks to be undertaken under this Agreement for the MLE International team to undertake a mixed-methods evaluation of ALEF's method, implementation and organizational support for adult empowerment and literacy in DRC and Uganda.

1. BACKGROUND

ALEF supports adult empowerment and literacy programs in the Mashi language in DR Congo (South Kivu province) and the Luganda language in Uganda. ALEF's implementing partners are ACDC and CACI, respectively.

ALEF is the principal funder of the Empowerment Group projects, and also serves as the technical advisor. The method used in the projects was designed by ALEF, who also was responsible for elaborating the course plans and materials together with the local NGOs. ALEF has been channeling funds for the Empowerment Group programs in DRC and Uganda since 2013.

The local organisations partnering with ALEF are responsible for implementing the program. They train personnel, organise and monitor the empowerment groups, buy and distribute course materials, employ and supervise personnel, handle finance and administration of the project and report to ALEF. In both DRC and Uganda, a number of groups are also run by sub-partners. In these cases, ACDC and CACI provide training, course materials and some supervision, while the sub-partner NGOs are responsible for participant enrolment and employment of facilitators.

The projects use ALEF's "Empowerment Group" method where participants work with natural texts in the home language (L1) dealing with relevant life situations. Group discussions about the topics treated are a key element in the method. Participants learn literacy and numeracy using the texts and later create their own texts based on their discussions.

Groups of 15-25 participants meet for two hours twice or three times weekly during seven or eight months in their local village or town area. The groups are led by a group leader who has received a two-week intensive course in how to apply the method. It is essential that group leaders do not lecture participants. Participants are meant to arrive at conclusions and make decisions about actions to take as a result of group discussions.

There are three consecutive levels. The first year, participants learn basic reading and writing in the L1, along with discussing their life situations and how to improve them. The second year, the same method is used to learn the four basic maths operations and applying numeracy to daily life. An additional language (L2) is also introduced through short oral dialogues. (In Uganda, the second language is English; in DRC, as most participants already speak some Swahili, the second language component focuses on basic reading skills in Swahili.) The third year, focus is on learning to read and write longer texts in the L1, holding discussions on Human Rights, learning to read and write and to relate to common documents in the L2, and creating an income-generating local association.

Every empowerment group receives at least one monitoring visit per month from a literacy coach. Coach reports are submitted directly to an online platform accessible by both ACDC and ALEF.



ANNEX A (continued)

2. SCOPE OF WORK

The consultants, working mainly virtually with members of the partner organizations in Uganda and DR Congo, will undertake a comprehensive mixed-methods evaluation of ALEF's method, implementation and organizational support for adult empowerment and literacy. This represents the second and final phase of the 2024 evaluation of ALEF's programs. This evaluation builds on the first phase of the evaluation that examined patterns and trends among the 2023 testimonies from individual participants and groups in DRC, Uganda and Togo regarding what had changed in their lives as a result of participating in the ALEF program.

Based on the testimonials from the three countries, a number of positive changes in people's lives could be attributed to the ALEF program. These included changes in health, income generation, agricultural practices and confidence/women's empowerment, which were all linked to specific lesson content and discussions. There are also references to group membership as contributing to support, confidence and learning.

Overall, this second evaluation phase shares aims with the first:

1. Provide insights regarding how the program is contributing to improving/changing participants' lives within and across sites and countries.
2. Provide ALEF with systematic, valid and credible data on the effects and impact of the program for use on the website, in funding applications, in discussions with donors and local governments, and other uses.
3. Provide data and analysis for publication that will contribute to international research on L1-based adult literacy and empowerment, specifically how ALEF's approach addresses participants' needs for empowerment, autonomy, resilience and other development-related goals.

Research questions:

ALEF's ultimate aim of empowerment and poverty alleviation can be broken down into a collection of desired outcomes of course attendance. Some of the questions that ALEF would like answered are the following:

- *How effective is ALEF's approach in terms of actual literacy, numeracy and second language learning?*

Evaluation methods: Review of past assessment results, discussions with partners on assessment methods, discussions with facilitators about individual results, implementation of our own assessments. The approach will also be compared to current understandings of literacy and learning via literature review, and perceived effectiveness evaluated based on stakeholders' responses.

- *How effective is ALEF's approach in terms of empowerment, human rights and poverty alleviation?*

Evaluation methods: Analysis of participants' collaboratively written texts, survey of participants' livelihoods/income-generating activities, living standards (health, access to clean water, children's access to formal education, etc.), and perceptions of empowerment (through questions about autonomy, decision-making etc.). If possible, add interviews with ALEF graduates 1-5 years later.

Based on the findings of the first phase of the evaluation, these areas will be investigated in more detail:

- Lesson themes: Performing a content analysis of the lessons, looking at how themes are chosen, how they are developed and seen by partners to represent relevant issues in people's lives, how regional differences might be accommodated, and how gender and other cross-cutting issues are represented.



ANNEX A (continued)

- Discussions: Observing facilitation of discussions and/or asking participants and facilitators about how they give space to each person, how safe they feel in sharing personal concerns, and what (if anything) might be improved. Look at how the pre-formulated questions steer the direction of discussions and possible advantages/disadvantages of this approach.
- Groups: Asking participants about how groups act to defend the rights of individuals and of the community, and how they perceive this as an outcome of participation in the groups. Look into how groups are formed for savings or income generation, and what they perceive as the conditions under which these groups function optimally.

Further questions to investigate:

- How are ALEF participants using IT, e.g. SMS, mobile money transfer and social media, and how do these uses call for or practice literacy and numeracy skills taught in the current curricula for each country?
- What are people writing in the L1? What is available to read in the L1 in each locale? What happens to the texts that the groups create?
- How much need do participants have for the L2, orally and in writing?
- How do participants develop critical thinking skills, the ability to state problems and discuss solutions, and ways to make group membership safe for sharing?

Methodology:

This evaluation is framed as collaborative with ALEF and its partners, meaning that the consultants will build on the monitoring and evaluation tools already developed.

Steps to be undertaken

The in-country part of this evaluation involves one consultant visiting Uganda for one week to work with the local partner, investigate the conditions under which data is and could be gathered, observe some of the study groups, and conduct a preliminary workshop to collaborate on evaluative instruments and determine capacity levels.

Based on the understandings gained, and guided by Phase I of the evaluation based on the testimonials, the consultants will then:

- Develop realistic data collection tools (including refinement of existing ALEF tools) that build on partner strengths but add validity wherever possible and consider ease in analysis/drawing conclusions and implications. Tools may include interview protocols, surveys of partners and coaches, literacy and numeracy assessments, and a cost-benefit framework.
- Prepare and conduct on-line training workshops for data collectors and refine tools to fit needs. Talk to data collectors about their choice of sites and support data collection and analysis. Support data collection virtually. Conduct interviews with ALEF and NGO partners
- Prepare and conduct final workshop to discuss results and determine how information will be used to improve the program.
- Write up findings, implications and actions



ANNEX A (continued)

3. TERMS OF AGREEMENT

The Consultant will provide services within the period beginning at the date of this signing to December 15, 2024, unless extended by agreement of the Parties or terminated in accordance with Section 6 (“Termination”). [Extended through end of February 2025]

4. COMPENSATION (See contract)

5. DELIVERABLES

- Short report on in-country Uganda work
- Periodic short reports on evaluative workshops, partner participation and preliminary analyses
- Full report for ALEF on all Phase II evaluation activities and results
- Brief summary of evaluation Phases I and II (with video if needed)
- Draft of publishable academic article based on findings (subject to ALEF’s permission before submitting to research journal)



ANNEX B: Research questions and means of verification

Main research questions	Means of verification
PROGRAMMATIC CONTENT	
How effective and relevant is ALEF's approach in terms of actual literacy, numeracy and second language learning?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review of curricular content and approach 2. Lesson observations 3. Literature review on current understandings of literacy and learning and comparison to ALEF's assessment methods and results 4. Review of past literacy and numeracy assessment results conducted by ALEF/partners 5. KIIs with partners and coaches on assessment methods 6. KIIs with facilitators about individual results and assessment methods 7. Possible implementation of our own assessments 8. FGDs or KIIs with ALEF participants
How effective and relevant is ALEF's approach in terms of empowerment, human rights and poverty alleviation?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review of curricular content and approach 2. Class observations 3. Part I - Testimonial study 4. FGDs or KIIs with ALEF participants 5. If possible, KIIs with ALEF graduates 1-5 years later 6. KIIs with facilitators about individual results 7. If possible, survey of participants' livelihoods/income-generating activities, living standards (health, access to clean water, children's access to formal education, etc.), and perceptions of empowerment (through questions about autonomy, decision-making etc.) 8. If possible, analysis of participants' collaboratively written texts
To what extent and how do literacy and numeracy skills contribute to personal and collective empowerment, and poverty alleviation? or are there other factors from the ALEF program that do so?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. KIIs with partners and coaches 2. KIIs with facilitators about individual results 3. FGDs or KIIs with participants 4. Survey of participants' livelihoods/income-generating activities, living standards (health, access to clean water, children's access to formal education, etc.), and perceptions of empowerment (through questions about autonomy, decision-making etc.) and their literacy level
PROGRAMMATIC STRUCTURE	
Can a cost-benefit analysis be determined for each setting? If yes, how cost-beneficial is the ALEF program?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. KIIs with ALEF and partners about costs associated with the courses 2. Follow-up, cross-referencing with literacy and empowerment results



ANNEX C: Key Informant Questions

Interviews, Focus Group Discussions²⁶, and Class Observations

Program managers and coordinators

1. What is your role at ALEF?
2. How long have you been working with ALEF?
3. How are the facilitators and coaches recruited? Are they remunerated?
4. What do you pay most attention to when recruiting/assigning facilitators and coaches?
5. What is your annual budget to run this program in general? Is it possible to have a copy of the annual budget?
6. How do you train/manage the coaches and facilitators? Do you hold weekly/monthly meetings?
7. How do you coordinate the coaches' visits? How frequently do they visit the groups?
8. What makes ALEF approach special or more effective compared to any other programs?
9. How do you think this program supports the participants?
10. What are the most reported changes in the participants you hear?
11. What are the attitudes/skills/knowledge that this program provides participants?
12. What are some challenges you face in program planning and implementation?
13. What are some achievements (you are proud of) of this program?
14. How much need do participants have for the L2, orally and in writing?

Facilitators

1. How long have you been a facilitator with ALEF? (If they have been a facilitator for a long time, what makes you return as a facilitator with ALEF?)
2. What is your occupation beside being a facilitator with ALEF? or are you solely an ALEF facilitator?
3. What drew you to become an ALEF facilitator? What were your reasons for joining ALEF?
4. As a facilitator, what do you pay most attention to when facilitating your group?
5. How do you prepare for the lessons? What do you pay most attention to when preparing for the lessons?
6. How do you make sure that your participants acquired their literacy and numeracy skills in Luganda? and in English?
7. How much need do participants have for English, orally and in writing?
8. How do you think these ALEF study groups support your participants?
9. What are some attitudes/skills/knowledge that your participants have reported to have helped them, whether in their personal or professional lives?
10. Is there a particular lesson that is always very effective?
11. What are some important changes you notice in your participants throughout the program? or What are some changes that your participants share with you throughout the program?
12. How supported do you feel in your work?

²⁶ Note: These were not true focus group discussions (FGDs) because they were conducted with entire groups of participants rather than selecting representatives.



ANNEX C (continued)

Coaches

1. How long have you been a coach with ALEF? (If they have been a facilitator for a long time, what makes you return as a coach with ALEF?)
2. What is your occupation beside being a coach with ALEF? or are you solely an ALEF coach?
3. What drew you to become an ALEF coach? What were your reasons for joining ALEF?
4. As a coach, what do you pay most attention to when visiting the groups?
5. How do you prepare for your visits?
6. How do you think the ALEF study groups support the participants?
7. What are some important changes you notice in the participants throughout the program? or what are some changes that the participants or the facilitator share with you throughout the program?
8. What do you think makes an effective ALEF class? (e.g., quality of the facilitator, content of the lesson etc.)
9. How much need do participants have for the L2, orally and in writing?

Participants

1. What is your current occupation?
2. How long have you been part of ALEF study groups?
3. What drew you to join these ALEF study groups? What were your reasons for joining the ALEF study groups?
4. How do you think these ALEF study groups support/contribute to you and your peers?
5. What is the one most important thing that you learned by attending the ALEF study groups?
6. Which lesson(s) had the most impact on you? Why? OR what was your favorite lesson(s)? Why?
7. What were you able to do when you learned how to read and write Luganda and/or English?
8. What attitudes/skills/knowledge have you transferred from these ALEF study groups to your personal and/or professional life? // In what kinds of situations have you transferred anything you learned in ALEF study groups to your personal and/or professional life? (e.g. cell phone, mobile money transfer, social media)
9. What changed in you since you started joining ALEF study groups?

Class observations

1. What are people writing in the L1?
2. What is available to read in the L1 in each locale?
3. What is available to read in the L2 in each locale?
4. What happens to the texts that the groups create?
5. How much need do participants have for the L2, orally and in writing?
6. How do participants develop critical thinking skills, the ability to state problems and discuss solutions, and ways to make group membership safe for sharing?
7. What are the roles of the facilitator and the participants?



ANNEX D: Overall timeline and country-based fieldwork schedules

The fieldwork plan was designed to accommodate the work calendars of the partners in Uganda and Congo. [Changes/additions from original plan in red]

Pre-travel (July 2024):

- Use Phase I results, reports and consultation with ALEF to summarize existing knowledge, find gaps, and refine research questions and aims of evaluation.
- Conduct literature review on approaches to L1-based adult literacy, assessing adult literacy and operationalizing concepts like empowerment.

In-person fieldwork in Uganda by Erina Iwasaki (5-10 August 2024):

- Observe study groups at different sites and different levels.
- Meet with and interview stakeholders.
- Refine/develop potential data collection tools in collaboration with partners (examples: survey/interview protocols for stakeholders, cost-benefit framework).
- Determine training needs for data collectors (with implications for workshops).
- If time allows, practice using new/improved data collection tools with partners. (Suggestions for getting first-person testimonials; ALEF added our suggestions for new survey questions, which were tested with both countries using Kobo.)
- Report findings with implications for workshops and data collection.

Workshops and data collection (October/November 2024): [Workshops replaced with meetings between MLE International team (Erina and Carol) and ACDC team (Janvier and Macho).]

- Prepare and conduct Workshop I [Zoom meeting 3 Oct] with partners in each country to work with new/improved data collection tools; determine timeline for data collection.
- Support data collection virtually.
- Prepare and conduct follow-up Workshop II [Zoom meeting 19 Nov] with partners in each country to collect results and plan further data collection.
- Support data collection virtually [Follow-up Zoom meeting 12 Dec]
- Prepare and facilitate final Workshop III with partners in the two countries to discuss data collection, preliminary analyses and lessons learned to improve the program and ongoing monitoring and evaluation. [Validation meetings on Zoom on 25, 28 and 31 Jan 2025.]

Analyzing the evaluative data (November/December 2024):

- Write up findings, implications and actions.
- If time allows, check with partners before finalizing.

Finalize analysis and report-writing (January/February 2025): [contract extended per agreement with ALEF]

- Complete analysis and write final report
- Submit final products of evaluation
- Combine Phase I and II findings to draft an academic article; check with ALEF and submit for publication.



ANNEX D (continued)

Uganda fieldwork schedule (Erina Iwasaki) 4-11 August 2024

Erina's visit was planned through e-mail and virtual meetings between the evaluators, ALEF and CACI. ALEF supported the partners for transportation and other costs associated with the one-week field visit (5-6 working days) conducted by Erina. She arrived on Sunday 4 August and departed Sunday 11 August, giving her 5.5 work days. The original plan was for her to visit at least three study groups, one per level, in the company of an interpreter (Luganda-English). She actually visited **nine** groups, met with participants, as well as holding meetings with staff at all levels: program coordination, literacy coaches and some facilitators.

Mon 5/8	Tuesday 6/8	Wed 7/8	Thurs 8/8	Fri 9/8	Sat 10/8
9am Visit CACI office					
10am Visit Level 1 in Lukwanga GL: Hope Coach: Edith	10 am Visit Level 2 in Matugga GL: Hawah Coach: Isaac	10:40am Visit Level 3 in Nangombe GL: Patience Coach: Edith	11:45am Visit ex-level 3 in Kasenyi (Fisherman's Village) Ex-GL: Ronald Coach: Edith	10am Coaches meeting & sharing circle (CACI office) All coaches except Isaac	Visit Makerere University & Kampala with Resty
Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch with the coaches	
2:20pm Visit Level 1 in Lusaka Makindye GL: Christine Coach: Daniel	3:20pm Visit Level 2 in Kirinda GL: John Baptist Coach: Patrick	1:30pm Visit Level 3 at Freedom Market GL: Kisaye Coach: Jovia			
4:30pm Two ex-level 3 groups in Ndejje CACI Faith & CACI Saniyuka @Resty's home GL: Miria					Leave for airport



ANNEX D (continued)

Virtual research and analysis in DRC

Erina and Carol planned the fieldwork in collaboration with ACDC and with the support of ALEF, which set aside a budget for field visits and the hiring of a videographer to accompany Janvier and Macho to visit the schools. As shown in the “virtual meetings,” we began with two meetings in early September between Erina and the ACDC team (Marc and Janvier) to determine the feasibility and modality for the ACDC team to collect data on our behalf. They developed a feasible plan (shown below) given the constraints of the rainy season. Our meetings in October went over procedures for video recording, including interpreting into French on the videos, so that we could process the fieldwork recordings using transcripts.

The fieldwork was carried out in mid- to late October by Janvier and Macho, with some last-minute changes due to weather and availability. A wide range of observations, interviews and group discussions were conducted to give us access to the information we needed. We had e-mail contact, but mainly used WhatsApp to stay in frequent contact about any questions or adaptations to the plan and to send and receive video links from YouTube. Periodic virtual meetings were useful to clarify what data were gathered and to get Janvier and Macho’s input on our analyses.

ACDC submitted a detailed field report on 2 November which was very helpful. At our request, they transcribed a set of specific video segments into Mashi and then French, sent on 17 December, at our request.

Virtual meetings of MLE International with ACDC

Date	Time (ET unless otherwise stated)	People
2 Sep 2024	14:00-15:00 (JST)	E with J & M – meet, discuss RQs & data to be collected, template for reporting
9 Sep	15:00-16:00 (JST)	E with J & M – discuss data collection timeframe
3 Oct	8:30-9:30	E & C with J & M – discuss research and data collection
11 Oct	8:00-10:00	E & C with J & M – individually for interviews
12 Oct	7:00-8:00	E & C with coaches
19 Nov	8:00-9:00	E & C with J & M – discuss videos and clarify
12 Dec	8:00-9:00	E & C with J & M - describe progress with analysis, get help with transcriptions
25 Jan 2025	8:00-9:30	E & C with J & M - validation meeting/discussion



ANNEX D (continued)

DRC plan for field visits

Programme d'entretien avec les participants, les facilitateurs & les MUSO pour l'évaluation

LIEU & DATE	FGs avec les participants	FGs avec les Muso	FGs avec les facilitateurs
Le 16/10/2024 CIRUNGA	Groupe de NYENJE N3 Facilitateur : MWANGAZA Coach : NZIGIRE Heure : 06h-08h	CIFUMA A 09H	
Du 17/10/2024 CIRUNGA	Groupe de BUSHANYI N2 Facilitateur : BORA Coach : NZIGIRE Heure : 07h-8h30		Mwamini, Bora, Nabintu, Mwangaza,
Le 21/10/2024 WALUNGU	Groupe de CIBURHI N2 Facilitateur : MATTHIEU Coach : SIDE Heure : 15H		
Le 22/10/2024 WALUNGU	Groupe de CISHIME N1 Facilitateur : RIZO Coach : CLAIRE Heure : 06h-08h		MATTHIEU , BARHATULIRWA, SAFARI, BULANGALIRE
Le 28/10/2024	Groupe de KASHOMBE N1 Facilitateur : NEEMA Coach : NDEKO Heure : 06h	IBONA A 09H	JEAN, FURAH NDIRUSHIZE, EPREM, MAPENZI ; NABIZANA, NEEMA
Le 29/10/2024	Groupe de KONGE III Facilitateur : BARHAKOMERWA Coach : MUSODA Heure : 15H00	LUGENDO A 17H00	ZIHINDULA , BARHAKOMERWA, CHARLES, ELYSEES, ANTOINE



ANNEX E: Data collected by country

Uganda (August 2024)

Collected data	Lukwanga	Lusaka Makindye	Matugga	Kirinda	Nangombe	Freedom Market	Ndejje	Kasenyi	TL
Class observations	Level 1	Level 1	Level 2	Level 2	Level 3	Level 3		Ex-lev 3	7 obs
Group leader** interviews	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	6 int
Participant discussions	21 F: 20 M: 1	26 F: 23 M: 3	18 F: 18 M: 0	11 F: 11 M: 0	22 F: 21 M: 1	18 F: 18 M: 0	Ex-lev 3 grps (2)	4 F: 4 M: 0	8 disc 120 ppl
Ex-participant interview						1			1 int
Coach* interview			1						1 int
Coach* discussion							1 F: 3 M: 3		1 disc
CACI manager interview							1		1 int

*Coaches - Uganda (3f, 3m)	*Coaches - DRC (2f, 4m)
KABONGE Daniel NAMUMBYA Edith SSERUWAGI MANDAY Patrick NAMUYIGA Jovia NANTEZA Phionah MUGABI Isaac	NDEKO MUSENGO Emmanuel MUSODA MIRINDI Innocent NZIGIRE CIZUNGU Sophie CIBICABENE BAHIZIRE Marie Claire RUTAKANGWA MIGABO Gilbert "Coach Muso" MUNGUAKOKNKWA BAGAYAMUKWI Side
**Group leaders of the region visited	**Facilitateurs de la région visitée
	(m) Bahati Ephrem (f) Neema Bashizi (m) Bahati Jackson (f) Mapenzi Pascasie (f) Nabizana Rose (f) Ajibu Musanganya (f) Furaha Nathalie (f) Kazaroho Gomez (m) Baderhage Jean



ANNEX E: Data collected by country (continued)

Democratic Republic of Congo (Oct-Nov 2024)

	Nyenje	Cifuma	Bishanyi	Kashombe	Madaka	Konge	Cishime	Lugendo Centre	Birava	Bukavu 11/10/24	TL
Observation de groupe	N3		N1	N1	N2	N3					5 obs
Entretien: Facilitateur de groupe	1 Mwanga za Muhaya		1 Bora Nfundiko	1 Neema Bashizi	1 Prudence Furuguta	1 Espérance Barhakome rwa	1 Rizo Bahizire (N1)				6 int
Discussion: participants de groupe	18 F: 18 M: 0		24 F: 22 M: 2	19 F: 18 M: 1	22 F: 21 M: 1	20 F: 17 M: 3	22 F: 22 M: 0				5 disc 125 ppl
Discussion: Participants de MUSO		14 (Mwamini)						21 (Jean Gilbert)			2 disc MUSO
Discussion: Coaches*										6 F: 2 M: 4	1 disc avec 6
ACDC Chef de Prog KII										Janvier	1 int
ACDC Coord de Prog KII										Macho	1 int
Discussion: Facilitateurs**									8 F: 5 M: 3		1 disc avec 8



ANNEX F: Suggestions for baseline/endline survey items

Note: Items highlighted in yellow were added to the endline survey in November 2024.

1. Possible additions to existing questions

Under “Education/literacy”

Which of the following can you do? Add:

	Yes	No
Use your mobile phone for banking		
Communicate with others by texting (SMS / message service)		
[And maybe:] Read for pleasure (written materials or social media)		

Under “Self-esteem” add:

	Agree	Disagree
I give advice to others		
I seek advice from others		
I hold a leadership position in my group		
I hold a leadership position in my community		

2. Possible pilot questions (to add to survey)

Participation in class

How often do you come to meetings?

Occasionally	Some of the time	Half of the time	Most of the time	Almost all of the time

If you have to miss a meeting, what reasons do you have?

	Yes	No
Weather (rain, etc.)		
Health reasons (self or family member)		
Problem with the meeting place (meeting canceled)		
Need to work		
Child responsibilities		
Familial responsibilities		
Other: [fill in]		

How active are you in lessons (meetings)?

I speak only occasionally	I sometimes speak	I speak about half the time	I often speak	I am one of the most active speakers

Which lesson or lessons have been the most useful to you? Why?



ANNEX G: Resource for measuring empowerment

Source: Soler, P., Planas, A., Ciraso-Calí, A. & Ribot-Horas, A. (2014). Empowerment in the community. The design of an open indicators system from participatory evaluation processes. *Pedagogía Social. Revista Interuniversitaria* 24, 49-77.

Table 2. Empowerment variables and indicators

Variable	Indicator	Dimensions	
		Ind	Com
Self-esteem	Self satisfaction progress	x	
	Bravery (To face with determination some actions and compromises)	x	
	Shyness (Ability to face public without fear)	x	
	Security (To believe in oneself)	x	
Responsibility	To assume voluntarily and realistically tasks and compromises	x	x
	To assume oneself role	x	x
	Capacity for community actions		x
Efficacy	Capacity to make decisions in the right moments	x	x
	Be systemic and constant in the task performance	x	x
Critic capacity	Analysis capacity	x	x
	Have own criteria	x	x
Autonomy	Initiative	x	x
	Self-management	x	x
Acknowledgment	Consider oneself as an actor and valid interlocutor	x	x
	Consider the others as actors and valid interlocutors	x	x
Team working	To show team working implication	x	
	To contribute with a proactive role in the team working	x	
	Communication capacity	x	x
Inclusion and community integration	Capacity to integrate the community or group		x
	New residents welcome		x
Community identity	Community or group feeling	x	x
	To be aware of the shared problems	x	x
Community knowledge	Community general knowledge	x	x
	Community services, resources and equipment knowledge	x	x
	Knowledge of the community agents and organizations	x	x
Community organization	Organization capacity		x
	Fluid information flow in the community		x
	Community response capacity		x
	Alliance working capacity		x
	Person and group participation	x	x
	Participation areas creation or disposition		x
Learning	To be aware of having acquire or improve oneself capacities or learning	x	x
	Improvement of the other capacities	x	x
Evaluation	Evaluation capacity	x	x
	Evaluation relevance	x	x
	Self-evaluation capacity	x	x

Ind: individual dimension

Com: community dimension

Source: authors'



ANNEX H: Further supporting quotes

Organized by section and subheading, these are the remaining quotes indicated by ⊕ that support the points made in that section of the report.

3.1 Effectiveness and relevance of literacy

- **Participants report significant changes in their lives related specifically to reading and writing.**

On ne savait pas lire et écrire avant et cela nous mettait mal à l'aise.

[We didn't know how to read and write before, and that made us feel uncomfortable.]

[FDG DRC lev2a]

Et ce qui concerne le travail des enfants à la maison, ce que j'écris à la maison, j'écris souvent quand les enfants quittent à la maison à l'école, on les a donné des devoirs à effectuer à la maison. Quand ils arrivent à la maison, j'ai fait les devoirs de mes enfants. Je contrôle même les cahiers de mes enfants. Même j'écris aussi la dérogation si l'enfant a été chassé. Il arrive à la maison, son père n'est pas là. Il me raconte et moi seule, je veux faire la dérogation les jours qu'on va payer les frais scolaires de nos enfants, même la dérogation que je dois effectuer pour mes enfants.

[And regarding the children's work at home, what I write at home, I often write when the children leave for home from school, they've been given homework to do at home. When they get home, I've done my children's homework. I even check my children's notebooks. I even write the waiver if the child has been expelled. When he arrives home, his father isn't there. He tells me what's going on, and I'm the only one who wants to write the waiver on the days we are going to pay our children's school fees, even the waiver I have to write for my children.]

[FGD DRC lev3b]

Auparavant, nous vivions dans une grande obscurité. Nos parents ne voulaient même pas nous faire inscrire à l'école et jusqu'aujourd'hui, ça nous a poussé à nous inscrire dans ce groupe d'autonomisation pour savoir lire et écrire. Et même si on nous envoyait des lettres, nous étions capables de lire. Et même si nous passons par une bannière, là où on écrit qqch, comme avertissement, nous sommes aussi capables de lire sur ces tableaux là et nous allons savoir où passer et là où c'est interdit de passer. C'est là, ça nous a beaucoup poussé et nous sommes vraiment dans une grande joie de savoir lire et écrire.

[We used to live in total obscurity. Our parents wouldn't even let us enroll in school, and to this day, that's pushed us to enroll in this empowerment group to learn how to read and write. And even if we were sent letters, we were able to read. And even if we pass by a banner, where something is written as a warning, we're also able to read on these boards and we'll know where to go and where it's forbidden to pass. That's where it really pushed us, and we're really happy to be able to read and write.] [Male participant, FGD DRC lev3b]



ANNEX H (continued)

She's grateful, she says she gives credit, especially to Level 1 that takes them through the sounds, yeah, the letter writing, which they did not know at all, then the writing of the names and villages of cities with the capital letter she would just write with small letters, yeah, and didn't know that it was a mistake. But she's happy that she learned that, and a lot more.

[Female participant, FGD Ug lev3b]

She can now budget for her family. She knows how much she spends in a day. She knows what she's going to save for the future. She has learnt a lot. They have gained a lot of knowledge. She is serious. She is really serious. [Female participant, FGD Ug level 3a]

She learnt how to read and write. She's one of the people who didn't know at all. And she testifies that she learnt and was able to sign with the Minister of Local Government. She was taken to sign something with the Minister of Local Government. And she testifies all that from the ALEF program. [Female participant, FGD Ug level 3b]

Moi, mon mari a étudié mais moi je n'ai pas étudié mais actuellement j'ai commencé à lui écrire un message et il comprend ce que je voudrai lui dire.

[My husband has studied but I haven't, but I've started to write him a message and he understands what I want to tell him.] [Female participant, FDG DRC lev2a]

Auparavant [...] elle faisait réciter les enfants mais elle ne savait lire et signer. Mais à partir de ces instructions, elle peut maintenant tenir un stylo et signer.

[Previously... she had the children recite, but she couldn't read or sign. But with these instructions, she can now hold a pen and sign.] [Female participant, FGD DRC lev1b]

- **Participants are happy and enthusiastic about developing their literacy skills.**

So she would take her announcement [on radio] they say, yeah, selling cassava and people would go and buy. ... She's now able to write the advert. [FGD Ug lev1a]

Mais moi, je veux commencer déjà parler succès. Moi en tout cas les gens sont très contents parce qu'en premier lieu ils ne savaient pas lire, ils ne savaient pas comment lire l'alphabet. Mais jusqu'à présent pour le niveau trois, il y a des gens qui commencent à lire la Bible dans leur groupe de vie et ils sont très contents de cela. Il y a des participants que j'ai rencontré qui commencent à écrire des messages sur le téléphone, ils écrivent des lettres donc il y a quand même un grand changement.



ANNEX H (continued)

[But I want to start by talking about success. In any case, people are very happy because at first they didn't know how to read, they didn't know how to read the alphabet. But up to now for level three, there are people who are starting to read the Bible in their life group and they're very happy with that. Some of the participants I've met are starting to write messages on the phone, they're writing letters, so there's been a big change.] [FGD DRC Coach6]

- **The L1 is an important aspect of literacy learning.**

Et puis le troisième aspect [positif] est la langue, la langue que nous utilisons, et ils sont contents d'apprendre dans leur langue maternelle, mais les autres programmes là, ils n'ont pas.

[And then the third {positive} aspect is language, the language we use, and they are happy to learn in their mother tongue, but the other programs there, they don't have it.] [KII DRC Prtnr1]

La langue maternelle de Mashi, quand on enseigne dans langue maternelle que l'on comprend confortablement, cela crée des soulagement, on comprend directement ce qu'on apprend. Mais aussi pour la langue swahili, vous voyez quand on va à l'école, pour aller voir les responsables de l'école là où les enfants étudient, là aussi ils utilisent le Swahili. Alors la langue swahili elle est très utile pour savoir comment on peut l'écrire quand on peut écrire le Mashi, on sait comment écrire le swahili c'est ça.

[The mother tongue, Mashi, when you teach in a mother tongue that you understand comfortably, it creates relief, you understand directly what you're learning. But also for the Swahili language, you see when you go to school, to see the school officials where the children study, there too they use Swahili. So the Swahili language is very useful for knowing how to write it when you can write Mashi, you know how to write Swahili that's it.] [FGD DRC Coach5]

[L]uganda is okay because I want for them to first learn [L]uganda, how to read the [L]uganda-because we need to change from [L]uganda to English. [KII Ug GL lev1a]

Members say the months of the year after the group leader says them. Group leader says the months in English and their Lugandan equivalent. Most people don't know the Lugandan months and just use the English months. [Obs Ug Lev2a]



ANNEX H (continued)

3.3 Challenges with regard to literacy

- **Not all participants are successful in their literacy learning.**

Qui est-ce qui a des problèmes de vision mais tellement que quand il a observé, par exemple, comment ceux qui ont fini le programme on commençait à faire les MUSO. Il est envoûté par ça. Il voudrait participer parce que s'ils parvenaient à terminer les trois niveaux comme ça ils participent aussi à une MUSO, mais en réalité, quand vous observez vous trouvez qu'il n'a pas la vraie motivation d'apprendre à lire et à écrire. Mais il est poussé à pouvoir participer au MUSO... Autre chose aussi, c'est par rapport au thème qu'on discute là le thème qu'on discute pendant les leçons il y en a qui viennent juste pour ça. Mais quand on commence à lire et donc apprendre les lettres comment écrire comment calculer pour moi ? Il n'est pas vraiment très très intéressé, mais quand on arrive, à la discussions là ça va plus que ça, c'est un peu ça.

[There is someone who has such vision problems but he observed, for example, how those who finished the program started to do the MUSO. He is mesmerized by that. He wanted to participate because if they manage to complete the three levels like that they would also participate in a MUSO, but in reality, when you observe you find that he has no real motivation to learn to read and write. But he has pushed to be able to participate in the MUSO.... There's another thing too, and that's the theme we discuss during the lessons. But when you start to read and learn the letters, how do you write, how do you calculate for me? He is not really that interested, but when we get to the discussions, it goes better, it is a bit like that. [DRC Valid Prtnr2]

3.4 Effectiveness and relevance of numeracy

- **Participants are able to start up and run small businesses.**

She learned how to serve. She calculates how many visitors, how many plates, so everyone can get equal portions. [FGD Ug lev2a]

Okay, well, [her favorite] is lesson three. It's all about budgeting, calculating, balancing books in the business. Because she's a business lady. [FGD Ug lev3a]

They advertise on WhatsApp... The cellular...helps them with business. But using the calculator on the phone, yeah, she says the customer might come and they want– she gives an example of banana clusters– they want so many. And she says that 1500 so immediately, she picks her phone, gets a calculator, and calculates taking 50 clusters times 1500. She knows it. [FGD Ug lev3b]



ANNEX H (continued)

[What they can do now:] [FGD Ug lev2b]

- Read a message on her phone and understand it and probably where possible, I reply.
- She can now count money accurately.
- She can now greet in English as well.
- She can now count, work on her business, and count the profits and plan for it.

3.7 Effectiveness and relevance of L2

They start that excitement from learning to speak English, how to greet, how to ask for food. Yes, how to ask their kids. [KII Ug GL lev2a]

And the English side, because as it is fun, you know. So they enjoy it. [KII Ug GL lev2b]

J'ai remarqué que dans la salle les gens étaient très enthousiasmés pour apprendre le swahili parce que ça permet la communication d'abord avec l'enfant. La plupart des jeunes parlent swahili, ceux qui sont proches de la ville. Mais aussi quand ils sont en ville ça permet la communication et les participants ont aussi souhaité apprendre un peu le français.

[I noticed that people in the room were very enthusiastic about learning Swahili, because it allows communication first of all with the child. Most young people speak Swahili, those who are close to the city. But also when they're in town, it allows communication, and the participants were also keen to learn a little French.] [KII DRC facil lev3b]

Pour le swahili, c'est dans les cours dans les MUSO, pour qu'ils soient ouverts à d'autres groupes, à d'autres univers, quand ils font la vie dans le cadre des communications comme l'achat des matières [premières] et la vente avec les crédits ou quand ils sont obligés de contacter les Banques et les coopératives ils sont aussi obligés de compléter les CV avec ces codes-là qui sont en Swahili.

[For Swahili, it is in the MUSO courses, so that they're open to other groups, other worlds, when they do life in the context of communications like buying materials [raw materials] and selling with credits or when they're obliged to contact Banks and cooperatives they're also obliged to complete CVs with these codes which are in Swahili.] [FGD DRC Coach2]



ANNEX H (continued)

3.9 Challenges with regard to L2

- **Young people reportedly ask for more L2 (in Uganda) and even L3, L4 (in DRC).**

Oui je crois d'ailleurs que l'on devrait rajouter le français si la méthode le permettait. Pour ce qui est du Swahili, nous avons beaucoup de langues au Sud Kivu, au niveau du pays, c'est 400 ou 500. Je ne sais plus. Et donc, il faut au delà de votre langue du quartier avoir une langue nationale, pour les banques, pour les téléphones, quand vous voulez aller en ville, les transports, ils utilisent le swahili et donc si vous voulez être connecté avec le monde extérieur. Il faut absolument cette deuxième langue. La langue du quartier en droit, quand vous dépassez votre tribu, la langue disparaît aussi. Donc il faut absolument intégrer cette deuxième langue.
[Yes, I think we should add French if the method allows it. As for Swahili, we have a lot of languages in South Kivu, 400 or 500 in the country as a whole. I don't know. And so, in addition to your local language, you need to have a national language, for banks, for telephones, when you want to go into town, for transport, they use Swahili and so if you want to be connected with the outside world. You absolutely need this second language. When you go beyond your tribe, the language disappears too. So you absolutely have to integrate this second language.] [KII DRC Prtnr1]

4.1 Evidence of empowerment

- **Participants are proud of their newfound confidence and ability to speak in front of others.**

She's grateful. She didn't know how to write her name. First of all, through the learning, she has learned even how to write her own and her children's name. She has learned public speech. She was too shy [before]... Now that she can even stand and share ideas, she's happy. She says she has learnt how to manage her business and knows how to even pay herself.
[FGD Ug lev3b]

She can now stand amidst, among the people and say something without fear. But at first, or before, she was fearing. [FGD Ug lev1a]

- **Participants have taken leadership roles in their communities.**

Elles parviennent à participer pendant ces réunions là, et elles demandent aussi à parler au temps des réunions. Nous avons une fille qui est recenseur. Elle fait des cérémonies sociales registre mais auparavant elle faisait pas ça.

They manage to participate during these meetings, and they also ask to speak at the time of the meetings. We have a girl who is a census taker. She does social ceremonies, but she didn't do that before. [KII DRC facil lev2a]



ANNEX H (continued)

- **Group solidarity is a factor in confidence and self-esteem.**

As a group, participants reportedly gain a sense of community and the ability to resolve conflicts that accompanies an improvement in their self-esteem.

Bweteyongeleza neno group mu maso, tulaba nga no obwongo bugaziwa, ela nga tutegele nebyetubade tetumanyi. Kwekolela netusobola nokibuvunila, ela netwoyongelayo.

[When we engage with this group, we see that our minds broaden, and we understand things we didn't know before. We become self-reliant, responsible, we can translate it and continue to grow.] [FGD Ug lev3a]

When we first came together as a group, we did not have anything of our own as a group. But today we are seated on our own chairs. We bought from our saving. We have plates, we have sauce pans. We can even hire them [out] and get money as a group. Of course, there are several challenges, but we thank God we are here. [FGD Ug lev2a]

C'est comme on a dit, quelqu'un qui ne voyait pas, Maintenant, il a commencé à voir. Vous voyez cette fierté... Vous voyez cette attitude, c'est typique. Maintenant, ce sont ces gens-là qui commencent à conseiller aux autres.

It's like we said, someone who couldn't see, now that person has started to see. You see this pride... You see this attitude, it's typical. Now these are the people who start advising others. [KII DRC prt2]

- **Female participants feel empowered as women and recognize their common issues.**

Comme il s'agit des groupes de femmes principalement, elles ont trouvé que les femmes soutiennent lors des accouchements. Une certaine solidarité même si le mari est défaillant, le groupe est là pour suivre la maternité.

As these are mainly women's groups, they have found that the women support each other during childbirth. A certain solidarity even if the husband is failing, the group is there to follow the maternity. [FGD DRC lev1a]

Elle dit que les comportements sont améliorés, l'hygiène est améliorée. Par comportement, je voulais savoir c'est quoi exactement. C'est le vécu quotidien pratiquement qui s'est amélioré. Dans le sens de comment savoir se tenir, se présenter devant les gens, parce qu'avant c'était un peu un look négligé, maintenant ils prennent soin de leur corps, et leur apparence. Comme compétence, elle dit qu'elle voit plus de gens manier des téléphones, surtout lire les messages, et lecture aussi et envoi des SMS.



ANNEX H (continued)

She says that behavior is improved, hygiene is improved. By behavior, I wanted to know what exactly that means. It's the day-to-day experience that has improved. In the sense of knowing how to behave, how to present themselves in front of people, because before it was a bit of a sloppy look, now they take care of their bodies, and their appearance. As a skill, she says she sees more people handling phones, especially reading messages, and also reading and sending SMS. [KII DRC facil lev1b]

Right now, she's brave enough to talk to her husband, to plan for their children, not to just produce. She can even say to her husband, please put on a condom. But the other time, she was fearing. [FGD Ug lev1a]

Succès de participants dans les groupes, il y a beaucoup de femmes analphabètes, parce que les femmes ne doivent pas étudier parce qu'elles vont faire des travaux domestiques, nous avons des succès parce que les femmes ont trouvé leurs droits. Les femmes étaient très marginalisées. Elles n'avaient pas à parler dans la communauté mais suite au éducation d'ALEF, les femmes travaillent aussi pour la communauté, surtout dans l'éducation sanitaire.
[Successful participants in the groups, there are a lot of illiterate women, because women don't have to study because they're going to do domestic work, we're successful because women have found their rights. Women were very marginalized. They didn't have a voice in the community, but as a result of ALEF's education, women are also working for the community, especially in health education.] [FGD DRC Coach4]

Pour le succès, je vais parler des femmes, surtout concernant leur droit. Les femmes ignorerait leur droit. Les femmes pensaient que c'est seulement les hommes qui pouvaient travailler pour la famille, mais après les instructions dans les cours, la femme travaille pour sa famille, l'autonomisation ALEF a aidé beaucoup dans la famille. Les femmes aussi commencent à faire scolariser leurs enfants comme les hommes aussi.
[For success, I'm going to talk about women, especially their rights. Women would ignore their right. Women thought it was only men who could work for the family, but after the instructions in the courses, the woman works for her family, ALEF empowerment has helped a lot in the family. Women are also starting to send their children to school, just like men.] [FGD DRC Coach3]



ANNEX H (continued)

4.2 Evidence of human rights awareness

- Stakeholders recognize the importance of lessons that raise awareness of human rights.

La leçon qui traite de ne pas avoir peur à eu beaucoup d'impact, mais aussi une leçon qui parlait de respect de chaque individu, c'est-à-dire considérer un individu tel que sans discrimination. Ces leçons là ont eu un plus grand impact sur les participants.

[The lesson about not being afraid had a big impact, but so did a lesson about respecting each individual, i.e. considering an individual as he or she is without discrimination. These lessons had a greater impact on the participants.] [KII DRC facil lev3]

Aussi, les droits humains. Après le niveau 3 ils sont capables de savoir comment revendiquer leurs droits. Ce n'est pas seulement pour écrire mais ils parlent aussi, ils font des discussions aussi, ils commencent à se défendre et à défendre leur droit. Et aussi aux villages qui sont plutôt très miniers, les femmes, elles sont très minimisées mais à partir de ces discussions, il commence à savoir aussi que la femme aussi a son droit. Même pendant l'héritage, les femmes étaient très délaissées mais à partir des discussions ils voient maintenant que les femmes ont des droits pendant les partages des terres. C'est pour ça qu'il y a des succès en lisant, en écrivant et en revendiquant leurs droits.

[Also, human rights. After Level 3, they know how to claim their rights. It's not just about writing, it's also about talking, they're starting to defend themselves and their rights. And also in the villages, which tend to be very much mining villages, women are very downplayed, but from these discussions, one is starting to know that women also have their rights. Even during inheritance, women were very much neglected, but from the discussions one now sees that women have rights during land sharing. That's why they succeeded in reading, writing and asserting their rights.] [FGD DRC Coach6]

Le fait de venir assister à la rencontre des groupes permet aux participants de maîtriser la leçon du jour. Alors s'ils ne viennent pas, ils ne peuvent pas savoir comment lire et écrire.. certains qui ont raté, ils ont l'impression qu'ils ont raté quelque chose de très important. Par exemple, j'ai donné une leçon sur les droits humains et ceux qui avaient raté cette leçon s'en voulaient à eux-mêmes... et donc pour moi participer au groupe, c'est le fondement, même de tout ce que nous faisons.

[Coming to the group meeting allows the losers to master the lesson of the day. So if they don't come, they can't learn how to read and write... some who have missed out, they feel they've missed out on something very important. For example, I gave a lesson on human rights, and those who missed the lesson blamed themselves... and so for me, participating in the group is the very foundation of everything we do.] [KII DRC facil lev3b]



ANNEX H (continued)

En ce qui concerne les élections chez nous et au Congo, auparavant, personne qui sait ni lire ni écrire, et si nous allons à l'élection où on vote, on nous fait voter la personne qui est préférée, que nous ne voulons pas et qu'on n'a pas choisi. Donc les témoins là qui, restent dans le bureau de vote, ils vont nous faire voter la personne qu'on n'a pas choisie parce que nous ne savons pas lire ni écrire. Mais aujourd'hui, comme nous savons lire et écrire, nous savons qu'à la prochaine élection, nous allons élire comme il faut. La personne que nous voulons nous-mêmes.

[As far as elections in Congo are concerned, in the past, nobody knew how to read or write, and if we go to the election where we vote, they make us vote for the person who is preferred, who we don't want and who we didn't choose. So the witnesses who remain in the polling station will make us vote for the person we didn't choose because we can't read or write. But today, because we know how to read and write, we know that at the next election, we're going to elect the right person. The person we ourselves want.]

[Female participant, FGD DRC lev3b]

- **Participants learn useful skills to act on and improve their environments.**

Nous avons appris à réclamer nos droits sans utiliser la violence. Le fait de réclamer ses droits dans la non violence.

[We've learned to demand our rights without using violence. The act of claiming your rights non-violently.] [FGD DRC lev3a]

Well, in Level 2, they covered the lesson about the small clinics. Our lady took a child to a clinic where the personnel who was there wasn't qualified, and gave raw medicine to the child [who] died. So she learned how to be very careful. She shows she goes to a bigger hospital since then, and in Level 3, they have learnt about writing a [will]. Okay? And knowing the last, you know rights, what the widow will take, those percentages, they have now covered in Level 3, yeah, and she's happy that now, as women are also knowledgeable about it before they would be just told to back off and we take all the properties. But, she found her own empowerment. [FGD Ug lev3b]

4.3 Evidence of poverty alleviation

- **Participants gain self-respect through cleanliness and taking care of themselves.**

Les rencontres soutiennent les participants dans les changements de comportements, par exemple, dans l'amélioration de leur hygiène. La majorité de mes participants viennent propres car on ne peut pas être en groupe en étant sale.

[The meetings support participants in behavioral changes, for example, in improving their hygiene. The majority of my participants come clean because you cannot be in a group and be dirty.] [KII DRC facil lev1c]



ANNEX H (continued)

Ils ont commencé à fabriquer le matelas eux-mêmes. Ils dormaient mal maintenant ils commencent à dormir sur un matelas. Ils ont fabriqué ça sans perdre de l'argent. Les autres aussi ils aiment beaucoup ce groupe d'autonomisation, parce qu'ils savent lire et écrire et même envoyer des et lire des messages sans rechercher quelqu'un qui peut leur lire et écrire. Même enregistrer un numéro de téléphone avait été difficile mais maintenant, c'est facile.
[They started making the mattress themselves. They were sleeping badly, now they're starting to sleep on a mattress. They made it without losing money. The others also really like this empowerment group, because they can read and write and even send and read messages without looking for someone who can read and write to them. Even registering a phone number used to be difficult, but now it's easy.] [FGD DRC lev3b]

- **Participants are proud of working to support themselves and their families.**

Le premier changement qu'elle a noté, c'est que les femmes voulaient absolument participer dans la diversification des revenus des ménages, par exemple, elles peuvent aller chez le voisin comme main d'oeuvre, après elles peuvent chercher qqch qu'elles amènent au foyer, plutôt que d'attendre que seul le mari apporte quelque chose à la fin.
The first change she noticed was that women absolutely wanted to participate in the diversification of household income, for example, they could go to the neighbor's house as laborers, after which they could look for something to bring home, rather than waiting for the husband to bring something in the end. [KII DRC facil lev1b]

Les changements que j'ai constaté sont la fabrication des sacs de couchage que j'appelle matelas, et aussi le fait que la plupart des gens essayent d'adopter des techniques de gestion de sol comme le compostier. Aussi, les gens savent reconnaître les AVEC [Associations villageoises d'épargne et de crédit], les gens savent connaître leur numéro, les emprunts.
The changes I've noticed are the making of bags for sleeping that I call mattresses, and also the fact that most people are trying to adopt soil management techniques like composting. Also, people recognize the AVECs [another term for MUSOs], people know their numbers, loans. [KII DRC facil lev1c]

5.1 Findings regarding the use of mobile phones

They advertise their WhatsApp. Yes, their products. ...cellular ...helps them with business. But using the calculator on the phone, yeah, she says the customer might come and they want. She gives an example of banana clusters. They want so many. And she says that 1500 so immediately, she picks her phone, gets a calculator, and calculates taking 50 clusters times 1500 She knows them. [FGD Ug lev3b]



ANNEX H (continued)

Some customers use WhatsApp. They take a picture of their shopping list. Yes, they sent to them. [FGD Ug lev3b]

Her children have helped take photos of her. Oh yeah, at her store posted on Facebook. Oh like where she now has three or nine customers. She sent them four batches of bananas, and they keep communicating, and she sends them. She also says, yes, the phone, they have not yet learned everything in that phone, okay, yeah, but it is really a good tool in business. [FGD Ug lev3b]

5.2 Lesson themes and their relevance

- **The lesson themes are highly relevant and applicable to participants' daily lives.**

When she was on Level 1, she heard that in Level 2 there is too much [a lot] about math, business, and whatever. When she was in Level 2, again, she heard that it's too much in level three. So she had to continue so that she can know all of that. [FGD Ug lev3a]

Knowing too much [a lot], like, when they discuss it, they know more. She knows more. She gains more knowledge and she... the brain expands. Yeah, because of what they talk. And then, so you want to keep coming. [FGD Ug lev3a]

Ekibiina kino kyanjigiriza ku butabanguko mu maka ne kye butegeeza, kye nali simanyi. Abaana bangi bali ku nguudo, ela tomanyi lwaki baliwo.

[This organization taught me about domestic violence and what it means, which I didn't know about. Many children are on the streets, and you don't know why they are there.]

[FGD Ug lev2a]

Je ne savais pas qu'on fait vacciner l'enfant. Chaque fois mes enfants étaient toujours malades. Mais depuis que je fréquente ce cours, j'ai appris que la vaccination est très importante et j'ai commencé à faire vacciner mes enfants et depuis lors ils sont en bonne santé.

I didn't know that children were vaccinated. My children were always sick. But since I've been attending this course, I've learned that vaccination is very important and I've started vaccinating my children and they've been healthy ever since. [FGD DRC lev1a]



ANNEX H (continued)

[HIV] people who are not educated, how can their health be, than those who are educated? And they brought out very big findings. Because if you are not educated, that's when you live and take expired drugs. You can't read the dates. You cannot even interpret the doses. They tell you two times, at least you will be swallowed once. The same time. The second time. They said I should swallow three times. But they said no, it's not in the same hour. In intervals. So that is when they are not educated. [KII Ug prtnr1]

Je crois qu'il y a les droits humains, un peu d'économie, donc la diversification de l'économie dans les ménages, amélioration de la vie. Oui, j'ai dit un peu l'amélioration de la vie... [par exemple] on n'a pas chauffé la nourriture. Après il y a des maux de ventre, on dit, c'est sorcier, alors qu'on a pas bien couvert quelque chose, il y a la pluie. Donc en général, vous sentez que la vie s'améliore un peu chez les participants.

[I think there are human rights, a bit of economics, so diversifying the household economy, improving life. Yes, I said a little improvement of life... {for example} one did not heat the food. After there are stomach aches, one says, it's witchcraft, when one hasn't covered up something properly, there's rain. So, in general, you can feel that life is improving a little for the participants.] [KII DRC Prtnr1]

À partir de ces instructions, il y a des changements dans leurs familles. Il y a des instructions concernant comment éduquer les enfants, comment vivre avec la communauté, comment on doit aller aux centres de santé. Et c'est là, qu'on voit l'amélioration de la famille.

From these instructions, there are changes in their families. There are instructions on how to educate children, how to live with the community, how to go to health centers. And that's where you see the improvement in the family. [FGD DRC lev1b]

- **Participants apply lessons learned.**

D'abord, les gens connaissent comment écrire et lire leur nom. En plus je pense que tout ce que je fais avec les participants, c'est ce qui a été finalement vu pendant le groupe d'autonomisation parce que ce sont ces mêmes membres qui sont responsables de ces mouvements et ils savent suivre les crédits, ils savent suivre les emprunts et les intérêts... Dans beaucoup de leçons il y a des conseils, par exemple comment tenir son champ, et je vois que lors des visites les champs des participants essayent de suivre ce qui a été recommandé lors des discussions de groupe.

[First of all, people know how to write and read their names. Plus I think that everything I do with the participants is what was finally seen during the empowerment group because these are the same members who are in charge of these operations and they know how to follow the credits, they know how to follow the loans and the interest... In many of the lessons there is advice, for example on how to tend one's field, and I see that when participants visit their fields, they try to follow what was recommended during the group discussions.] [KII DRC facil lev1c]



ANNEX H (continued)

Les rencontres donnent la motivation de travailler davantage, beaucoup de nos enfants sont maintenant reconnus par l'état car ils sont enregistrés aux bureaux de l'état civil grâce aux enseignements tirés de nos leçons, compréhension des indications comme les panneaux, etc.
[The meetings give us the motivation to work harder, and many of our children are now recognized by the state because they are registered at the registry office thanks to the lessons we've learnt, understanding signs and so on.] [FGD DRC lev1b]

Motivation pour travailler beaucoup plus. Le groupe les incite à quitter l'état de paresse, améliorer l'hygiène mais elles disent aussi que les groupes permettent à beaucoup de ménages d'enregistrer les enfants par exemple l'état civil. Situation qui permet d'inscrire les enfants correctement à l'école primaire parce qu'avant si vous n'avez pas ces documents, c'est pratiquement impossible de faire inscrire les enfants. Une autre idée qui émerge, c'est la lecture des inscriptions sur les panneaux. Par exemple, il y a beaucoup d'interdictions qui sont notées et les gens se faisaient attrapés bêtement. Maintenant elles peuvent voir certaines interdictions et ne pas se faire arrêter inutilement.

Beaucoup disent qu'ils ont amélioré la présentation des repas mais aussi l'équilibre des aliments pour les enfants. Les autres disent qu'ils ont acquis un peu d'estime de soi et puis la considération de la communauté.

[Motivation to work much harder. The group encourages them to get out of a state of laziness, to improve hygiene, but they also say that the groups enable many households to register their children, for example their civil status. If you don't have these documents, it's practically impossible to get children enrolled in elementary school. Another idea that emerges is the reading of inscriptions on signs. For example, there are a lot of bans written on them, and people used to get caught out. Now they can see certain prohibitions and not get stopped unnecessarily. Many say that they have improved the presentation of meals, but also the balance of foods for children. Others say they've gained a bit of self-esteem and consideration from the community.] [FDG DRC lev2a]

5.3 Findings regarding the savings and income generation groups

- **The group activities that follow Level 3 are reportedly appreciated and successful.**

Les membres qui ont fini les trois premiers niveaux, ils commencent les MUSO. Ils écrivent pour les crédits facilement sans problème, ils défendent facilement leurs droits. Ils participent aux activités communautaires en terme d'amélioration de leurs conditions de vie, et ils sont aussi consultés par la communauté. Donc même pour ceux qui ne sont pas membres des groupes, les participants [du MUSO] les aident à partir de la formation qu'ils ont eu.

[Members who have completed the first three levels start MUSOs. They can easily apply for credit, they can easily defend their rights. They participate in community activities to improve their living conditions, and they are also consulted by the community. So even for those who aren't members of the groups, the [MUSO] participants help them from the training they've had.] [FGD DRC Coach2]



ANNEX H (continued)

Et aussi le dernier aspect, c'est le fait de se regrouper dans les MUSO. Là, ils réclament ensemble, donc le fait de rester ensemble avec les autres membres de la communauté, c'est ça les soutient très suffisamment, parce que lorsque il y a un problème. ils peuvent facilement recourir aux groupes et pour trouver une solution comme ça.

[And also the last aspect, it's the fact of meeting in the MUSO. There, they claim together, so the fact of staying together with the other members of the community, that supports them very sufficiently, because when there's a problem they can easily resort to the groups and to find a solution like that. [DRC Valid Prtnr2]

5.4 Texts written by participants

- **The texts written by participants are a source of pride and contribute to community knowledge, in contexts where there is little to read in the L1.**

Yeah, the billboards... I'm imagining we have like 30 Level 3 groups completing in that year. So we shall have those 30 billboards across those groups. So that's where the text will be. And we feel by that time at least that text will be, will be genuine, and will be approved or read through with the coaches, together with these people who wrote, and it is good information and ready to be put outside, so that even if we are asked, we shall really stand and say, Yes, this is how it is. [KII Ug Valid Prtnr1]

Il y en a qui disent désormais 'On va changer notre manière de faire telle culture' et ils essaient un peu de vulgariser cela dans le groupe donc ils essaient un peu... donc c'est le facilitateur, on dirait, qui est le gardien des textes qui ont été créés, qu'on fait parfois des recommandations ou en résolution dans la communauté.

[There are some who now say 'We're going to change our way of doing such and such a crop' and they try to popularize that a little in the group... so it is the facilitator, we would say, who is the guardian of the texts that have been created, that we sometimes make recommendations or decide with the community.] [DRC Valid Prtnr2]

6.1 Positive results for participants as individuals and as groups

- **Empowerment through skills and knowledge**

Par rapport aux attitudes, compétences et connaissances, la plupart viennent sans savoir comment on tient un stylo et elles en sortent avec la... Ils savent déjà comment lire et écrire... Dans les attitudes, il y a beaucoup de choses qui ont changé comme envoyer les filles et les garçons à l'école sans discrimination, cela a beaucoup bougé, en terme des droits des enfants, mais aussi en terme d'amélioration de la vie en général. J'ai l'impression que les gens se tiennent un peu mieux qu'avant.



ANNEX H (continued)

[In terms of attitudes, skills and knowledge, most of them come without knowing how to hold a pen and they leave with the.... They already know how to read and write... In attitudes, there are a lot of things that have changed like sending girls and boys to school without discrimination, that has changed a lot, in terms of children's rights, but also in terms of improving life in general. I have the impression that people have it a little better than before.]

[KII DRC facil lev3b]

She is saying she is happy. She has learned a lot, two hours they spend here. The program was well designed to know that it is for adults. They can spend two hours here and learn something new. Instead of staying at home to gossip with others, you can come here with friends. They discuss and go back with some knowledge. [FGD Ug lev1a]

Les principaux changements que je peux reporter sont d'abord savoir lire et écrire, beaucoup de gens viennent témoigner que maintenant, je suis en mesure de lire et écrire. Le deuxième changement, c'est l'estime de soi, beaucoup de gens considèrent qu'ils ont maintenant chassé la peur, ils peuvent prendre la parole dans le publique, et troisième changement, tout le monde a envie de chasser la pauvreté et donc beaucoup de participants font des activités supplémentaires par rapport à ce qu'ils faisaient avant. Ils utilisent aussi le téléphone.

[The main changes I can report are, firstly, being able to read and write. Many people have come to testify that I can now read and write. The second change is self-esteem. Many people feel that they have now overcome fear, and can speak out in public. They also use the telephone.] [KII DRC facil lev3b]

Ils disent: 'Au départ, nous on ne savait même pas écrire notre nom et quand on se promenait, on ne sait même pas lire ce qui est écrit quelque part', donc sur le plan de la lecture écriture ils disent 'C'est comme si on était des aveugles, et on a commencé à voir'. Par rapport au téléphone, tout ce qui peut être écrit. Sur le plan économique, vous voyez, nous sommes dans un milieu rural. Si on peut le dire comme ça, vous allez rencontrer quelqu'un. Il n'avait pas de logis, il habitait une case en ville, tout ça. Et avec les enseignements ils ont commencé à améliorer leurs habitats.

[They say: 'At first, we couldn't even write our name, and when we went for a walk, we could not even read what was written somewhere, so in terms of writing they say: 'It's as if we were blind, and we've started to see.' In terms of the telephone, anything that can be written down. Economically speaking, you see, we're in a rural environment. If you can put it that way, you'll meet someone. He didn't have a home, he lived in a hut in town and all that. And with education they started to improve their homes.] [KII DRC Prtnr2]



ANNEX H (continued)

6.2 Results going beyond the participants themselves

- **There is evidence of a multiplier effect because participants share their knowledge.**

Auparavant, chez nous, nous avons discriminé les enfants entre les filles et les garçons. Les filles restent à la maison et les garçons vont à l'école. Jusqu'aujourd'hui, quand on a appris dans ce cours d'alphabétisation ou d'autonomisation, nous avons compris que tous les enfants sont les mêmes. Jusqu'aujourd'hui, nous avons envoyé tous les enfants à l'école pour étudier. Les filles et les garçons. Et nous avons aussi donné ces formations à nos voisins, donc à notre communauté ici à Lukunda. Parce que ceux qui ne veulent pas entrer dans nos groupes, nous arrivons même chez eux même à les former et leur expliquer comment ils vont faire. Et autre chose, nous trouvons de l'argent auparavant et cet argent, on a bu ça dans un bidet, la boisson. Les enfants mangent mais les frais de scolarisation, les frais qu'ils vont acheter de la farine ou quelque chose à manger. Mais jusqu'à aujourd'hui, nous avons compris comment nous pouvons nous mettre ensemble dans un groupe ou dans une association. Aujourd'hui, notre argent ne peut plus être dans une condition qui n'est pas bien préparée.

[We used to discriminate between boys and girls. Girls stay at home and boys go to school. Until today, when we learned in this literacy or empowerment course, we understood that all children are the same. Until today, we've sent all children to school to study. Girls and boys. And we've also taught these things to our neighbors, so to our community here in Lukunda. Because those who don't want to join our groups, we even manage to train them at home and explain to them how they're going to do it. And another thing, we used to find money and we drank it in a bidet, the drink. The children eat, but the school fees, the fees for them to buy flour or something to eat. But until today, we've understood how we can get together in a group or an association. Today, our money can no longer be in a condition that is not well prepared.] [FGD DRC lev3b]

- **Facilitators/group leaders and coaches are committed to and rewarded by their work.**

Je me sens soutenue dans mon travail, car mon mari ne m'empêche pas de faire les rencontres des groupes et avec les enfants aussi et après la petite prime de ALEF aide aussi à mieux faire le travail.

[I feel supported in my work, because my husband doesn't stop me from doing the group meetings and with the children too, and afterwards the small bonus from ALEF also helps to do the job better.] [KII DRC facil lev1c]



ANNEX H (continued)

Comments from coaches in Uganda [FGD Ug coach1-6]:

- I joined [because] I grew up seeing my mom being [unable] to buy something... It was a funny sort of personal experience which pushed me to offer my support to the project.
- I was helping one of the participants, and I was touched because now she is sending me texts.
- Now [ALEF] is part of my life and a part of my family.
- We are not earning much. That is the unfortunate part of it. But we are ready to serve. These coaches were chosen because they were ready to volunteer.
- That's why I really felt good to join this because it's touching the people's souls to see that they are changing from a certain situation to another situation.
- So it is not only one person caring, but there is actually a network and big other roles. It even goes beyond at times even.

J'ai vu que pendant les élections beaucoup de voix ont été attribuées à des gens non-votés alors ça m'a révolté et ça m'a poussé à devenir facilitatrice.

[I saw that during the elections a lot of votes were given to people who hadn't voted, so I was outraged and decided to become a facilitator.] [KII DRC facil lev3b]

Nous sommes là pour aider la population et la communauté à aider tout le monde dans l'autonomisation. Et surtout contre la vulnérabilité pour qu'il n'y ait pas de bêtises donc c'est ce qui nous pousse souvent d'être coach. C'est pour aussi aider les gens pour que ils deviennent autonomes de chasser la pauvreté de nos communautés et tout ça et les autres aussi qui restent à la maison qui n'ont jamais vu le tableau noir. C'est surtout aussi pour les aider aussi vraiment à savoir lire écrire et calculer aussi c'est ça.

[We're here to help the population and the community to help everyone in empowerment. And above all against vulnerability so that there's no nonsense, so that's what often drives us to be coaches. It's also to help people become autonomous, to drive poverty out of our communities and all that, and also the others who stay at home who've never seen the blackboard. Above all, it's also to help them really learn to read, write and calculate.] [FGD DRC Coach5]

Parce que j'aime le travail qu'on nous a amené, par ALEF. C'est le travail d'enseigner, les autres qui sont en dehors de connaître les études. J'aime enseigner ceux qui n'ont pas eu la chance d'étudier.

[Because I love the work that ALEF has brought us. It is the job of teaching others who do not have the chance to study. I love teaching those who have not had the chance to study.]

[KII DRC facil lev1a]



ANNEX H (continued)

Alors quand j'ai entendu parler du programme, c'est par là qu'on a commencé les négociations comment accompagner dans ce milieu, de ce niveau c'est par-là vraiment qu'on a conseillé la méthode ALEF. C'est aussi ce que la communauté a choisi. La langue d'instruction est locale. C'est ce qui m'a vraiment poussé à devenir coach avec ALEF.

[So when I heard about the program, that's when we started negotiating how to support this environment, this level, that's really when we recommended the ALEF method. It's also what the community chose. The language of instruction is local. That's what really pushed me to become a coach with ALEF.] [FGD DRC Coach1]

Et si j'ai vu que les groupes portent des fruits sur le terrain en aidant les membres à prendre en charge, améliorer les conditions de vie, j'ai dit que ce serait utile que j'apporte aussi ma pierre pour que notre communauté accède à un niveau considérable au-dessus de la pauvreté qu'il parcourt. C'est pour ça que je disais que c'était une vocation.

And if I saw that the groups were bearing fruit on the ground by helping members to take charge and improve their living conditions, I said it would be useful for me to do my bit too, so that our community could rise to a considerable level above the poverty it is experiencing. That's why I said it was a vocation. [FGD DRC Coach2]

You're supposed to teach for two hours? But you realize that after two hours, people still are hungry to be back. [KII Ug GL lev3b]

Après avoir renseigné, je fais des visites à domicile pour m'assurer que les participants ont saisi...[How check understanding?] Je fais des visites chez eux, les participants lisent sur le téléphone des messages, c'est tout... Oui, je me sens soutenue dans mon esprit de créativité. Même si les gens disent que ça ne paye pas beaucoup, je m'en fous. Parce que je sais ce que je fais, c'est ma vision.

[After the information has been given, I make home visits to make sure the participants have understood...[How check understanding?] I make home visits, the participants read messages on the phone, that's all... Yes, I feel supported in my spirit of creativity. Even if people say it doesn't pay much, I don't care. Because I know what I'm doing, it's my vision.]

[KII DRC facil lev2a]



ANNEX H (continued)

Au niveau global, je trouve quand même qu'il y a beaucoup de gens qui sont disposés à s'engager sur base de 'volontariat' même s'il y a cette prime, mais bon, je trouve quand même qu'on ne manque pas de gens pour venir nous aider, et donc je trouve que les programmes quand même permettent à mettre en valeur certaines valeurs humaines qui va au delà de combien moi je vais gagner, on voit juste d'abord la communauté et c'est très important pour moi.

[On a global level, I still find that there are a lot of people willing to get involved on a 'voluntary' basis, even if there is this bonus, but I still find that there is no shortage of people coming to help us, and so I find that the programs still help to highlight certain human values that go beyond how much I'm going to earn, we just see the community first and that is very important to me.] [KII DRC Prtnr1]

- **The lives of facilitators and coaches are also improved.**

Oui, moi je peux confirmer à deux niveaux. alors le premier niveau, c'est le niveau d'abord des facilitateurs. Parmi les facilitateurs, nous avons ceux qui n'ont pas de prime... Quand on leur posait la question: pourquoi vous n'abandonnez pas, ils disent: 'C'est mon mari qui commence à me pousser d'aller continuer le travail parce qu'il a vu que c'est quelque chose d'intéressant qui se fait dans la communauté' et donc vous voyez, entre les époux des facilitatrices sont presque convaincus al À un autre niveau, il y a des facilitateurs qui ont fini et qui nous amènent des nouveaux participants, disons des participants qui ont fini qu'ils amènent des nouveaux. D'ailleurs, je me souviens que j'ai fait deux ou trois.

[Yes, I can confirm this {the benefits} on two levels. The first level is that of the facilitators. Among the facilitators, we have those who don't have a bonus...When asked why you don't give up, they say: When we ask them why you don't give up, they say: 'It's my husband who's starting to push me to continue the work because he's seen that it's something interesting that's being done in the community' and so you see, between the husbands of the facilitators are almost convinced al At another level, there are facilitators who have finished and who bring us new participants, let's say participants who have finished that they bring new ones. In fact, I remember doing two or three.] [DRC Valid Prtnr1]

J'aime bien apprendre aux gens à lire et à écrire, parce que ça permet aux gens de mieux travailler pour le ménage...Je fais un peu d'agriculture et un peu de petits commerces aussi.

[I like to teach people to read and write, because it helps them work better for the household...I do a bit of farming and a bit of small business too.] [KII DRC facil lev3b]

En premier lieu, ça m'a permis de développer mes aptitudes personnelles mais aussi à développer la population de notre entourage.

[Firstly, it allowed me to develop my personal skills, but also to develop the people around us.] [Male facilitator, FGD DRC facil1-9]



ANNEX H (continued)

7.1 Logistical issues

- **Competition from other projects bearing gifts (DRC)**

Quand on arrive sur le terrain, on rencontre d'autres organisations, d'autres partenaires qui veulent faire la même activité. Peut-être ils ont une autre approche qui n'est pas la nôtre, et là ça nous pose un peu des problèmes. Oui on prend le cas, par exemple, de l'année passée 2023. On avait des élections. Alors les candidats, si ce sont les politiciens, donc pour sensibiliser les gens du village à aller voter, ils viennent avec des programmes comme ça, 'nous allons vous apprendre à lire et à écrire'. Mais en réalité, ce n'est pas un programme bien établi, peut-être il va apprendre aux gens comment on va écrire son nom. Et là, quand ces gens arrivent comme ça dans chaque village par-ci par-là, parfois nos gens se dirigent là-bas. Comme c'est pour quelques jours, et après, quand ils ont fini, ils reviennent. Donc on a ces mouvements comme ça. D'ailleurs on a appris qu'il y en a qui les matins sont chez nous, pendant la journée, il sont en cours là. Comme ils savent que ce sont des programmes qui vont se terminer après deux trois semaines, deux mois. Alors ils font les deux.

[When we get to the field, we meet other organizations and partners who are doing the same activity. Maybe they have another approach than ours, and that is a bit problematic. Yes, let's take the example of last year, 2023. We had elections. So the candidates, if they are politicians, to sensitize the people in the village to go and vote, they come with programs like 'we are going to teach you how to read and write.' But in reality, it is not a well established program, they may teach people how to write their names. And so, when these people come to the villages here and there, sometimes our people go there. Since it's for a few days, when they are done, they come back. So we have movements like that. In fact, we learned that there are some that are with us in the mornings, and during the day, they are in these other classes. Because they know that these programs will only last two, three weeks, two months, they do both.]

[KII DRC prtnr2]

Souvent, le combat est déséquilibré, mais il faut du temps pour que l'intéressé comprenne que 'Ah! le cash n'était pas la solution' parce que nous avons dans nos groupes, certains qui ont fui ce genre de programme et qui sont avec nous.

[Often, the fight is unequal, but time is needed for the interested person to understand that 'Ah, cash was not the solution; because we have in our groups, some that have fled this type of programs and are with us.] [KII DRC Prtnr1]



ANNEX H (continued)

Franchement, moi, je suis personnellement fier de ce programme. Quand on commençait nous mêmes on venait, comme les participants, on savait que les autres programmes donnaient de l'argent, beaucoup de choses là beaucoup. Mais au fur et à mesure qu'on participait, on a compris le mot "autonomisation." Lorsqu'on parle aux gens qu'ils doivent chercher des solutions à leurs problèmes, pas plutôt "continuons à penser qu'il y aura des gens qui viendront d'ici là pour vous amener manger, trouver les habits," tout ça. Mais les gens commencent à comprendre pour résoudre leurs problèmes. Plus de 90% des solutions doivent provenir d'eux. Donc dans cet esprit là, pour résoudre les grands problèmes de leur vie, il faut que la personne fasse des efforts....On comprend que quand même par rapport au départ et là où nous sommes aujourd'hui, il y a une grande différence, donc les gens ne sont plus très dépendant de nous.

[Frankly, I am personally proud of this program. When we started out, we were like the participants, we knew that the other programs gave money, a lot of things there, a lot. But as we participated, we understood the word empowerment. When you talk to people, they have to look for solutions to their problems, instead of "let's continue to think that there will be people who will come by then to bring you food, find clothes," all that. But people are beginning to understand how to solve their problems. More than 90% of the solutions must come from them. So in that spirit, to solve the big problems in their lives, the person has to make an effort....We understand that there is a big difference between the beginning and where we are today, so people are no longer very dependent on us.] [KII DRC Prtnr1]

7.2 Meeting the needs of all participants

- **Male participants in groups of mostly women**

Il y a d'autres ONGs qui ont cette approche. Là de donner des cadeaux pour que les gens viennent apprendre. Maintenant chez nous, lorsqu'ils ont vu que nous sommes restés fermes, on n'a rien donné, il y en a qui partent et après un temps, ils ont vu que nous ... sommes restés dans la philosophie du projet, il revient donc nous avons l'espoir que les hommes aussi viendront. Puisqu'au fil des années, quand on avait commencé, il y avait un grand groupe et d'un coup ils sont partis, et après un temps, ils sont revenus un à un, mais pas nombreux, mais il y en a qui sont rentrés. Nous pensons que plus le temps avance et ils pourront revenir.

[There are other NGOs that have this approach. They give gifts so that people come and learn. Now with us, when they see that we've remained firm, we've given nothing, some people leave and after a while, they see that we ...have stayed with the philosophy of the project, it's coming back so we're hopeful that the men will come too. Because over the years, when we started, there was a big group and suddenly they left, and after a while, they came back one by one, but not many, but some have come back. We think that as time goes on, they'll be able to come back.] [DRC Valid Prtnr2]