

PLAY FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF  
QUALITY EDUCATION:  
MULTI-COUNTRY ENDLINE REPORT



**RIGHT TO PLAY**  
PROTECT. EDUCATE. EMPOWER.

**HCA**  
HARRY CUMMINGS AND  
ASSOCIATES  
DECEMBER 2017

## Executive Summary

Right To Play's (RTP) Play for Advancement of Quality Education (PAQE) program is an eight-country program supported by Global Affairs Canada (GAC) with the Ultimate Outcome of improving education attainment for girls and boys between 2 and 15 years of age. The PAQE program is an initiative led by RTP International, with country level programming coordinated by RTP country offices in Benin, Ghana, Liberia, Mali, Mozambique, Pakistan, Rwanda and Tanzania. The program was initially conceived as a five-year program. Ultimately, the program was reconceived and delivered over a two-year period, with inception activities beginning in 2015 and end of project activities concluding in 2017. The most widespread PAQE intervention was the training of teachers, education officials, school administrators, and coaches on the use of play-based learning (PBL) approaches using RTP's progressive Continuum of Teacher Training (COTT) model, with teachers being the primary focus of these efforts. The introduction of PBL in classrooms and the reported positive effect it had on both teaching practice and student learning has been among the most positive immediate effects realised in the one to two years of implementation in PAQE target schools.

PAQE programming also focused on awareness advocacy and interventions to address barriers to education, especially as they relate to girls. These initiatives included government, CSO and community-based partners in collaboration with community coaches and youth leaders to encourage awareness and action aimed at removing barriers to education and promoting child welfare. The scope of these activities ranged from door-to-door visits by community coaches and youth, to large scale community events with hundreds of participants. PAQE's collaboration with government and CSO partners also worked to promote the integration of play-based approaches at various levels within the education systems in the target countries. These efforts took the form of consultations, workshops and the provision of technical advice to partners to support the adoption of play-based learning in schools. At the local level, the PAQE program targeted parent teacher associations and school management committees to develop school based strategies focused on addressing barriers to education and promoting positive learning environments in schools. Finally, RTP International promoted awareness and engagement with Canadian audiences through its initiatives that reached out to schools, donors, volunteers and partners across Canada.

This report, and the accompanying country reports, provide a summary of data collection and analysis activities that are focused upon providing evidence on the performance indicators aligned to the intermediate and immediate outcomes of the PAQE Performance Measurement Framework (PMF). The intermediate and immediate outcomes of the PAQE program are dispersed across four overarching Pillars:

- Pillar 1 – The Practice of Play-Based, Gender Sensitive Learning Environments in Schools;
- Pillar 2 – Community-Based Efforts to Address Barriers to Education;
- Pillar 3 – Strengthening the Capacity of Government and Civil Society Partners to Support Gender Sensitive, Child-Centered, Play-Based Learning Policies and Practices; and
- Pillar 4 – Engagement and Awareness of Canadian Target Audiences

In late 2016 and early 2017, the PMF for the PAQE program was redeveloped to address gaps and limitations of the baseline assessment as identified by RTP and GAC. The redeveloped framework included refinement of performance indicators, updated data collection protocols, and an updated data collection toolkit. The three core elements of the 2017 assessment design consist of a historical review of evidence, the triangulation of results through a mixed-methods data collection, and the retrospective feedback from

program stakeholders on the extent to which observations and outcomes documented resulted from the implementation of the PAQE program. The diverse scope of data used to produce evidence in this report ranges from a comprehensive scope program planning, monitoring and activity reporting data over the life of the PAQE program to a smaller scale controlled primary data collection initiative rolled out across all eight PAQE countries. These data sources were triangulated and helped to provide convergence and validation of the evidence provided in this report. Where possible and appropriate, evidence generated in the 2017 assessment was reviewed against the baseline data generated in 2015. Due to the redevelopment of M&E protocols, however, quantitative comparisons with baseline results were limited. The primary data collected during 2017 field visits consisted of 2,006 children and 507 adults from survey, key informant interviews and focus groups discussions (FGD) collected by independent consulting teams across all eight PAQE countries. Monitoring and program reporting data as collected and documented by RTP country offices and reviewed for this assessment consisted of teacher training surveys for more than 2,500 teachers; over 5,000 teacher and coach observations; and over 300 reports on trainings, activities, events and school assessments.

There are several key limitations on the findings of this assessment. Most of these limitations are related to the necessary changes made to monitoring and evaluation protocols introduced during the redevelopment of the PMF. The first key limitation is related to the changes in the data collection strategy from the beginning to the end of the project. The different protocols used compromise the ability to compare the quantitative monitoring and fieldwork data with quantitative baseline results. The second limitation was that the feasibility and viability of large scale randomized representative sampling approaches was limited by the resources and capacity available across all target countries and regions. HCA addressed these two key limitations through the use of a mixed-methods approach, to validate the evidence of change using a broad scope of data sources. The third limitation is that the data collection instruments and the documentation approaches used for county-level monitoring data varied over time and across country contexts. This presented challenges when aggregating results, but was compensated by first generating monitoring results at the country level for each indicator prior to aggregation at the multi-country level. Primary data from 2017 field visits was consistently collected across all PAQE countries allowed for consistent aggregation of results from all countries. Finally, given various languages and comprehension levels across all country contexts, there is always a risk that through the translation process, the intent or the original meaning of questions and responses may be misconstrued through the translation process. HCA worked diligently with local teams to ensure that data collection tools and beliefs and experiences of respondents have been reflected accurately.

By the end of the PAQE program, initiatives had reached nearly 6,000 teachers, in more than 1,000 schools, across the 8 target countries. It is estimated that over 475,000 school children have been exposed to RTP's play-based, gender sensitive learning approach through the implementation of PAQE initiatives.

The PAQE program trained nearly 6,000 teachers in more than 1,000 schools reaching approximately 475,000 students.

The scope of the PAQE program was ambitious given its relatively short duration. In spite this limitation, progress has been made across the key outcomes of the PAQE program. During field visits, support and appreciation for play-based learning and PAQE initiatives were expressed by stakeholders at all levels in all countries. Key achievements realised through the PAQE program include: the scope of teachers who have been introduced to the PBL approach through the COTT and the widespread engagement of CSOs

and community coaches that are implementing sport, play, and awareness initiatives with thousands of youth and community-members throughout the PAQE target regions. Selected countries have established strong relationships with national education authorities that have already influenced national level education strategies, in other countries, inroads made have laid a groundwork for influencing education approaches on a wider scale in the future. At the local level, thousands of parents have been engaged in school planning initiatives that have helped to raise awareness and to promote action to improve education and promote child welfare for children in targeted schools. Overall progress, however, across many outcomes is still in its early stages. The two years (or less) since program initiatives have been introduced, has left limited time for initiatives and outcomes to become fully realized across most of the PAQE target regions. Intermediate outcomes are in their early stages of realization, but more time and support will help to determine the extent to which these efforts will have a sustainable impact. Key findings for each of the four pillars of the PAQE program are discussed below.

Pillar 1 – The Practice of Play-Based, Gender Sensitive Learning Environments in Schools – the first pillar focused on teacher’s progress in terms of learning and applying the play-based learning approach, the effect that these initiatives have had upon children and youth in target schools, as well as the school-based efforts to develop and implement plans and strategies to improve the physical and emotional safety of school environments. A total of nearly 6,000 teachers have participated in the COTT. It is important to consider that not all PAQE countries were able to offer the full scope of the COTT to teachers in their target schools due to the contracted duration of the project. Consequently, teacher results as they relate to teachers’ knowledge and application of play-based learning approach need be understood in the context that teacher exposure to the approach is still new and not fully realized in all target schools. The majority of teachers targeted have fully completed the foundational and play-based learning modules of the COTT; however, several countries were not able to fully realize the completion of the positive learning environment components of the continuum.

For the majority of teachers, they have found that when they are comfortable using games and when games are well aligned to the learning objectives, teachers are having a lot of success and often reported enjoying using play-based learning activities in their classrooms. During field visits, over 90% of teachers reported using play-based approaches more than once per week in their classes, with approximately 20% of teachers indicating that they use of the approach daily. In teacher interviews, 72.6% of teachers reported being completely or very confident applying PBL in the classroom. Post-teacher training survey results showed that approximately 60% of teachers reported that they have the skills needed to apply the PBL approach well. Following the completion of their COTT training, teachers were observed by RTP staff, district education officials, and school administrators and assessed on their delivery of the PBL approach. On average, across all countries, teachers were observed to be applying the PBL approach well across 64% of the assessment criteria.

Teachers are performing well on 64% of the play-based learning criteria in the classroom.

Key areas of strength identified during classroom observations were gender inclusion, positive communication, and leading games with students. In Benin, Ghana, Mozambique, Rwanda and Tanzania, over 80% of teachers were observed to be using gender inclusive practices well (similar results were not fully documented in other countries). Results from teacher interviews, training surveys and observations, indicated that teachers still face some challenges in the application of the approach. The most frequent challenges reported and observed were related to aligning and modifying PBL activities to meet

curriculum expectations and to fit them within the social and cultural contexts in target communities and schools. Other key challenges identified by teachers and other stakeholder included: large class sizes and short lesson durations; limited capacity to apply RTP's Reflect, Connect, Apply (RCA) approach; and a lack of materials and resources needed to effectively facilitate some games and activities.

The effect of PBL efforts on children and youth was widely reported as positive by teachers, school administrators and parents during field visits. In terms of life skills, children, youth and adults alike all report that collaboration and communication were the areas of greatest growth in youth as a result of the PAQE program. Child/youth questionnaire findings showed children were most likely to agree with statements related to collaboration and inclusion, which aligns well to the elements of play-based activities that encourage children and youth to work together. More than 60% of children and youth surveyed strongly agreed with statements aligned to these life skills. Teachers, school administrators and parents reported during field visits that children are showing more confidence through increased communication and engagement in PAQE-trained teachers' classrooms. Life skills related to emotional management were the least widely reported of the five domains from both children and adults during field visits. Less than half of children strongly agreed with statements related to emotional management. More effort may be needed to strengthen the programming and/or measurement of this domain to better understand this finding. In addition to the overall life skills, teachers, parents and school administrators widely indicated that they felt that children are expressing greater interest and engagement in school because of play-based initiatives. A new, validated life skills measurement tool that is specifically designed to collect evidence related to RTP priorities is recommended to help strengthen the evidence on the effects of play-based learning on children in target schools.

Children showed the greatest improvement in collaboration and communication skills, while play-based learning initiatives through PAQE were least likely to have influenced emotional management skills.

With a total of 447 schools having been supported in the documentation of school-based strategies since the introduction of the PAQE program, school-based strategy initiatives as promoted by the PAQE program met (and in some countries exceeded) their targets for the number of schools reached to support school-based committees in the development of plans. These foundational planning efforts have been initiated in approximately 40% of all target PAQE schools. Plans and strategies were mainly realised through the engagement of parent teacher associations and school management committees at the community level. However, while these foundational efforts to mobilize school/community-based actors are important steps, they still appear to be in the early stages of implementation in most targeted schools. The greatest evidence for implementation achieved during the PAQE program was through the realization of rehabilitated classrooms, play spaces or sanitation facilities in 138 schools. Given the timeline of the project, many schools have had less than a year to translate new strategies and plans into implementation. While efforts to address barriers to education, gender equity and child protection have been identified in hundreds of school plans, evidence on the implementation of these efforts is still somewhat limited at this time. The widespread scope and the relatively short implementation timeline of the PAQE program makes it challenging to provide the level of support needed to local level stakeholders to both develop and support the implementation of formal school strategies. The engagement of district and sub-district education authorities as well PTAs and SMCs in workshops and school-based strategy initiatives in most PAQE countries showed early signs of progress that could form an important foundation for promoting the sustainability of physically and emotionally safe learning environments going forward.

Pillar 2 – Community-Based Efforts to Address Barriers to Education – the second pillar was built around RTP’s efforts to engage more fully with target communities through the engagement in community events and sensitization initiatives, as well as through the mobilization of CSOs, community coaches and youth leaders. In all, PAQE has engaged with more than 100 CSO partners and 1,000 community coaches to support initiatives to address barriers to education. The most broadly reported barrier in most target regions is related to poverty, a lack of resources in schools and poor school infrastructure. These issues persist, though they are being addressed on a limited scale by the provision of materials through the mobilization of CSO partners and community leaders. Respondents during field visits have expressed that there is an ongoing need for more action and mobilization in the target communities related to the advocacy initiatives promoted through PAQE to address socio-cultural barriers to education. Traditional views on girls that have resulted in early marriages, teen pregnancies and domestic responsibilities still limit girls’ attendance in schools. Coaches expressed a high level of confidence to use play-based methods to engage with youth and communities to address these issues. Nearly 80% have reported that they are ‘completely’ or ‘very’ confident using play to engage with the community. Special events reaching thousands of community members and outreach to parents by community coaches are bringing attention to these issues. Child labour, corporal punishment and domestic violence were reported as key issues of child protection. CSOs and coaches in some communities are working directly with community leaders and child protection services to engage on these issues. Changes in perception at the community level are difficult to estimate on a broad scale, but key successes reported have included the role that community coaches have played in facilitating the identification of youth not attending school and engaging with community leaders, child protection authorities and parents to support their return to school.

PAQE has engaged with more than 100 CSO partners and 1,000 community coaches to support initiatives to address barriers to education.

The widest reach of initiatives to address barriers to education is related to the national level advocacy taken with large national and multi-national partners, and the large community level awareness and sensitization initiatives. It is estimated that more than 160,000 community members (mostly children) have participated in PAQE supported community sport and sensitization events. Alongside RTP staff and community coaches, over 4,500 youth leaders have participated in the planning and implementation of these initiatives at the school and community levels. Youth engagement ranged from support roles to taking full responsibility for the planning and implementation events and activities (most frequently with and for other children and youth). Establishing sustainable relationships between community level actors (i.e. coaches, CSO partners and school committees) and policy and authority figures (i.e. child protection authorities and elected leaders) has been successful in some countries (such as Pakistan, Tanzania and Mozambique). These efforts have laid an important foundation for initiatives and sustainable change.

Pillar 3 – Strengthening the Capacity of Government and Civil Society Partners to Support Gender Sensitive, Child-Centered, Play-Based Learning Policies and Practices – the third pillar was focused on RTP’s efforts to engage with partners in a capacity building and advocacy role for the adoption of gender sensitive, child friendly and play-based initiatives. This assessment finds that at the national level, RTP’s influence on formal education policies varies from country to country. In 4 out of 8 PAQE countries, RTP has played a key role in influencing the integration of play-based approaches national education initiatives

(in Mali, Mozambique, Rwanda and Tanzania). In Tanzania, RTP contributed directly to the Ministry of Education's initiative to integrate play-based learning into its pre-primary and primary curricula. The pre-primary curriculum had already been finalized at the time of field visits, while the finalization of the updated primary curriculum was reported to be in its final phases. RTP's key successes regarding its

Right To Play's partnerships with government agencies in several countries are well positioned to influence and support the integration of play-based learning into pre-service teacher training at the national and district levels.

influence at the systems level ranged from a direct influence on national PBL education initiatives to the important role RTP has played in influencing the inclusion of PBL in pre-service teacher training initiatives. Several target countries, such as Ghana, Rwanda and Benin have existing national curriculum and education policies with which PAQE initiatives are already largely aligned. In addition to more directly influencing policies, RTP has engaged in meetings, advocacy and the provision of technical support with over two dozen national level ministries and departments. These ministries and departments are inclusive of education, child protection, health, and youth agencies. During interviews with National and policy level education authorities, they indicated the RTP had been quite influential on influencing policy at the National level. In interviews with 11 officials, 9 (81.7%) indicated that RTP had been a strong influence in advocating for the integration of PBL in National plans and strategies.

At the district level, RTP has partnered with over 60 regional/district level authorities across the target PAQE countries. District level officials have been more actively engaged in PAQE initiatives than their national counterparts. Dozens of district level officials throughout the PAQE target regions have participated in and supported RTP teacher trainings and school-based training initiatives. Additionally, education officials collaborated directly with RTP staff to conduct school visits and provide technical support to teacher who have been trained in play-based approaches through the continuum of teacher training. In some regions, district level officials have actively supported efforts to establish school-based strategies to address education barriers and to promote play-based efforts in target schools. These officials widely indicated that they were confident in their ability to support school administrators and teachers, but also frequently reported that district level play-based initiatives were not yet fully developed or implemented. All 19 education officials (100%) interviewed during 2017 field visits reported that they were supportive of using the PBL approach in schools.

CSO partner representatives interviewed during field visits in 2017 frequently reported engaging in initiatives child protection initiatives, gender equity and education barriers through their involvement with PAQE. Few CSO representatives reported using PBL approaches, but some reported supporting the approach through their engagement in sport programming and in their support for community coaches. In addition to district and community level CSO initiatives, RTP has engaged in wider national level partnerships with larger national and multi-national NGO partners. These partners have been key contributors to RTP's overall advocacy efforts at the national level through their participation in meetings and advocacy campaigns promoted through the PAQE program.



PAQE stakeholders at all levels, across several countries, have highlighted their commitment to encourage positive discipline over corporal punishment in target schools.

RTP PAQE initiatives targeting the use of positive discipline and the elimination of the use of corporal punishment in schools were seeing positive results across various levels in several PAQE target countries. Education officials, school administrators, teachers and CSO partners all expressed a commitment to reducing the practice. While the practice was still reported to be widely used in many countries and schools, interviewees at all levels, as well as school-based strategies in several countries have discussed and adopted efforts to encourage positive discipline and positive communication with children and youth in place of corporal punishment.

Pillar 4 – Engagement and Awareness of Canadian Target Audiences – the fourth pillar was focused on the advocacy and awareness efforts of the PAQE program as they relate to the promotion of play-based and gender-sensitive approach to Canadian stakeholders. These efforts were rolled out through RTP International’s school-based ‘Play Your Part’ workshops in 181 schools and assemblies in 218 schools. More than 1,900 youths were reported to have been reached through ‘Play Your Part’ workshops, from which a survey of 81 was undertaken. Nearly, 80% of the youth surveyed reported that they ‘want to plan an event at their school.’ School assemblies that discuss play-based and gender-sensitive approaches was also estimated to have reached 51,000 Canadian school children.

RTP International also conducted a web-based supporter survey to donors and non-donors alike with a total 116 respondents. Questions related to the supporter awareness and knowledge of impact of play-based initiatives on quality education and gender equity. Approximately, 70% of respondents answered awareness questions accurately, with donors more likely than non-donors to express an understanding RTP’s play-based activities and objectives.

Recommendations – This study has generated a series of recommendations associated across the three pillars associated with PAQE’s international program initiatives. The recommendations target the continuation and expansion of key program successes, as well as an increase in resources and capacity building in outcome areas where the PAQE program has seen limited progress.

#### Recommendations related to the implementation of PBL in target schools:

- 1) Ensure that future teacher training initiatives emphasize key challenges, such as aligning/modifying games, developing strategies to manage large class sizes and strengthening capacity around the Reflect, Connect, and Apply approach.
- 2) Develop PBL modules and/or new strategies that explicitly target emotional management skills for children and youth.
- 3) Review the findings and the methodology used in the Early Grade Reading Assessment in Mali and assess the viability of using a similar approach in other countries.
- 4) Establish mechanisms for consistent and ongoing regular technical support to be provided or accessed by teachers following their completion of COTT trainings.
- 5) Establish local or sub-district support structure to ensure that technical support can be regularly accessed by target schools to support the implementation of school-based strategies.



- 6) Work with National and International governmental and non-governmental partners to support broader efforts to address sanitation and infrastructure challenges.

#### Recommendations for community-based efforts to address barriers to education:

- 1) Connect CSO partners with other CSOs, NGOs and government authorities that are working to address similar issues.
- 2) Establish ongoing technical support and advice for PTAs, SMCs and community leaders to support community-based efforts to identify and establish action plans to address barriers to education.
- 3) Build upon the successes in some countries where CSOs and community coaches have worked with child protection services and community leaders to support children to attend to school.
- 4) Connect youth with elected, traditional and religious leaders to encourage dialogue around socio-cultural barriers to education (especially those related to gender).

#### Recommendations for strengthening the capacity of government and CSO partners to support PBL

- 1) Focus initiatives in some countries upon supporting schools to implement PBL initiatives that help support the realization of the objectives in existing education policies.
- 2) Formalize efforts to provide technical support and advice on PBL training into district and national pre-service teacher training initiatives.
- 3) Facilitate collaboration between national/regional level partnerships and community-level actors, such as PTAs/SMCs, teacher networks, school administrators, community-based organizations and community coaches.
- 4) Continue advocacy on the elimination of corporal punishment in schools.

Conclusion - The PAQE program has made important progress toward the achievement of its anticipated outcomes. The redevelopment of the performance measurement approach in Year 2 of the project introduce some challenges to the monitoring and evaluation protocols used in this assessment. Although the comparability of results against baseline and across countries were limited by differences in the sampling and data collection approaches used over time and at different sites, the overall scope of data used and the triangulation of results from various data sources has helped to reinforce confidence in the validity of the findings in this report. For many indicators, conservative estimates have been used, even where some reporting suggests that achievement of results for some outcomes are higher than reported.

Successes related to the number of teachers trained and the broad support for the adoption of play-based and gender-sensitive approaches at various levels of the education system represent key achievements over PAQE's two-year implementation period. The overall scale of the PAQE program rolled out over a relatively short period meant that many program activities (such as school planning, advocacy, life skills development and policy development) are still in the early stages of demonstrating outcomes. In spite of this, progress has been documented and observed across all outcome areas, but will need more time and support if outcomes are to be fully realized and sustainable. Many communities are still faced with challenges related to traditional cultural views (especially on gender) and widespread poverty that impose significant barriers to improving educational outcomes on a wider scale. In spite of these barriers, the PAQE program has contributed to progress in its target schools to support child friendly environments that have been seen to support improved learning in children. Education authorities, schools and teachers will require, continued and consistent support if early gains realized through the PAQE program are to be sustained over the long term.