

ENDLINE EVALUATION REPORT

Nal'ibali Letsatsi and Lesedi Programmes

Abstract

This evaluation captures how the Lesedi and Letsatsi Reading for Enjoyment Programme has transformed children's confidence and literacy behaviours, strengthened educators and caregivers, and ignited a growing culture of reading across two rural communities.



Hero Makers

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Acronyms

Acronym	Meaning
CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
CBO	Community-Based Organisation
CWP	Community Work Programme
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DSD	Department of Social Development
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ELOM	Early Learning Outcomes Measure
EWC	Every Word Counts (WordWorks Programme)
FLC	Fun Learning Club / Funda Leader Club (if applicable)
FSP	Funda Sonke Programme (if applicable in your materials)
IDP	Integrated Development Plan
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPO	Non-Profit Organisation
NSP	National Strategic Plan (if mentioned; remove if not needed)
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal (if applicable)
PSR	Programme Status Report (if used internally)
QPR	Quarterly Progress Report
SACE	South African Council for Educators
SETAs	Sector Education and Training Authorities
SGB	School Governing Body
SP	Story Pamphlet / Supplement (Nal'ibali)
SS	Story Sparkers
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (only if referenced)
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WRAD	World Read Aloud Day

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Executive Summary

The Lesedi & Letsatsi Endline Evaluation (2023–2025) assesses the outcomes, effectiveness, and sustainability of the Nal’ibali Reading for Enjoyment Programme implemented in two rural sites in the Northern Cape (Lesedi) and Free State (Letsatsi). Using a mixed-methods approach, surveys, interviews, focus groups, classroom observations, partner consultations, and programme document review, the evaluation measured changes in early literacy behaviours, reading culture, educator practice, and community engagement over the three-year period.

The evidence is clear: the programme delivered substantial positive outcomes for children, educators, caregivers, and community partners. Children’s confidence, imagination, vocabulary, and willingness to participate in story sessions improved markedly. In classrooms where Nal’ibali resources were regularly integrated, teachers reported stronger listening skills, improved story recall, richer expressive language, and higher levels of engagement.

Educators described Nal’ibali training as “eye-opening” and reported shifting from formal, worksheet-driven lessons to joyful, expressive storytelling. Most classrooms now have reading corners, and teachers expressed strong commitment to sustaining story-based learning, with continued need for books, mentoring, and parent involvement.

Caregivers, many of whom have few or no books at home, adopted new home-literacy routines, including shared reading, oral storytelling, songs, rhymes, drawing, and library visits. Most now read or tell stories more frequently, feel more confident supporting their children’s learning, and see clear improvements in their children’s interest in books.

A standout strength of the programme was the transformative role of Story Sparkers and Funda Leaders, who modelled reading behaviour, created warm and joyful learning spaces, and reached hundreds of children weekly. Their passion, reliability, and strong relationships with schools and communities emerged as a cornerstone of programme success.

Partners, including NGOs, libraries, social workers, clinics, and community champions—affirmed that Nal’ibali strengthened their work, improved literacy awareness, and contributed to safer after-school environments. Activities such as reading festivals, holiday programmes, creative writing workshops, and mobile libraries (tuk-tuks) became highly visible community assets.

However, the evaluation identified persistent risks affecting sustainability:

- ▶ resource shortages, especially age-appropriate and home-language books
- ▶ parental participation gaps and transport constraints



- ▶ theft of reading materials
- ▶ staff turnover and uneven coordination, particularly in Letsatsi
- ▶ heavy reliance on volunteers and stipends that do not match the workload
- ▶ dependency on external funding without institutional anchoring

Stakeholders consistently emphasised the need for stronger communication, locally based coordination, structured mentoring, fair support for facilitators, father-inclusive strategies, and deeper integration with schools, libraries, and municipal and provincial government.

Overall, the evaluation concludes that:

- ▶ Nal'ibali's model is effective, culturally grounded, and community-centred.
- ▶ The programme meaningfully improves early literacy behaviours, educator practice, and family reading routines.
- ▶ It catalyses community-wide shifts in reading culture and strengthens psychosocial wellbeing.
- ▶ But the system supporting this work is fragile: sustainability requires stable funding, improved coordination, adequate materials, and institutional integration.

With multi-year investment, stronger data systems, and embedded partnerships with schools and local government, the model has strong potential for scale and long-term impact.



1 Background & Context

1.1 National Literacy Landscape

South Africa faces a persistent literacy crisis. The 2021 PIRLS assessment found that 81% of Grade 4 learners cannot read for meaning. This crisis is most pronounced in rural and under-resourced communities, where literacy environments are weak, libraries are inaccessible, and caregivers often lack confidence or resources to support home literacy learning. Emerging research shows that early, enjoyable exposure to stories, especially in a child's home language, significantly improves reading confidence, comprehension, and long-term academic outcomes.

The Nal'ibali Reading for Enjoyment Campaign was established to respond to this national challenge by embedding a culture of reading, storytelling, and imagination in South Africa's homes, schools, ECD centres, and community spaces. It is grounded in a simple but powerful theory: If children experience reading as enjoyable and socially meaningful, they will read more, and if they read more, they will learn more.

Both districts face high poverty, limited early childhood infrastructure, low levels of book access, and generational illiteracy, making literacy interventions critical. Story Sparkers and Funda Leaders serve as the programme's frontline facilitators, visiting schools, libraries, ECD centres, and community venues weekly to run reading, storytelling, and creative activities.

The sites have strong variations in context:

1.2 Community Context: Lesedi & Letsatsi

Geographic and Social Setting

The programme was implemented in **two deeply rural, socio-economically strained communities:**

Lesedi (Northern Cape)

Centred in Danielskuil, Postmasburg, Lime Acres, Skeyfontein, Kuilsville and surrounding settlements. The area is characterised by:

- ▶ High unemployment and economic reliance on mines
- ▶ Long travel distances between settlements
- ▶ Schools facing overcrowding, resource shortages, literacy backlogs
- ▶ Limited access to libraries (mobile tuk-tuk libraries fill this gap)



- ▶ Caregivers with low literacy levels or limited confidence in reading

Lesedi benefited from a larger and more established team with two Literacy Mentors, multiple Story Sparkers, and a Project Coordinator, enabling broader reach and more consistent activities in schools, ECDs, libraries and reading clubs.

Letsatsi (Free State)

Centred in Dealesville and Soutpan, rural towns with:

- ▶ High poverty levels
- ▶ Very limited youth programmes
- ▶ Schools struggling with literacy, behaviour, and learner motivation
- ▶ Caregiver availability constraints
- ▶ Inconsistent access to community spaces for literacy

Letsatsi had smaller staffing and repeated coordination gaps due to prolonged vacancy of a local coordinator. This had a direct impact on activity consistency, workshop attendance, reporting quality, and partner integration.

1.3 Programme Overview

The Lesedi & Letsatsi Reading for Enjoyment Programme (2023–2025) was funded primarily by the Lesedi Solar Park Trust and the Letsatsi Solar Park Trust, implemented by The Na’ibali Trust, and evaluated externally by Hero Makers. The **core purpose** of the programme is to:

- ▶ Strengthen reading for enjoyment in ECDs, schools, libraries, homes, and informal community spaces
- ▶ Build children’s confidence, imagination, and early literacy skills
- ▶ Equip educators, youth facilitators, and caregivers with practical literacy techniques
- ▶ Inspire community involvement in storytelling and reading
- ▶ Build a strong ecosystem for ongoing literacy support

Activities include:

- ▶ Daily ECD & school story sessions
- ▶ Weekly reading clubs
- ▶ Book-lending systems using tuk-tuk libraries
- ▶ Caregiver training programmes (“Every Word Counts”)
- ▶ Partner training (ECD forums, librarians, youth NGOs, CWP volunteers)
- ▶ Literacy festivals, WRAD events & holiday programmes
- ▶ Radio storytelling and reading competitions
- ▶ Children’s creative writing workshops & the Seeds of Change anthology



1.4 Programme Evolution (2023–2025)

The Lesedi and Letsatsi Reading for Enjoyment Programme forms part of Nal'ibali's long-term strategy to build a sustained culture of literacy and storytelling across under-resourced communities. Although the formal grant period began in **January 2023**, the groundwork laid during **late 2022** shaped the trajectory of the programme's development.

Early Foundations: 2022–Early 2023

From 2022 Q4 into early 2023, the programme footprint was still emerging and characterised by:

- ▶ **Minimal staffing:** only one Literacy Mentor and two Story Sparkers operating in Lesedi.
- ▶ **Irregular reading club sessions**, often dependent on volunteer availability and limited community mobilisation.
- ▶ **Limited access to books** with no structured lending system and inconsistent supplement distribution.
- ▶ **ECD centres without reading corners** or trained staff for story-based learning.
- ▶ **Weak data systems**, with fragmented reporting tools and no standardised monitoring.

This period represented the programme's pilot phase, high in enthusiasm but constrained by infrastructure, systems, staffing and resources.

Transformation & Expansion: 2023

A major shift occurred during 2023 as the programme entered a period of **strategic expansion and professionalisation**. In Lesedi, the team grew from three to **seven Story Sparkers and two Literacy Mentors**, supported by a newly appointed Project Coordinator and technical support from Nal'ibali's national office. This enabled much broader reach and more consistent engagement across schools, libraries, ECD centres and communities.

Key Developments During 2023

1. Strengthening Human Capacity

- ▶ Recruitment and induction of Story Sparkers and Literacy Mentors.
- ▶ Large-scale training in **Every Word Counts (EWC)** through WordWorks.
- ▶ Training of **49 ECD practitioners** in storytelling and early literacy.
- ▶ Field-team contributions to the development of Nal'ibali's **new curriculum**.

2. System and Quality Improvements

- ▶ Introduction of **quality standards** for reading clubs and child-friendly reading spaces.
- ▶ Re-launch of the **reading club registration** process with vetting and training.



- ▶ Introduction of **monitoring templates**, pre/post assessments, and beneficiary databases.

3. Resource & Infrastructure Expansion

- ▶ Distribution of tens of thousands of supplements annually.
- ▶ Provision of hanging libraries, reading-corner resources, and starter packs.
- ▶ Launch of **Tuk-Tuk mobile libraries**, taking books directly to children.
- ▶ Establishment of structured **book-lending schemes** in Danielskuil and Postmasburg, growing from 17 books lent to over 108 in one quarter.

4. Community Network Growth

- ▶ Formation of **Community of Practice (CoP)** networks across Lesedi and Letsatsi.
- ▶ Partnerships with SmartStart, CWP, clinics, libraries, Flourish, and schools.
- ▶ Launch of the EWC caregiver programme (over 60 enrolled; 36 completed).

5. Child Participation & Creative Growth

- ▶ Over **15 children's writing workshops**, culminating in published stories and creative anthologies that sparked community pride and visibility.

By the end of 2023, both sites had transitioned from early-stage piloting to **structured, coordinated programme delivery** with an expanding literacy ecosystem.

Quality Strengthening & Consolidation: 2024

During 2024, the programme focused on strengthening consistency, deepening quality, and expanding community engagement.

Key developments included:

- ▶ Introduction of a revised Reading Club Practical Guide.
- ▶ Further refinement of quality standards for reading spaces.
- ▶ First publication of Seeds of Change, showcasing children's writing.
- ▶ Expansion of partner networks and more integrated community events.
- ▶ More reliable supplement distribution and inventory management.
- ▶ Implementation of personalised library cards for book-borrowing in Lesedi.
- ▶ Strengthened coordination structures, particularly visible in Lesedi.

Letsatsi, however, faced coordination challenges due to prolonged vacancies and staff capacity gaps, affecting community mobilisation, partner support, reporting systems, and caregiver training schedules.

Despite this, Story Sparkers continued to deliver consistent sessions and maintained strong relationships with children and educators.

Scaling, Accountability & Integration: 2025



By 2025, the programme had reached a mature phase, shifting toward **system strengthening, activation at scale, and peer learning across sites**.

The final year centred on:

- ▶ Intensive community-wide literacy activations and events.
- ▶ Expanded school holiday programmes and literacy festivals.
- ▶ Frequent reading competitions, public storytelling and radio features.
- ▶ Strengthened mentoring support for educators and ECD practitioners.
- ▶ Additional story-writing workshops for the 2025 *Seeds of Change* anthology.
- ▶ Enhanced accountability mechanisms, including stocktakes, inventory checklists and improved data systems.
- ▶ Cross-site peer learning through a joint workshop in Bloemfontein (February 2025).

Implementation gaps in Letsatsi persisted due to the absence of a stable coordinator, affecting:

- ▶ Partner mentoring and joint planning
- ▶ Timely EWC caregiver rollout
- ▶ Reporting and requisitions
- ▶ Community-based mobilisation

Nonetheless, Story Sparkers demonstrated **exceptional commitment**, continuing reading clubs and sessions even under resource constraints.

Summary of Programme Evolution (2022–2025)

Across the four years, Lesedi and Letsatsi transitioned from:

Small, pilot-phase sites

- ▶ with minimal staffing, weak data systems, and limited resources
- to

Fully-fledged, multi-layered literacy ecosystems, characterised by:

- ▶ Stronger teams of trained facilitators
- ▶ Book-rich environments supported by mobile libraries
- ▶ Structured reading clubs with quality standards
- ▶ Growing caregiver engagement through EWC
- ▶ Published children’s writing that lifted community identity
- ▶ Strengthened partnerships with NGOs, libraries, ECD forums and municipalities
- ▶ Improved monitoring systems and greater community ownership

This evaluation therefore captures not only the outcomes of the 2023–2025 grant period but the **multi-year transformation** of Lesedi and Letsatsi into stronger and more resilient reading communities.



1.5 Literacy Ecosystem Strengthening

A central goal of the programme is to build a **localised literacy ecosystem**. This includes:

Schools

- ▶ Implementing regular story sessions
- ▶ Creating/expanding reading corners
- ▶ Integrating storytelling across Foundation Phase learning
- ▶ Supporting teachers to adopt reading-for-enjoyment pedagogy

ECD Centres

- ▶ Extensive storytelling and play-based literacy
- ▶ Support for practitioners through modelling, mentoring, and training

Libraries

- ▶ Activation of child-friendly reading spaces
- ▶ Youth storytelling sessions
- ▶ Partnership in holiday programmes and literacy festivals

Caregiver Networks

- ▶ WhatsApp groups for literacy messaging
- ▶ Parent training using Every Word Counts
- ▶ Radio stories reinforcing literacy at home

Community Organisations

- ▶ Youth NGOs, churches, ECD forums, schools, CWP volunteers, and clinics
- ▶ Collaboration through quarterly **Communities of Practice**
- ▶ Hosting reading clubs, story festivals and outreach events

1.6 Theory of Change

The programme is grounded in the Theory of Change below:

1. **If** children experience enjoyable, frequent stories in their home language
2. **Then** they will develop confidence, comprehension and imagination
3. **If** teachers, Story Sparkers and caregivers gain skills and resources
4. **Then** they can sustain reading habits in classrooms and homes
5. **If** communities participate in literacy activities
6. **Then** a culture of reading will begin to form



7. **If** this ecosystem is strengthened over time
8. **Then** literacy outcomes for children will improve long-term

This model guided design, implementation and evaluation.

1.7 Why an Endline Evaluation?

The **Terms of Reference** required a comprehensive assessment of:

- ▶ Programme relevance
- ▶ Implementation fidelity
- ▶ Effectiveness
- ▶ Changes in children's literacy behaviours
- ▶ Educator, caregiver, and partner capacity
- ▶ Community engagement
- ▶ Programme sustainability
- ▶ Lessons learned and areas for improvement

This **evaluation synthesises evidence** from:

- ▶ Children's assessments
- ▶ Educator surveys & interviews
- ▶ Teacher interviews
- ▶ Caregiver surveys & focus groups
- ▶ Story Sparkers & Literacy Mentors
- ▶ Partner interviews
- ▶ Programme Manager interview
- ▶ Social worker reflections
- ▶ Site observations
- ▶ Implementation dashboards and grant reports

1.8 Summary of Contextual Realities Affecting Literacy

Across both communities, **literacy outcomes** are shaped by:

- ▶ Poverty and unemployment
- ▶ Inconsistent access to books
- ▶ Overcrowded classrooms
- ▶ Limited caregiver literacy confidence
- ▶ Transport barriers for children and facilitators
- ▶ Theft/vandalism affecting book stocks (Lesedi)
- ▶ Limited staff complement (Letsatsi)



- ▶ Lack of public libraries (especially in remote areas)
- ▶ Competing priorities in schools (admin overload, curriculum pressure)

Despite these barriers, the programme has created **enthusiasm, joy, identity, and hope** around reading, proving that a strong storytelling culture can flourish even in resource-constrained communities.

2 Methodology

The endline evaluation of the Lesedi and Letsatsi Reading for Enjoyment Programme employed a **comprehensive mixed-methods design**, shaped by the programme’s multi-year evolution from its early developmental phase (2022–2023) into a more structured and robust implementation model during 2024–2025. As systems, staffing, partnerships, and monitoring tools evolved significantly over time, the evaluation was intentionally designed to capture both **current outcomes and the historical trajectory** that shaped them.

2.1 Evaluation Approach

The evaluation applied a **mixed-methods, triangulated approach** to ensure rigour across diverse data sources and to reflect the complexity of the programme’s implementation in two distinct rural contexts. Quantitative and qualitative methods were combined to assess:

- ▶ programme effectiveness
- ▶ children’s literacy outcomes
- ▶ educator and caregiver capacity
- ▶ Story Sparker and Funda Leader delivery quality
- ▶ partner and community engagement
- ▶ sustainability readiness
- ▶ implementation fidelity

The approach aligns with Nal’ibali’s Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) standards and acknowledges the programme’s shift from early fragmented systems (2022–2023) to modernised digital MEL tools in 2024–2025. All data-collection processes adhered to Nal’ibali’s research ethics framework and Hero Makers’ safeguarding protocols, ensuring informed consent, confidentiality and culturally appropriate engagement across all participant groups.



2.2 Data Sources

All respondents participated voluntarily and provided informed consent prior to completing surveys or interviews.

Quantitative Components

a. Caregiver Surveys (n=36)

Assessed:

- ▶ home literacy practices
- ▶ reading frequency
- ▶ access to books
- ▶ parent–child literacy interaction
- ▶ attitudes toward reading
- ▶ perceived child outcomes

b. Educator Surveys (n=29)

Evaluated:

- ▶ confidence levels
- ▶ classroom storytelling practices
- ▶ reading-corner implementation
- ▶ use of Nal'ibali materials
- ▶ perceived learner outcomes

c. Children's Literacy Assessments

Involved:

- ▶ comprehension tasks
- ▶ sequencing activities
- ▶ oral retellings
- ▶ expressive language observations

d. Programme Monitoring & Tracking Data (2023–2025)

Reflected the evolution of MEL systems:

- ▶ **2022–early 2023:** spreadsheets, WhatsApp logs, paper registers
- ▶ **2023:** standardised reporting templates introduced
- ▶ **2024:** roll-out of **SurveyCTO**, enabling digital, consistent, real-time data capture

Monitoring datasets included:

- ▶ ECD sessions
- ▶ reading clubs



- ▶ book-lending system data (Tuk-Tuk libraries)
- ▶ supplement distribution
- ▶ school visits
- ▶ community activations
- ▶ EWC caregiver training attendance
- ▶ Story Sparkers' monthly reports

SurveyCTO significantly improved reliability compared to earlier fragmented systems.

Qualitative Components

a. Semi-Structured Interviews

Conducted with:

- ▶ teachers and ECD practitioners
- ▶ Story Sparkers and Funda Leaders
- ▶ Literacy Mentors
- ▶ caregivers in both provinces
- ▶ programme manager
- ▶ partner organisations (NGOs, librarians, clinic staff, CWP supervisors, community champions)

Interviews captured lived experiences, implementation challenges, contextual dynamics, and perceptions of programme impact.

b. Focus Groups

Held with:

- ▶ caregivers (graduated and non-graduated EWC participants)
- ▶ Story Sparkers

These groups surfaced collective views on barriers such as scheduling, transport, resource shortages, and sustainability challenges.

c. Observations

In-field observations were conducted across:

- ▶ Foundation Phase school story sessions
- ▶ ECD centres
- ▶ libraries
- ▶ community storytelling and reading clubs
- ▶ mobile library/tuk-tuk visits
- ▶ literacy festivals and activations



Observation notes documented learner engagement, facilitation quality, classroom environment, and contextual differences between Lesedi and Letsatsi.

2.3 Document & Programme Review

A structured review included:

- ▶ Inception report
- ▶ Programme planning documents
- ▶ Story Sparkers' monthly reports
- ▶ training materials and coaching notes
- ▶ 2022–2023 quarterly progress reports
- ▶ reading club registration and vetting documentation
- ▶ EWC training registers and assessment forms
- ▶ Children's writing workshop reports and *Seeds of Change* publications
- ▶ partner MoUs and Community of Practice (CoP) documentation
- ▶ government engagement briefs
- ▶ communication logs and supplement distribution records

These documents provided chronological insight into the programme's growth, operational challenges, and improvements over time.

2.4 Sampling Strategy

A **purposive sampling strategy** was employed to ensure adequate representation across:

- ▶ schools
- ▶ ECD centres
- ▶ caregivers
- ▶ Story Sparkers and Literacy Mentors
- ▶ partners (NGOs, libraries, clinics, CWP)
- ▶ community structures

Sampling captured diversity in:

- ▶ age
- ▶ linguistic background
- ▶ reading exposure
- ▶ geographic location
- ▶ programme participation levels

Because Lesedi and Letsatsi differ structurally (team size, coordination, infrastructure), the sampling strategy treated them as **distinct but comparable cases**.



Sampling was conducted in alignment with ethical guidelines, ensuring voluntary participation and sensitivity to local language and cultural preferences.

2.5 Analysis Approach

The evaluation used a multi-stage analytical process:

1. Descriptive Statistical Analysis

Applied to caregiver and educator surveys and monitoring datasets.

2. Thematic Coding

Interview and focus group transcripts were coded into thematic clusters aligned with evaluation questions.

3. Triangulation

Cross-analysis across data types to identify consistent patterns and validate findings (e.g., teacher survey + observation + Story Sparkers interview).

4. Longitudinal Analysis

Compared early programme performance (2022–2023) to outcomes observed in 2024–2025.

5. Cross-Site Comparison

Explored differences between Lesedi (stronger staffing, coordination and materials) and Letsatsi (smaller team, coordination gaps, lower book access).

This ensured that findings were rigorous, balanced, and rooted in contextual reality.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

All ethical procedures for this evaluation were aligned with Na'ibali's research ethics framework and Hero Makers' safeguarding standards. The following principles guided all data collection:

- ▶ **Informed consent**
All survey respondents, interviewees, and observation participants were briefed on the purpose, scope, voluntary nature and expected duration of the study. They were assured of confidentiality and anonymity before participation, and all adults provided written and/or verbal informed consent.
- ▶ **Child safeguarding and protection**
Evaluators followed Hero Makers' Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy at all times. This included ensuring safe data-collection environments, using non-intrusive



questioning, avoiding identification of individual children, and maintaining the child's best interests as the primary guiding principle.

- ▶ Confidentiality, privacy and data security
All data were anonymised at the point of collection. Personal identifiers were removed from transcripts, survey datasets and reporting. Only the evaluation team had access to raw data, which were stored securely in password-protected systems following POPIA-aligned data-protection procedures.
- ▶ Voluntary participation and right to withdraw
Participation in all interviews, surveys and observations was strictly voluntary. Participants were informed that they could decline to answer any question or withdraw from the process at any stage without penalty or consequence.
- ▶ Cultural and language sensitivity
Data collection was conducted in the preferred languages of participants, primarily Setswana, Afrikaans and English. Instruments and interview approaches accommodated local cultural norms, literacy levels and communication preferences to ensure respect, accuracy and comfort.

2.7 Limitations

- ▶ Early data (2022–early 2023) was incomplete due to evolving MEL systems.
- ▶ Staff turnover and coordination gaps in Letsatsi affected the consistency of monitoring data.
- ▶ Caregiver survey participation was constrained by availability, low literacy levels, and transport barriers.
- ▶ Some reading clubs and ECD sessions had fluctuating attendance because of community events, and school scheduling.

These were mitigated through triangulation, cross-validation and field-based verification.

3 Detailed Findings

The findings in this chapter synthesise quantitative and qualitative evidence collected across children, caregivers, educators, Story Sparkers, Funda Leaders, partners, social workers and programme staff. They reflect both the *current outcomes* of the Lesedi and Letsatsi Reading for Enjoyment Programme and the *implementation evolution* that shaped these outcomes over the three-year period (2023–2025).

Overall, the programme has clearly shifted the literacy landscape in these communities: children are more engaged with stories, educators and caregivers are more confident,



and partners see real value. At the same time, structural and resourcing weaknesses threaten sustainability if external support falls away.

The chapter is organised by thematic clusters aligned to the evaluation questions.

3.1 Children's Literacy, Engagement and Learning Behaviours

3.1.1 Enthusiasm and Emotional Connection to Stories

Across both sites, children demonstrated exceptionally high enthusiasm for story sessions. Fieldworkers consistently observed learners:

- ▶ running to greet Story Sparkers and Funda Leaders
- ▶ gathering eagerly around reading carpets
- ▶ participating with visible excitement, laughing, singing and acting out parts of the story

In classrooms where teachers routinely integrated Nal'ibali stories into their weekly routines, story sessions became "the highlight of the day" in otherwise resource-constrained environments.

Lesedi:

- ▶ Children anticipate sessions with excitement and readily engage in discussions, actions and follow-up activities.
- ▶ Exposure to mobile libraries, ECD story time and creative writing workshops amplified interest and pride.

Letsatsi:

- ▶ Weekly visits are strongly anticipated; even previously shy children now participate.
- ▶ Positive relationships with facilitators motivate learners to attend reading clubs and stay focused during stories.

Stakeholders repeatedly described Nal'ibali sessions as a joyful and safe space in which children feel seen, heard and valued.

3.1.2 Comprehension, Vocabulary and Expressive Language

Assessment activities and field observations revealed **mixed but encouraging literacy skills**.

Strengths observed across both sites:

- ▶ Strong imagination and story engagement
- ▶ Good sequencing skills (ordering events, explaining "what happened next")
- ▶ Confident retellings when stories were familiar and regularly revisited



- ▶ Growing vocabulary, especially in classes using Nal'ibali materials frequently

Common challenges:

- ▶ Difficulty recalling finer details of stories (names, specific events)
- ▶ Limited expressive language in overcrowded and multilingual classes
- ▶ Inconsistent exposure to books and print at home

Teachers nonetheless reported clear improvements in:

- ▶ listening skills and concentration
- ▶ pre-reading abilities (e.g. turning pages, following illustrations)
- ▶ willingness to ask questions and express opinions
- ▶ ability to infer meaning from pictures and context

Schools that fully embraced Nal'ibali resources and integrated story cards, songs and games into the timetable showed better attention, recall and willingness to speak than those using materials more sporadically.

3.1.3 Child Outcomes from the Perspective of Caregivers

Caregiver survey findings closely align with the classroom data, providing strong evidence of positive changes in children's interest, confidence and early literacy behaviours.

Caregivers reported high levels of engagement with stories at home:

- ▶ **16 caregivers** rated their children as "*extremely interested*" in stories, and
- ▶ **12 caregivers** rated them as "*somewhat interested*."

A large majority (**29 caregivers**) indicated that their child's interest in reading had increased as a result of Nal'ibali activities, including reading clubs, ECD sessions and mobile-library visits. Improvements in early language and literacy were particularly notable, with **33 caregivers** observing stronger vocabulary, letter recognition, the ability to "read" pictures and greater confidence in retelling stories.

Independent reading outcomes were also encouraging. Among **30 Grade 3 cases**,

- ▶ **12 children (40%)** read on their own often,
- ▶ **six children (20%)** read independently sometimes,
- ▶ **nine children (30%)** had not yet begun reading independently, and
- ▶ **three children (10%)** read on their own rarely.

Caregivers most frequently highlighted gains in:

- ▶ curiosity and questioning;
- ▶ confidence in speaking and self-expression;



- ▶ the ability to entertain themselves with books or stories;
- ▶ general school readiness and enjoyment of learning.

Material Use and Attendance

Some caregivers used Nal'ibali materials less regularly than others. The most common barriers included limited time due to work or household responsibilities, lack of a quiet reading space, children's fluctuating interest and insufficient books at home. Story Sparkers also noted contextual constraints that affected attendance, such as long distances to reading clubs, transport costs, social-grant collection days and competing school activities, particularly in more remote villages.

Library Access

Nearly **63.9%** of caregivers reported taking their child to a library or mobile library. In many communities, the tuk-tuk mobile libraries serve as the primary access point for children's books, particularly where public libraries are distant, under-resourced or operate on limited hours.

Book Ownership

Patterns of book ownership were uneven. Half of households reported owning between **three and nine** children's books, **31%** had only one or two books, and **8%** had none at all. While borrowing from the mobile library helps fill this gap, many caregivers expressed a desire to build a small personal collection so their children could read more freely at home.

Motivation for Reading

Reading together at home is primarily driven by intrinsic motivation and positive emotional connection. More than **80%** of caregivers agreed or strongly agreed that they enjoy reading with their child and believe it is essential for development. Many shared that reading has strengthened the caregiver-child bond and increased their confidence in supporting early learning.

3.1.4 Creative Development and Story Authorship

The creative writing workshops, book launches and radio features provide powerful evidence of children's expanding literacy identities:

- ▶ Children in Lesedi and Letsatsi produced original stories and illustrations.
- ▶ Two editions of *Seeds of Change* (2024 and 2025) were published, featuring local children as authors.
- ▶ Some children read their stories on community radio, giving them a public platform and recognition.

Teachers and parents reported that these opportunities:



- ▶ boosted **pride, motivation and self-esteem**, especially among children who struggle academically
- ▶ helped children see themselves as **creators**, not just consumers, of stories
- ▶ reinforced the importance of local languages and cultural narratives

3.2 Educator Skills, Practices and Confidence

3.2.1 Educator Survey Findings

The educator survey (29 respondents) confirms strong adoption of reading-for-enjoyment practices:

- ▶ Universal belief in reading aloud:
 - 100% of educators said it is important to read aloud and reported that they do so.
- ▶ Frequency of reading:
 - 62% (18/29) read storybooks three or more times per week.
 - 38% read once or twice a week.
- ▶ Reading corners:
 - 27 of 29 classrooms have a reading corner.
 - The average number of books per corner is ~18, though some have fewer than 10.
- ▶ Use of Nal'ibali materials:
 - The most widely used Nal'ibali resources across both sites are the newspaper supplements and story cards, utilised by 83% of educators and 78% of caregivers. Their popularity is linked to regular distribution, bilingual and engaging content, and their versatility, educators often adapt them into mini-books or use them alongside songs and games.
 - A total of 24 educators reported using Nal'ibali supplements, story cards or associated interactive materials such as songs, rhymes and games during their sessions.
 - The majority of educators indicated that they use these resources "often" rather than occasionally, highlighting consistent integration of Nal'ibali materials into classroom and reading-club activities.
- ▶ Confidence levels:



- Mean self-reported confidence in storytelling and reading activities is 4.4 out of 5.
- Half of educators rated themselves at the maximum confidence level (5).
- ▶ Perceptions of skill and benefit:
 - 18 “Agree” and nine “Strongly Agree” that they have the skills to engage children with stories; only one neutral and one strongly disagreed.
 - 28 of 29 “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” that children benefit greatly from being read to; one strongly disagreed.
 - Views on resource sufficiency were mixed:
 - 14 agreed there are enough story materials
 - eight were neutral
 - four felt resources were insufficient
- ▶ Training impact:
 - Most (19/29) agreed or strongly agreed that Nal’ibali training improved their literacy teaching, though five disagreed and three were neutral.

3.2.2 Training Experience and Pedagogical Shifts (Teacher Interviews)

- ▶ Interviews with 16 teachers provide deeper insight into how the programme influenced classroom practice and pedagogical approaches.
- ▶ Most teachers reported being introduced to the programme by local Nal’ibali representatives or Story Sparkers and participated in training focused on storytelling techniques, creating reading corners and understanding the reading-for-enjoyment philosophy. A smaller group who did not attend formal training indicated that they were still influenced by colleagues, Story Sparkers or the materials circulated through the project.
- ▶ Teachers consistently described the training as “eye-opening” and noted that it provided fresh, practical strategies, such as using expressive voice, gestures, movement, songs and actions, to make reading more engaging. Many emphasised that the programme helped shift reading from a formal, assessment-driven activity to a joyful, relational practice centred on story and connection.
- ▶ Reported pedagogical changes include:
 - establishing or upgrading reading corners and carpets to create inviting literacy spaces.
 - integrating daily or weekly story sessions into classroom routines.



- borrowing books for classroom use and encouraging learners to take books home. (Although there is no formal log for tracking home reading, educators monitor children’s ability to retell stories and use new vocabulary as evidence of book use. This aligns with caregiver reports: 92% observed improvements in children’s language or literacy skills and 81% saw increased interest in reading.)
- incorporating Nal’ibali story cards, posters and songs as standard elements of their teaching practice.

3.2.3 Observed Changes in Children (Educator Perspective)

Educators consistently observed that:

- ▶ children are more **excited**, listen more attentively and ask more questions
- ▶ vocabulary, language structure, confidence and concentration have improved
- ▶ shy children are “blossoming”, volunteering to speak and asking to borrow books
- ▶ children retell stories later in the day or week, indicating retention and enjoyment

Teachers also noted improved empathy and social skills as children relate to characters and situations in stories.

3.2.4 Ongoing Challenges Identified by Educators

Despite strong progress, educators reported persistent constraints:

3.3 Caregiver Knowledge, Attitudes and Home Literacy Practices

While educators reported significant progress in adopting reading-for-enjoyment practices, several persistent constraints continue to affect the consistency and depth of implementation.

Educators highlighted ongoing shortages of age-appropriate books, particularly in Setswana and Afrikaans, which limit opportunities for sustained reading practice. Many described the pressure of crowded curricula and the need to prioritise formal assessment content, which reduces the time available for dedicated storytelling or informal reading sessions. Large class sizes further restrict the ability to offer individualised attention or small group reading support.

Loss, theft and damage of books and materials were reported as practical barriers, particularly in schools lacking secure storage. Teachers also expressed concern about



limited parental involvement in reading activities. Caregiver engagement remains constrained by factors such as long travel distances, transport costs, work schedules, household responsibilities and seasonal demands (including social-grant days and agricultural cycles). Attendance at caregiver training sessions often declines significantly, from initial groups of around twelve caregivers to only a few completing all sessions. Greater flexibility in scheduling, the use of community-based venues and the provision of transport support or incentives were suggested as strategies to strengthen parental participation.

Despite these challenges, educators expressed a strong desire for:

- ▶ ongoing training, mentoring and refresher sessions.
- ▶ access to large-print storybooks and audio/visual storytelling resources.
- ▶ structured mechanisms and support to meaningfully involve parents in reading activities at school and at home.

3.3.1 Demographics and Household Context

The caregiver survey (36 respondents) shows:

- ▶ Most caregivers were **mothers (24)**, followed by grandmothers (5), aunts (3), fathers (2) and others (2).
- ▶ Education levels varied: around two-thirds had Matric or some secondary schooling; seven had higher qualifications; five had only primary schooling or less.
- ▶ Unemployment is high:
 - 20 not employed
 - seven part-time
 - three full-time employed
- ▶ Home languages are primarily **Setswana and Afrikaans**, often mixed with English.

Crucially, very few households own children's books:

- ▶ Only three caregivers reported owning any children's books and all indicated **zero storybooks**.
- ▶ One household reported owning 0–10 books in total (including adult books); the rest left this question blank.

Despite this, **32 of 36** caregivers said their child has access to reading materials in their home language, indicating that Nal'ibali, libraries and mobile libraries are the main sources of access.



3.3.2 Access to Libraries and Reading Materials

- ▶ Two-thirds of families (23/36) take their child to a library or Nal'ibali mobile library.
 - Frequency ranges from weekly or monthly to only during special events.
- ▶ 28 caregivers reported receiving story pamphlets or books from the project, most of whom used them at home.
- ▶ Many families introduced new reading-related routines such as:
 - bedtime stories
 - sharing stories from their own childhood
 - regular "reading times"
 - family visits to the library

3.3.3 Home Literacy Practices and Behaviour Change

Everyday reading behaviours have shifted significantly:

- ▶ 30 caregivers read books or picture books with their child at least a few times a week; seven do so daily.
- ▶ Most tell oral stories a few times a week (20) or daily (6).
- ▶ 19 sing songs or recite rhymes a few times a week and 12 daily.
- ▶ 17 engage in fun literacy activities (e.g. pointing out words on signs) a few times a week; 15 do so daily.
- ▶ 27 families draw or write with their child at least a few times a week.
- ▶ 26 encourage children to "read" or retell stories; half do so daily.
- ▶ Listening to radio stories is common: 13 families listen a few times a week and 8 daily.

Change over time is clear:

- ▶ **25 caregivers** reported reading or telling stories **more often** since joining Nal'ibali.
- ▶ 6 said their frequency is about the same; only two reported doing so less often.

3.3.4 Caregiver Attitudes, Confidence and Community Engagement

Caregiver responses indicate strong intrinsic motivation to support their children's learning. More than **80%** of caregivers agreed or strongly agreed that they enjoy reading with their child and view it as essential for development. The programme has also strengthened caregiver confidence: **53%** strongly agreed that they now feel more capable of helping their child learn. Many families described reading as a treasured bonding experience rather than a task or obligation.



Overall, caregivers expressed highly positive attitudes toward reading-for-enjoyment:

- ▶ Nearly all agreed that reading with young children is important and that parents can support learning regardless of their own educational background.
- ▶ **32 caregivers** reported enjoying reading with their child and feeling more confident as a result of the programme.
- ▶ **30 caregivers** said their child enjoys reading or story time at home.
- ▶ Most disagreed that finding time to read is difficult.
- ▶ **32 caregivers** intend to continue making storytelling a regular part of family life, noting that reading to their children has also increased *their own* interest in reading.

Knowledge and Community Engagement

Engagement with reading activities extended beyond the home. While **20 caregivers** reported having prior knowledge about supporting reading at home, **16** did not; among these, most said their awareness and skills increased significantly through Nal'ibali.

Additionally:

- ▶ **25 caregivers** knew about local reading resources such as story hours, reading clubs and book swaps, and many attended at least occasionally.
- ▶ **17 caregivers** sometimes and **16** often discussed reading with other parents.
- ▶ **28 caregivers** expressed strong interest in ongoing community reading activities, including workshops, reading clubs and book-sharing groups.

Remaining Barriers to Engagement

Despite positive attitudes, several challenges continue to limit deeper participation:

- ▶ lack of books at home.
- ▶ transport constraints that affect attendance at reading events.
- ▶ lower literacy confidence among some caregivers.
- ▶ inconsistent attendance at organised reading clubs.

Book shortages remain a structural barrier. Borrowing from the mobile library helps but does not fully address the need for personal books. Half of households own **3–9** children's stories; **31%** have only **1–2**; and **8%** have none. Many caregivers expressed a desire to build a small home library so that children can read freely outside scheduled sessions. The mobile library fills gaps but is not a substitute for book ownership.

Caregiver training participation also fluctuated. Sessions often conflicted with work schedules, household duties and long travel distances, and some caregivers felt self-conscious about their own literacy levels. Attendance typically declined from groups of around **12 caregivers** to only a few completing the full series. Greater flexibility in scheduling, access to child-care support and provision of transport stipends may help improve participation in the future.



3.4 Story Sparkers and Funda Leader Delivery Quality

3.4.1 Roles, Motivation and Training

Story Sparkers and Funda Leaders serve as the frontline implementers of the Nal'ibali Reading-for-Enjoyment Programme. Their responsibilities span a wide range of literacy-support activities, including:

- ▶ facilitating weekly reading sessions in schools, ECD centres and community venues.
- ▶ conducting read-alouds, storytelling, songs, rhymes, and creative arts activities.
- ▶ running reading clubs, holiday programmes and community literacy events.
- ▶ distributing reading materials and helping to stock or refresh reading corners.
- ▶ mobilising children and caregivers for activations and programme events.

Their motivation is consistently grounded in a strong commitment to children, a passion for storytelling and a desire to contribute positively to their communities. Many expressed that they have long aspired to become teachers, youth workers or community educators.

Participation in the programme has enabled Story Sparkers and Funda Leaders to develop a valuable set of professional competencies. They reported gaining strong facilitation skills, such as leading group storytelling, incorporating movement, songs and props, and managing diverse groups of children. They also developed communication and leadership capabilities, as well as experience in session planning, data reporting and community mobilisation. Many described increased confidence and renewed interest in pursuing careers in education or community development. While formal employment outcomes were not tracked, these skills significantly enhance their employability.

Story Sparkers and Funda Leaders received multiple layers of training and support, including:

- ▶ initial Funda Leader training.
- ▶ refresher workshops and WordWorks literacy training.
- ▶ child protection and safeguarding training.
- ▶ ongoing mentoring and site visits from Literacy Mentors and coordinators.

Most participants valued this support highly and noted that it helped them deliver more consistent and engaging sessions. Some, however, expressed a need for additional assistance with administrative tasks, reporting requirements and advanced reading-club management.



3.4.2 Reach, Attendance and Community Response

The programme achieved substantial reach across schools, ECD centres and community spaces, with consistently positive responses from children, caregivers and partners. Story Sparkers and caregivers frequently reported that children retell stories to siblings and friends, and that even parents who did not participate in training began reading or storytelling at home after observing their children's enthusiasm. Community events, such as World Read Aloud Day celebrations and local book festivals, helped attract new families and stimulated broader interest in reading. Partner organisations also noted increased demand from other community groups wanting to adopt Nal'ibali-inspired methods.

Typical reach patterns included:

- ▶ reading clubs regularly serving **20–30 children** per session.
- ▶ Story Sparkers visiting multiple classes and reaching an estimated **450–500 children per week**.
- ▶ ECD sessions engaging between **60 and 177 children** weekly.

Attendance generally:

- ▶ increased over time as families became familiar with the programme.
- ▶ dipped during winter months and school holidays.
- ▶ recovered through consistent effort, parent meetings and community-based activations.

Children's response was described as uniformly positive. They frequently asked for longer sessions, independently retold stories and demonstrated visible increases in confidence, vocabulary and participation. Parents and teachers regularly expressed appreciation to Story Sparkers for the noticeable improvements in children's behaviour, engagement and enjoyment of reading.

3.4.3 Resources, Challenges and Sustainability Concerns

Story Sparkers generally reported having access to the core materials needed to deliver sessions, but several important gaps remain. A common concern was the shortage of age-appropriate books for young children, along with a need for shorter, print-rich stories that better support emergent literacy. Educators and facilitators noted that some existing storybooks, particularly those for older readers, are too long or linguistically complex. They expressed a desire for more engaging stories in local languages, with large pictures and simple vocabulary. This feedback highlights the need to review both story length and language level to ensure alignment with children's developmental stages.



Occasional shortages of craft supplies, and supplementary resources were also reported. Budget constraints contributed to these gaps: the project initially procured more materials than required and later restructured to prioritise quality and targeted distribution. Transport stipends and book supplies were sometimes insufficient or delayed, creating inconsistencies in delivery. Despite these challenges, partners emphasised that Nal'ibali's financial support remained vital and that many resource constraints stemmed from broader organisational limitations in the local context.

Key Operational Challenges

Story Sparkers highlighted several operational barriers:

- ▶ **Long walking distances and limited transport options:** Many facilitators walk considerable distances between ECD centres and schools. Transport stipends, intended to offset these costs, were occasionally delayed or did not fully cover actual expenses. As a result, some Story Sparkers were unable to visit all sites consistently despite strong commitment. Ensuring timely, adequate reimbursement—or assigning facilitators closer to their communities—would improve consistency.
- ▶ **Low stipends relative to workload:** Some participants expressed that stipends do not fully reflect the intensity or breadth of their responsibilities.
- ▶ **Language barriers in multilingual classrooms:** Tswana-speaking Story Sparkers often facilitate in predominantly Afrikaans communities (and vice versa), creating communication challenges with teachers and caregivers. Facilitators responded by using bilingual materials, seeking translation support and learning basic phrases. Additional language training and multilingual resources could strengthen this aspect of delivery.
- ▶ **Initial reluctance from some teachers:** A few teachers were hesitant to allocate class time for storytelling in the early stages of implementation.
- ▶ **Irregular attendance of children and parents:** Attendance fluctuated due to competing responsibilities, transport constraints and seasonal factors.

Sustainability Concerns

Story Sparkers expressed concern that without ongoing support, some gains may not be sustained. They feared that:

- ▶ children could lose interest or regress without access to regular sessions or materials;
- ▶ schools and communities may struggle to maintain activities independently, particularly in areas with limited literacy infrastructure.

Communities rely heavily on Nal'ibali because facilitators supply books, training, coordination and mobilisation. With few existing structures to support reading clubs, activities may stall without continued assistance. In response, the programme is actively



developing local reading champions, literacy committees and Communities of Practice to gradually shift leadership and responsibility to community members.

Willingness to Sustain Activities

Despite these challenges, most Story Sparkers expressed a strong desire to continue promoting literacy in some capacity. Some indicated they would volunteer as facilitators; others aspired to start reading clubs or small community-based organisations, and nearly all emphasised the need for ongoing access to books, safe venues, local government stipends and community buy-in.

Story Sparkers consistently described Nal'ibali as unique among NGOs operating in their communities and reported that the programme has had a "profound impact" on children, caregivers and their own personal growth.

3.5 Partner, Social Worker and Community Perspectives

3.5.1 Social Workers / Katlipeli Social Development Forum

Social workers from the Katlipeli Social Development Forum reported that Nal'ibali's materials and training aligned seamlessly with their existing child and youth care programmes. They observed that children not only improved their reading skills but also became more creative and confident, with several receiving medals and awards for their progress. Importantly, the programme also strengthened family bonds: parents, including fathers, became more involved in reading activities, helping to reduce stigma associated with single-parent households. The partnership was described as amplifying impact, demonstrating that *"when there are many hands, we get far."*

The Forum highlighted several positive effects:

- ▶ Nal'ibali fostered professional growth among child and youth care workers, encouraging more interactive, child-centred approaches.
- ▶ Parents, grandparents and other community members increasingly embraced storytelling and reading as part of daily life.

Challenges Identified

Key challenges primarily related to partner organisational constraints rather than programme design:

- ▶ **High transport costs and limited funding:**
Partner NGOs and community groups noted that transport shortages, funding limitations and staff workload pressures originated mainly within their own organisational contexts. While Nal'ibali introduced additional reporting and training



requirements, these were generally viewed as supportive and capacity-building. Strengthening clarity on roles and expectations may help partners better distinguish project-related obligations from internal operational challenges.

► **Staff turnover and reliance on external coordinators:**

Both Lesedi and Letsatsi experienced staff transitions in 2023–2024 due to maternity leave and resignations. In the early stages, some coordinators were not drawn from the local community, which affected trust, communication and programme continuity. Nal’ibali has since prioritised recruiting community-based coordinators and establishing thorough handover processes to stabilise delivery.

Social workers emphasised that if programming were to end, it would leave a “big hole” in community support structures, as literacy underpins much of their broader developmental work. They advocated strongly for sustained funding and greater localisation of programme management to ensure continuity and long-term impact.

3.5.2 Partner Organisations (NGOs, Libraries, Community Champions)

Nine partner organisations, including NGOs, libraries, community forums, clinics and local champions, shared their experiences of working with Nal’ibali. Overall, the collaboration was described as smooth, inclusive and mutually beneficial. Partners highlighted regular meetings, clear communication of roles and flexible, solutions-oriented problem-solving. While partners contributed venues, staff time and community mobilisation, Nal’ibali provided books, supplements, training and programme structure. Many partners noted that Nal’ibali activities complemented and strengthened existing ECD and school initiatives by adding storytelling, reading corners, parent engagement and access to reading materials.

Community Response and Emerging Change

Partners reported high levels of enthusiasm from children, parents and grandparents. Story sessions and activities drew families into safe community spaces, with several organisations observing that children spent less time on the streets and more time engaged in reading. They noted improvements in reading habits, learner confidence and general academic engagement. Some partners described “chain reactions”—for example, grandparents beginning to learn to read because grandchildren wanted to practise stories at home.

Mobilisation Strategies

Effective mobilisation approaches included:

- community meetings and fun days.
- school-based events and class activations.



- ▶ door-to-door outreach and caregiver engagement.
- ▶ WhatsApp groups and social media communication.
- ▶ the highly visible Nal'ibali tuk-tuk mobile libraries, which helped attract children and caregivers.

Challenges and Areas of Strain

Partners acknowledged several challenges affecting implementation:

- ▶ **Transport and funding constraints** within partner organisations, which limited their ability to attend events or transport children.
- ▶ **Limited administrative capacity**, which made it difficult to manage monitoring tools, caregiver training logistics and book distribution.
Partners differentiated between project-specific challenges (e.g., new reporting tools, organising caregiver sessions) and broader organisational constraints (e.g., limited staff, funding shortages, competing mandates). This distinction is important for designing tailored support.
- ▶ **Staff shortages and limited Afrikaans-speaking facilitators** in some areas.
- ▶ **Low attendance** at some holiday programmes or reading festivals.
- ▶ Concerns that **not all learners** could be included in special events due to space, transport or staffing limitations.

Sustainability Concerns

Many partners expressed concern that activities may stall without Nal'ibali's ongoing financial and human resources. Beneficiaries currently rely heavily on Nal'ibali because few local structures or trained literacy champions exist to sustain reading clubs independently. To strengthen sustainability, the programme is:

- ▶ training community reading champions and new volunteers.
- ▶ forming literacy committees and Communities of Practice.
- ▶ linking reading clubs to local libraries, NGOs and schools.
- ▶ gradually shifting leadership, coordination and resource management to local partners.

Partners agreed that over-dependency reflects the absence of these structures and building them is essential for long-term continuity.

Partner Recommendations

Partners suggested several strategies to support future sustainability:

- ▶ increased government funding and local business involvement.
- ▶ additional books, reading corners and multilingual materials.
- ▶ recruitment and training of new volunteers and local literacy representatives.
- ▶ establishment of adult reading groups or caregiver book clubs.
- ▶ greater use of local radio for publicity, storytelling and reading-promotion messaging.



All partners expressed strong willingness to collaborate again, emphasising the clear and visible value Nal'ibali brings to their communities.

3.6 Programme Management, Implementation Effectiveness and Operational Lessons

3.6.1 Objectives and Alignment

The Programme Manager confirmed that the core objectives were to:

- ▶ model reading behaviour for children by having adults read aloud.
- ▶ strengthen educator capacity to integrate storytelling and literacy activities across subjects.
- ▶ build caregiver understanding of play and early learning.

These aims align closely with Nal'ibali's mission to build a lifelong culture of reading-for-enjoyment.

3.6.2 Implementation Adaptations and Innovation

Over the three-year period, the project adapted substantially:

- ▶ Tuk-tuks were refurbished as **mobile libraries**, expanding reach to remote areas.
- ▶ A planned lamp-post campaign was dropped due to cost, freeing funds for more practical tools.
- ▶ The caregiver programme was **radically condensed** from 14 weekly sessions to 3 consecutive training days plus 3 days of mentorship, significantly reducing drop-outs and increasing completion.
- ▶ Creative writing workshops produced two editions of children's storybooks (*Seeds of Change*), launched during Literacy Month.
- ▶ Holiday programmes, "movie days" and radio partnerships kept children engaged and raised project visibility.
- ▶ Hard-to-reach communities (such as Skeyfontein and Lime Acres) were reached by appointing part-time Story Sparkers there.

3.6.3 Data Systems and Monitoring

Initially, data tracking was weak:

- ▶ fragmented tools (spreadsheets, WhatsApp logs, paper registers).
- ▶ minimal beneficiary databases.



By late 2024:

- ▶ a robust **beneficiary database** was developed to record schools, learners, educators, reading clubs and caregivers.
- ▶ SurveyCTO was introduced to standardise and digitise session reporting.

These improvements enhanced data quality, though the project still primarily tracked **activities**, with limited outcome-level indicators (e.g. children’s reading enjoyment, mother-tongue use).

3.6.4 Staffing, Budgeting and Leadership

Implementation was hampered at times by:

- ▶ suspension of the Head of Programmes.
- ▶ turnover of project coordinators.
- ▶ failed recruitment for the Letsatsi coordinator position.

Key developments and lessons:

- ▶ Project coordinators were eventually split so each site had its **own coordinator**; Lesedi improved markedly with a dedicated local coordinator.
- ▶ Letsatsi stagnated due to an unfilled coordinator vacancy and staff tension.
- ▶ Budget revisions were required to address concerns about resource over-procurement and ensure alignment with actual needs.

The Programme Manager emphasised a critical lesson: **large, multi-site literacy projects require dedicated, local coordinators with the authority to manage budgets and partnerships; remote management does not work.**

3.6.5 Capacity, Training and Support

- ▶ Caregivers valued the condensed training model; educators appreciated in-class support but often struggled to attend training sessions consistently.
- ▶ Skills gaps were noted in coordination, planning, financial systems, M&E and supervision (particularly in Letsatsi).
- ▶ Story Sparkers occasionally filled gaps by **substituting for absent teachers**, a contribution widely appreciated by schools.

3.6.6 Cross-Site Comparison

A cross-site comparison highlights several key differences in implementation conditions, resource availability and programme reach between Lesedi and Letsatsi.



Area	Lesedi	Letsatsi
Staffing stability	High – consistent, locally based coordinator	Low – coordinator post vacant for extended periods
Partner integration	Strong partnerships; active Communities of Practice	Moderate and uneven engagement
Book access	High – Tuk-Tuk library operational on schedule	Limited – delays and fewer available titles
Caregiver programme	High completion rates and broader reach	Restricted rollout due to logistics and staffing
Community mobilisation	Frequent, well-attended activities	Variable and dependent on individual champions
Data quality	Strong following SurveyCTO introduction	More variable across partners and sites

Interpretation of Differences

Lesedi benefitted from stable leadership, with a locally based coordinator who provided consistent oversight and coordination. Strong partnerships with schools, ECD centres and community structures supported smooth implementation, and the Tuk-Tuk mobile libraries became operational as planned. Caregivers in Lesedi completed their training cycles at higher rates, and Story Sparkers reported strong community engagement.

In contrast, Letsatsi faced significant structural constraints. Coordinator vacancies and staff turnover disrupted continuity. Long travel distances between Dealesville and Soutpan reduced the frequency of visits and increased transport-related challenges. Safety concerns in certain communities, as well as delays in launching the mobile libraries, further constrained service delivery. These factors, combined with uneven partner networks and varying levels of community readiness, contributed to slower mobilisation and lower programme reach.

Reasons for Limited Rollout in Letsatsi

The limited rollout of some activities in Letsatsi stemmed from:

- ▶ shortages of books and transport resources.



- ▶ insufficient staffing to cover all ECD centres and schools.
- ▶ logistical delays, including the late deployment of Tuk-Tuk libraries.
- ▶ safety concerns that restricted movement and event scheduling.

As a result, not all planned activations or caregiver training sessions could be fully implemented.

Drivers of Variation Between Sites

Differences in outcomes across the two sites were shaped by:

1. **Leadership stability and local management**, Lesedi had consistent local coordination; Letsatsi did not.
2. **Staff turnover and vacancies** affecting continuity.
3. **Community readiness and local buy-in**, which were higher in Lesedi.
4. **Distance and transport challenges**, particularly in the geographically spread Letsatsi site.
5. **Partner engagement** and the strength of local networks.
6. **Resource availability and distribution**, including timeliness of Tuk-Tuk deployment and book supply.
7. **Quality of monitoring and data systems**, which improved markedly in Lesedi following SurveyCTO rollout but remained variable in Letsatsi.

These structural and contextual differences collectively explain much of the variation in programme outcomes between Lesedi and Letsatsi.

3.7 Unexpected and Additional Outcomes

The programme generated several unplanned but significant outcomes:

- ▶ **Employment and skills development:** Story Sparker and Funda Leader roles provided jobs and income for youth, who gained facilitation, communication, leadership and organisational skills.
- ▶ **Local story production:** Creative writing workshops led to the publication of locally authored books, giving children a sense of pride and cultural ownership.
- ▶ **Gender dynamics:** Fathers became more involved in reading and storytelling, challenging stereotypes about caregiving and fatherhood.



- ▶ **Community empowerment:** Partners reported greater networking among NGOs, schools and libraries; some linked improved matric results to stronger literacy foundations.
- ▶ **Social resilience:** Reading clubs and holiday programmes provided constructive activities for youth, reducing vulnerability to teenage pregnancy and substance abuse, and supporting psychosocial wellbeing.

These ripple effects extend the programme's impact well beyond literacy into broader social development and community resilience.

3.8 Cross-Cutting Themes, Risks and Enablers

Drawing together all stakeholder perspectives and data sources, several cross-cutting themes emerge:

3.8.1 Human and Relational Strengths

- ▶ Nal'ibali is widely experienced as **joyful, transformative and needed**.
- ▶ Children, teachers, caregivers, Story Sparkers and partners all report strong positive effects.
- ▶ The most powerful asset is **human connection**, committed Story Sparkers, motivated educators and increasingly engaged caregivers.

3.8.2 Material and Structural Weaknesses

- ▶ Persistent shortages of age-appropriate books, especially in local languages.
- ▶ Transport constraints and low stipends for Story Sparkers and partners.
- ▶ Reliance on volunteers and over-stretched NGO staff, leading to fatigue and burnout.
- ▶ Inconsistent communication with parents and uneven training follow-up in some sites.

3.8.3 Parental Engagement: Growing but Fragile

- ▶ Caregiver engagement and confidence have improved significantly, but participation is still uneven and constrained by poverty, time, and limited literacy confidence.
- ▶ Fathers' involvement is a promising but under-developed opportunity.

3.8.4 Centrality of Local Coordination

- ▶ Lesedi's stronger outcomes illustrate the importance of a **dedicated, on-site coordinator**.



- ▶ Letsatsi's lagging performance underscores the risks of remote, under-resourced management.

3.8.5 Sustainability and System Integration

- ▶ Stakeholders fear a steep drop in reading activities if funding ends.
- ▶ Schools, NGOs and volunteers cannot maintain full programme intensity without external support.
- ▶ Sustainability will require:
 - predictable multi-year funding
 - structured mentorship and supervision
 - community literacy committees and CoPs
 - integration of Nal'ibali-type activities into government programmes and municipal plans

3.8.6 Overall Picture in Brief

- ▶ **Impact:** Strong, especially on children's confidence and engagement, teacher practice, caregiver behaviour and community reading culture.
- ▶ **Enablers:** Passionate Story Sparkers, committed educators, responsive caregivers, aligned partners.
- ▶ **Constraints:** Book and transport shortages, low stipends, staffing instability, parental time pressures, and early-stage system weaknesses.
- ▶ **Key warning:** The model works and is highly valued, but it will **not sustain itself on goodwill alone**. Without structural support, funding and institutional anchoring, hard-won gains risk fading over time.

The Lesedi and Letsatsi Reading for Enjoyment Programme has delivered meaningful and multi-layered benefits across children, caregivers, educators, youth facilitators and community partners. The evidence demonstrates a clear improvement in children's enthusiasm for reading, expressive language development, listening skills, story recall and confidence. Educators have strengthened their storytelling practices, integrated reading-for-enjoyment into daily routines and gained confidence in using diverse literacy materials. Caregivers, despite low-resource home environments, have adopted new routines that support early learning and now have a stronger appreciation of storytelling as a developmental tool. Story Sparkers and Funda Leaders have grown in skill, confidence and purpose, becoming central catalysts of literacy culture in their communities.



The programme's effectiveness is rooted in the human relationships and trust built over time. Children respond to warm, reliable facilitators; teachers value classroom support; caregivers internalise new knowledge through practical modelling; and community partners recognise Nal'ibali as a programme that ignites hope and strengthens family bonds. These human assets are the strongest drivers of programme success.

At the same time, several structural weaknesses pose risks to long-term sustainability. Chronic resource shortages, especially age-appropriate books in home languages—limit consistent literacy exposure. Transport constraints, low stipends, staff turnover and the absence of a dedicated coordinator in Letsatsi undermined implementation fidelity. Parental engagement, while improved, remains fragile due to poverty, low literacy confidence and limited time. Monitoring systems strengthened significantly over time but continue to focus primarily on activity counts rather than child-level outcome indicators.

The divergent trajectories of the two sites offer a crucial lesson: **local coordination is non-negotiable**. Lesedi's strong performance was enabled by a stable, community-based coordinator; Letsatsi's stagnation illustrates the limits of remote management. Without clear leadership, cohesive communication and onsite oversight, implementation suffers and partnerships weaken.

Overall, the programme has produced strong outcomes, high community demand and clear value for children, families and educators. However, without predictable multi-year funding, structured mentorship, community reading committees and formal integration into government systems, the gains achieved are vulnerable. The programme's model works, demonstrably so, but **will not sustain itself on goodwill alone**. Strategic investment, institutional anchoring and strengthened systems are essential for lasting impact.

4 Recommendations

The following recommendations are designed to enhance programme sustainability, strengthen quality and support scale-up in similar contexts.



4.1 Strengthen Programme Design, Management and Coordination

4.1.1 Appoint dedicated, community-based coordinators in each site

Lessons from Lesedi show that strong local leadership improves partnerships, supports Story Sparkers, improves data quality and accelerates implementation. Coordinators should have authority to manage logistics, partnerships, budgeting and monitoring.

4.1.2 Develop sustainability planning from project inception

A clear, phased sustainability plan should include:

- ▶ transition milestones.
- ▶ roles for schools, NGOs and community structures.
- ▶ communication plans for beneficiaries.
- ▶ defined exit strategies.

This will reduce uncertainty and build shared ownership.

4.1.3 Strengthen governance and communication between funders, implementers and partners

Clarify expectations on:

- ▶ reporting
- ▶ monitoring visits
- ▶ communication lines
- ▶ budget flexibility

Consistent communication reduces confusion and enhances responsiveness.

4.1.4 Expand MEL systems to track outcomes, not just activities

Shift from counting sessions and beneficiaries toward measuring:

- ▶ changes in children's reading enjoyment and confidence.
- ▶ vocabulary and comprehension indicators.
- ▶ caregiver engagement and home reading frequency.
- ▶ educator practice shifts.

This will enable deeper learning and adaptive management.



4.1.5 Secure multi-year, predictable funding streams

Annual funding cycles limit planning and weaken momentum. Multi-year commitments from donors and integration into municipal and provincial education plans will stabilise programme continuity.

4.2 Enhance Training, Mentorship and Capacity Building

4.2.1 Provide ongoing, practical, context-sensitive training

Training should emphasise expressive storytelling, mother-tongue literacy, integration across subjects, parent engagement and facilitation of inclusive reading clubs.

4.2.2 Establish peer learning and Communities of Practice

Regular forums (virtual or in-person) for educators, Story Sparkers, librarians and NGOs will:

- ▶ share strategies
- ▶ coordinate literacy events
- ▶ strengthen local networks
- ▶ support sustainability

4.2.3 Implement structured mentorship and supervision systems

Build a consistent supervision model including:

- ▶ monthly check-ins
- ▶ observation visits
- ▶ refresher workshops
- ▶ performance-linked mentoring

This will prevent burnout and reinforce quality.

4.2.4 Professionalise and accredit facilitator roles

Partner with SETAs and DBE to explore accreditation pathways for Story Sparkers and Funda Leaders. This enhances retention, motivation and career progression.



4.3 Strengthen Resource Provision and Infrastructure

4.3.1 Expand and rotate book supplies, prioritising home languages

Create a quarterly book-supply plan that ensures:

- ▶ diverse stories.
- ▶ age-appropriate texts.
- ▶ multi-lingual content (Setswana, Afrikaans, isiXhosa, English).
- ▶ rotation protocols* to avoid duplication (*planned rotation of mobile library routes, Story Sparker visits and book collections. These schedules ensure that each community receives equitable access to books and facilitators without overburdening staff or resources.)

Mini-libraries and story kits should be circulated across sites to maximise access.

4.3.2 Support mobile library models and book-lending systems

Scale the Tuk-Tuk library model and formally establish book borrowing systems managed by schools, ECDs or community champions.

To reduce theft and vandalism, partners recommended storing the vehicles overnight in secure municipal or police yards, fitting them with alarms or tracking devices, registering them with neighbourhood-watch programmes and avoiding high-risk areas after dark. Community awareness campaigns can also encourage residents to protect the Tuk-Tuks as shared assets.

4.3.3 Provide adequate stipends and transport support

Transport reimbursement is essential to reduce personal expenses for facilitators, especially in remote and high-distance contexts. Stipends should match workload, expertise and inflation realities.

4.3.4 Develop father-inclusive and family-focused reading initiatives

Encourage male caregiver participation through:

- ▶ father-child storytelling events.
- ▶ reading competitions.
- ▶ featuring fathers on radio segments.
- ▶ male-led reading clubs.

This responds to growing but fragile interest among fathers.



4.4 Deepen Community and Partnership Engagement

4.4.1 Strengthen parental engagement strategies

Introduce:

- ▶ monthly caregiver–child reading circles.
- ▶ WhatsApp/SMS reading tips.
- ▶ parent storytelling competitions.
- ▶ literacy activations at social grant points and community gatherings.

4.4.2 Formalise partnerships with NGOs, libraries and community forums

Create partnership MoUs, clarify roles and coordinate literacy events through joint planning committees.

4.4.3 Leverage local media for literacy promotion

Partner with:

- ▶ community radio stations
- ▶ local newspapers
- ▶ social media groups

This builds awareness, reinforces public messaging and mobilises families.

4.4.4 Establish community literacy committees

These should include:

- ▶ teachers
- ▶ Story Sparkers
- ▶ library staff
- ▶ ward councillors
- ▶ NGOs

The committee can plan quarterly reading events, oversee book-lending systems and advocate for resources.

Note: Communities of Practice (CoPs) are formal learning networks where facilitators meet regularly to share experiences and problem-solve. Other mechanisms, such as



literacy committees, mentorship structures and rotation protocols, serve operational or governance functions. These tools complement CoPs but have distinct purposes.

4.5 Support Scale-Up and Replication

4.5.1 Replicate the condensed caregiver training model

This model improved completion rates, reduced dropout and increased caregiver confidence. It is cost-efficient and scalable.

4.5.2 Integrate literacy initiatives into government systems

Collaborate with:

- ▶ DBE
- ▶ DSD
- ▶ Municipal IDPs

Align reading-for-enjoyment with the NDP 2030 goal that all children read for meaning by Grade 3.

4.5.3 Tailor replication to local language and cultural contexts

Adapt stories, session formats and engagement strategies to the realities of each new community.

4.5.4 Document and share success stories and models

Publish case studies, video stories and implementation briefs demonstrating effective practice to attract new partners and scale through a knowledge-sharing platform.

5 Cross-Cutting Themes

The multi-year evidence from children, caregivers, educators, Story Sparkers, partners and programme staff reveals a set of strong cross-cutting themes that define the character, strengths and vulnerabilities of the Lesedi & Letsatsi Reading for Enjoyment Programme. These themes explain *why* the programme achieved its impact, and *what threatens its continuity* without long-term support.



5.1 The Human Relationships Are the Programme's Core Asset

Across all stakeholder groups, the consistent message is that the programme's success flows from human connection:

- ▶ Children trust Story Sparkers and respond to their warmth, creativity and consistency.
- ▶ Teachers value facilitators who bring relief, energy and literacy expertise into classrooms.
- ▶ Caregivers feel respected, supported and encouraged by practical modelling.
- ▶ Partners describe Nal'ibali as inclusive, collaborative and "a light" in the community.

These relationships generate confidence, belonging and joy, the emotional foundations of literacy development. All evidence shows that the programme's human infrastructure is its strongest, most irreplaceable asset.

5.2 Enthusiasm and Engagement Are Extremely High Across Communities

Children's enthusiasm for reading is consistently high and clearly visible across both sites. Educators and Story Sparkers frequently described learners' excitement when facilitators arrive, their eager participation in songs, retellings and dramatizations, and their growing confidence in volunteering during sessions. Teachers and caregivers also observed positive behaviour changes linked to reading activities, as well as children's pride in their own story-writing and participation in *Seeds of Change* publications.

Caregivers and educators expressed strong motivation to maintain literacy routines at home and in the classroom. Partners similarly reported that a reading culture is gradually taking root in families and neighbourhoods.

Knowledge Sharing and Wider Community Interest

The programme's influence extends beyond the children and caregivers directly involved. Many children retell stories to siblings and peers, prompting informal story-sharing within homes and playgrounds. Caregivers who did not attend formal training reported beginning to read or tell stories at home after observing their children's enthusiasm. Community activations, such as World Read Aloud Day, have attracted new families, while partner organisations reported increased interest from other community groups wishing to adopt or replicate similar reading clubs.



5.3 Home Literacy is Strengthening – But Still Fragile

The evaluation shows significant improvements in home literacy practices:

- ▶ more shared reading.
- ▶ more storytelling in cultural and home languages.
- ▶ increased visits to libraries and book-lending systems.
- ▶ parents teaching letters, words and pictures.
- ▶ improved bonding between caregivers and children.

However, the sustainability of these gains is vulnerable because:

- ▶ households own few or no books.
- ▶ most families rely on Nal'ibali for access to reading materials.
- ▶ unemployment and poverty limit parents' time and mobility.
- ▶ father engagement is emerging but underdeveloped.

Home literacy growth is promising but remains dependent on accessible resources and ongoing community support.

5.4 Educator Practices Have Shifted – But Structural Constraints Persist

Teachers demonstrate clear improvements in storytelling confidence, engagement techniques and classroom literacy environments. Many have embraced reading corners, DEAR sessions, story cards and expressive storytelling.

Yet, their ability to sustain and deepen these practices is constrained by:

- ▶ book shortages.
- ▶ curriculum overload.
- ▶ large class sizes.
- ▶ multilingual classrooms.
- ▶ occasional theft or loss of materials.
- ▶ uneven parental involvement.

These structural factors require systemic responses, not individual effort.

5.5 Youth Employment and Skills Development Are Significant Secondary Impacts

The programme unknowingly fostered meaningful youth development:



- ▶ Story Sparkers gained facilitation, leadership, organisation and communication skills.
- ▶ Several became role models for children and families.
- ▶ Some now seek careers in teaching or early childhood development.
- ▶ Youth involvement strengthened community credibility and mobilisation.

These effects extend the programme's impact beyond literacy and address youth unemployment and empowerment.

5.6 Local Coordination is the Single Strongest Determinant of Implementation Quality

Comparative analysis between Lesedi and Letsatsi confirms:

- ▶ Lesedi thrived with a dedicated, motivated local coordinator.
- ▶ Letsatsi stalled when the coordinator post remained vacant.
- ▶ Partnerships, data quality, staff morale, communication and community mobilisation all declined without local leadership.

This theme appears repeatedly across interviews, observations and management reflections: **community-based coordinators are essential.**

5.7 Transport, Resources and Stipends Are the Programme's Structural Weak Points

Across all groups, the same constraints emerged:

- ▶ walking long distances.
- ▶ irregular or insufficient transport reimbursements.
- ▶ limited stipends for Story Sparkers.
- ▶ book shortages (especially in Setswana and Afrikaans).
- ▶ insufficient materials for ECD ages.
- ▶ resource losses due to theft or damage.

These structural weaknesses place pressure on facilitators and limit scalability.

5.8 Sustainability Requires Systemic Anchoring – Not Just Community Goodwill

Every stakeholder group, teachers, caregivers, partners, social workers, Story Sparkers, expressed deep concern about programme continuity. The consistent theme is:

"The project is important, but the community cannot sustain this alone."



Without:

- ▶ multi-year funding
- ▶ government integration
- ▶ structured community literacy committees
- ▶ stable coordinators
- ▶ robust partner agreements

the gains made will erode.

Nal'ibali's model is effective but requires structural backing to last.

6 Implications For Future Programming & Scale-Up

The evaluation provides clear evidence that the Lesedi & Letsatsi model is **effective**, **scalable**, and **aligned to national education priorities**, but also highlights the conditions required to sustain and replicate it responsibly.

6.1 The Model is Scalable Because It Is People-Centred and Resource-Light

Key features make the model adaptable to new districts and provinces:

- ▶ Story Sparkers and Funda Leaders anchor delivery at low cost.
- ▶ Simple, high-impact story sessions require minimal materials.
- ▶ Reading corners and mobile libraries can be established quickly.
- ▶ Caregiver training can be condensed and replicated with fidelity.
- ▶ Creative writing workshops and children's anthologies are replicable across contexts.

This positions the programme as a cost-effective solution for provinces seeking to improve literacy outcomes.

6.2 Government Alignment Creates Opportunities for Expansion

The programme directly supports:

- ▶ **NDP 2030** – Children reading for meaning by Grade 3.
- ▶ **DBE's Reading Strategy** – building reading habits, enjoyment and access.
- ▶ **ECD policy goals** – early language and socioemotional development.
- ▶ **DSD mandates** – family strengthening and youth support.



- ▶ **Municipal IDPs** – safe after-school activities and community development.

Government departments increasingly seek community-based literacy models. Nal'ibali holds a strategic advantage by already providing training, materials and youth employment opportunities.

6.3 Scale-Up Requires Stable, Local Coordination Structures

For any expansion, each new site must have:

- ▶ a dedicated coordinator.
- ▶ transport and logistics systems.
- ▶ clear partner agreements.
- ▶ monthly planning and reporting structures.
- ▶ strong communication channels with Story Sparkers and schools.

This ensures implementation fidelity and protects programme quality.

6.4 Strengthening Partnerships Is Essential for Sustainable Scale

Future models should incorporate:

- ▶ community literacy committees.
- ▶ formalised MoUs with NGOs, libraries and schools.
- ▶ joint planning and co-hosted events.
- ▶ shared resources (venues, transport, mobilisation).
- ▶ community-led book-lending systems.

This reduces dependency on a single funder and distributes responsibilities across the ecosystem.

6.5 Investing in Youth Facilitators Is a High-Return Strategy

Story Sparkers and Funda Leaders represent a cost-effective, high-impact workforce for community literacy. Scaling up requires:

- ▶ improved stipends.
- ▶ professional development pathways.
- ▶ local recruitment and leadership pipelines.
- ▶ potential accreditation through SETAs or DBE partnerships.



This strengthens retention, improves quality and builds community-based education leadership.

6.6 Scaling Requires a Stronger MEL Framework

Expanding the programme across provinces requires an MEL framework that includes:

- ▶ standardised child-level indicators.
- ▶ reading enjoyment and confidence scales.
- ▶ vocabulary and comprehension measures.
- ▶ teacher practice assessments.
- ▶ caregiver literacy support indices.
- ▶ digital data collection (e.g., SurveyCTO).

This enables adaptive programming and systematic performance monitoring at larger scale.

6.7 Long-Term Sustainability Depends on Multi-Year Funding

Short-term funding cycles hinder momentum, planning and staff stability. To scale effectively, the programme must secure:

- ▶ 3–5 year funding agreements.
- ▶ government co-financing.
- ▶ a blended finance model (public + private + NGO partners).
- ▶ community contributions (venues, volunteer support).
- ▶ provincial literacy coordinating structures.

Multi-year commitments would allow Nal'ibali to deepen impact, reduce turnover and embed literacy culture sustainably.

6.8 A Pathway to Provincial and National Expansion

Based on evaluation findings, a realistic scale-up path includes:

- ▶ Strengthen Lesedi & Letsatsi as anchor demonstration sites.
- ▶ Document best practices, toolkits and standard operating procedures.
- ▶ Use success stories, Seeds of Change and radio features to advocate for support.
- ▶ Introduce coordinated provincial literacy days and campaigns.
- ▶ Partner with provincial departments to embed reading-for-enjoyment in early grades.
- ▶ Expand Story Sparkers teams and mobile libraries in a phased model.



This positions Nal'ibali as a strategic partner for literacy development across rural and peri-urban South Africa.

7 Risks & Mitigation Strategies

The evaluation identified several risks that threaten the long-term sustainability, scalability and quality of the Lesedi & Letsatsi Reading for Enjoyment Programme. These risks arise from the programme's structural context, operational environment and resource constraints. This section summarises the key risks and outlines practical mitigation strategies.

7.1 Structural & Systemic Risks

Risk 1: Insufficient and Unstable Funding

The programme is highly valued but financially fragile. Partners, schools and caregivers cannot sustain activities independently, and Story Sparkers rely on stipends.

Implications:

Loss of reading clubs, mobile library services, caregiver training, Seeds of Change workshops and literacy events.

Mitigation Strategies:

- ▶ Secure multi-year funding agreements with corporate and philanthropic partners.
- ▶ Pursue co-financing agreements with provincial DBE, DSD, and municipalities.
- ▶ Integrate Nal'ibali activities into school and municipal plans (e.g., IDPs, school improvement plans).
- ▶ Develop a blended revenue model combining donor funding, government contributions and community support.

Risk 2: Lack of Local Coordination

Lesedi thrived with a stable coordinator; Letsatsi stagnated without one.

Implications:

Weak partner management, inconsistent reporting, low morale, and reduced programme reach.

Mitigation Strategies:

- ▶ Ensure each site has a dedicated full-time, community-based coordinator.
- ▶ Provide structured leadership training and mentorship for coordinators.
- ▶ Introduce clear performance indicators linked to coordination quality.



Risk 3: Book & Resource Shortages

Book scarcity is the most consistent constraint across sites, especially multilingual, age-appropriate and culturally relevant materials.

Implications:

Limited reading exposure, lower engagement levels, weakened home literacy practice.

Mitigation Strategies:

- ▶ Establish quarterly book rotation systems.
- ▶ Partner with publishers for low-cost bulk procurement.
- ▶ Expand the mobile library fleet and book-lending systems.
- ▶ Mobilise local book donation drives (schools, churches, community groups).

7.2 Operational Risks

Risk 4: Transport Constraints

Story Sparkers walk long distances to schools and ECDs, reducing time and energy for quality facilitation.

Implications:

Lower attendance at some sites, session cancellations, fatigue and burnout.

Mitigation Strategies:

- ▶ Provide reliable, timely transport reimbursements.
- ▶ Introduce site clustering to reduce travel burden.
- ▶ Utilise bicycles or tuk-tuks for local mobility.
- ▶ Collaborate with municipalities for shared transport solutions.

Risk 5: Volunteer Fatigue & Stipend Limitations

Story Sparkers feel valued but overstretched. Inadequate stipends contribute to turnover and loss of institutional memory.

Implications:

Reduced consistency, diminished quality, reliance on fewer facilitators.

Mitigation Strategies:

- ▶ Increase stipends to align with living costs and workload.
- ▶ Formalise performance-based incentives.
- ▶ Provide clearer career pathways (training, certification, promotion).
- ▶ Improve scheduling, planning tools and administrative support.

Risk 6: Data Limitations



Early data systems were weak; later systems still emphasise activity counts over outcome indicators.

Implications:

Difficulty demonstrating child-level progress; challenges in monitoring scale-up.

Mitigation Strategies:

- ▶ Move to outcomes-based MEL indicators (reading enjoyment, vocabulary, comprehension, confidence).
- ▶ Improve digital data capture using SurveyCTO and dashboards.
- ▶ Train Story Sparkers and educators in basic MEL literacy.

7.3 Social & Community Risks

Risk 7: Uneven Parental Engagement

Although improved, parent engagement remains fragile and varies significantly across schools and communities.

Implications:

Inconsistent home reading practice; reduced sustainability.

Mitigation Strategies:

- ▶ Introduce parent reading circles & “Read with Me” events.
- ▶ Use WhatsApp/SMS nudges with weekly reading tips.
- ▶ Mobilise local champions (fathers, grandparents, youth) as literacy advocates.
- ▶ Create a community literacy calendar aligned to events, festivals and school terms.

Risk 8: Language Mismatches

Some Story Sparkers or educators facilitate in a language not spoken by all children.

Implications:

Reduced comprehension, lower engagement and inconsistent literacy gains.

Mitigation Strategies:

- ▶ Recruit facilitators matched to community languages.
- ▶ Translate and adapt more resources into Setswana, Afrikaans and isiXhosa.
- ▶ Support multilingual reading corners and mother-tongue storytelling.

Risk 9: Partner Dependency Without Clear Roles

Partners rely heavily on Nal’ibali; without structured agreements, delivery inconsistencies occur.

Implications:



Reduced quality, duplication of effort, uncoordinated literacy events.

Mitigation Strategies:

- ▶ Formalise partnerships through MoUs and roles/expectations.
- ▶ Create Community Literacy Committees for coordination.
- ▶ Strengthen communication lines between partners, Story Sparkers and coordinators.

8 Final Summary & Way Forward

The Lesedi & Letsatsi Reading for Enjoyment Programme has had a clear, positive and multi-layered impact on literacy engagement, learning confidence and community reading culture. Across all groups, children, caregivers, educators, Story Sparkers, partners and programme managers, the evidence shows:

- ▶ Children are more confident, expressive and excited about stories.
- ▶ Educators have incorporated storytelling into daily teaching.
- ▶ Caregivers have adopted new home literacy routines.
- ▶ Youth facilitators have gained employment, skills and purpose.
- ▶ Partners recognise Nal'ibali as a high-impact, mission-aligned programme.

The programme's success rests on accessible story materials, energetic Story Sparkers, meaningful partnerships and strong local coordination.

At the same time, significant structural and operational weaknesses, funding instability, resource shortages, transport constraints, and uneven parental participation, threaten the durability of these gains. The comparison between Lesedi (stable coordination, strong partnerships, higher reach) and Letsatsi (coordinator vacancy, stagnation) underscores the non-negotiable need for **local leadership**.

The evaluation clearly demonstrates that the model is:

- ▶ **effective** (children are learning and thriving).
- ▶ **scalable** (low-cost, adaptable, people-driven).
- ▶ **aligned with national priorities** (Grade R–3 literacy outcomes).
- ▶ **highly valued** by communities.

To secure long-term transformation, the way forward includes:

Consolidate and Strengthen Current Sites

- ▶ Retain full-time coordinators in each site.
- ▶ Deepen training and mentorship for Story Sparkers and educators.
- ▶ Expand book-lending systems and home-language resources.



- ▶ Enhance parental engagement strategies.
- ▶ Strengthen MEL systems to measure outcomes, not only activities.

Build a Sustainability Framework for Communities

- ▶ Establish community literacy committees.
- ▶ Formalise partnerships with NGOs, libraries and schools.
- ▶ Strengthen the mobile library model and structured book circulation.
- ▶ Support youth-led reading clubs and peer educators.

Secure Multi-Year Funding and Government Integration

- ▶ Engage the DBE and DSD for co-financing and policy alignment.
- ▶ Present the evaluation to provincial departments to secure political support.
- ▶ Position the programme within municipal IDPs and district education plans.
- ▶ Advocate for literacy champions in schools, libraries and communities.

Prepare for Responsible Scale-Up

- ▶ Document best practices into toolkits and standard operating procedures.
- ▶ Replicate the condensed caregiver model in new provinces.
- ▶ Develop provincial clusters anchored by strong coordinators.
- ▶ Use the success of Seeds of Change and reading festivals to mobilise new districts.

Build a National Learning Ecosystem

- ▶ Leverage community radio and local media for broader literacy promotion.
- ▶ Create inter-district Communities of Practice.
- ▶ Publish annual literacy impact stories and case studies.
- ▶ Position Nal'ibali as a thought leader in reading-for-enjoyment methodologies.

In conclusion: the Lesedi & Letsatsi evaluation shows a programme with undeniable impact, strong community resonance and a compelling case for expansion, but one that must be stabilised through structural investment and embedded coordination.

The next phase requires **strategic funding, government partnerships, and community ownership** to ensure that the joy, confidence and learning seen in these communities continues to grow.



Annex A: Data Collection

Tools

A1. Children's Session Observation Tool

- ▶ Structured tool used for capturing engagement, comprehension, vocabulary use, sequencing and participation during story sessions.

A2. Educator Survey Instrument

- ▶ Final questionnaire used with 29 educators, including Likert-scale items, open-ended questions, and classroom resource checklists.

A3. Caregiver Survey Instrument

- ▶ Survey used with 36 caregivers covering household demographics, home literacy routines, reading materials access and attitudes.

A4. Teacher Interview Guide

- ▶ Semi-structured interview tool used for interviews with 16 educators.

A5. Story Sparkers & Funda Leaders Interview Guide

- ▶ Guide used during 13 facilitator interviews, covering training, resources, challenges and perceived impact.

A6. Partner / NGO Interview Guide

- ▶ Interview guide used with nine organisations, including NGOs, clinics, libraries and community groups.

A7. Programme Manager Interview Guide

- ▶ Semi-structured interview schedule used for the project leadership interview.



Annex B: Datasets & Summary Tables

B1. Educator Survey Dataset (Quantitative Summary)

- ▶ Aggregated results, frequency tables, confidence scores, and narrative highlights.

B2. Caregiver Survey Dataset (Quantitative Summary)

- ▶ Tables detailing reading routines, confidence indicators, book access and outcomes.

B3. Story Session Assessment



Annex C: Transcripts & Qualitative Evidence

C1. Educator Interviews

C2. Story Sparker & Funda Leader Interviews

C3. Partner Interviews

C4. Programme Manager Interview

(These support the thematic analysis in Section 3.)



Annex D: Programme Evolution & Administration

D1. Programme Timeline (2022–2025)

- Key milestones, staffing transitions, adaptations and scale-up indicators.

D2. Organogram: Lesedi & Letsatsi Staffing Structures

- Story Sparkers, Literacy Mentors, coordinators and reporting lines.



Annex E: Ethical Considerations & Safeguarding

E1. Hero Makers Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy 2025

E2. Hero Makers Child Protection and Safeguarding Declarations

