



**SYRIA
EDUCATION
PROGRAMME**

MANAHEL - JUNE/JULY 2023

LEARNING BULLETIN

Low-cost collaboration delivers over 2,000 storybooks to schools

The Manahel team continues to build relationships and maximise results through collaboration and joint coordination. In June 2023, the non-governmental organisation (NGO) Hope Revival reached out to coordinate the distribution of 2,125 storybooks for children in Manahel-supported schools. The project, including story production and printing, is fully funded by The Canada Fund for Local Initiatives.

Manahel is able to leverage pre-planned distribution by current partners to deliver the storybooks at no added cost to either Hope Revival or Manahel – demonstrating the benefits of coordination for distributing supplies.

2,125

storybooks in
Manahel-supported
schools



Manahel's dedicated protection team reviewed the stories and found them suitable for the target audience of children and their caregivers, as well as effective in promoting social inclusion and the

integration of children with disabilities within the education system and their communities.

Following a needs assessment in summer clubs, Manahel contacted Education Directorates (EDs) for approval of the story content. After gaining their approval, Manahel stored the storybooks in their warehouse while continuing to identify schools for support in the next phase. This collaboration with Hope Revival and the EDs allows Manahel to enhance educational opportunities and aligns with Manahel's aim to foster students' passion for reading and promote inclusive learning environments in schools.

Collaboration with Education Cluster improving local implementation

Manahel's meeting with the Education Cluster to discuss collaboration during the extension period has resulted in positive next steps for more consistent coordination. The Cluster, the coordinating body for the Northwest (NW) Syria education response, confirmed an invitation for the Manahel Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) team to join a training refresher on the 4Ws¹ database reporting and indicators so that Manahel could sign off on partners' reports and ensure more accurate reporting of data submitted by its downstream partners.

The Cluster also shared details of the education-

¹ The 4Ws database was designed to answer 'who, what, where and when' questions about delivery of key activities. This information is essential to cluster coordinators and organisations to coordinate their activities effectively, reach their targets in a timely manner and ensure that humanitarian needs are met without gaps or duplication.

related materials platform they use, ensuring that downstream partners utilise the materials created and adopted by the Cluster. Manahel will aim to share knowledge of specific topics at each cluster meeting so that members can benefit from the programme's experience of implementing education interventions.

Key lesson learned

During the period, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Aid Fund for Northern Syria (AFNS), and the Syria Education Programme (SEP) were all involved in financing education activities in Northwest Syria (NW Syria) alongside other actors with independent funding. In some cases, Manahel was able to coordinate with partners to improve the efficiency of activities. However, Manahel learned there is a need for greater oversight of resources to maximise impact. Experience also highlights the potential value for money that could be gained from improved governance of NGO and donor-funded education activities in NW Syria. It also highlights the potential for widening the Early Grade Mathematics Assessment (EGMA)/Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) to include samples of all project schools and provide a comparative report of learner impact.



Successful resilience and wellbeing assessment to be reintroduced

Manahel is reintroducing the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) to target children's wellbeing and resilience. SDQ results are used to identify strengths and difficulties impacting children as per their age group, gender, and disability and

appropriate interventions are then established to respond to children's specific needs. In previous years, findings from the SDQ indicated that younger children (5 to 8 years old) have difficulties with their peer relationships, while Grade 4 children are in a critical period for experiencing bullying, poor self-image, and having an increased awareness of discrimination. As a result, Manahel worked to tailor the programme's PSS intervention to these needs, rather than offering a generic programme to all children. Over four years, the SDQ has revealed a remarkable 50% decline in the number of children facing high emotional and behavioural challenges.

The initial assessment in this new phase is being administered at the start of the summer to enable Manahel to identify emerging issues or challenges faced by students so these can be addressed promptly. Delivering the SDQ at this stage will help Manahel tailor support and interventions for children during the summer club.

50% decline in the number of children facing high emotional and behavioural challenges.

Conducting a post-assessment at the start of the academic year will then provide valuable insights into how students have progressed over the summer, allowing Manahel to refine psychosocial support (PSS) interventions and ensure a smooth transition to the new academic year. To learn more about Manahel interventions and evaluation processes, [see this video](#).

Key lesson learned

Through the SDQ, Manahel has learned that gathering information to understand the programme's impact on children improves the quality and effectiveness of the activities that it implements. Furthermore, this approach enables Manahel to give children, caregivers, and teachers accountability over programme outcomes by continuously seeking their feedback on how interventions have impacted, or might impact, children's emotional resilience. This ongoing analysis of participant feedback informs programme adjustments, as well as future strategic planning to align with emerging needs.

Engaging partners and EDs to improve implementation

Manahel has engaged downstream partners in meetings to develop project activities throughout the programme extension period. Through this early engagement, Manahel gained valuable insights and perspectives that influenced the development of the extension plan. These efforts resulted in the design of activities which were informed by the input of all parties, FCDO's insights, and feedback from the annual review.

This collaboration resulted in positive outcomes and the signing of an agreement to extend the memorandum of understanding (MoU) between Manahel and the Education Directorates (EDs). Also, a meeting between Manahel and the EDs took place in June, where upcoming plans for the extension were discussed. These included plans for summer camp and for the new academic year which starts in September.



Preparing for teacher-led assessments to improve learning outcomes

To enhance the quality of education, the Manahel team has begun to prepare the teacher-led early grade learning assessment (TEGLA) pilot implementation from June 2023. This important teacher-led tool provides the Syria Education Programme (SEP II) and the EDs with a complete population-level database of the performance of every early grade student every semester (or annually). The data collected can be used immediately by teachers to inform and target teaching and remediation activities.

The Manahel team started by translating existing EGRA and the EGMA into teacher-led tools. The team then crafted a comprehensive training package and trained a group of master trainers - colleagues with a deep understanding of EGRA/EGMA and its application - to ensure widespread dissemination of the implementation features. In turn, these master trainers cascaded their knowledge down to 15 other teachers, five lead teachers, five headteachers, and five ED instructors.

TEGLA piloted in six schools assessing 235 students

Using an online Kobo questionnaire, teachers and lead teachers recorded scores and Manahel analysed the data which provided insights into overall and individual student performance and identified answering patterns, revealing strengths and weaknesses across literacy, numeracy, and reading fluency and comprehension.

Key lesson learned

The early involvement of project partners is important during the design and planning stages. It is evident that Manahel's early engagement with EDs and downstream partners means it gains a comprehensive understanding of their perspectives, requirements, and concerns and can address emerging issues.

This proactive approach has enabled Manahel to anticipate potential challenges and identify solutions in advance, resulting in more effective project delivery. Furthermore, early engagement has fostered a sense of ownership and commitment among all parties, creating a conducive environment for productive discussions and a shared vision. As a result:

- **Partners understand the gap resulting from the bridging and extension period and are now aware of Manahel's endeavours.**
- **EDs have been given a space to talk to other NGOs and plan for school support because they were engaged in the planning and detail of the extension period.**
- **EDs and partners are now more proactive and engaged in problem-solving as they differentiate between what can and can't be influenced by the programme.**

In July, Manahel also conducted focus group discussions (FGDs) with teachers and lead teachers to understand implementation and how TEGLA could be replicated during summer clubs.

It has become clear that SEP II can play a key role in training and supporting early grade teachers in analysing and using this data to inform and improve their teaching while working with the EDs to use results of the assessment to inform interventions and school support. During this bridging period, Manahel has started the process and developed the tools which will be used as SEP II gets underway.

Key lessons learned

TEGLA is a powerful tool capable of identifying students with lower academic achievement and the most appropriate remediation processes for improving performance. The experience of collaboration with teachers and the implementation of the TEGLA has provided Manahel with insights through a data-driven approach:

- Pilot testing in a small number of schools is essential to refine assessment tools, process questions and define approaches before scaling up. Feedback and validation are important to identify potential challenges and improve functionality.
- Data collection through online questionnaires enables teachers and lead teachers to facilitate comprehensive data analysis, providing valuable insights into individual student performance and patterns of students' strengths and weaknesses in different areas. The TEGLA results, for example, were aligned with the EGRA/EGMA findings and showed that girls performed better in literacy, while boys scored higher in numeracy, especially in difficult mathematical problems. The reading fluency and comprehension test helped identify students who struggled to read up to 10 correct words per minute (CWPM), with boys exhibiting more difficulties in reading compared to girls.
- Engaging in FGDs with teachers and lead teachers provides valuable feedback on TEGLA's implementation, obstacles faced, areas for improvement, and potential learning techniques.

Such discussions foster a collaborative environment and pave the way for continuous improvement.



The importance of risk management in supporting sustainable change

Risk management plays a central role in building resilience in the formal education sector in NW Syria and in doing so, creating pathways to long-term sustainable change. Manahel's Risk Management Unit (RMU) has robust processes in place to pre-empt, assess, and mitigate the risks that it faces. These are detailed in a new Information Brief and summarised below:

- **Conflicted areas.** The RMU continuously assesses risks of working in conflict affected areas, advising programme staff and schools on emergency preparedness and security management.
- **Manahel signs annual MoUs** with EDs to resist external pressures. All employees undergo background checks.
- **To protect formal education spaces,** the RMU supports EDs which may be vulnerable to the civilian Syrian Salvation Government (SSG) pressure through capacity building, policy development and priority setting.
- **To avoid fraud and aid diversion,** Manahel monitors the delivery chain of activities through all stages, including an e-voucher system for the payment of teacher stipends.

- **School protection measures** include awareness sessions on break-ins and damage, the provision of locks, fences and storage of high value items.
- **Manahel actively engages with donors**, shares information, highlights education needs in NW Syria and assists in seeking additional funds to minimise the impact of reduced teacher stipends.
- **Manahel has emergency preparedness** measures in place, security training for staff, and works with schools to ensure they have emergency plans.

To learn more about how Manahel addresses the risks faced by the programme, please see a complete [Information Brief here](#).

Key lesson learned

Thorough preparation anticipating potential and real risks is the best approach for facing contingencies in a challenging environment. Over the eight years of programme delivery, Manahel has learned that risk management processes are essential for protecting operations from interference, building confidence among donors and partners, building resilience in the education sector, and asserting the importance of the independence of key education actors, including EDs.

Overall, Manahel’s experience in navigating complex risks and challenges serves as a valuable lesson in the field of humanitarian and education programmes. The team’s proactive risk management approach, adaptability, strong partnerships, and commitment to safety and accountability demonstrate these are effective strategies for promoting education and protecting children’s futures in conflict-affected regions.

Plans for August

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| 1 | Implementing the summer club activities in 295 schools, following a detailed safety assessment of all schools |
| 2 | Implementing the SDQ baseline assessment for children in summer schools |
| 3 | Rolling out TEGLA in summer schools |
| 4 | Introducing PSS activities to school staff responding to recommendations from Third Party Monitoring |
| 5 | Conducting the baseline assessment of teachers’ competencies based on discussions with key education staff to identify competencies as per the Teacher Competency Framework (TCF) |
| 6 | Training teachers on literacy and numeracy while also conducting baseline continuous assessments for children |
| 7 | Establishing a further 26 Special Education Centres to support the inclusion of children with disabilities, including those with mild, moderate, and severe disabilities into schools. |

Manahel, which in Arabic means ‘fountains’ – of hope, of knowledge, and of life -, is the northwest component of the FCDO-funded Syria Education Programme (SEP). Delivered by Chemonics UK, Manahel provides education to primary school-aged children and, since 2018, has benefited over 580,000 children through school, home, and after-school education and by responding to children’s psychosocial and protection needs.