Annual Report 2020



Funda Wande

Reading for Meaning
Calculating with Confidence


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Mission

Funda Wande is a not-for-profit organization that aims to equip teachers to teach **reading-for-meaning** and **calculating-with-confidence** in Grades R-3 in South Africa. We do this by hiring the best people we can find and work as a team to create high-quality materials, experiment with different teacher training approaches, and independently evaluate everything we do. Our materials and training are created in the languages that children speak and understand and are freely-available for anyone to download and use (Creative Commons 4.0). Every year the South African government spends 99 times more money on education than all local and international philanthropies combined. That's why we believe that the best use of private money is influencing how public money is spent. It is also the only way to create impact at scale. We see our organization as a coral-reef that incubates programs and people that will eventually be incorporated into national and provincial government and civil society institutions. In order to influence government our programs and materials are all evidence-based, independently-evaluated, policy-aligned, cost-effective, politically-palatable and well-advocated. Everything we do is about prioritizing and thinking whether this will lead to all children learning to read for meaning and calculate with confidence by age 10 by 2030.

Goal: By 2030 all children in South Africa will read for meaning and calculate with confidence by age 10.

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Overview

2020 was a year unlike any other in our lifetimes. It was dominated from start to finish by one thing: COVID-19.

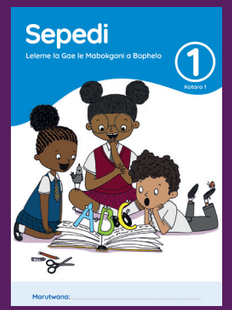
As the invisible virus made its way around the world it closed our schools, grounded our planes and threw the labour market and society into turmoil. In South Africa the COVID-19 death toll in 2020 was between 40,000-100,000 people depending on how excess deaths are classified. This struck home for us when one of our most beloved coaches, Vuvu Hlanza, lost her life to the virus while searching for a hospital that had oxygen. Our healthcare system is failing in many of the same ways as our education system.

As an organisation we were forced to adapt to the new realities or remote work, remote teacher training and pivoting to new forms of support using Zoom and WhatsApp. It was a 'big push' into the digital realm of teacher training. All of this also fast-tracked our plans to pivot to a new streamlined intervention for (1) Literacy-and-Lifeskills and (2) Mathematics. Rather than a myriad of resources and a lesson plan for how to use them (our old approach), we have moved towards a single Learner Workbook with a single aligned Teacher Guide - together these cover the full curriculum. We are implementing and evaluating these resources using different modes of support in Limpopo (Teacher Assistants), Eastern Cape (Coaches), and the Western Cape (Government Subject Advisors). 2020 was a trying year, and 2021 is set to be another. We are moving ahead into 2021 with three words: Resilience. Adaptability. Flexibility.

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Literacy

During 2020 the literacy team concentrated on developing and finalising a ‘coherent curriculum program’ for Grade 1 across three languages (isiXhosa, Sepedi and Afrikaans). The core of this program includes four components: a Learner Activity Book (1) with a companion Teacher Guide (2), supported by an anthology of graded readers (3), and a Big Book of posters and stories (4). This approach involved reconceptualising our initial literacy intervention (2019, Eastern Cape) and was a considerable amount of work. To accomplish this the team expanded by 75% in 2020 and now includes 31 members (including part-time independent contractors). We have taken a collaborative approach to develop these resources, which included partnerships with Molteno, workshops with provincial curriculum coordinators, and contracting academics from several South African universities. The development of the workbook also gave an opportunity for our coaches to take part in materials development. Portia October, Juliah Maphuta and Permie Issac have become part of the conceptual and content development group and are lead writers and content contributors. Our materials are freely available for download and licensed under a Creative Commons license. For examples see our 2021 Grade 1 Term 1 Learner Activity book (SEP, AFR, XHO, English reference) and companion Teacher Guide (SEP, AFR, XHO, English reference). Grade 2 will be developed in 2021 and Grade 3 in 2022.





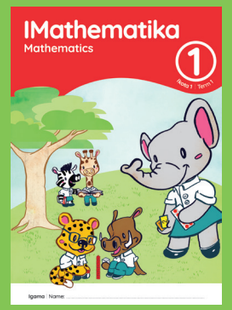


Maths

2020 was meant to be the first year of of the ‘Bala Wande: Calculating with Confidence’ intervention in Grade 1 in the Eastern Cape. This is in the same schools as the Funda Wande intervention. Accordingly, Bala Wande was launched on 18 January 2020 across the 29 intervention schools. As a result of COVID-19 plans started to change by March, and required adaptations to our workbooks (developing COVID-editions aligned to the Department’s new timetable), and flexibility in the modalities of our coaching support with a shift to Zoom and WhatsApp with the logistical and technical challenges involved in that. Going forward WhatsApp is the preferred mode which will be used in 2021. The collaborative process of materials development continued, building on relationships established in 2019. Grade 1 (four terms) and Grade 2 (Term 1) CAPS aligned and Covid editions were developed (for example the isiXhosa Term 1 Learner Activity Book and Teacher Guide).

The reach of Bala Wande was extended in line with the new Funda Wande Randomised Control Trials in Limpopo (Sepedi) and the Western Cape (isiXhosa and Afrikaans). This required us to version the Term 1 materials into these two new languages by the end of 2020, and these are now available on our website (Learner Activity Book in Sepedi and Afrikaans; Teacher Guide in Sepedi and Afrikaans). The Bala Wande team has strengthened, drawing on internal and external resources – Permie Isaac was promoted to Head of Implementation in the Eastern Cape mathematics intervention and Dr Sihlobo Mpofu joined the Johannesburg office.

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Eastern Cape

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The year 2020 started off as a promising one for the intervention in the Eastern Cape with Term 1 activities implemented as planned. However with COVID-19 school closures from the 18th of March 2020, our face-to-face coaching was compromised. This forced us to rapidly innovate and create homework programs for learners and WhatsApp and Zoom training for teachers.

While many teachers, and some parents, responded well to these initiatives, they will never be able to make up for the huge learning losses all children have experienced. Our Grade 1-3 learners' school year was 82 days (40%) shorter than the 2019 school year. Furthermore, given that almost all schools implemented rotational time-tabling for Term 3 and 4 (half the class attends on Monday, the other half on Tuesday etc.), the real loss in instructional time is far greater and is somewhere in the range of 60-80% of lost instructional time in 2020. We have also found it difficult to engage parents, with only 10% of parents actively engaging in the WhatsApp groups, despite many attempts at reaching out.

We also developed new reading homework booklets, and an online 'Reading Academy' to train teachers. This includes modules on Decoding, Comprehension and CAPS Reading Activities (1 & 2). Encouragingly the Eastern Cape Department of Education uploaded the Academy on their platform in December 2020 and a wider rollout is scheduled by them for 2021.

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Limpopo

The aim for 2020 was to pilot our Teacher Assistant intervention in five schools ahead of our larger Randomised Control Trial in 120 schools in the Capricorn District of Limpopo in 2021-2022. Although COVID-19 was a serious disruption to these plans and delayed further Sepedi video-development, we did manage to increase our core-team to 11 people and also recruit and select the 145 Teacher Assistants that will be used in the Grade 1 intervention in 2021. These were the successful TA's from over 1000 applicants with at least a matric. Recruitment included literacy and numeracy tests, as well as problem-solving tests and observing them during group games. This strategic shift to focus on Teacher Assistants was validated by the Presidency announcing that the Department of Basic Education would hire 300,000 education assistants for four months as part of the Presidential Youth Employment Initiative (PYEI). Our youth are employed using the Youth Employment Service (YES) and paid the same salary (R3,600) as the PYEI.

In 2021 we will be implementing a 3-arm RCT of 40 schools each: (1) Teacher's Assistant (TA) and materials arm, (2) Material's only arm, and (3) the Business-as-usual (control) arm. The program will be rolled out to Grades R and 1 where the Grade 1 cohort will receive Literacy and Mathematics support and Grade R will receive mathematics support in 2021.

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Western Cape

In 2020, at the request of the Western Cape Education Department (WCED), we entered into a formal partnership to help improve Foundation Phase literacy and numeracy in the province from 2021-2024. This began by workshoping viable alternatives to teacher training at scale, and the logistics around the rollout of high-quality materials to all Foundation Phase learners beginning with a pilot in 2021. Funda Wande met with various stakeholders from WCED including the curriculum and assessment management directorate and established reference groups with subject advisors and curriculum coordinators. This resulted in a formal partnership with WCED to pilot our literacy and mathematics 'all-in-one' workbook approach in 2021 called the '*Read. Write. Calculate*' programme, which is available in both isiXhosa and Afrikaans. In 2021, the programme will be piloted in 50 schools across the province with 40 Afrikaans-medium schools and 10-isiXhosa medium schools taking part. This is being evaluated by experts in and outside the Department. Should the pilot be successful, we aim to scale to all Afrikaans-medium and isiXhosa-medium schools over the next five years. In the longer term the WCED's Grade 3 Systemic Evaluations will be used as a measure of change in literacy and numeracy scores over time.

The Western Cape model attempts to use existing personnel (Subject Advisers and Heads of Department) to train teachers on the new materials with support on training materials provided by Funda Wande. Furthermore, 20 WCED personnel, including Subject Advisers and curriculum officials, have been given bursaries by Funda Wande to enrol in the Advanced Certificate in Foundation Phase Literacy offered at Rhodes University in 2021.



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Advocacy

Since the inception of Funda Wande, a key mandate has been to ensure that early grade reading remains high on the national agenda. To accomplish this, we spend considerable time and resources meeting with national and provincial officials, attending colloquiums, giving presentations etc. In all of these we present a clear message that little progress can be made on any front unless we "get reading right" in the first three years of school. It would seem that these are now bearing fruit. The previous ministerial and presidential statements prioritising reading are being translated into concrete practical documents, including the country's "Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) 2019-2024" – the key guiding document of government priorities and activities. This states a single outcome for the Foundation Phase: "*10-year-old learners enrolled in publicly funded schools read for meaning*" (p.77) with a list of interventions aimed at moving towards this goal. Most of these interventions have been advocated by Funda Wande and include "*Rolling out the best practices such as lesson plans, graded reading books, individualised coaching of teachers*" "*Development of reading material in indigenous languages for academic purposes, including workbooks*" and "*Professional teacher development provided for teaching, reading and numeracy.*" The prioritisation of foundation phase reading can also be seen in President Ramaphosa's Ministerial Performance Agreement with Minister Motshekga (dated 30 October 2020). This bodes well for subsequent resource allocations to early grade reading and mathematics. In addition to engagements with government, a number of Funda Wande staff have been involved in the South African Human Rights Commission's (SAHRC) "Right to Read and Write" Section 11 Committee. The aim of this initiative is to add specificity to Section 29(1) of the Constitution, the Right to a Basic Education.



Finance

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The impact of lockdown on the finances during the year was significant, with the majority of our face to face intervention and meeting activities shifting to online, resulting in significant cost savings with reduced travel to schools, filming of material and delayed recruitments. With the move to online and remote work, there was additional support of data and resources to staff, teachers and learners and the need to re-phase activities into 2021, including the end-line evaluations and extension of the Eastern Cape coaching intervention by one year.

Our core funders are Allan Gray Orbis Foundation Endowment, FEM Education Fund, Michael & Susan Dell Foundation and Zenex Foundation. During 2020, we secured additional funding for our interventions in the Eastern Cape (extension), Limpopo and Western Cape as well as funding for our organisation expansion, research and advocacy work. As an organisation we are now also shifting to ‘mandate-based-funding’ rather than ‘project-based-funding’. This was based on the view of the management team and the board for the need for strategic allocation of resources towards the long term 2030 goal of the organisation. There is now also a greater need for agility to adapt to uncertainty due to COVID-19.



Governance

In January of 2020 Funda Wande was established as a separate Non-Profit Company with its own board of directors. The four inaugural board members are Prof Sizwe Mabizela, Maya Makanjee, Dr Ben Piper and Anthony Farr. By the end of 2020, the Funda Wande board had expanded to include Zimkhitha Peter, who has taken over as the new CEO of the Allan Gray Orbis Foundation Endowment. During the course of 2020 the board met three times via Zoom.Funda Wande was also registered as a Public Benefit Organisation with SARS (PBO number: 930069851, NPC number: 2020/022315/08).

From a governance perspective the main shift in 2021 is the planned leadership transition in the second half of the year where the current Executive Director and founder (Dr Nic Spaull) will transition out of the role. This has been planned for 18 months and has the support of the leadership team, the funders and the board. Most literacy NGOs in South Africa are not led by Black South Africans despite making up 80% of the population. This is a problem for multiple reasons since their perspectives are not reflected at the highest levels in NGOs. That includes their insights, their experience, their histories as well as the legitimacy that their leadership brings. The recruitment process has already begun and is open to both internal and external candidates. This is the beginning of an exciting new chapter in the life of Funda Wande. Following the transition, Nic will remain within the broader Allan Gray ecosystem of philanthropies and will be available for guidance and governance support.

11 Universities

Developing a university qualification to train the next generation of literacy experts has always been a priority for Funda Wande. July 2020 marked the date when the Advanced Certificate in Teaching Foundation Phase Literacy was registered on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and is offered at Rhodes University. Rhodes also continues to offer the Short Courses to accommodate applicants who do not meet the entrance requirement of a Foundation Phase teaching qualification. During 2020 most students of the Advanced Certificate were Eastern Cape Department of Education (ECDOE) Subject Advisors and Funda Wande coaches.

In order to expand the targeted group, Funda Wande also provided a new bursary for 15 students from other provinces, prioritizing government officials in strategic positions and practitioners in literacy NGOs. The selection committee awarded 11 bursaries for short courses and 4 for the Advanced Certificate.

We have also set out to independently evaluate the content of the course. The first six modules have been evaluated by Prof Catherine Snow and Dr Pamela Mason from Harvard University who submitted their report "An Evaluation of the Reading for Meaning Course" in May 2020. In 2021 Dr Nick Taylor from the Joint Education Trust will also be evaluating the whole programme (all 12 modules).

In 2020, the coordinator, Sarah Murray, together with other members of the literacy team presented the resources developed for the course at a national workshop for universities organized by the Primary Teacher Education Project. In September 2020, Sarah gave a keynote address at the LITASA Conference using the Funde Wande videos.





Future

The future of Funda Wande depends on people, quality, scalability, impact, and the ability to take risks.

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People: We need smart and dedicated people who believe in our long-term vision, that it is indeed possible for all South African kids to learn to read for meaning and calculate with confidence by age 10 by 2030. Those people will lead our programs, develop our materials, and advocate for their widespread uptake by government, provided there is solid evidence of impact and cost-effectiveness.

Quality: Everything we do is about quality. We do not need more mediocre black-and-white books or learning programs that look like they were designed in the 1990's. We will develop the highest quality Open Access Grade R-3 materials that rival or trump existing for-profit publishers' products. Children who attend no-fee schools and learn in African languages should have access to the same quality of materials that well-resourced children in suburban schools have. We will find new ways of delinking price and quality through innovative mechanisms to fund, develop, license, print and distribute Open Access materials. Build it and they will come.

Scalability: Our aim has never been to run our programs in thousands of schools ourselves. We pilot and evaluate our materials and approaches in a medium-size number of schools (30-40 schools per intervention) in order to test efficacy, estimate cost-effectiveness and evaluate impact. Our path to impact at scale is always through government. We take risks, develop approaches and gather evidence that make it easier for others to follow.

Impact: In 2021 and beyond we will continue to independently evaluate what we do and make those findings available timeously to everyone, irrespective of the outcomes. Mistakes are part of the process. We will only advocate for programs that are cost-effective and have good evidence of impact.

Taking risks: At Funda Wande we believe that *"If you aren't failing you aren't trying hard enough."* When 78% of Grade 4 kids can't read for meaning (PIRLS 2016), and 61% of Grade 5 kids cannot calculate with confidence (TIMSS 2015), we know that we have a moral responsibility to be bold and take calculated risks on new ideas, new people and new approaches.


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Our Team

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For more information, and to
access all of our resources visit
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NPC: 2020/022315/08, PBO 930069851