



The Benefits of Digital Reading for Vulnerable Families in Crisis Settings

Findings from the Tuta Tuta project in Jordan



The phrase **Tuta Tuta** is widely used at the end of children’s story books and is the equivalent of “And they lived happily ever after.”

Introduction

In February 2017, Worldreader launched the Tuta Tuta program, funded by a grant from the Stavros Niarchos Foundation. This program aimed to promote frequent reading by parents and caregivers to Syrian refugee children within their Jordanian host communities – supporting their educational and social-emotional needs by providing access to a digital collection of Arabic storybooks. The books were accessible through data-connected mobile phones. Designed to use a blended learning approach, the program combined direct support for vulnerable families to read to their children with digital reminders and a behavior change campaign. The digital campaign promoted parental engagement in learning through shared reading, and introduced and normalized the concept of mobile phone use for educational support and access to books.

The program launched operations in August of 2018 after a year of mobile app development, content identification and curation, partnership development, and formative research. Tuta Tuta reached over 58,000 refugees and Jordanian families through digital campaigns and provided direct support to an additional 2,000 parents through the parenting programs of Worldreader’s five local partners.

The use of digital content and digital reading interventions in emergency and protracted crises is relatively new. The Tuta Tuta pilot program contributes to a growing body of evidence that mobile technologies and digital content can be leveraged for parental engagement, learning, and improved education outcomes in situations of conflict and adversity.

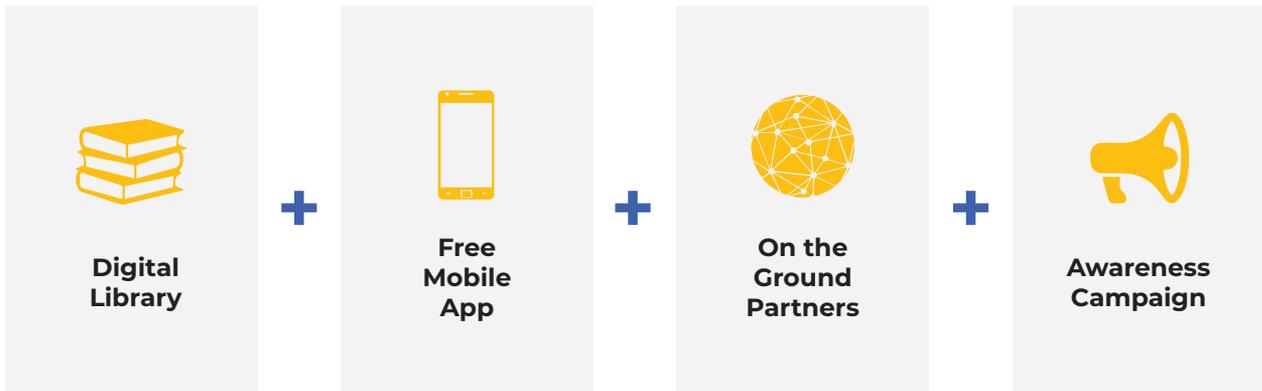


Program

The Tuta Tuta pilot program was designed to support the educational and social-emotional needs of refugee and Jordanian families in crisis and conflict-impacted settings through the promotion and adoption of digital reading. Tuta Tuta focused on reaching the parents and caregivers of children aged 0 – 12. The program leveraged digital content, mobile technology and partnerships to bring education resources and storybooks to families in a country where books are expensive, inaccessible to most refugee and host-community families, and there is no culture of reading for pleasure. The program provided free access to a library of 250 digital stories in Arabic and Arabic/English (by the end of the pilot), encouraging parents to be active partners in their child's reading, learning and emotional wellness.

While child-level outcomes were not measured during the pilot, significant research has already established the critical link between regular reading to children and improved child development.

The collection was promoted through a number of channels including Google Display Network, Facebook, Hala Radio's popular morning show, and social media platforms such as WhatsApp. A digital campaign promoting the importance of reading, designed in partnership with creative agency and marketing partners J. Walter Thompson and Memac Ogilvy, developed videos, a commercial, and social media postings for partner websites.



The project partnered with five local organizations – Haya Cultural Center, ILearn, Jordan River Foundation, Queen Rania Foundation, and The Children's Museum of Jordan. These partners helped to design the project to effectively reach parents, adapting the program to align with their own organizational goals, while receiving technical assistance from Worldreader on how to engage parents in regular reading with children. Worldreader adapted their program to partners' needs in three ways: for frequent in-person contact with parents, for integration into existing parenting programs, or to distribute to a wider array of new users using a mobile booth to invite parents to download the app.



A Learning Pilot

The project, a learning pilot, partnered with a Jordanian-based research firm, Integrated Solutions, to conduct in-country monitoring and evaluation, before, during, and after implementation. Data collection was conducted using a variety of tools, including questionnaires, a Reading Attitudes and Behaviors survey, key informant interviews, secondary data, focus group discussions, and back-end data collected through the app.

Key Findings

The following graph illustrates the increase in parents reading to children at the end of the project:

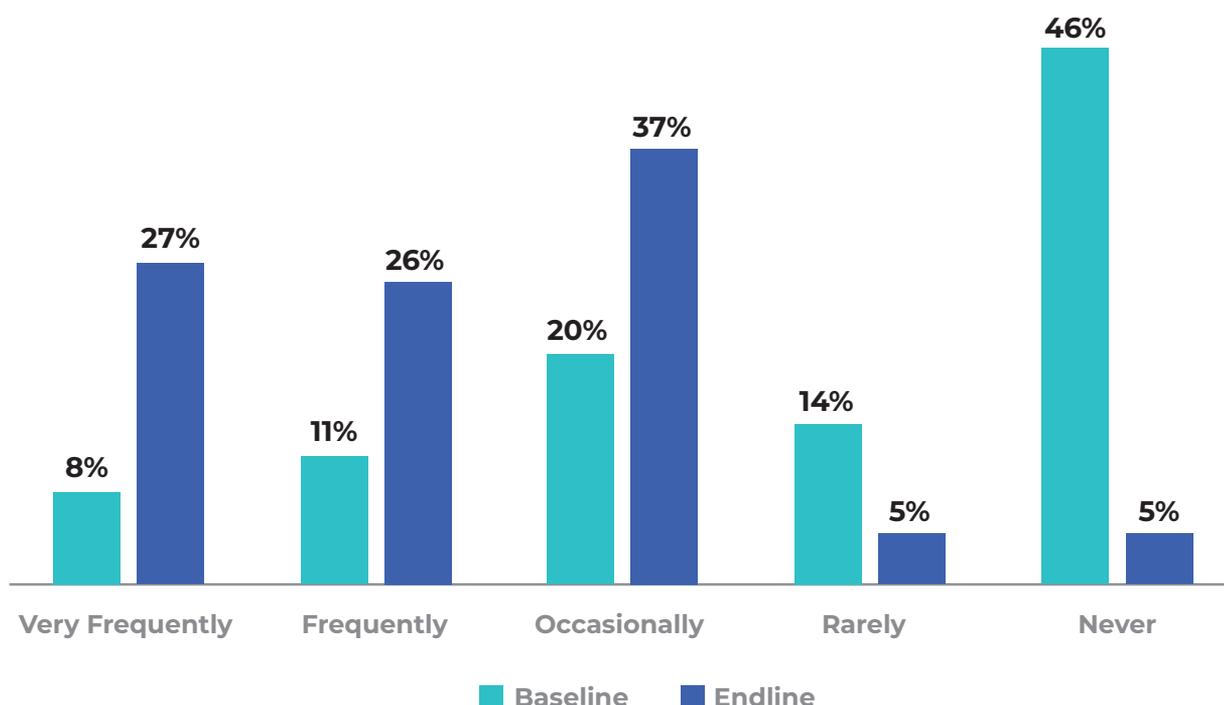


Table: Baseline to end line results to question: How often do you read stories to children?

Key findings from the project include:

- Parents understand the benefits of reading to their children, particularly for building social-emotional bonds. However, a poor reading culture exists at the household level, with most childhood reading associated with studying rather than for pleasure.
- Digital behavior change campaigns are a cost-effective way to give access to reading materials at scale, with the project reaching 58,853 downloads in nine months and exceeding its 50,000-user goal. There was a 16.3%¹ conversion rate from users (who downloaded and opened the app) to readers (users who spent time reading).

¹ Worldreader backend data from August 2018 to May 2019



- In-app messages and push notifications improve engagement of readers and positive reading behaviors by 25%². Parents who received push notifications also had a 32%³ higher retention rate in the application.
- Most users of the app (88%⁴) were mothers reading to children between three to five years of age, highlighting the opportunity to improve messaging and training to emphasize both the role of fathers in reading and the positive impact of reading to children from birth onwards.
- Community-based facilitators at partner organizations, providing guided support to 2,000 parents, increased the frequency of parents reading to their children by 21%⁵.
- Networks and referral through social media and communication platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook are effective in supporting communities of learning and encouraging behavior change. Over 3,400 users were acquired organically (e.g., through referrals, word of mouth, or organic Google searches). These users read almost 42%⁶ more (defined by their median daily reading time on days read) than those users acquired through Google Ads.

- Refugee families prefer books that explore socio-emotional learning, such as stories based around morals and values, supporting family conversations and helping children to discuss issues they face in school or in their community.
- Testing and focus groups found that motivational messaging about the developmental and emotional benefits of reading to children were more effective than gamification strategies such as offering points or rewards.



2 Clevertap (Internal engagement tool) data from February to April 2019

3 Clevertap (Internal engagement tool) data from February to April 2019

4 In app survey from February to April 2019

5 Endline survey conducted by Integrated, August to May 2019

6 Clevertap data from February to April 2019



- Data, connectivity, and time are barriers to digital reading for vulnerable families, with concerns over connectivity increasing by 42%⁷ during the pilot, highlighting a need for better training around downloading books for reading offline. While lack of time was the second most important barrier, partner organizations worked to reinforce the benefit of even short periods of shared reading to children.
- The Tuta Tuta collection of books was key to the success of the program and is the result of the generous contributions of many regional publishers in the MENA region, including Alhodhud, Asala Publishers, Dar Al Yasmine Publishing, Jabal Amman Publishers, Kalimat, Kitabna, Majdalawi Masterpieces, Rimal Books and Talal Abu-Ghazaleh Translation Distribution and Publishing.

Next Steps and Recommendations

- There is huge potential to develop the program to national scale through government departments and multilateral institutions. There is also the possibility to develop new partnerships for regional expansion into countries such as Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Yemen, or Iraq, linking with organizations that work in emergency contexts across the region. In complement to expansion, Worldreader also recommends:
- Conduct further research on measuring the impact of regular reading between parents and children on learning and social-emotional development.
- Grow an engaged network of parents through familiar digital platforms already used by refugee communities to raise awareness of the importance of reading to children.
- Build strong partnerships with government and non-governmental organizations to effectively scale access and increase impact at a reasonable cost.
- Work with local partners to effectively reach refugee communities with appropriate digital content and messaging that is sensitive to their needs.

⁷ See Integrated Final Report, pg. 25





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