

# Children's Storybooks and Early Literacy in Rural Kenya

*Evidence from 1.5 Randomized Evaluations*

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# Presentation Outline

- Policy Issue
- Intervention Design
- Evaluation Design
- Results
- Policy Lessons
- What's Next



# Policy Issue

- **Investments in early childhood** are critical to adult outcomes
- **Primary school learning outcomes are poor.** In Kenya (one of the best-educated countries in Sub-Saharan Africa), less than 1 in 3 third graders read at a second grade level.<sup>1</sup>
- **Learning deficits start early.** Pre-literacy skills (e.g., vocabulary, letter recognition) are low for children even before they enter primary school. Without these fundamentals, children struggle to learn to read.

<sup>1</sup>Uwezo (2016): *Are Our Children Learning? Uwezo Kenya Sixth Learning Assessment Report*. Nairobi: Twaweza East Africa.



# Policy Issue

- **Stimulating parent-child interactions**, including reading, improves child development & school readiness
- **Home-based** interventions can be expensive
- **School-based** interventions are not always effective and miss vulnerable children
- **Parents value education**, but may not realize the importance of reading to very young children



# The EMERGE Project



**E**ncouraging  
**M**ultilingual  
**E**arly  
**R**eadings as the  
**G**roundwork for  
**E**ducation



# The EMERGE Project



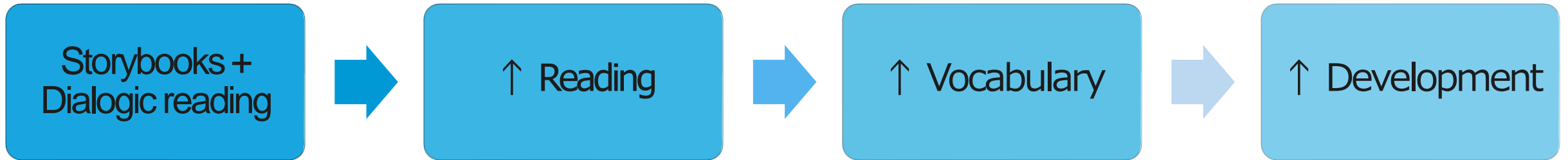
**CHILDREN'S STORYBOOKS**



**PARENT READING TRAINING**



# Intervention Design



- Storybooks are a **fundamental technology** for building pre-literacy skills
- **Reading with pre-primary-aged children is uncommon** in Kenya and many other LMICs
- Introducing parents to the **dialogic reading** approach may increase reading time and make it more **interactive**
- Dialogic reading shown to improve children's **vocabulary** (mostly in high-income countries)
- Can a **light-touch** intervention change reading behavior in this context?

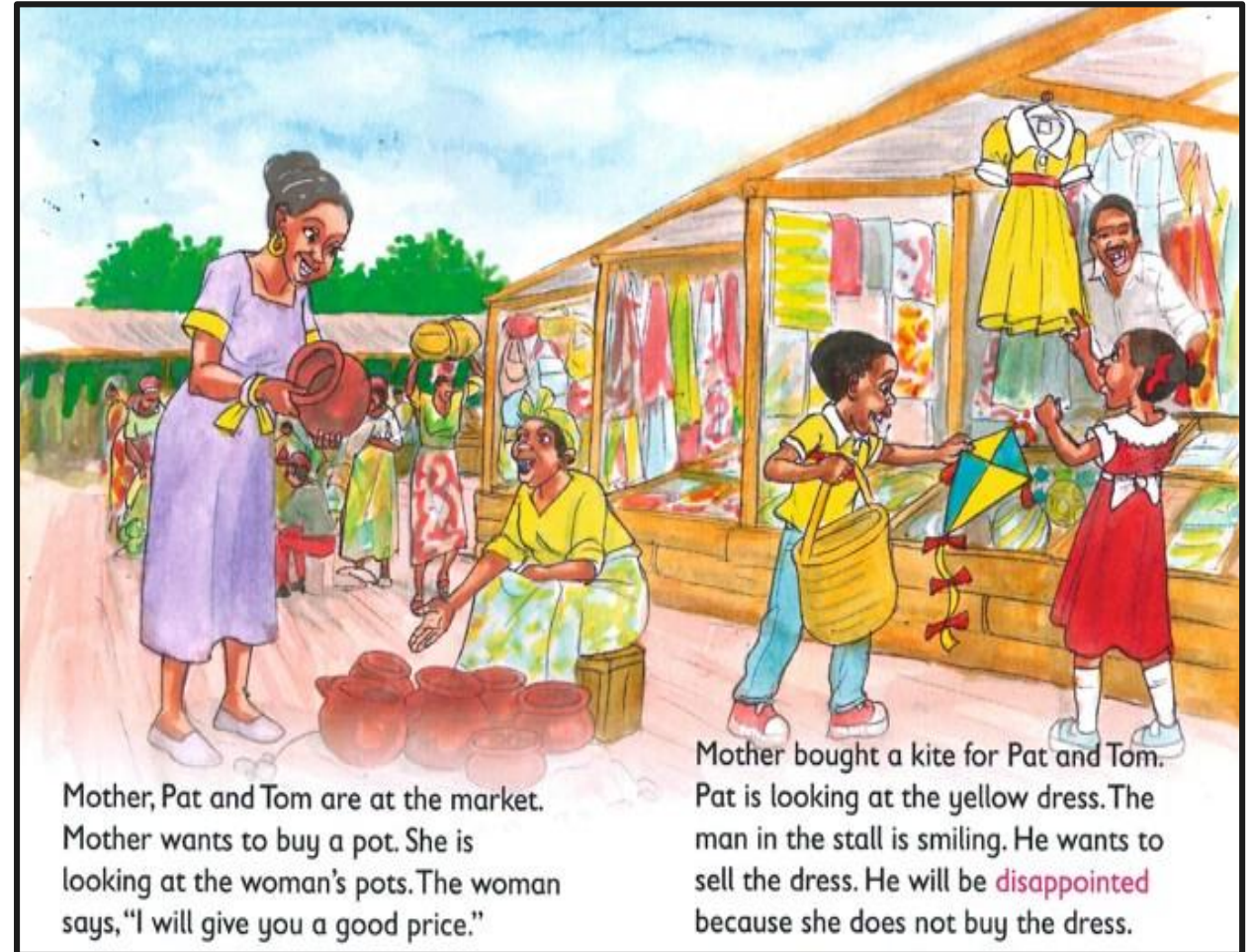


# Intervention Design

## Storybooks

We created **local-language storybooks** for young children

- Adapted locally-appropriate English-language illustrated storybooks
- Translated into Luo (local language) and Swahili





# Intervention Design

## Training

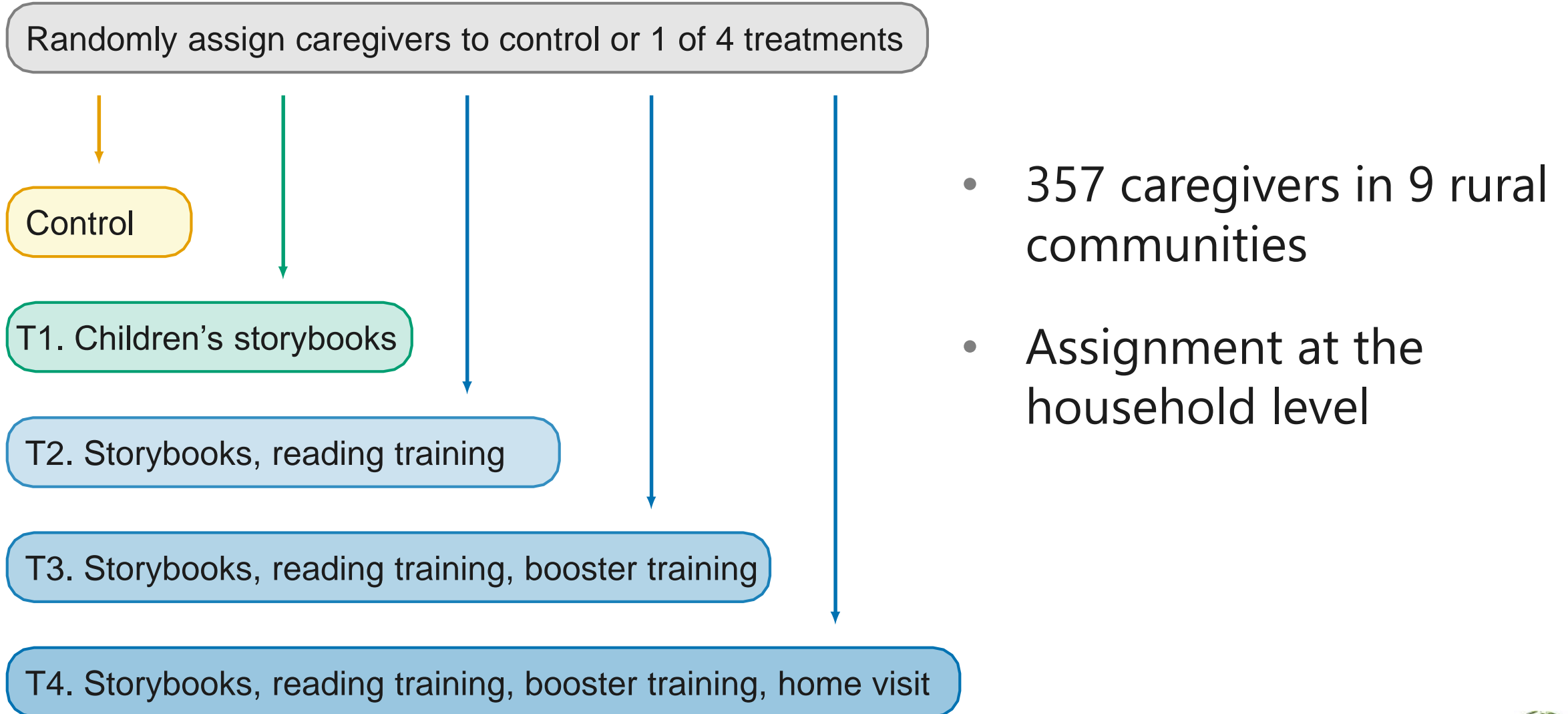


We developed a modified **dialogic reading** training for parents (or caregivers)

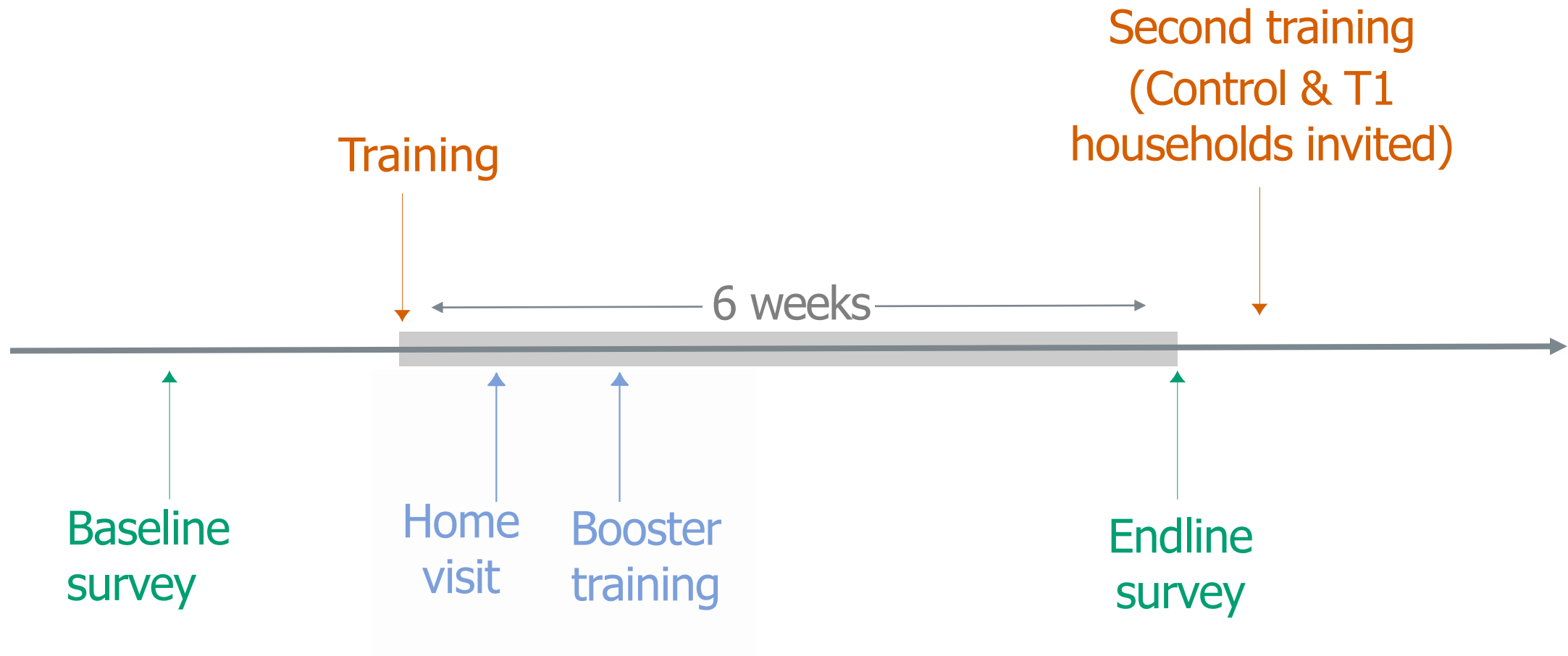
- Adapted from successful programs in Bangladesh and South Africa
- Focused on book-centered **conversations** (not just reading "to" children)
- **Illiterate caregivers empowered** to stimulate dialog without reading



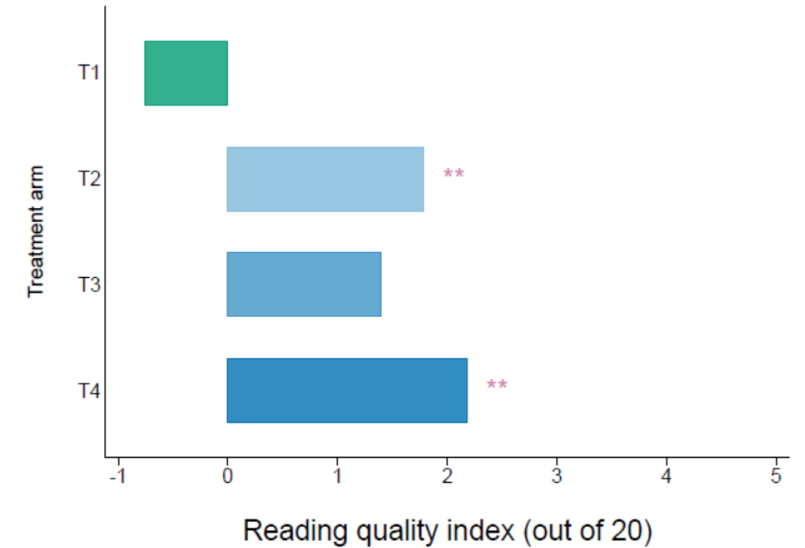
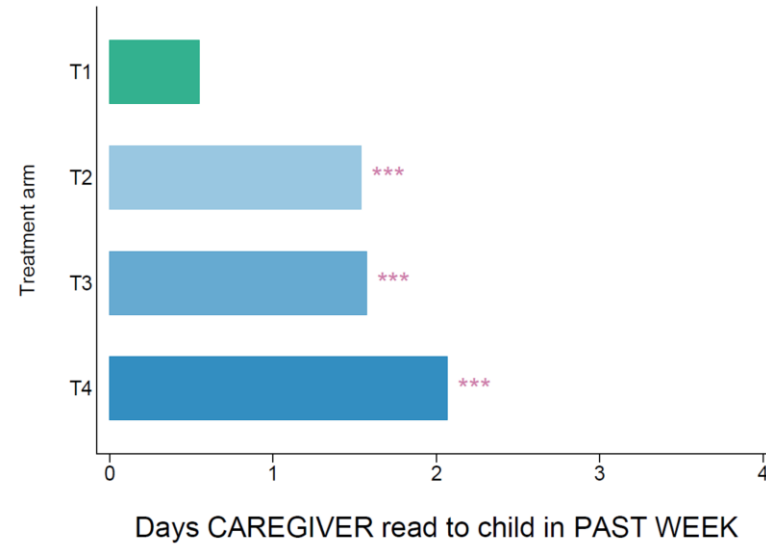
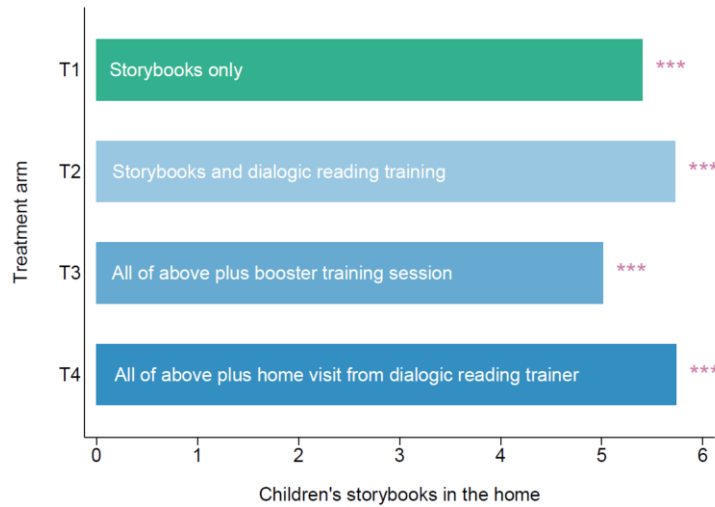
# Evaluation Design



# Evaluation Design



# Results



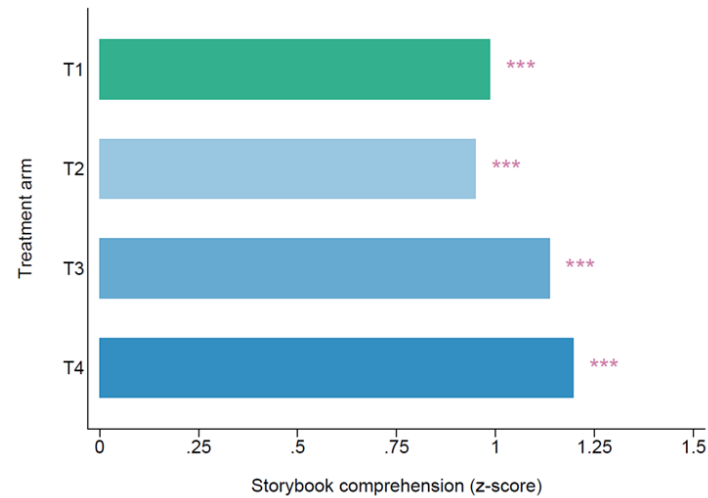
- **Books stayed in the homes**

- **Parents reported reading more**

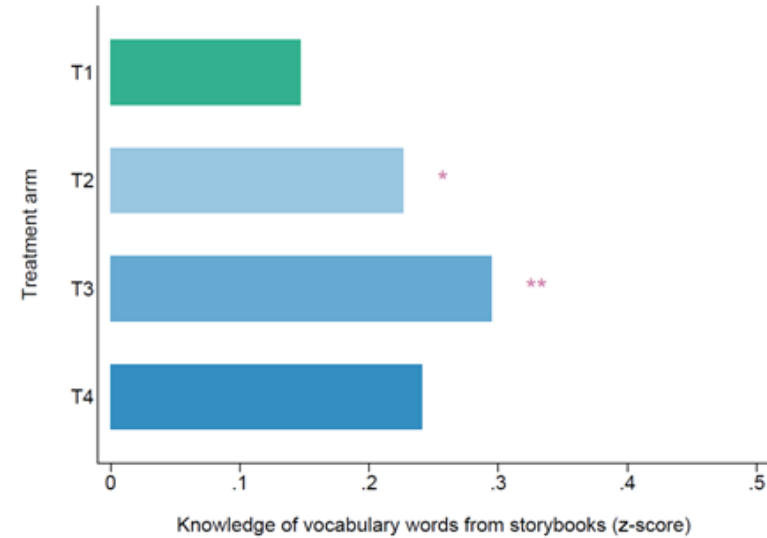
- **Parents demonstrated better reading quality**



# Results



- **Children learned the content of the books**



- **Children learned vocabulary words embedded in the books**



# Results

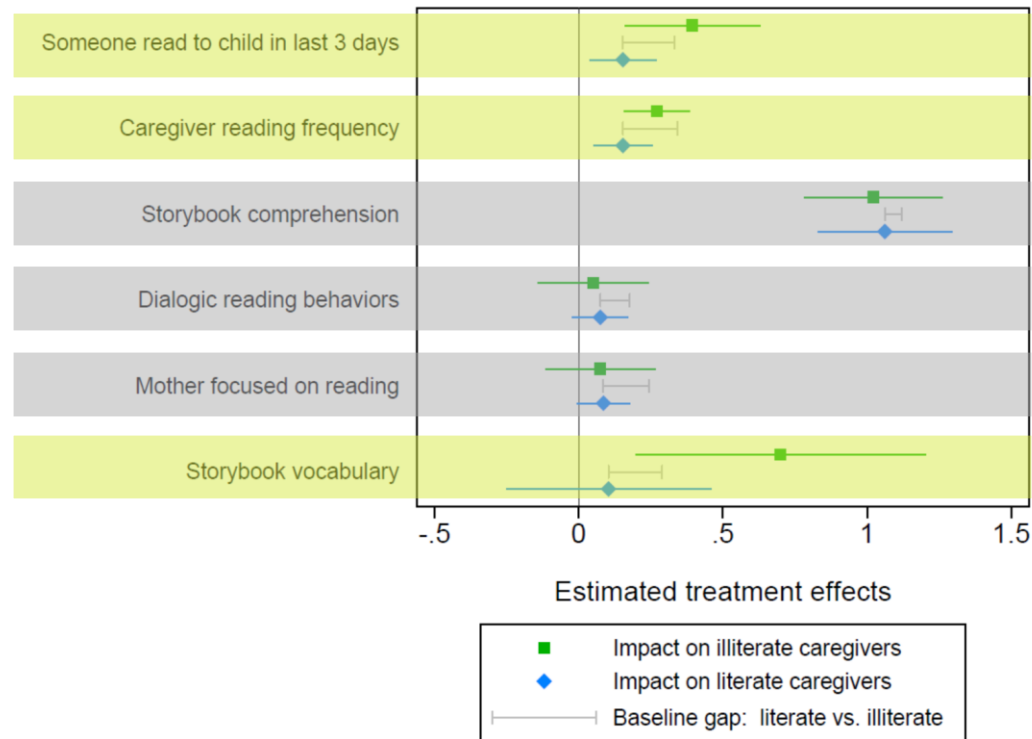
- Providing **books alone** increases children's **access** to storybooks and **comprehension of book content**
- **Adding training** improves **quantity** and **quality** of **reading** with children (more stimulating parent-child reading interactions, more storybook vocabulary words learned)
- **Booster training** and **home visits** do **not increase impact**



# Results

## Heterogeneity by Caregiver Literacy

- We measured outcomes separately for households with **literate parents** and households with **illiterate parents**
- Does a **book-centered** intervention primarily benefit children of literate parents, **worsening a learning gap**? **No, and even helps to close the gap!**



- Children of illiterate parents **never did significantly worse** than children of literate parents
- On some outcomes, children of literate and illiterate parents fared similarly
- On other outcomes, children of illiterate parents did **better** than children of literate parents



# Policy Lessons

Parent training programs like EMERGE...

- Can be beneficial for **vulnerable populations** and help **close a learning gap**.
  - Poor households
  - Rural households
  - Out-of-school children
  - Children of illiterate parents
- **Compliments** formal **ECD schooling**
  - Improving pre-literacy skills for the most disadvantaged children **reduces classroom disparities** and makes work easier for teachers.
- Can be **low cost** and may not require expensive home visits
  - Books: \$1/book
  - Staff time: \$13/household
  - All other costs: \$9/household
  - Total: \$28/household

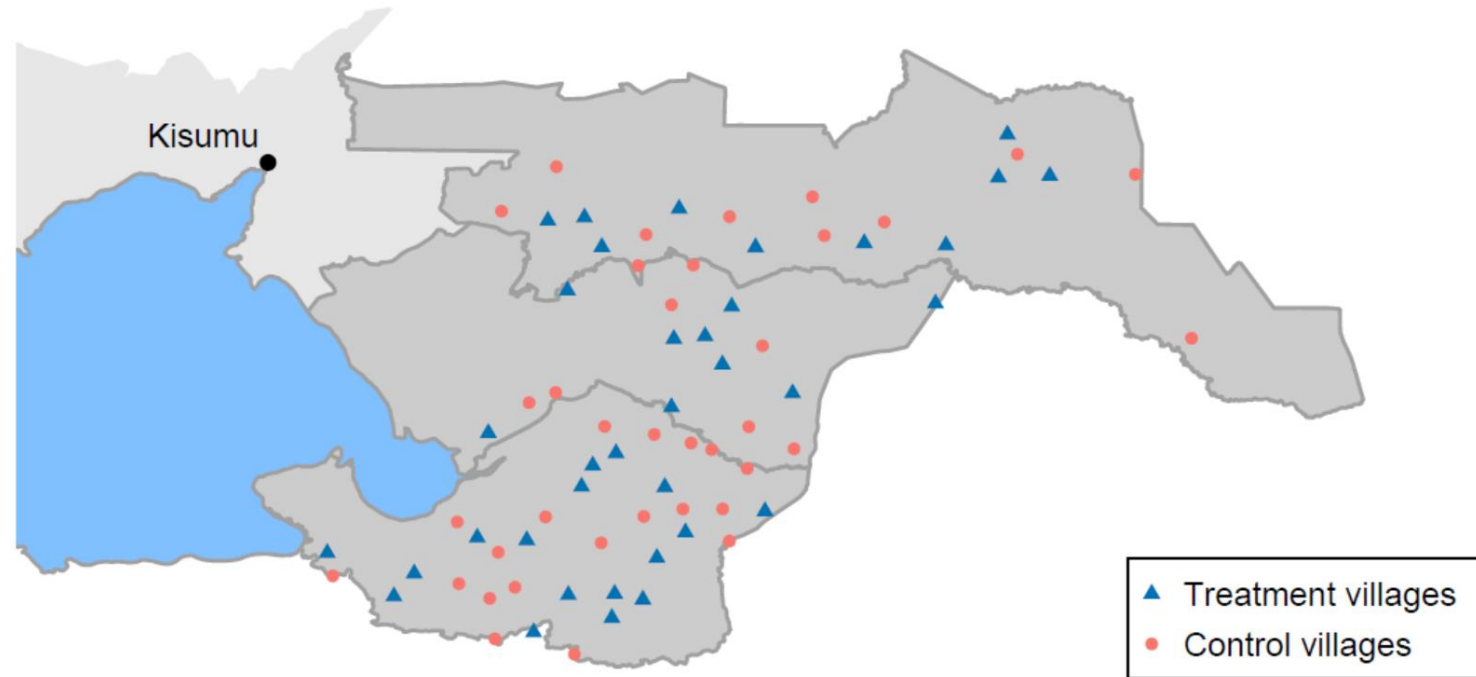




# What's Next

Larger (2000 household), longer term (measuring impacts one year after intervention) study

- Late 2017: Baseline survey
- Early 2018: Storybook distribution and parent training
- 6 weeks later: Midline survey
  - Initial results show similar positive short-term impacts
- Late 2019: Endline survey
  - Long term vocabulary and literacy development
  - And much more!





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# Thank You