Overview of the Innovation

The project aimed to demonstrate that improving Head Teachers’ school leadership competencies had a positive impact on pupils’ learning outcomes. Three models, and a non-treatment group, were tested in order to be able to determine the most (cost) effective model for Head Teachers’ continuing professional development (CPD).

The intervention group consisted of 140 head teachers of primary schools in Rwanda and some of their Sector Education Officers (SEOs). The head teachers participated in a school leadership development trajectory, and were randomly assigned to four groups that received: (A) training and coaching; (B) coaching only; (C) training only or (D) no training or coaching at all (see table below). Those SEOs involved in the intervention were trained to provide the coaching required. Training and/or coaching was based on the theoretical ‘eight dimensions of successful school leadership’ that the project derived from diverse experience outside Rwanda. Head teachers who were trained first identified their own strengths and weaknesses using a contextualized self-assessment tool and, based on these, formulated commitments and a plan of action to achieve them.

In addition to the 140 head teachers, 2,150 teachers and 124,876 benefitted from the intervention. Total project budget was GBP 325,588.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector Education Officer is trained and coaches the Head Teachers in her/his Sector</th>
<th>Head Teacher is trained</th>
<th>Head Teacher is not trained</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group A:</td>
<td>- Both Head Teacher and SEO’s are familiarized with theory of effective school leadership.</td>
<td>Group B:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- SEO’s are trained to coach her/his (group) of Head Teachers.</td>
<td>- SEO’s are familiarized with theory of effective school leadership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Based on a self-assessment Head Teachers formulated resolutions to improve their performance and a plan of action to realise their resolutions.</td>
<td>- SEO’s are trained to coach her/his (group) of Head Teachers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector Education Officer is not trained and does not provide coaching to the Head Teachers of her/his Sector</th>
<th>Group C:</th>
<th>Group D:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Head Teachers are familiarized with theory of effective school leadership.</td>
<td>- 8 Sectors being control group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Based on a self-assessment Head Teachers formulated resolutions to improve their performance and a plan of action to realize their resolutions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grant Recipient:
The programme was implemented by WOB from Belgium.

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What makes it innovative?
The theoretical model of ‘eight dimensions of successful school leadership’ hasn’t been tested in Rwanda. The ‘intervision method’ that uses coaching as a tool to improve school leadership competencies is also a new concept to Rwanda. This included the new role of the SEOs in coaching head teachers.
Relevance to education priorities;
Main theme: Skills Development
Sub theme: Effective Teaching and Learning
The ESSP recognises the inadequate quality of primary education in Rwanda leading to poor learning outcomes. The development of Head Teachers’ core competencies for effective school leadership has been identified as one of the main factors for the improvement of education quality.

Project learning (activity/output to outcomes level)
• Head teachers perform a crucial role in the school’s learning environment and creating conditions for effective classroom learning to take place. More emphasis on those head teacher competencies that support teaching and learning is required (as distinct from their general coordination and administration responsibilities).
• Initial concerns about potential cultural barriers to a coaching approach proved unfounded: the coaching concept worked well and enthused and empowered the SEOs, while head teachers expressed their satisfaction with the approach
• Large-scale data collection within a limited time frame was considered a real challenge.
• The strict focus on head teachers’ individual learning proved challenging and may need to be partially replaced by a stronger focus on group learning and dealing with shared professional problems.
• The project provided a structured environment for SEOs and head teachers to meet with each other and interact around professional issues. This bringing together of decentralised level actors would otherwise not take place and benefits of creating this mechanism go beyond the coaching intervention.

Project outcomes and reflection on monitoring and evaluation
The specific objective of the project was to generate evidence-based information on cost-effective and scalable capacity development approaches to improve competencies in school leadership, leading to a significant improvement in primary school pupils’ learning outcomes. Model B, familiarization of SEOs only and then coaching of head teachers by SEOs, appeared to demonstrate the best return on the resources invested.

The experimental groups (A, B and C) referred to above showed significantly better results on head teacher and teacher performance; e.g. reported head teachers progress made on the dimensions of successful school leadership, and teachers’ progress made on use of assessment data in the teaching and learning process - in comparison with the control group (D). However, no statistically relevant changes in student learning outcomes, as
indicated by examination results, were reported. One of the possible explanations is that the implementation period was too short to see an impact on students learning outcomes from an intervention targeting Head Teachers. Just as important, the examination results are aggregated at the sector level thus cannot be attributed to individual schools and hence enable the effect of improvement in school leadership to be detected.

The design of the study is very good but the validity and reliability are inconsistently established for the instruments, and the transparency of the report is poor.

**Conditions for success**

A very critical condition for success in scale-up is for government (MINEDUC and MINALOC) to provide incentives for decentralised level staff to engage in the implementation of this CPD model, making sure that (i) SEOs are not being drawn into non-educational activities, (ii) coaching activities are written into SEO job descriptions and (iii) GoR budgets cover travel and equipment for SEO’s, allowing them to engage in regular coaching sessions.

Although initial external funding could be provided to get scale-up going, a CPD intervention for head teachers is only possible to sustain if fully absorbed by government budgets in the long run.

The project also refers to the importance of DEOs in the institutionalisation of the project. It is unfortunate that this group have not played a major role during the pilot stage.

The School Leadership and Management Unit in REB must be mandated to be able to lead on CPD for head teachers, liaising closely with the College of Education and MINALOC, while being allowed to provide direct leadership to SEOs and head teachers.

There is a need for more systemic approaches to support the coaches, for example through the establishment of a training facility for coaches in one of the existing education training institutions in Rwanda enabling a systemic and sustainable approach to the model.

The project found that providing the conceptual documents and related tools in the mother tongue of all participants (Kinyarwanda) will be beneficial.

**Scale up and sustainability considerations**

The programme can be scaled up at relatively low cost and the government and development partners seem keen to further develop leadership skills of head teachers to improve learning outcomes. Model B (coaching only) provides the best option for scale up, on condition that the government is providing a structural budget to maintain the system (while funds from elsewhere may be needed to set up the system).
The project has already increased its scope through the start of a new pilot Professional Learning Networks (PLN) programme currently being implemented with WOB’s involvement and funding. Learning from the IfE pilot has informed this new PLN initiative. The testing of this adjusted model at slightly larger scale will need to guide wider adoption in the medium term, with the aim to reach all 4,152 primary and secondary head teachers in the country on a continuous basis.

Involvement of and liaising with the various stakeholders at national level [CoE, REB and MINALOC] will be required for national uptake, with a need for an ongoing quality assurance role for WOB. The School Leadership and Management Unit of REB will need to be in the lead.

The project highlights that the piloted system of CPD cannot be a replacement for initial training for head teachers (either pre-service or in-service). This prior training should be provided by experts in training school leaders’ competences. The innovative CPD processes tested in the IfE project should build on the foundation laid by this initial training (requiring coaching skills more than high levels of technical expertise). Such an initial training for head teachers is currently in the process of being set up by the College of Education and the School Leadership and Management Unit of REB, with support from WOB.

**Cost considerations**

Significant cost variations exist for the different pilot models. Average cost per student amounted to £2.07 for group A; £1.25 for group B; and £1.35 for group C. During the pilot intervention, costs for group A and C were higher given the fact that these involved training of all Head Teachers on effective school leadership, while for group B this training was limited to SEOs who provided coaching to Head Teachers. Given the similarity in outcomes of the different models, Model B is the best VfM option.

WOB conducted a detailed economic analysis for this model to calculate the unit cost of the IfE pilot phase and use that as the basis for costing the scale up. Research costs were deducted and training unit costs were reduced, as many of the training costs in the ‘upscaling mode’ will be channelled through the government system.

Overall, in a scaled-up programme, average costs per student are relatively low, i.e. GBP 0.21 to set up the system (or GBP 14.8 per head teacher./GBP 9.33 per teacher) and an additional GBP 0.03 to maintain it (or GBP 18.82 per head teacher/GBP 1.19 per teacher).

**Immediate Next Steps**

- Securing external funding for national uptake of the project in an institutionalised mode, based on model B and the new PLN initiative.
- Start-up activities for national scale-up, including
  - Launch event: inform and commit all stakeholders
  - Training of Trainers: local coaching experts have to be trained in order to become competent to train groups of SEO’s.
  - Train SEO’s: 12 trainers train SEO’s to become competent coaches of groups of Head Teachers
  - SEO’s organize monthly group coaching sessions per Sector to practice knowledge and skills gained in the workshop.
  - Visits to group coaching sessions by trainers to provide feedback on the performance of SEO’s
  - Reflection days for SEOs in each district organized on a quarterly basis to give follow up after the four-day workshops and facilitate transition to institutionalization
- DEO’s take the formal leadership role of Professional Learning Networks for SEO’s at District level.
- WOB to continue to advocate for Head Teacher CPD through the Teacher Professional Development Technical Working Group, and as co-chair of the School Leadership Task Force.

This programme was piloted with support from the Innovation for Education Fund, a partnership between the Governments of Rwanda and the United Kingdom.

The fund was managed by Cambridge Education, a member of the Mott MacDonald Group.