Overview of the innovation
This project piloted a new way to engage parents and the wider community to curb school drop-out rates, impacting on school completion rates. At school, the approach strengthened the capacity of PTAs in school management and worked closely with head teachers and teachers to mitigate school dropout.

In the community, radio talk shows and 'community education workers' (CEWs) reached out to parents and encouraged them to step in and actively play a role in their children’s education with regard to drop-out. Parents were given support to identify and address the challenges that lead to school drop-out.

Among the core responsibilities of the CEWs during the implementation of the innovation was to pay visits to the homes of children who dropped out, discuss the reasons for drop out with the children and their parents, address the challenges they faced and raise awareness about the importance of completing school. In total, 214 CEWs were trained in three districts – Ngororero (73), Musanze (68) and Gasabo (73).

Grant Recipient:
The project was managed by the IMBUTO Foundation from Rwanda.

Contact:
Diyana Gitera: diyana@imbutofoundation.org
Theoneste Niyonzima: theoneste@imbutofoundation.org

What makes it innovative?
Previously in Rwanda there was no comprehensive grassroots approach supporting parents, teachers and communities in combating the increasing problem of school dropouts and repetition rates.

The approach was particularly innovative through its creation of a new role – the Community Education Worker – to specifically address the issues of drop-out. This role was modelled on the success of the Community Health Worker in Rwanda.

Relevance to education priorities:
Main Theme: Accountability and Empowerment;
Sub-theme: Skills Development
The project directly addresses the first priority in the 2010-15 ESSP for improving completion rates while reducing drop-out and repetition in basic education.

Project Learning (activity/output to outcomes level)
• The strength of the project is its ‘closeness to the ground’. The project is organised at the cell level and the CEWs come from the same communities as the people they work with.
• Related to this, is the great enthusiasm and commitment among the group of CEWs. Many CEWs personally commit much more time visiting families of drop out students and making sure drop out children return to school than they have to and without any additional benefit.
• IMBUTO’s interesting monitoring system uses SMS reporting
• The project focuses on getting drop out children back to school. At the same time, the project has only a partial focus on addressing the school-based factors that cause the drop-out (as opposed to other factors such as poverty). While fully realising that ‘keeping students in school’ may not be at the core of this innovation, it is very important for the Ministry to see this innovation as one area of focus when addressing the drop out problem, which needs to be complemented with deliberate strategies to improve the learning experience in schools and a commitment to establish a genuinely inclusive education culture that addresses all learners.
Project outcomes and reflection on monitoring and evaluation

The evaluation comprised quantitative measures for drop out and re-integration of targeted students, and self-reported attitudes and behaviour of a variety of stakeholders (teachers, head teachers, SEOs), along with follow-up qualitative interviews and focus groups with parents and learners. Some comparisons are made from baseline to end-line.

The evaluation indicated that there has been an increase in reintegration across the districts, e.g. in Gasabo district, where there had been 2,712 primary students re-integrated in 2013, this increased to 9,484 in 2015. However, there are no data on their retention. The latter may need more time and may not be possible to establish in the pilot period. Anecdotal information suggested that a high percentage of the reintegrated children were still in school by the end of the project.

General improvement in the drop out and integration at district levels cannot be attributed to the innovation, though some contribution is assumed. These improvements for targeted students are accompanied by more involvement and positive attitudes of parents. The role of CEWs and the interaction with communities was received well and this innovative component of the project, in particular, is thought to have made a difference.

The results are undermined by poor sampling, lack of demonstration of validity and reliability of instruments, and no statistical testing of differences where these apply.
Conditions for success
The main condition for success for this project is the positive response to CEWs. 65% of parents noted that the biggest contributor to their perception of education was the sensitisation by CEWs. This in-person communication was considered more effective than the radio. However, there are implications for funding and the identification of appropriate personnel if the project were to be sustained. This is linked to the question whether the use of volunteers in the pilot can also provide a long-term solution. IMBUTO has developed ideas in terms the use of volunteers and financial sustainability of the model, which includes the use of cooperatives.

The support from DEOs and SEOs (and consequent systemic links) is critical for this innovation to be successful and the project has been very good at mobilising them.

The project has been highly successful in getting children back into school but the question remains whether returning to school will indeed be supportive of the children’s learning needs. School-based factors impacting on the child’s learning experience can be a cause of drop out and need to be taken into account in a more comprehensive model of improving completion rates.

Scale up and sustainability considerations
Two scale-up options are presented: (i) gradual scale up, in which all Districts will be reached within 5 years and (ii) immediate nationwide scale up.

The idea of gradual scale up makes most sense, for manageability reasons as well as the absorption capacity of the Ministry of Education. A more gradual scale up will also help the Ministry to have its capacity strengthened over time to be ready to manage a nationwide drop-out prevention and response programme. The scale up model has been adjusted and the support package has been slimmed down to ensure better value for money, based on lessons learnt from the pilot. There will be no radio campaigning in the scale up package, and a lighter incentive package for CEWs. The CEW remains the crux of the model and the innovation seems very scalable if communities adopt the innovation and support the CEWs, or if MINEDUC commits to making this a formal position in the system. However, this will need to be set against other already existing positions and structures at decentralised levels in the system and the costs and added value of adding another position.

There is a need for IMBUTO and MINEDUC to jointly reflect on the policy and institutionalisation dimensions of scale up in the long run. Embedding this intervention in the government system seems a relatively straightforward thing to do, and the Ministry seems indeed committed to making this happen, but the scale up and sustainability documents from IMBUTO do not yet sufficiently address how handover will take place and how strengthening the capacity of MINEDUC will take place over time with a technical assistance (rather than implementation) role for IMBUTO.
Cost Considerations
IMBUTO has provided a detailed budget for the next 5 years based on the gradual scale up model. Upscaling costs will in total approximately GBP 4 million with unit costs of 15,000 RWF per CEW per month. This is lower than the pilot unit costs and is set against the anticipated reintegration of drop-out students of 10% in the project. The calculations raise the issue of the availability of external funding at least during the next 5 years, as well as the need for detailed discussions between IMBUTO and MINEDUC about which costs can be borne by the Ministry and which need to be found externally.

The current documentation does not explain how the Ministry will share the cost burden, and how this compares to current expenditure in MINEDUC. Another issue that deserves more attention is the involvement of volunteers (i.e. the CEWs) and the question whether voluntarism will be sustainable in the long run.

Immediate Next Steps
- IMBUTO and MINEDUC to agree on the joint development and implementation of the scale up of this project, based on the initial desire expressed by MINEDUC to indeed go for upscaling of this innovation
- IMBUTO and Ministry to agree on the budget envelope and how the budget requirements will be met, including deciding on which cost components can be covered by the Ministry as well as identifying the need for attracting external funding
- As part of scale up planning, decide on the role of IMBUTO and the planning of the trajectory towards full Ministry ownership and management, including technical assistance components to ensure system readiness
- MINEDUC to consider broader systemic implications of scale-up - notably the establishment of the CEW position and how this is supported, and the possible role of complementary MINEDUC led behaviour change mass communications. The existing MINEDUC education programme on radio and TV could be effectively used for this purpose.