Overview of the Innovation
The Gasabo School Development Program (SDP) piloted a ‘whole District, whole School’ approach. It aimed to improve learning outcomes for boys and girls and their greater participation in lessons through more learner centred approaches to teaching in public schools in the Gasabo District of Rwanda. The project simultaneously empowered the different stakeholders (teachers, head teachers, Sector Education Officers (SEOs), local leaders and parents) of the school community for the delivery of quality basic education.

Teacher training in foundational child centred educational competencies was complemented by ensuring educational leaders and the parent community were equipped to provide a framework of support and accountability. The project included the innovative re-focusing of the roles of head teachers and SEOs towards supervising teaching and learning. ‘Teacher multipliers’ were introduced as peer mentors in schools. These are teachers trained to deliver workshops and provide ongoing support to colleagues on key principles of participation, positive values and cognitive skill development.

The project also provided school and village based training workshops, empowering Parent Teacher Committees and introducing Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) to the parent communities.

The project trained 77 head teachers, 284 teachers and 117 community members directly and reached a total of 59,682 students. The project budget was GBP 270,000.

Grant Recipient:
The project was run by The Wellspring Foundation, an International NGO.

Contact:
Richard Taylor   richard@thewellspringfoundation.org
Phocas Ngendahayo phocas@thewellspringfoundation.org

What makes it innovative?
The project applied an integrated school improvement approach to improve education quality in all schools in Gasabo district. It did so by involving all key stakeholders (parents, local leaders, teachers, head teachers, SEOs, DEO’s, Regional Inspectors, etc.) in the intervention. The project introduced a new way of working through teacher development based on participatory values supported by SEOs and head teachers who can identify and support teachers’ weaknesses. The teacher multipliers are new roles, enabling individual teachers to become peer supporters.

Relevance to education priorities;
Main theme: Effective teaching and learning
Sub-themes: Accountability and empowerment
The project was in line with the 2010-15 ESSP to ensure that educational quality continues to improve and the focus on decentralisation as part of educational reform. The teacher mentor (‘multiplier’) element is complementary to the GoR initiative to introduce a cadre of School Based Mentors.

Project learning (activity/output to outcomes level)
• The introduction of teacher multipliers has been a successful and key component of the project. The teacher multipliers received training on several subjects and methodologies and in particular the module on value integration has been core to the project.
• The model lessons provided by teacher multipliers were highly valued by the colleague teachers, as were the feedback sessions on these lessons, which were facilitated by qualified
The project also successfully provided training to the school communities, notably on Asset Based Community Development. Community connectors were nominated by each community during the training process and they have led the ABCD programmes in their own communities, liaising and communicating with school and PTC leaders. The training included foundational training [sharing stories, asset mapping and developing action plans] resulting in the preparation of action plans.

According to district and head teachers the whole district approach resulted in a reduced dropout rate [through active involvement of the PTC leaders and community ‘connectors’], more all-inclusive learning, and more punctual attendance of children. Moreover, teachers indicated that they performed better as they now do not only address ‘fast learners’, but also the ‘slower learners’. Teachers also noted that lesson planning had become easier.

A major challenge is that PTC’s change every year and hence maintaining continuity is a major issue. Moreover, PTC members are often amongst the most affluent and powerful persons in the community and do not represent the wider community. This is important to take into account taking the PTC training forward.

The project learned the importance of the use of specific criteria for success and performance for teacher and school leaders in order to achieve impact. Specific criteria will help teachers and leaders learn what to look for in a lesson and how to offer specific assessment and evaluation of practise. This has especially helped school leaders. The Leader’s Criteria that were developed under the project provided an important tool and it was the first time school leaders were assessed against any kind of criteria.

**Project outcomes and reflection on monitoring and evaluation**

The integrated approach, by definition, sees the whole as greater than the sum of the parts so attribution of successful outcomes to an individual component is tenuous. However, the teacher multipliers stand out as most notable success factor with the potential to have the most immediate impact on learning outcomes when scaled up.

The descriptive evaluation design compared baseline and end-line results on a variety of data: student P6/S1 examination results, student completion rates, observations of teacher classroom practice and school development questionnaires for head teachers and teachers. These were supported by qualitative interviews with teachers and head teachers.
The results show significant improvement in teachers’ classroom practices across all the indicators (e.g. participation, positive values); qualitative findings suggested that there had been a very positive response by teachers to the teacher multipliers but also that the latter’s impact is variable and depends on the support of the school leader. The conclusions claimed improved P6 results and retention, but with no supporting data, which was due to unforeseen circumstances beyond the control of Wellspring.

The intervention in Gasabo showed the value of classroom participation by students. There are also positive results reported on the various individual elements of the project, such as values training and parental involvement.

The study is generally rigorous and transparent, but weakened somewhat by sampling problems and lack of statistical testing of differences between baseline and end-line.

Conditions for success
This project’s evaluation highlighted the importance of a realistic timeframe to achieve the desired results. Time is needed for significant change to come about in the classroom, especially in relation to changes in both behaviour and attitudes across stakeholder groups. In the long-term, there is a key learning about the potential for peer learning as an integral part of a wider teacher professional development package.

Another crucial factor to successfully implement and sustain the programme is developing the role and commitment of the head teachers. When the head teachers are active and build and use their leadership skills, the sharing of practices among teachers increased - resulting in consistent improved school performance. Otherwise, there is a risk of pockets of change in a school, leading to confusion, rather than whole school change.

Targeting and empowering all education stakeholders at decentralised level viz. parents, local leaders, teachers, head teachers, SEOs, DEO’s, and Regional Inspectors, and linking their training, is a very intensive support model. Such a resource-intensive model can only work on a nationwide scale if it is adopted by the government as its preferred professional support model at decentralised levels.

Scale up and sustainability considerations
The Wellspring programme is a resource-heavy and support-intensive school improvement programme as it maintains an integrated approach involving all key stakeholders at decentralised government levels.

Four proposed options for scaling-up were presented: (i) national scale up of the entire programme through the school based mentor (SBM) structure; (ii) replicating the intervention in one other district, (iii) scale-up through strategic partnerships with NGOs aimed to deliver specific components of the programme (e.g. the leadership and/or parental component) in an additional 100 schools across a range of Districts, and (iv) scale up parts/aspects of the innovation on a nationwide scale. The various scale-up options all have different impact on: (i) reach, (ii) costs, (iii) sustaining the intervention through government structures, and; (iv) potential impact on learning outcomes.

National scale up (option 1) would have the largest reach at lowest cost per learner with the greatest potential for embedding the intervention in the formal structures (first 3 criteria).
Nationwide scale-up will require strong leadership and ownership from REB/MINEDUC and excellent coordination with MINALOC.

It is likely that transferring the intervention to one additional district (option 2) would yield the highest impact on learning outcomes since it will ensure higher levels of direct support through the continued involvement and technical assistance from Wellspring, but impact on national figures may be limited due to the concentrated model.

Options 3 and 4 are about replication of certain elements of the programme (e.g. integration of values; lesson observations; school leadership training; peer learning as part of a teacher professional development model; sector based learning, and community involvement) in target districts or nationally. However, there are indications that the strength of the innovation lies in the integrated nature of the whole school approach, where different components work together to improve the quality of education at the school level. Taking out individual elements of the overall package may lead to a disproportional loss of impact of the intervention. In resource constrained situations, these options could be considered, realising that additional testing of these new packages will be needed (as this is not the model tested in the IfE pilot).

If funds are available, national scale up may be the desired option. However, in addition to the high costs there are a number of systemic risks involved and this option requires involvement of a strong cadre of committed national trainers from within the system (Teacher Training Colleges, College of Education, Senior Mentors, and/or lead multipliers). In order to prepare the government for taking on this role, initial support by Wellspring may be needed in relation to content, and especially in terms of process management and working on ‘system readiness’.

DFID or other development partners may want to consider funding the first stages of scaling up the ‘Gasabo model’ as part of a capacity strengthening initiative at decentralised levels.

Cost considerations
National scale up (option 1) provides the lowest unit cost of US$1.80 student/year, while national scale also provides a pathway for institutionalisation as it works through the existing government structures. An important consideration for this option is the overall budget envelope amounting to approximately US$ 8 to US$ 12 million over 4 years. This is a substantial sum to invest, and complete hard quantitative evidence on the success of the approach has not been collected yet. Overall, the economic analysis provides a good comparison between the different options, but could have been stronger by also comparing unit costs of similar programmes implemented elsewhere. Moreover, the project could have been more specific about the added value of the proposed US$ 8-12 million investment with regard to anticipated improved practices for teachers and learning outcomes for students, especially if compared to alternative approaches.

Immediate next Steps
• Disseminate project findings with GoR and partners and identify the needs for the collection of further evidence
• Continue the scale up and sustainability discussions with REB, present scale-up budgets and cost/benefit analysis, with REB to decide whether it would like to adopt the whole District, whole School model (scale-up option 1 or 2), or aspects of it (scale up option 3 or 4)
• As part of its advocacy efforts, Wellspring to facilitate the publication of a document defining the key elements of a good school improvement programme and advocate for systemic change, based on the learnings from the pilot innovation
• Continue Wellspring’s advocacy role through RENCED and various education sector working groups to see the ‘voice’ of civil society unified and strengthened in Rwanda in relation to change in, and support for, delivery at decentralised levels (District, Sector, school).
• Continue supporting the new competency-based curriculum and training thereof, ensuring that the learning from the IFE pilot will influence the curriculum implementation process.

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.