

Methods Brief

Village TEACH: The power of the local champion

Overview

Between 2016 and 2019, Elevate implemented *It Takes a Village to Teach a Child* (Village TEACH)—a participatory school scorecard program that empowers rural communities to improve education service delivery at the local level—in 50 schools in Mukono District of Central Uganda.

During this period, Elevate also conducted an impact evaluation to measure program efficacy and explore the potential for Village TEACH to succeed at scale in Uganda. Having found that Village TEACH reduces student dropout by 40%, the results of the evaluation affirmed our confidence in the program’s ability to transform local education communities. Furthermore, our exploration of a viable path to scale was hugely valuable in highlighting various aspects of the delivery model that might be refined to increase impact and sustainability.

Our exploration of the path to scale highlighted four potential barriers to effective program delivery, including:

- Lack of social cohesion between stakeholder groups
- High turnover of Village TEACH committee members
- School leadership capacity constraints

This brief explores the importance of the local Village TEACH Champion—a leader elected by each community to spearhead program implementation at the school level—in ameliorating these barriers to implementation, establishing Village TEACH as a community-driven initiative from program inception, and increasing both impact and sustainability. We use this brief to discuss the personal qualities exhibited by strong Village TEACH champions and recommend strategies for identifying and recruiting successful champions.

Methodology

This brief draws upon qualitative data from Village TEACH Committee discussions and reports collected from program officers during 2018. Committee discussions not only facilitated an in-depth exploration of school-level implementation barriers, but also generated a set of concrete recommendations to improve the Village TEACH program model from the perspective of the beneficiary. Program officer reports were particularly useful in exploring what effective school-level leadership looks like in the context of the Village TEACH program.

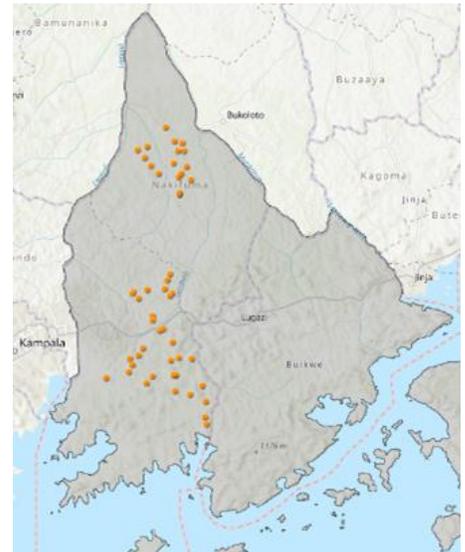


Figure 1. Distribution of 50 treatment schools in Mukono District

To analyze these qualitative data sources, an inductive coding methodology was used. First, a comprehensive list of school-level implementation challenges was generated and sorted into thematic areas. Separately, recommendations from Village TEACH Committees regarding improvements to the program model were identified and coded by theme. Finally, a list of qualities exhibited by strong committee champions was developed by drawing upon these analyses, as well as observations of positive leadership and mediation skills utilized by head teachers during the program.

Findings: the qualities exhibited by a strong champion

- **Strong champions are respected by all school stakeholder groups.**
To be successful, champions must be respected by parents, teachers, pupils, administrators and community members alike. If the champion is respected by all stakeholder groups, they are more capable of building bridges between disparate—at times antagonistic—groups, ameliorating rivalries and division, and supporting the committee to find commonalities between competing ideas and perspectives. Well-respected champions also give more credibility to the committee’s work.
- **Strong champions are motivated to improve education in their community.**
Strong champions value quality education, are motivated to improve education for their community, and believe that a community-driven approach to improving education quality is possible. This mindset is necessary for champions to maintain focus and commitment to the committee’s work, put in the time and effort necessary for the committee to succeed, and not be overwhelmed by the implementation challenges that will invariably arise throughout the duration of the program cycle.
- **Strong champions are embedded in the community.**
Turnover among committee members—particularly committee leaders—reduces institutional knowledge and depresses committee productivity. Strong champions are deeply embedded in their community and can plan to remain in the community for at least the duration of the three-year program cycle. This quality also interacts with the level of respect champions enjoy in their community and their motivation. Champions who are deeply embedded in their community tend to be more well-respected and more inherently motivated to improve education quality for their community.
- **Strong champions have the time and capacity to fulfill their duties.**
With heavy workloads and the simultaneous implementation of multiple community development programs, champions must have the bandwidth to carry out their role with fidelity. Champions who are overburdened by other work or competing priorities fail to hold timely meetings, regularly monitor committee activity, and can ultimately lead to the committee’s failure to operate independently.
- **Strong champions are creative and adaptable.**
The occurrence of both known and unplanned implementation challenges necessitates that champions remain agile and adaptive. Champions with rigid mindsets can generate disappointment or disillusionment amongst committee members, and thus put the viability of the committee at risk. Strong champions guide their committees to creatively respond to obstacles and encourage them to search for new and innovative ways to solve challenges.

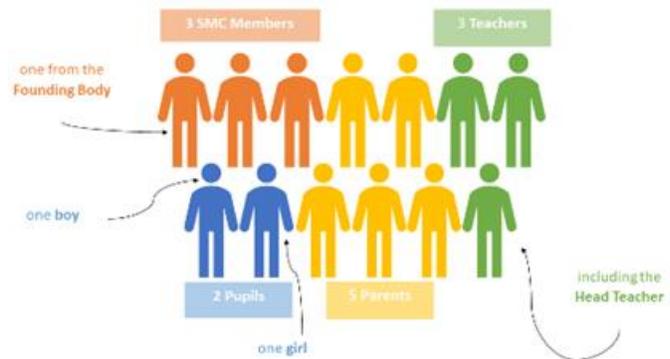
Discussion: recruiting strong champions

Village TEACH is rooted in the conviction that local communities hold the keys to driving lasting, transformative change in their schools. Elevate's role is simply to provide the structure to help them achieve this ambition; we facilitate and mediate rather than diagnose challenges and prescribe solutions.

Under this philosophy, the best way to identify strong champions is by allowing local communities to nominate potential champions within a structure that allows them to identify the best possible candidates. The first step in this structure is to elect the 13-member Village TEACH Committee.

Guidelines for a successful committee election:

- Committees must be comprised of the following members:
 - 3 SMC Members
 - 3 Teachers
 - 2 Pupils
 - 5 Parents
- Nominees must understand and accept the roles, responsibilities and purpose of the committee.
- Nominees must verbally agree to their nomination.
- Nominees must understand what they can expect from Elevate throughout the process.
- If nominations exceed slots for certain stakeholder groups, a simple majority vote will determine the final composition of the committee.



Once the committee has been elected, the champion will be nominated from within their ranks.

To be nominated as the champion, the committee member must:

- Understand and accept the roles, responsibilities and purpose of the committee champion,
- Understand what they can expect from Elevate throughout the process,
- Sign a written agreement signaling their commitment to the role,
- Exhibit the qualities discussed above,
- Be literate,
- Speak the local language,
- Have regular access to a phone,
- Not be a teacher.

To ensure that committees are prepared to nominate the best possible champion, champion elections are not held until the second term of program implementation. This ensures that committees are well established, trust and open communication has been built amongst members, and potential champions are well-educated regarding the routine roles, responsibilities and purpose of the committee.