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Learning from the project *Ask the Teacher*

Can digital social innovation ensure the continuity of education services to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, how and in which context?

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Reason

Teacher training in lower-resource settings is often **inadequate** and/or of **low quality**. Despite some forms of Teacher Professional Development (TPD) being available in Uganda, teachers are too often not equipped well-enough with the general **transferable** and **hands-on pedagogical skills** they need to deliver effective learning for their students. Teacher training in the country is characterised by the following challenges:

- Quality of opportunities: training curricula tend to focus on filling gaps left by pre-service training. **Training requirements** are poorly **defined** and **addressed**.
- Lack of **government-provided opportunities**. While it is the role of Centre Coordinating Tutors' (CCTs)* to provide in-service professional development support in target districts, it is currently **NGOs that reach more teachers with TPD**.
- Affordability: Despite most teachers' desire to pursue TPD, they are often hindered by their ability to **afford courses/support** provided by non-government providers.
- **Time** constraints.

In November 2019, Save the Children started their 3 year project



**The Centre Coordination Tutors (CCTs) are instructors in the regional Core Primary Training Colleges (PTCs). The CCT structure was established in 1994 by ministry of education and sports with an aim of enhancing in service teacher professional development. The role of CCTs is to support identify teachers' professional development needs, design continuous professional courses and train them to increase efficiency and capacity.*



“Enabling Teachers Approach (ETA) Project for Teacher Professional Development (TPD) in 50 schools in Western Uganda, targeting approximately 541 teachers with **professional development**.

Due to COVID-19, the Ugandan government closed schools for 22 months which was the longest COVID-19 related school closure in the world. The ETA project adapted activities and shifted some of them to **Interactive Voice Response (IVR)** which was pre-recorded for sessions to support teachers' access to the training content.

This first project showed that technology could enhance **quality in-person** and **remote teaching** and **learning processes** during and after school lockdown. However, there were still some challenges in bringing direct support to teachers and the dropout rate was high.

Digital social innovation

As its predecessor, the Ask the teacher project used a **blended learning approach** to enhance teacher professional development (TPD) across **three districts of Western Uganda**: Bundibugyo, Kasese and Ntoroko.

On the one hand, Save the Children uses **Interactive Voice Response (IVR)** to offer teachers knowledge and skills required to **deliver quality education** through **contextualised** and **pre-recorded TPD training modules**. Under Wehubit, and based on a survey, **7 modules were added**, for a total of 45 lessons: Introduction to the key changes in the abridged curriculum; Assessment for Learning; Supporting Girls education; Child-Centered Teaching Methodologies; Positive discipline in the classroom; Literacy Acquisition; Teacher Wellbeing and Large Class Sizes.

On the other hand, teachers can ask for support and feedback by directly calling a **resource person**. This person will either answer directly or send extra resources. CCT's also meet face-to-face with the teachers to reactivate what was learned via the phone and **support implementation**.

541 teachers used IVR lessons in Kasese, Ntoroko and Bundibugyo between 13th September 2021-27th January 2022. **514 teachers** completed at least one lesson and **415 completed all 7 modules** (36 Lessons).

Teachers have access to **45 lessons** in total through Interactive Voice Recording.



From the start of the IVR system, the portal has received over **160,000 accesses** through phone calls.



KEY MESSAGES

- ▶ Interactive Voice Response (IVR) as a means for lifelong training was used by teachers in Kasese, Ntoroko and Bundibugyo, even in **remote areas**. Interactive Voice Response (IVR) has allowed teachers in Kasese, Ntoroko and Bundibugyo, disregarding their **economic status, digital skills and remote location**, to access context specific learning materials.
- ▶ The digital innovation has improved headteachers' supervisory skills in the 50 supported schools, as they were able, through the modules, to get more insights on the **abridged curriculum** introduced upon reopening of schools after COVID-19 lock down.
- ▶ The innovation has brought teachers together enabling them to regularly share lessons and challenges through **learning circles**. This has led to developing collective solutions to challenges and school improvement plans in some cases.

LESSONS LEARNED

Inclusion and equity

- ▶ **Inclusion and accessibility** were taken into account in the very design of the solution. No internet, specific digital skills or smartphones needed here : technology is used on regular phones that every teacher owns.

Users and stakeholders' responsiveness

- ▶ The Centre Coordinating Tutors (CCT) have been available to respond to the follow-up questions from the teachers, either through calling directly or during the CCT school monitoring visits. The CCTs have also helped to **prevent dropout** by directly calling teachers that **stopped picking IVRs**.

COVID-19 has prompted stakeholders, including the government, to recognise and implement digital tools as a way to reach out to teachers. The Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) has given its buy-in and appointed a **focal person** to follow-up on the Ask the Teacher project.

Use beyond the project

Save The Children (STC) negotiated a toll-free line (#161) for Airtel users and the organisation is currently trying to secure the same for MTN. After a period of 1 year free of charge, the teachers will be charged a **below-market price cost** per phone call to access the content, which will sustain the portal.

The learning content on the #161 toll-free line will be highly promoted by STC and the MoES among all teacher training institutions across Uganda, in order to attract **new users** and **drive traffic** on the portal.



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PERSPECTIVES

Save the Children (STC) will promote the use of the modules (& lessons) within STC, both in **Uganda** and in **other countries** where STC works. Modules will also be promoted among the different partners that work with STC.

STC has continuously worked to engage the MoES. Before the end of Wehubit's project implementation, the Ministry has asked STC to submit the content used in teacher training to Uganda National Institute for Teacher Education (UNITE) for **approval**. UNITE has approved the content of all modules developed by STC, these modules and the IVR system will be used nationally.

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*in collaboration with Ignatius Tebukozza and Libbuma Muhindo (Save the Children)
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