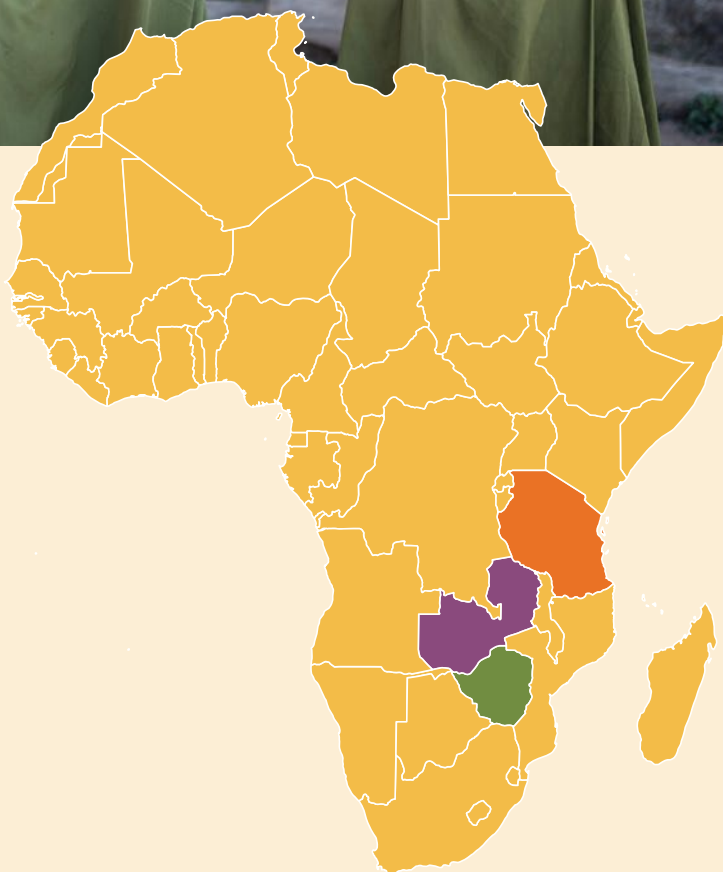


Students Hadija, Anna, Maria, and Jesca holding their My Better World self-development books outside their school in Tanzania's Kilolo district.
Image Credit: Kumi Media/CAMFED



Scaling up a life skills and mentorship programme led by young women in sub-Saharan Africa

Regional overview



Authors

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Summary

Interviews with government officials suggest that the Learner Guide Programme aligns with their national priorities to improve equity in education, and the movement towards competence-based or learner-centred curricula. As such, they identified the value and contextual relevance of CAMFED's Learner Guide Programme.

Government officials from all three countries identified three common areas of relevance including supporting:

✓
Equity within education

✓
'Life skills' to support learners after school

✓
Guidance and counselling services

Although the practicalities of scaling up the Learner Guide Programme vary between countries, there were two overarching priorities identified by government officials. The first was the integration of the life-skills component of the My Better World programme. The second was the integration of the peer-to-peer and mentoring aspects of the Learner Guides into national school systems.

Government officials identified that there remains a need for further consideration on how to scale up the programme in several areas:

- Financial support to scale up the Learner Guide Programme
 - In the event that it is viable to run the programme in its current form at scale, then provision of training and support for the Learner Guides needs to be considered so that national education standards are formally met by the Learner Guides.
 - If it is not financially viable, then the roles of the Learner Guides, teachers, and guidance and counselling teachers would need to be reconsidered for an adapted version of the programme with teachers potentially delivering the My Better World Content, and with guidance and counselling teachers providing the social support aspect. However, it is noted that this version would lose the peer-to-peer aspect provided by the Learner Guides.
- How to integrate the My Better World programme into the national curricula formally, ensuring that there is no duplication between existing national curricular on life skills topics and how to overcome challenges of formally timetabling My Better World lessons in already overloaded school timetables.

Government officials also identified additional ways to support the feasibility of scaling up the Learner Guide Programme, including:

A need to have continued and strategic advocacy to grow awareness of the Learner Guide Programme to provide opportunities for further engagement to enable scaling up.

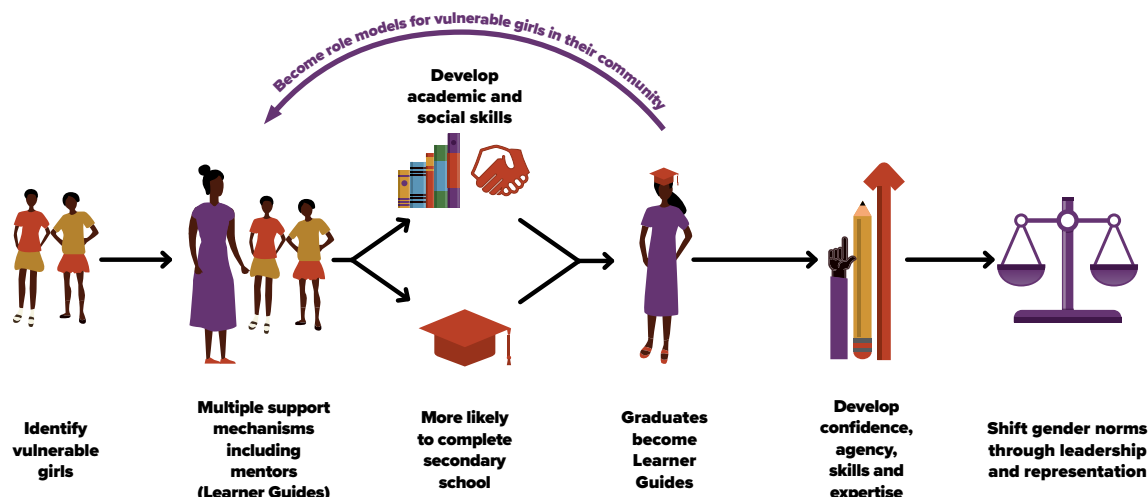
Addressing the financial viability of the process of scaling up by:

- Leveraging relevant ministries beyond the ministry of education
- Building on community funding models
- Making use of existing volunteer support mechanisms.

Introduction

CAMFED's Learner Guide Programme aims to support girls in secondary school to strengthen self-development and foundational learning skills, thus encouraging them to stay in school and improve their learning outcomes (Figure 1). The primary support mechanism is provided by recent school graduates called Learner Guides, who went through the same CAMFED programme during their secondary education. In addition, some school graduates have been recruited as Learner Guides who were not previously supported by CAMFED. These graduates subsequently return to their local schools and volunteer to help other children with their studies. Supported by the CAMFED Association, teachers, and school authorities, the Learner Guides deliver a life skills and wellbeing programme called My Better World and provide peer-to-peer mentorship to students, as well as take on roles within school and community committees. As an incentive for volunteering, the Learner Guides also receive access to interest-free loans which open business opportunities for them.

Figure 1: The Learner Guide Programme



Evidence suggests that CAMFED's programme results in improved retention and learning outcomes, as well as post-school transition (PMA and CAMFED, 2022). It is also cost-effective (Sabates et al., 2018). Learner Guides are recognised as role models and leaders within their communities (PMA and CAMFED, 2022). Ultimately, the Learner Guide Programme intends to support girls to complete school, empower them to be able to change their life trajectory, and support other girls and women around them to do the same. These shifts in agency and action have the potential to shift harmful gender norms that inhibit gender equality.

The primary objective of this research was to understand government perspectives on how they can adopt and sustainably scale up relevant elements of the Learner Guide Programme in Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. This would have the potential to enable greater access to quality education for marginalised girls in underserved communities in these countries.

This overview presents the design and methodology of the research. It then provides a synthesis of why the Learner Guide Programme is viewed by government officials as relevant to Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. This synthesis draws on the country briefs for each country, which present country-specific findings in more detail (Chimuka & Ciampi, 2023; Maambo & Ciampi, 2023; Mgonda & Ciampi, 2023). The overview offers key findings relevant for the scaling up process of the Learner Guide Programme across all three countries, including related to:

- Synergies between the Learner Guide Programme and national education policies
- Elements of the Learner Guide Programme that are seen as priorities for national education systems by key decision makers
- Opportunities and challenges for adaptation, adoption, and scaling up of the Learner Guide Programme in all three countries.

Research design

This research has been designed and conducted through a collaboration between a research team from the University of Dar es Salaam, the Altamont Group, and the REAL Centre at the University of Cambridge. The national CAMFED teams led the implementation and logistics of this study. CAMFED has provided important insights and support throughout the process, but the analysis and findings have been prepared by the research team independently of CAMFED. This study gained ethical clearance both from the University of Cambridge and the University of Dar es Salaam and from each country's national ethical research board.ⁱ

The first step of this research was to identify and engage with officials from relevant ministries who were potentially key to supporting the process of scaling up the Learner Guide Programme. Each national CAMFED team identified relevant government agencies and individuals in their contexts based on their existing local networks to create a Scaling Advisory Committee (SAC) (Table 1).ⁱⁱ

Table 1: Scaling Advisory Committee government agencies

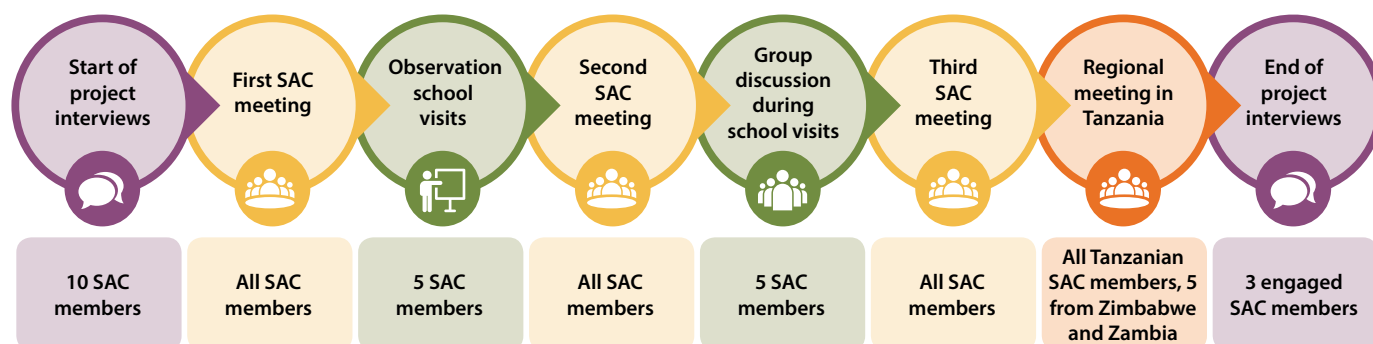
Tanzania	Zambia	Zimbabwe
Ministry of Education, Science and Technology	Ministry of Education	Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education
National Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training	National Youth Development Council	Ministry of Women Affairs, Community and Small to Medium Enterprises Development
President's Office, Regional Administration and Local Government	Teaching Service Commission	Ministry of Youth, Sports, Art, and Recreation
Prime Minister's Office, Labour, Youth, Employment and Persons with Disability	Ministry of Youth, Sports, and Art	Education Coalition of Zimbabwe
Tanzanian Education Network	Zambia National Education Coalition	
Tanzania Institute of Education	District Education Board Secretaries	
Tanzanian Institute of Adult Education		
District Education Officers		
Total number of members: 19	Total number of members: 22	Total number of members: 10

The purpose of the SACs was to create a forum where government members could explore, identify, and recommend which elements of the Learner Guide Programme might be adapted and adopted by their government, and identify pathways of how this scaling up might take place. Government officials who were part of the SAC were tasked with engaging in activities including attending SAC meetings and participating in interviews and school visits. As part of the research process, they also contributed to developing questions to be asked to teachers, students, parents and Learner Guides during the school visits, and participated in asking questions to them.

Throughout the research process, they shared their reflections on the Learner Guide Programme, including the opportunities and challenges for scaling up this intervention. The different phases of the research allowed time for them to gain greater insights into the programme, and also for them to hear from participants in the programme at the school level to inform their perspectives.

Each country undertook these activities in a similar sequence (Figure 2) between March and November 2022. The activities were designed to allow time for reflection and sharing of experiences and observations of the Learner Guide Programme between the SAC meetings.

Figure 2: Sequence of SAC and research activities

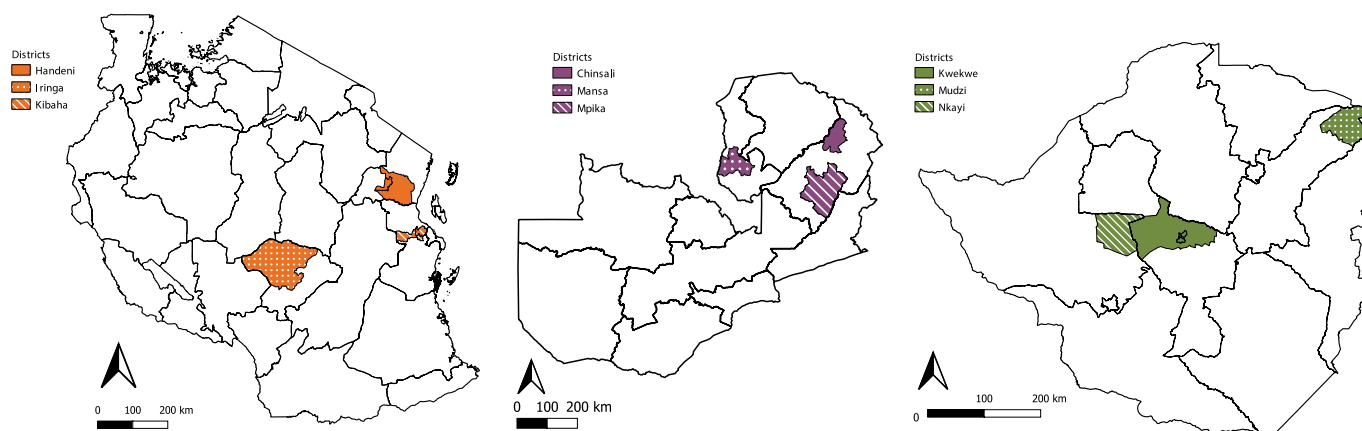


The research began with the national researchers conducting interviews with 10 of the government officials in each SAC to identify their initial reflections on the current state of education in their context, their awareness of the Learner Guide Programme, and their views on the scalability of the programme. The interviewees were selected by the national researchers to ensure representation across different ministries, to include senior and more influential officials where possible, and to include a mix of male and female respondents.

During the first SAC meeting, the government officials were presented with a detailed overview of the Learner Guide Programme by CAMFED, as well as the research project by the national researchers. The terms of reference for the SAC membership were also outlined, and the research activity schedule was discussed and agreed by the SAC members.

Following the first SAC meeting, school visits were organised for the government officials. School visits aimed to enable government officials to study the Learner Guide Programme 'in action' by observing a timetabled My Better World lesson. Five government officials were selected from each SAC to participate in observation visits to one school in three different districts. Five additional government officials from each SAC were selected to participate in a single observation visit to one school in one district. During the selection process, government officials who had not seen the Learner Guide Programme in action previously were given priority. Other selection criteria included ensuring a mix of organisational representation, and job roles, as well as their availability. The national teams also aimed to consider the level of influence of individuals during the selection criteria. However, in many cases, those identified as potentially having the most influence – often more senior officials – were not available to undertake the full set of activities. Therefore, ministry representatives who engaged in the school observation visits tended to be those reporting to the more influential, senior officials.

In each country, four schools in different districts were selected for the visits (Figure 3). All selected schools were mixed sex. Three schools were selected as examples of ones where CAMFED viewed the Learner Guide Programme as running well, and one school in was selected where CAMFED viewed the Learner Guide Programme as facing some implementation challenges. This was selection aimed to ensure that SAC members had a balanced view of the programme. All schools had at least two hours of the My Better World lessons timetabled per week, and two Learner Guides in post. This selection was designed to provide the government officials with an oversight of the opportunities and challenges of the programme.

Figure 3: Selected districts for school visits

After the first school visit, the second SAC meeting took place to discuss what had been observed. Based on this, SAC members worked with the national researchers to review and adjust the questions to be asked to Learner Guide Programme stakeholders during the next school visit. This second school visit provided the five selected government officials with a chance to return to the three schools. During the visit, they conducted group discussions with four key stakeholder groups who were engaged in the Learner Guide Programme: teachers, Learner Guides, students and parents. Once completed, the SAC members met for a third time to discuss their observations, and used this as a basis to consider some of the practicalities of scaling up the programme in their context.

In November 2022, government officials who were part of the SACs from all three countries convened in Tanzania to share their perspectives on the ways in which the Learner Guide Programme aligned with their national education programmes. They also debated and discussed which elements could be scaled up in their contexts, and how this could be achieved, along with the challenges of doing so. The regional meeting had over 70 participants representing three ministries from Zambia, three ministries from Zimbabwe, and 10 ministries and relevant civil society organisations from the host country, Tanzania. Members from each national CAMFED team, Learner Guides, teacher mentors, and two students from the Learner Guide Programme in Tanzania also participated in the regional meeting, as well as the researchers from the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe (associated with the Altamont Group), and the University of Cambridge. During the meeting, the SAC members participated in plenary and group discussions to share their thoughts and recommendations for scaling up the Learner Guide Programme. Each group discussion included SAC members from different countries and institutions working together to ensure that cross-country experience could be generated. There were eight groups in total, each comprising of six to eight members. After the activity, each group presented their main discussion points to the wider group.

The final stage of data collection involved a set of three interviews with government officials who were part of the SAC in each country. Those interviewed were selected because they had been particularly engaged in school visits and SAC meetings throughout the process. The interviews aimed to gather their reflections on the research activities, they provided them with further information on how to scale up the Learner Guide Programme, and the next steps to be taken for scaling up to take place.

All the interviews, SAC meetings, and group discussions with the teachers, Learner Guides, students, and parents followed ethical and processes to ensure that informed consent was gained from all research participants, and that anonymity was protected. The research team and government officials also completed the CAMFED Child Protection Policy training prior to the school visits to ensure that safeguarding protocols were followed at all times.

The data from each of the research activities were recorded, translated, and transcribed by the research team (Table 2). Translations were checked by the national researchers, and the data analysis was a collaborative effort between members of the research team. The data were analysed using an open thematic coding approach to identify dominant themes within the data. All data sources were also used to triangulate responses to ensure a rigorous analysis process. Written outputs were co-produced by members of the research team.

Table 2: Summary of data collected

Data type	Tanzania	Zambia	Zimbabwe	Total
Start of project interviews	10	9	10	29
Observation school visits	4	4	4	12
Group discussion school visits	16	16	16	48
National SAC meeting observations	3	3	2	8
Regional SAC meeting observations	1			1
End of project interviews	3	3	4	10

This overview draws on data from the regional meeting, together with the perspectives outlined in three papers that present country-level analyses of national findings for each of the countries (Chimuka & Ciampi, 2023; Maambo & Ciampi, 2023; Mgonda & Ciampi, 2023).

Why is the Learner Guide Programme relevant to Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe?

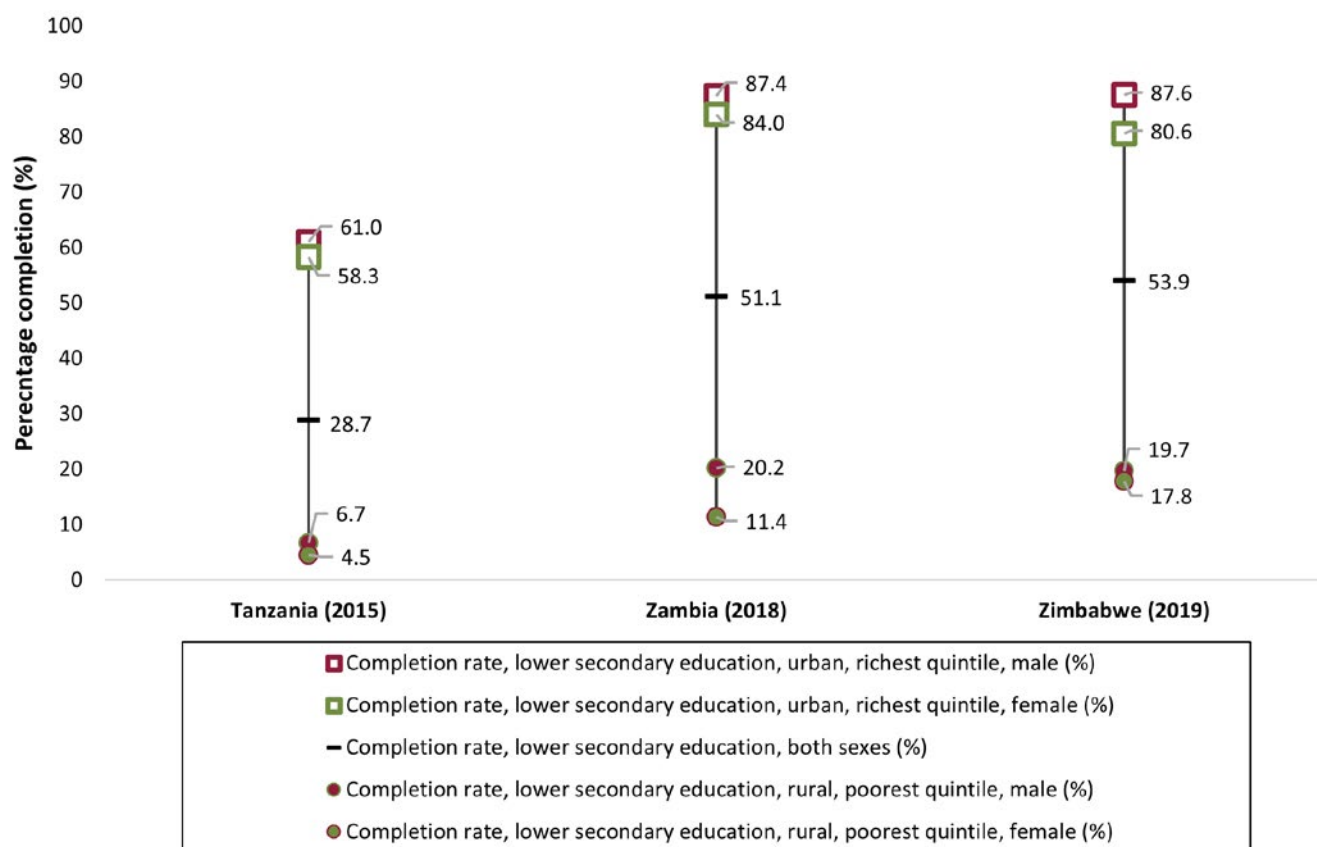


Progress towards gender equality in education and beyond

Gender inequality in education is inter-connected with inequalities in wider society. In the three study countries, the 2021 Gender Inequality Index which measures the three dimensions of reproductive health, empowerment, and the labour market ranks Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe in the 7th lowest percentile of the index (UNDP, 2021). The Global Gender Gap, which measures gender parity across the four dimensions of economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival and political empowerment, shows that all three countries score just over 0.7, with 1 being no gap (World Economic Forum, 2022). Overall, out of 146 countries, Zimbabwe ranks 50th, Zambia ranks 62nd, and Tanzania ranks 64th.

Educational attainment is an important measure of gender parity, as this can unlock life trajectories and pathways beyond school for the most marginalised girls. According to the most recent Demographic and Health Surveys for Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, low completion rates for lower secondary school can be observed: 29% for Tanzania, 51% for Zambia, and 54% for Zimbabwe. Importantly, the data also illustrate that girls from the poorest households who live in rural areas are extremely unlikely to complete lower secondary school in any of the three countries (Figure 4). It must be noted that the low rates for Tanzania are likely to be due to the age of the demographic and health survey data, given the latest data are from 2015. The most recent National Basic Education Statistics from Tanzania identify that 39.5% of students complete secondary education in Tanzania (United Republic of Tanzania, 2021a) indicating an overall improvement of secondary school education completion rate, although the rate still remains low.

Figure 4: Completion rates for lower secondary education in Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe based on wealth quintile and gender



Source: Demographic and Health Survey data, analysed by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics

Beyond gender parity, research suggests that all three countries face similar challenges in terms of gender equality in and through education. These are often amplified by poverty which perpetuates education inequalities, particularly at secondary school level (World Bank, 2023). Gender norms in all three countries continue to influence education participation, such as boys being favoured for education over girls, early marriage of girls, and gender stereotypes of economic and household roles (Beckford & Lekule, 2021; Bengesai et al., 2021; Tina et al., 2020). Early pregnancy also continues to be an important reason why girls drop out of secondary school across the region (Malunga et al., 2023; Moshi & Tilisho, 2023; Mpundu & Sharma, 2023). This is connected to a complex range of factors including poverty, early marriage, lack of parental support, religion, and low educational status (Maharaj, 2022). Early pregnancy and early marriage have been exacerbated by the COVID 19 pandemic (World Vision, 2020). Reports also suggest that school related gender-based violence continues to affect school attendance across most countries in sub-Saharan Africa (Lee & Rudolf, 2022), with female learners being the main victims of sexual violence (Diamond, 2022).

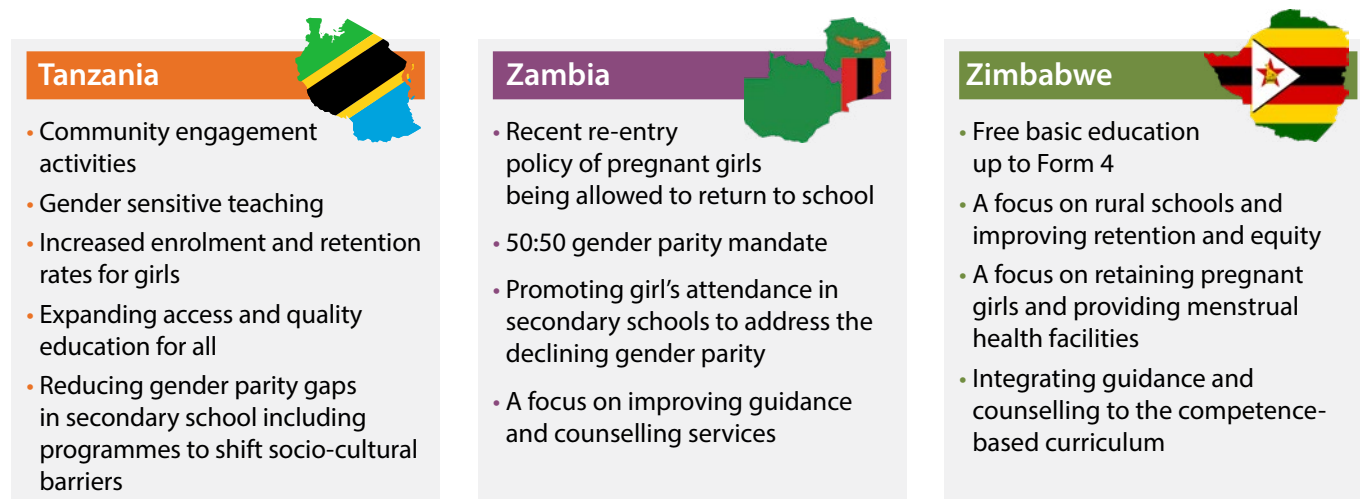
These gender inequalities also extend beyond school. Many girls who complete secondary school continue to face challenges in labour market opportunities, pay, and leadership roles. When coupled with gender norms regarding financial autonomy and control, which often favour men, these challenges affect women's overall economic empowerment (World Bank, 2023). These inequalities highlight that in all three countries, there remains a need to support marginalised girls to complete lower secondary school so that broader goals of gender equality may be supported.



Attention to gender equality in national education and development strategies and plans

In recognition of these challenges, national education and development strategies and plans in all three countries prioritise equity in education and have a broad focus on improving both gender parity and gender equality (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Summary of relevant policy aspects of Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe



All three prioritise learners' development of life skills

The Tanzanian National Strategy for Gender Development cites a range of issues including inadequate teacher training on gender issues, gender biased curricula, social and cultural values, and poverty which all limit girls' access to education (Ministry of Community Development Gender and Children, United Republic of Tanzania, 2005). It identifies aspects to support equitable education and increased enrolment and retention rates for girls such as community engagement and introduction of gender sensitive teacher training and materials. In an effort to support this, the National Five-Year Development Plan identifies that the Tanzanian government has made lower secondary education universal, with the aim of ensuring 'equitable education for all' (Ministry of Finance and Planning, United Republic of Tanzania, 2021b, p 21). In the most recent Education Sector Development Plan, it is noted that the government has focused on reducing the gender parity gap in lower secondary education by aiming to improve staff attitudes to marginalised groups, including girls, implementing community programmes to shift socio-cultural barriers, and support the capacity of 'youth, adult and non-formal education to provide diverse quality, relevant, flexible and recognized learning opportunities' (Ministry of Education Science and Technology, United Republic of Tanzania, 2018, p. 61).

The Zambia Education and Skills Sector Plan 2017-2021 indicates that the government has implemented a re-entry policy for pregnant girls which allows girls the right to stay in school as long as they choose during pregnancy, take maternity leave, and return to school post-partum. It also states that they have implemented a 50:50 gender parity mandate which aims to achieve equal enrolment of girls and boys at entry grade level. It also notes that the government is providing financial support to promote girls' attendance in secondary schools to address the widening of gender disparities found in secondary schools (The Ministry of General Education & The Ministry of Higher Education, Republic of Zambia, 2017).

The Zambian Education and Skills Sector Strategic Plan 2017-2025 relates the limited progress towards gender parity to ongoing issues of teenage pregnancies and has therefore places an increased focus on equipping teachers and guidance and counselling teachers to deliver a 'comprehensive sexuality education' programme (p. 7) and to provide students with improved guidance and counselling services identified as currently having 'limited effectiveness' (p. 64).

Zimbabwe's Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education acknowledges that equity in education remains an issue particularly at secondary school level (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, Republic of Zimbabwe, 2021). It cites reasons including early marriage and pregnancy, household chores, and education not being regarded as important for girls. To address these issues, it is noted that the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education has started to align all education policies to the 2020 Education Amendment Act, which identifies the right for every child to have access to free basic education from early childhood to Form 4. The act also prioritises the retention of pregnant girls in school and the provision of menstrual health facilities (Government of Zimbabwe, 2019).

In all three countries, various strategies and plans also emphasise prioritising learners' development of life skills (Ministry of Finance and National Planning, Republic of Zambia, 2022; Ministry of Finance and Planning, United Republic of Tanzania, 2021b; Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, Republic of Zimbabwe, 2021). National planning documentation of each country uses different language for this. For example, Tanzanian plans refer to these as 'soft skills', Zambian plans refer to them as '21st century skills', and in Zimbabwe, life skills are incorporated in the competence-based curriculum. In all three contexts these skills are viewed as essential for employment and citizenship after school and include aspects such as leadership, morality, and problem solving.

Key areas of alignment of the Learner Guide Programme with national education priorities

The attention in national strategies and plans outlined in the previous section have potential implications for how the Learner Guide Programme could support national priorities in improving equitable education. Throughout the research activities, all government officials from the three countries identified that the Learner Guide Programme aligns with their national priorities. These alignments were reiterated at the regional meeting, with concluding comments of the regional meeting identifying that the Learner Guide Programme can support education systems in all three contexts. These included comments such as:

We have agreed on the fundamentals of what should be adopted. And key is that we have agreed [on] most of the issues that are within the programme [and] to say that this is good for our education systems. (Regional meeting, Education Coalition of Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe)

The specifics of the alignment of the Learner Guide Programme were nuanced within each country, as explored in greater detail in each country brief. We highlight the notable similarities across the three countries in the following sub-sections.



Supporting equity in education

Government officials in all three countries indicated that the Learner Guide Programme aligns with national plans that address issues of equity in their education systems. For example, Tanzanian officials identified the programmes' alignment with national priorities supporting girls to access and transition to higher education; Zambian officials noted alignment between the programme and the national priority of improving learning outcomes; and Zimbabwean officials highlighted the alignment between the programme and the national priority of supporting and tracking dropouts. This alignment was reiterated at the regional meeting. For example, one Tanzanian government official at the regional meeting outlined how the Learner Guide Programme closely aligns with the Tanzanian Government's support from the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), and the government's Secondary Education Quality Improvement Project (SEQUIP). This alignment was perceived as important to support the scaling up of the Learner Guide Programme:

The GPE supported programmes and SEQUIP corresponds with the Learner Guide Programme as both of these programmes and the Learner Guide Programme aim at enhancing universal access to education and participation to quality education to all children, and specific attention is on those learners who are coming from vulnerable and marginalised groups. And further, these two programmes are striving to translate effectively the issues of equitable access that is stressed in order to improve retention and learning outcomes. The scaling up of the Learner Guide Programme has come at the right time because, as a country, we have programmes which are having similar objectives that are ongoing and are running within government ... so it will be easier for Learner Guide Programme interventions to be accommodated within the government systems for their smooth implementation. (Regional meeting, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Tanzania)

Supporting life skills

All three countries identified an alignment between the life skills component of the Learner Guide Programme and the national priority for improving learner skills beyond academic achievement. Government officials from all three countries also identified that the programme presents opportunities to integrate life skills through the My Better World lessons into the national curricula.

Reiterating this at the regional meeting, one Zambian official identified that:

Through the My Better World programme, the learners are equipped with new vocabulary so that they can better express, explore and learn ... If you look at the learners that are involved in the Learner Guide Programme, they are just doing what is being discussed there. They discuss issues, they explore issues, they learn from their work. And it is these kinds of skills that will help our learners even turn into learners who are able to apply a skill and implement it ... The learners are encouraged to think critically, logically and thoughtfully ... They become very, very responsible citizens. If ... we learn about skills from early childhood education to university education, these components are lacking. The Learner Guide Programme for me, I see it filling a very big gap ... This helps to build confidence, set goals, and be more assertive. All in all, this can enhance the skill development in our learners ... So, for Zambia we are saying that if we truly want our citizens, our children to become more skilful, more industrious and creative, we can adopt the Learner Guide Programme. (Regional meeting, Ministry of Education, Zambia)



Supporting guidance and counselling services

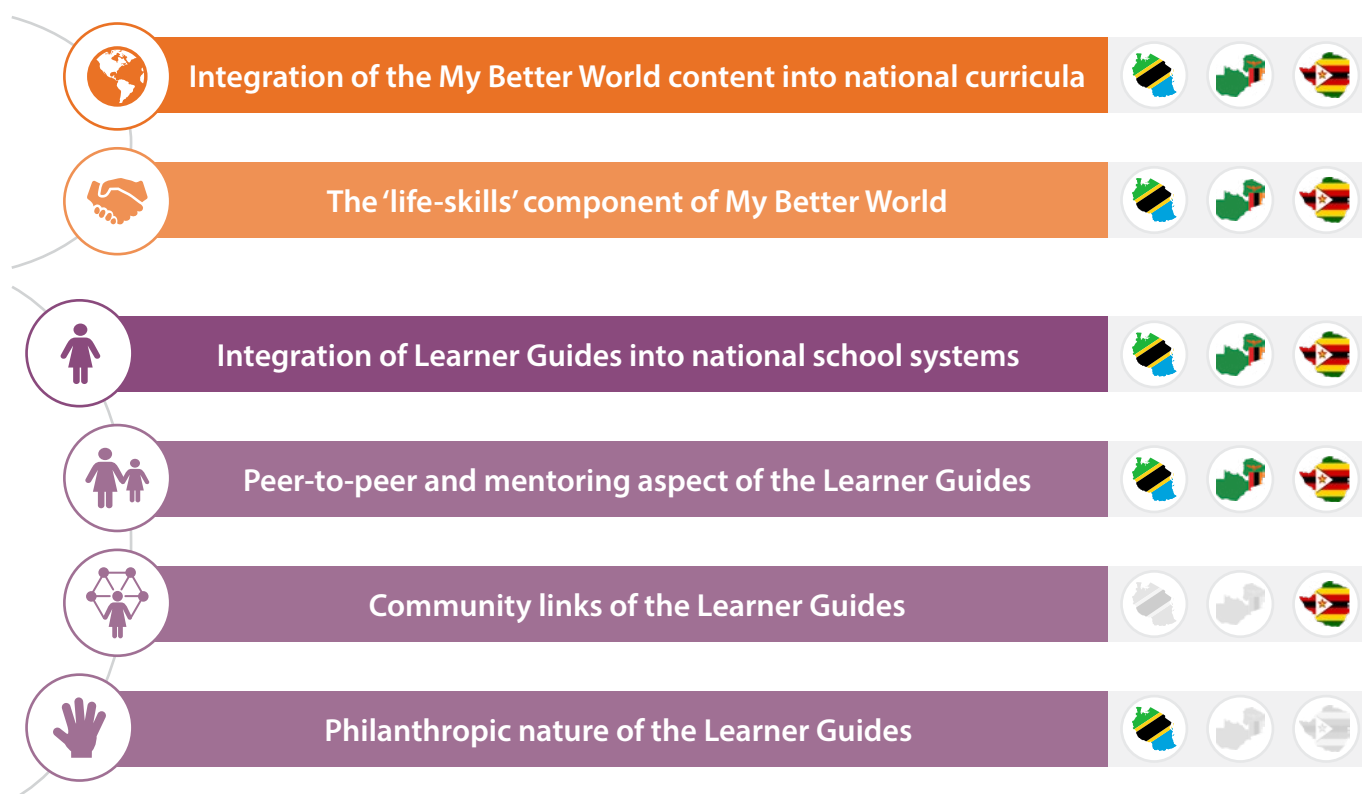
Tanzanian, Zambian, and Zimbabwean government officials also identified alignment of the Learner Guide Programme to the guidance and counselling services and syllabi. For example, one Zimbabwean government official identified several ways in which the Learner Guide Programme has been supporting the Zimbabwean government to reach targets set in the national education strategy. These include examples such as the Learner Guides working with school development committees and forming mother support groups to help with school feeding, as well as CAMFED's engagement in developing training for guidance and counselling teachers. This official identified that the Learner Guide Programme aligns directly with Zimbabwean national education plans and strategies:

We have got a programme where the Learner Guide Programme falls under ... whose outcomes are to improve access to affordable quality education, to improve retention, completion, and transition rates. To enhance quality of learning, and [this] programme ... has got three sub programmes. It has got the learner welfare, it has got the psychological services, it has got the special needs section. We work with quite a number of partners in this area ... and CAMFED is one of the partners that we work with ... so that is how the Learner Guide Programme sees itself in the ministry. (Regional meeting, Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, Zimbabwe)

Government officials also noted that Learner Guides have links within the communities that enable them to provide additional support to the guidance and counselling teachers. However, there remains a need to define the roles and capacity support of Learner Guides, as discussed further below.

Prioritised aspects of the Learner Guide Programme for scaling up

Government officials in all three countries agreed that integration of the My Better World content into national curricula was a priority due to the life skills component. They also all agreed that the integration of Learner Guides into national school systems should also be prioritised due their peer-to-peer mentoring. Additionally Zimbabwean officials prioritised the community links provided by the Learner Guides, and Tanzanian official prioritised the philanthropic nature of the Learner Guides volunteering.



Integration of the My Better World content into national curricula

As the My Better World programme aligns with the national plans in all three countries, this was identified by government officials as an important aspect of the Learner Guide Programme to retain. Government officials from all three countries prioritised the 'life skills' aspect of the Learner Guide Programme as a priority to scale. This sentiment was reiterated at the regional meeting where officials identified that it should be an overarching priority to integrate the content of the My Better World programme into national education systems, with one of the discussion groups from the regional meeting saying that:

We all have agreed to the fact the My Better World is linked to the existing curriculum content particularly on the life skills and civic education and in all these countries this ... concurs with their own institutions so we can easily link the My Better World with the existing curriculum mandate in our countries. (Regional meeting, SAC Member Group 6)

Suggestions to scale up this aspect of the Learner Guide Programme include further engagement with relevant ministries and forums to support the integration of the My Better World content into the various national curricula by leveraging the strong links between My Better World and the national curricula identified. In Tanzania, there are direct links with the guidance and counselling syllabus, while in Zimbabwe there are strong connections with the existing Competence Based Curriculum, and Zambia has a pending curriculum review which is a good opportunity for strategic engagement.

In addition, as elaborated further in the country briefs, several practical suggestions from government officials to adapt the My Better World programme include:

- Splitting the books into smaller, age-appropriate sections
- Adding a section on 'entrepreneurship' to the content
- Ensuring the cover of the books are made stronger and more durable.



Integration of the Learner Guides into national school systems

As discussed further in the country briefs, government officials recognised that the young women who are Learner Guides are a core part of the effectiveness of the Learner Guide Programme. Officials from all three countries identified that the 'peer-to-peer' mentoring aspect provided by the Learner guides as being a priority. Zimbabwean officials also prioritised the community links and community connections that the Learner Guides bring the schools systems, and Tanzanian officials noted that it is was important to retain philanthropic nature of the Learner Guides volunteering.

These points were reiterated at the regional meeting, and were reflected in comments such as:

We also noted that there is a very important aspect of the peer-to-peer connection that we do not want to lose while we continue to implement this programme. We also noted that there is another very important aspect [of]... the community linkages that we get from the Learner Guide Programme. (Regional meeting, SAC Member Group 5)

Aspects of the Learner Guide Programme that need further consideration for scaling up

When discussing how to scale up aspects of the programme identified in the previous section, there were several areas that were identified as needing further consideration. While there were some contextual differences (as detailed in the country briefs), this section highlights areas of similarity.





Sustainable financing for the programme

The overarching concern between the three countries about supporting the scaling up process of the Learner Guide Programme was the need for it to be financially sustainable:

Critically also we should look at ... what is the sustainability plan beyond [what] CAMFED [is] looking at. We are advocating [to] government at a time when governments are really struggling with issues to do with education finance ... What is also critical to CAMFED and partners... is how we are going to package the report ... We need to introduce these issues bit by bit and we need come up with a plan of which one comes first. (Regional meeting, Education Coalition of Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe)

There were several suggestions made by SAC members to enable long term funding. SAC members discussed mechanisms to support the financial sustainability of scaling up the programme. All three countries recommended going beyond the ministry of education and working with other relevant ministries such as the ministries responsible for youth and community development.

We talked about the budgetary constraints whereby we are asking those questions ... [such as] 'how are governments going to be funding this scaling up to the Learner Guide Programme in the schools?'. ... We can ... improve co-ordination between local authorities, ministries and other different institutions ... We can ask our government to consider budgeting for the funding of the programme, and we can also bring in different other people to come and help us to fund this programme. (Regional meeting, SAC member Group 5)

Sustainable financing has implications of if and how Learner Guides are kept in their current role, or if the delivery of the My Better World programme would fall to other formally employed teaching staff.



Defining the role of the Learner Guides

Whilst there was general agreement that ideally the Learner Guides should be retained as part of the scaling up process, the practicalities and feasibility of this was debated. One of the major challenges concerned sourcing sustainable channels of funding to support remuneration costs such as local travel reimbursements. Currently Learner Guides volunteer to deliver My Better World lessons and provide mentorship to students, and there was a consensus between government stakeholders that Learner Guides, even if they are volunteering, should receive some form of remuneration.

If Learner Guides were to continue in their current volunteering role, government officials suggested that the Learner Guides could continue to provide peer support in the form of school clubs, sticking with their current volunteer arrangement:

The question has been asked lots of times ... 'what is the role of Learner Guides in the schools? Are Learner Guides teachers? Do they have space within the schools?' ... We were thinking that ... while the teachers are also taking up the programme, for us not to lose the peer-to-peer connection and for us not to lose the community connections, we can also use the existence of clubs. (Regional meeting, SAC Member Group 5)

Making use of the Learner Guides in school clubs would ensure there was some differentiation between Learner Guides and teachers, and between Learner Guides and guidance and counselling teachers. This differentiation between the three was noted as an important point of consideration for government officials because of mandates around formal teaching qualifications required for delivering formal lessons in schools; a qualification which Learner Guides currently lack.

If it was not possible to address the financial challenges of retaining Learner Guides fully, an alternative strategy was suggested that the My Better World subject content could be taught by teachers, and the social support component could be delivered by the guidance and counselling teachers. It was also suggested that there could be some training for teachers to provide some 'peer-to-peer' support so that the prioritised element of 'peer-to-peer' learning is not lost:

The government can train teachers in school on the My Better World programme to help scale up the Learner Guide Programme so that if we have the assistance of teachers the programme will scale. Also, the Guidance and Counselling teachers can take up the social component from the My Better World programmes. And also, the government can offer training for a few days to ensure the continuity of peer-to-peer support in school [so] it is easy to form a relationship with the learners. (Regional meeting, SAC Member Group 4)

However, it was noted by several government officials that one of the primary reasons that the peer-to-peer dimension of the Learner Guide Programme is successful is because the vertical power relationship between the student and teacher is not present between the student and Learner Guide. This is in part due to the less formal role of the Learner Guide, but also due to similarities in age and community background. These nuanced dimensions would be lost should the teaching staff take on aspects of the current Learner Guide role.



Learner Guide training and support

For the programme to be scaled up, government officials suggested that if the Learner Guides could be retained in their current role as mentors and facilitators of the My Better World content, there would be a need to formalise their training and support. This would provide them with the necessary professional development to ensure that the support and teaching services they deliver to learners were of sufficient quality. This professional development of the Learner Guides was deemed important by all three countries. There were several recommendations of mechanisms to support long-term capacity development including increasing the training of the Learner Guides on psychosocial support:

Another point is to include psychosocial support in the training content of the Learner Guides. In this case, maybe the component is there, but the one that is there, it is not enough for the Learner Guides to deal with the psychosocial issues of the learners. (Regional meeting, SAC Member Group 8)

Another suggestion was ensuring that teacher mentors were better equipped to provide Learner Guides with ongoing support in their teaching skill development:

We can also strengthen the teacher mentors ... to make sure that .. they can help these Learner Guides ... to continually train them so that they learn the skills to deliver these sessions ... to help them to have these very important classroom skills. (Regional meeting, SAC Member Group 5)

Two other suggestions were put forward which aimed to support the Learner Guides' progress in their career pathways. The first suggestion was that that Learner Guides could be credited with 'notable experience' which could support them in their future career paths:

Let the government consider the prospect of giving incentives to the Learner Guides through payment of credits, providing opportunity for further training and giving preference [to] the Learner Guides during government teacher recruiting ... In Tanzania ... volunteering is part [of] the consideration [for recruitment], therefore through this volunteering of Learner Guides they can be considered [at] the time...the government comes for recruitment. (Regional meeting, SAC Member Group 7)

Connected to this, another group suggested that Learner Guides could undertake a formal qualification during their time as a Learner Guide:

[What] we have seen ... is the training of Learner Guides with a BTEC and we all have agreed that this is really possible by using the available qualification ... to a point of bringing Learner Guides to a level of training recognition. (Regional meeting, SAC Member Group 6)

Another suggestion was to include the Learner Guide Programme into the national teacher training curriculum:

We recommend the Learner Guide Programme to be included in [the] teacher training programme. This should be added to the content of the teachers in such a way that it can add value to the teacher training curriculum. (Regional meeting, SAC Member Group 7)

This suggestion points towards other discussions about integrating the My Better World content into the national curricula, and potentially equipping teachers so that they can deliver or make use of the relevant aspects of the My Better World content in their teaching.



Formally integrating the My Better World content into the national curriculum

Tanzanian and Zambian government officials identified some potential difficulties in formally integrating the My Better World content into the national curriculum. Government officials cited the need to ensure that there was no duplication between My Better World and existing national curricula; particularly those aspects which focus on life skills. Tanzanian government officials also noted the potential trade off if the My Better World content was to be integrated into formal teaching as this might jeopardise the 'transformative' nature of the whole programme. Discussions at the regional meeting identified different points of view on integrating the Learner Guide Programme into the current education systems. One group suggested that the existing teachers, and guidance and counselling teachers could be trained to teach the core aspects of the Learner Guide Programme:

The government can train teachers in school on the My Better World programme to help scale up the Learner Guide Programme so that if we have the assistance of teacher[s] the programme will scale. Also, the Guidance and Counselling teachers can take up the social component from the My Better World programmes. And also the government can offer training for a few days to ensure the continuity of peer to peer support in school so it is easy to form a relationship with the learners. (Regional meeting, SAC Member Group 4)

Other groups suggested that there is a need to keep the Learner Guide in place because if this role is shifted to teachers and guidance and counselling teachers, the community links and peer-to-peer aspects of the programme will be lost:

While we don't lose focus about all those other possibilities ... we also noted that there is a very important aspect of the peer-to-peer connection that we do not want to lose while we continue to implement this programme. ... we also noted that there is another very important aspect [and] that is the community linkages that we are getting from the Learner Guide Programme in the model that we are implementing right now .. so in our group we were just trying to say how can we do it...[and] still preserve that peer-to-peer. (Regional meeting, SAC Member Group 5)

Another consideration of formally integrating the My Better World content into the national curriculum was how this could be formally timetabled within schools. Both Zambian and Zimbabwean government officials expressed concern over how the Learner Guide Programme could be formally timetabled given the existing difficulties of the already overloaded school lesson timetable. As noted previously, suggestions to overcome this included scheduling the My Better World lessons outside of core learning hours. However, this has implications on attendance and engagement levels of students. This was reiterated at the regional meeting with one SAC member identifying that:

The Learner Guide comes in after the [formal timetabled] lessons, but there is a concern that the My Better World lessons are depriving students from the academic learning. But we have to get this in the formal programme because of the effectiveness. (Regional meeting, Ministry of Education, Zambia)

Opportunities to support scaling up of the Learner Guide Programme

Given an overarching concern for financial sustainability to ensure continuation of the Learner Guide Programme, which has implications for if and how Learner Guides can be maintained in their current roles and the delivery of the My Better World programme, this section summarises key proposals by SAC members for achieving this.



Sustained and strategic advocacy for awareness and adaptation

Across all three countries, government officials identified the need for sustained and strategic advocacy to ensure that policy makers are aware of the Learner Guide Programme and its relevance to the country's educational system. They also suggested this continued engagement is necessary to address the areas of the programme which require further consideration for adaption and adoption. To achieve this, government officials from the three countries suggested the need for inter ministry advocacy with comments such as:

In order to solve that problem [of scaling up], I think three ministries have to sit together see how to deal with it, which are President's Office Regional Administration and Local Government, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Work, so as they can ponder on how they can accommodate them. (Regional meeting, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Tanzania)

I think CAMFED must intensify the campaign to take advantage of the Education Coalition Group ... I have never heard this issue being discussed [there]. It's time that they introduce the story to the Education Coalition Group so that they really understand what needs to be done. (Regional meeting, Education Coalition of Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe)

It's just an issue of us making sure that we sensitise the Learner Guide, sensitise the schools, sensitise ... [the] [SAC] members and go further and discuss and talk at even high level over these issues. (Key informant interview, Ministry of Education, Zambia)

As elaborated upon in the country briefs, the three countries specifically identified key institutions and groups to target with this additional engagement.

Strategic engagement in upcoming curricular reviews

Zambian government officials identified a need to design the advocacy work strategically around the upcoming curriculum review, and use this process as an opportunity to raise the profile of the Learner Guide Programme with national policy makers and to consider its integration into the national curriculum:

Currently there is the curriculum review process that will be taking place this year where there will be wider consultation taking place around what we want to see in our curriculum ... Part of what we can do in the short term is really to engage in the curriculum review process with very concrete evidence around ... how we want this to be addressed in the curriculum and how we want government to really take it up ... [so that we can] have government at least state or recognise the importance so that we can use that to push government to the level of ensuring that the scaling up of the programme sits in the plans and budget of the ministry. (Key informant interview, Zambia National Education Coalition)



Sourcing sustainable finance

Leveraging ministries beyond the ministry of education

As discussed previously, one of the primary considerations that government officials from all three countries identified is the need for financial viability. Several officials noted that the ministries of education are financially stretched but, given the nature of the Learner Guide Programme, there are opportunities to leverage other ministries beyond the ministry of education for financial support.

As noted in detail in the country briefs, government officials in all three countries identified that the Learner Guide Programme aligns with the mandates of other ministries including those for youth, women and gender, and community development ministries, at national and local levels. This message was reiterated during the regional meeting with comments from government officials such as:

We have said all the countries have existing structures which are already there in the ministries of education. We have counselling and guidance teams ... we have learner welfare departments in the ministries ... we call them by different names but in all the three countries we have these structures ... so we want to mainstream the Learner Guide activities into all those structures within the ministry of education itself. In addition to the ministry of education themselves, we also have other ministries that are also critical in working with Learner Guides – ministries that are responsible for youth, ministries for women and young women, ministries that are responsible for development in our districts that are local councils ... we were saying that we should work with all those different departments because they also have something that they can contribute towards the Learner Guide Programme. (Regional meeting, SAC Member Group 5)

Supporting this idea, another group added that:

We aim to push to formalise the programme so that all parts of the government attached to the education sector can adhere to this circular. (Regional meeting, SAC Member Group 7)

Building on community funding models

Zambian and Zimbabwean government officials raised the possibility of engaging with community funding models which have been successful in other programmes, such as payment for Early Childhood Development teachers in Zimbabwe who were paid by the parents. One Zambian government official also noted that:

One of the most immediate solutions of paying [the] Learner Guide is ... they should be put into the plan at school level ..., even through the communities themselves. Parent Teacher Associations sometimes have done several things in this way. (Key informant interview, Ministry of Education, Zambia)

Making use of voluntary support mechanisms

Some officials expressed an interest in retaining the philanthropic or volunteering aspect of the Learner Guides, which could also contribute to financial sustainability. Government officials in Tanzania and Zambia identified that this is aligned with their national priorities. Zambian government officials identified that the National Volunteering Policy outlines how to navigate the issues of stipends for volunteers, and that this has been used to support the Community Health Workers. Tanzanian government officials identified that the Prime Minister's Office is mandated to support youth and volunteer development. Zimbabwean official indicated that there is not currently a fund in place in the national ministries which supports voluntary work.

Conclusions

This regional brief draws together findings from across Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe to identify key aspects of scaling up the Learner Guide Programme.

The research identifies that the Learner Guide Programme is deemed to be contextually relevant to all three of the study countries. Government officials identified that the programme aligns with core areas of national policies and plans, particularly in the areas of supporting equity within education, life skills, and guidance and counselling services.

Government officials in all three countries further identified that integration of the life skills component of My Better World in the national curriculum is a priority. They also identified that the integration of the peer mentoring and community link aspects of the Learner Guides are important to retain during scaling up.

However, there are areas that need further discussion to enable the scaling up of the Learner Guide Programme. Importantly, there is a need to identify sustainable financing for the programme. If it is financially viable to scale up the Learner Guide Programme in its entirety, there will still be a need to clarify the role of Learner Guides in relation to the formal teachers and guidance and counselling teachers. There will also be a need to consider how Learner Guides are given formal training and support that aligns with national standards. If it is not financially viable, one suggestion is that teachers could deliver the My Better World content, and guidance and counselling teachers could provide the social support given by the Learner Guide. However, concerns were raised about the loss of peer-to-peer mentoring in this instance. There also remains a need to determine whether and how to integrate the My Better World content formally into the national curricula. Concerns including the duplication of existing life skills content and challenges of formally timetabling My Better World lessons within already overloaded school timetables need to be addressed. One possibility was for My Better World sessions to be done after the formal school day, perhaps as an after-school club, but this raises issues with student participation and attendance once the school day is over.

Given the need for continued discussion about the identified areas for further consideration, government officials identified the need for strategic advocacy to grow awareness of the Learner Guide Programme and develop opportunities for critical engagement to enable scaling up. Vitrally, the financial viability of the scaling process must be addressed, so government officials identified three avenues which could support this which include leveraging relevant ministries beyond the ministry of education, building on community funding models, and making use of existing volunteer support mechanisms.

Endnotes

- ⁱ The ethical research boards included the Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology, the Excellence Research Ethics & Science Converge of Zambia, and the Research Council of Zimbabwe.
- ⁱⁱ The Zambian committee preferred the term Scaling Technical Committee (STC). For ease, we use the term Scaling Advisory Committee (SAC) for all three countries in this paper.

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