Scaling up a life skills and mentorship programme led by young women in Tanzania’s national education system: Opportunities, challenges, and actionable steps

Country brief: Tanzania

Image Credit: Eliza Powell/CAMFED
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The Tanzanian government officials who participated in the Scaling Advisory Committee (SAC) suggest that CAMFED’s Learner Guide Programme is well aligned with national priorities. A review of relevant government plans in Tanzania indicates synergies between the Learner Guide Programme and the following national frameworks and plans:

- Complementing secondary school guidance and counselling services identified in the 2010 National Life Skills Education Framework.
- Addressing the current gap in essential ‘soft skills’ needed for employment identified in the 2021/22 - 2025/26 National Five-Year Development Plan.
- Improving access and participation of young women in school and beyond identified in the Five-Year National Development Plan.

The key elements of the Learner Guide Programme identified by SAC members for scaling up include:

- The peer-to-peer mentoring approach provided by the Learner Guides.
- The inclusion of the life skills as taught through the My Better World programme.
- The spirit of ‘giving back’ to the community.

SAC members agreed that overall, the Learner Guide Programme can support the Tanzanian education system in multiple ways. They identified three areas which would need further consideration if it were to be scaled up:

- To provide further support for Learner Guides with professional development in different teaching methodologies.
- For the My Better World lessons to be expanded across all Forms.
- To connect the National Life Skills syllabus and the content of My Better World.

SAC members also identified some additional ways to support feasible scaling up the Learner Guide Programme including leveraging ministries beyond the Ministry of Education, engaging with the local district authorities, and potentially working with teachers to deliver the My Better World programme.
Introduction and research overview

Operating in Tanzania since 2013, CAMFED’s Learner Guide Programme aims to support girls in secondary schools to strengthen self-development and foundational learning skills, thus encouraging them to stay in school and improve their learning outcomes. 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 in their studies. Supported by the CAMFED Association, teachers, and school authorities, the Learner Guides deliver a life skills and wellbeing programme to students called My Better World and provide peer-to-peer mentorship to students, and have roles on school and community committees. As an incentive for volunteering, the Learner Guides also receive access to interest–free loans to open up business opportunities for them.

Figure 1: The Learner Guide Programme

This policy brief is based on our research that set out to identify the following:

- The perspectives of the Tanzanian government towards the potential for scaling up the Learner Guide Programme.
- The key elements considered to be most feasible and appropriate to adapt and adopt.
- How scaling up might be achieved.

CAMFED Tanzania set up a Scaling Advisory Committee (SAC) which is primarily comprised of representatives from government agencies including:

- Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
- National Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training
- President’s Office, Regional Administration and Local Government
- Prime Minister’s Office, Labour, Youth, Employment and Persons with Disability
- Tanzanian Education Network/Mtandao wa Elimu Tanzania
- Tanzania Institute of Education
- Tanzanian Institute of Adult Education
- District Education Officers from Handeni, Iringa, Malinyi, Ilala, Kibaha.
The SAC members were asked to undertake various activities to help them understand the Learner Guide Programme, identify if and how it was relevant to Tanzanian education systems, and explore what aspects of the programme could be scaled up and how.

The analysis presented in this policy brief is based on fifteen interviews with Tanzanian government officials who were SAC members, three observations of in-country meeting discussions amongst SAC members, and three visits to schools implementing the Learner Guide Programme by SAC members to observe CAMFED’s Learner Guide Programme in action. All data has been fully anonymised and the authors have not included the job role or gender of the speakers to ensure anonymity is protected.

The schools were selected by CAMFED in districts where the Learner Guide Programme is considered to be well established. All selected schools were secondary schools which had at least one two-hour lesson of the My Better World scheduled per week and had a minimum of two Learner Guides in place. Two schools where the Learner Guide Programme was operating well, and one school which had some challenges with implementing the Learner Guide Programme were identified by CAMFED to ensure that SAC members had a balanced view of the programme.

Why is the Learner Guide Programme relevant to Tanzania?

The Tanzanian government’s initiatives to provide fee-free education in all public primary and secondary schools have shown positive results in terms of improved enrolment at pre-primary, primary, and secondary school levels (United Republic of Tanzania, 2014, 2021a). However, some children remain unable to complete primary or secondary school - particularly those most disadvantaged due to poverty and gender. According to the most recent National Basic Education Statistics, only 39.5% of students complete secondary education in Tanzania (United Republic of Tanzania, 2021a).

According to the Tanzanian government, reasons for children not completing school include a lack of awareness or negative attitudes towards education and schooling, poverty, distance from home to school, and cultural aspects such as teen marriages, teen pregnancies, divorce, polygamy, and menstrual health issues (United Republic of Tanzania, 2021a).

In the ongoing educational reforms and priorities outlined in the National Five-Year Development Plan 2021/22 - 2025/26 (United Republic of Tanzania, 2021b), the Tanzanian government in partnership with stakeholders in the education sector is working towards expanding access and quality education to all students regardless of their socio-economic status. They are also working towards youth empowerment through “life skills education” and “peer educators” (United Republic of Tanzania, 2021b, p. 24). Linked to this, the government is prioritising the “behavioural nature of soft skills” needed for employment (United Republic of Tanzania, 2021b, p. 5). These soft skills include aspects such as communication skills, self-confidence, problem solving, and attitudes towards work and teamwork. Demonstrating the commitment to these directives, the Tanzanian government is currently “reforming the education curriculum in line with labour market demand” (United Republic of Tanzania, 2021b, p. VI). In addition, it officially now allows pregnant girls to return to school.

Seven out of ten SAC members identified that there is alignment between the Learner Guide Programme and national education initiatives. Of these, many agreed that this programme has the potential to support the national Tanzanian education system. For example:
Perspectives on scaling up CAMFED’s programme in Tanzania

This section presents findings related to the potential to scale up CAMFED’s Learner Guide programme in Tanzania, based on the perspectives of government officials who participated in the SAC activities.

The Learner Guide Programme can support secondary school guidance and counselling services

Despite the role of guidance and counselling services in promoting life skills in schools as identified in the soon to be updated National Life Skills Education Framework (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, 2010), eight out of ten SAC members reported an absence of trained counsellors in schools. This was reinforced by teachers and students in schools visited. This is supported by a recent study which showed that despite teacher-counsellors being “fairly available” in public schools, the quality of this service is inadequate largely due to the lack of specialisation and training of the appointed staff members (Kazimoto, 2022, p.87). This means that there is insufficient support to facilitate students’ wellbeing.

The presence of Learner Guides in the schools and communities was viewed as giving the opportunity for students to freely report their concerns and find support. Teachers who were interviewed noted that students found Learner Guides were more accessible to students regarding difficulties they were facing due to similarities in age and experience:

“They have a good relationship since they are almost the same age group, and for that they have a close relationship and students are having freedom around them. The interaction among them is very good even when a student meets with challenges such as health issues they reach out to them without fear and with easiness.” (Group Discussion with teachers during a school visit).

Linked to this, findings from a group discussion with teachers in a school visited suggested that Learner Guides are providing essential links between the schools, students, parents, and community:

“As teachers, we cannot see beyond school, but these Learner Guides have been useful in following up on students with issues, linking us with parents, and have always come to the rescue of students, especially girls who have a higher risk of dropping out from school.” (Group discussion with teachers during a school visit).

This connection between the Learner Guides, the school, and the community adds to the support systems needed by vulnerable or struggling students. For example, one SAC member noted that:
The Learner Guide Programme can support the current gap in essential ‘soft skills’ needed for employment

The National Five-Year Development Plan notes that there is an “urgent need to address the mismatch between the level of skills employers look for in job seekers” (United Republic of Tanzania, 2021b, p. 22). All SAC members interviewed identified that they felt that the Learner Guide Programme contributes to academic learning and personal development which are essential skills for the education system, with one member noting:

*This part of life skills … this is one of the weaknesses of our system … in terms of soft skills … and these Learner Guides are an alternative way which can import some of it, so they are very important in our education system for importing soft skills, life skills and also mentorship.* (Prime Minister’s Office, Labour, Youth, Employment and Persons with Disability).

Those interviewed expressed the view that students have improved in academic performance and social-emotional competencies both at home and in school. Changes that were identified in students’ behaviour included aspects such as goal setting, responsibility, and self-confidence:

*Set[ting] goals for themselves … [and] being very responsible and respectful.* (Parents Group Discussion during a school visit).

*The students are now expressive and not afraid to ask questions and they can communicate very well and are daring to ask questions in all classes because of this programme.* (President’s Office, Regional Administration and Local Government).

SAC members valued improvements in academic outcomes and personal development linked to the Learner Guide Programme. This outcome aligns with one of the ‘Salient Features’ identified in the National Five-Year Development Plan which identifies the need for “interventions that address the problem of low soft skills (knowledge, creativity, persistence, self-drive and attitude)” to overcome the mismatch between the skills demanded by employers when compared to training by academic institutions (United Republic of Tanzania, 2021b, p. 5).
The Learner Guide Programme improves access and participation of young women in school and beyond

The Learner Guide Programme supports girls to complete secondary school

SAC members noted that the Learner Guide Programme has a key role in enabling marginalised learners (typically girls) to complete school, especially as a result of role models and peer-to-peer learning. As such, the Learner Guide Programme is seen to support marginalised girls to complete secondary school. This ultimately opens pathways for young women to participate in employment or further education:

[The programme has achieved] raising in academic performance. Now we can find girls who were marginalized but they [have] gone so far through this you can see that they have benefited from this programme through follow ups and counselling and their independence has been raised so you can see it’s real. (Kibaha District Council).

SAC members also identified that the Learner Guide Programme “has helped in aspects of student drop outs and school absence.” (Kibaha District Council).

The Learner Guide Programme supports young women to transition to work and further education

SAC members also identified that the Learner Guide Programme aligns with the national directive related to supporting internships to facilitate employability. Such opportunities enable graduates to “acquire workplace experience and academic knowledge to work environments.” (The United Republic of Tanzania, 2017, p. vii). One SAC member identified that the Learner Guide Programme endorses this approach saying that:

The guideline about internship that was given by the Prime Minister was very helpful … and I think what should be done to the Learner Guides is that they should be trained like other teachers … [and] that the government should … establish an education centre for them either at teachers colleges or University of Dar es Salaam so as they can be trained for a period of time. (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology).

Comments such as these identify that not only does the Learner Guide Programme align with national movements towards volunteering and internships to support vocational skills gaps, but also that it could provide women with a pathway to tertiary education; an aspect identified in the Five-Year National Development Plan.
Prioritised aspects of the Learner Guide Programme to scale up

Drawing on the recognised importance and alignment of the Learner Guide Programme, as noted above in the findings of the research, the SAC members identified three key aspects that they considered should be prioritised during the scaling up process which include:

• The peer-to-peer mentoring provided by the Learner Guides.
• The inclusion of the life skills taught through the My Better World programme.
• The spirit of ‘giving back’ to the community.

The peer-to-peer mentoring approach provided by the Learner Guides

SAC members identified that the peer-to-peer mentoring approach of the Learner Guide Programme should be scaled up because of how it supports the guidance and counselling aspects of education. Firstly, because of the ‘peer’ position held by the Learner Guides, students are able to openly discuss difficult topics. In addition, the Learner Guide connection to the community was deemed important as this link helps Learner Guides to identify at-risk students, alert the school and parents, and provide support. Both these aspects are captured by a government official:

“
I like the peer mentoring which is one the powerful means to promote retention and to get children to trust the Learner Guides which is different from parental or teacher mentoring ... You may notice a level of aggressiveness that Learner Guides has as to how they make follow up even to the high authority. (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology).
"

While peer-to-peer mentoring has been identified as a priority aspect of the programme to scale up, SAC members have also noted there is a need to ensure that it links with existing guidance and counselling frameworks:

“
There should be an awareness between ruling and guiding that if we are integrating them, there are some aspects that will be restructured in a way that we will unpack each element to see those which can be maintained because there are some elements that can’t be removed. (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology).
"

The inclusion of the life skills as taught through the My Better World programme

All SAC members supported the role of My Better World lessons in building the life skills of the students, and some suggested that the My Better World content could support the national life skills curriculum content:

“
Though it is a big book, it ... can be linked with other programmes in the education ... and I think us as government has a role to play so as we can harmonise this programme to become one with other programmes. (President’s Office, Regional Administration and Local Government).
"
The SAC members noted that life skills are important because most of the cases of dropping out from school, teen pregnancy, truancy, and others could be minimised if students had proper training and guidance on life skills:

"Life skills would empower students to make informed decisions and manage their risk environment when at home and at school. (President's Office, Regional Administration and Local Government)."

Although this aspect was prioritised by SAC members, one SAC member noted that there was some duplication between the life skills taught in the My Better World lessons and the life skills that are part of the National Curriculum, but that Learner Guides were better positioned to deliver this effectively:

"They are two policies working in parallel, but seriousness is in this side of Learner Guide. (National Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training)."

The spirit of ‘giving back’ to the community

SAC members identified that the Learner Guide Programme encourages volunteering and community engagement and is a core component that should be retained, as it supports the spirit of ‘patriotism’ and ‘giving back’ to the community. One member noted that:

"What the nation wants is to raise the spirit of patriotism and raise an awareness of youth giving back to the nation in regard to everything that it has offered to them. And volunteering is one way of doing so, hence I think that aspect should not be removed …What I like in Learner Guide Programme is that spirit of volunteerism …the Guiders are volunteers, and they are doing it passionately which, nowadays, it is not likely to find such readiness. (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology)."

Aspects of the Learning Guide Programme for further consideration

The discussions in the Tanzanian SAC meetings show that, despite the strong case for scaling up, there remains a need to consider the practicalities of the following areas of the Learner Guide Programme:

Learner Guides to be supported with professional development and different teaching methodologies

Notwithstanding the ability of the Learner Guides to engage with students, five out of ten of the SAC members identified some specific areas where Learner Guides could be improved to support the professional development of Learner Guides while they were volunteering. The identified areas included handling classroom assessments as well as mastery of different teaching methodologies. In the same vein, teachers in schools discussed this point noting:
It was also noted by one SAC member that he viewed the training of Learner Guides could be a means of professionalisation (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology). This might enable them to acquire formal employment requirements within the government structure. He noted that “then the government could give them priority in employment”. This could potentially solve the challenge of incentives while developing the Learner Guides’ individual career growth.

Expansion of My Better World lessons

SAC members suggested that there is a need to consider offering My Better World lessons from the primary school level, as this is in line with national priorities on developing ‘soft-skills’ early on. A SAC member viewed that:

“Pupils in senior classes at primary school have challenges of teen pregnancies, dropouts and ill-behaviours.” (President's Office, Regional Administration and Local Government).

She added that “most of them find themselves in such problem for lack of proper mentorship and guidance.” It was suggested that providing My Better World lessons at primary school will equip and enable the pupils to make informed choices, be knowledgeable about their career goals and how to attain them and be aware of their sexuality.

It was also noted that provision of My Better World lessons needs to be expanded to include Forms 1 and 2 in secondary schools. SAC members noted that, because there are many topics covered in the My Better World programme, there is a need to distribute the content/themes to reflect their levels of difficulty and urgency across all Forms. This will reduce overloading while allowing enough time for the learners to appropriately apply the skills in their environment. Spreading the lessons will also ensure the continuity of the socio-emotional skills offered and their applicability by the students as they encounter challenging situations while at school. Similarly, it was suggested that the My Better World books should be condensed into smaller volumes according to the school year.

Embedding the My Better World programme into the existing life skills curriculum

Whilst there is a notable overlap and link between the content of the My Better World programme and that found in the national life skills syllabus, SAC members expressed concern that an attempt to integrate My Better World themes into the standard academic subjects will deprive the lessons of the transformative power as demonstrated among students over the years. They echoed that My Better World lessons should not be viewed as merely academic, but transformative, reflective, and engaging in themes that aim to empower youth to address their socio-emotional and real life problems. One SAC member noted that:
Opportunities to support sustainable scaling up of the Learner Guide Programme

Having established that the Learner Guide Programme could complement Tanzanian education directives in multiple ways, the SAC members identified opportunities that would support the scaling up of the programme:

**Leverage ministries beyond the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology**

It was noted by SAC members that the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, the Prime Ministers Office, Regional Administration, and Local Government in Tanzania are financially stretched:

*This life skills programme [The Learner Guide Programme] is very important, but I think the biggest challenge is getting the finances to sustain the components of the Learner Guides. Given that the government already has some priorities to make, there is a need to use the already existing structures in order to reap the benefits of the programme.* (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology).

In the same vein, six out of ten SAC members suggested a need to engage other ministries such as the Prime Minister’s Office which is mandated to support youth and volunteer development in the country. It was observed that the Prime Minister’s Office of Labour, Youth Employment and Persons with Disability provides funds for youth to promote their skills and establish businesses for self-employment. Additionally, SAC members suggested that as youth volunteers, Learner Guides could formally be recognised by the government and be given access to youth loans. This would enable them to sustain themselves by opening businesses in the localities in which they offer their services.

**Leverage local government authorities**

All SAC members indicated that it is important to sustain the Learner Guides to maintain the peer mentoring philosophy in the Learner Guide Programme. They pointed to two avenues which might facilitate this. Firstly, they mentioned that every local government authority in Tanzania is supposed to assign a percentage of annual revenue to support women and youth. It was suggested that the Learner Guides could be linked up with the local government authorities and be supported by them.

Secondly, one SAC member identified that:

*Every institution or entity or local government may allocate some amount of money from their income to support the volunteers.* (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology).

This highlights that because the Learner Guides are classed as volunteers, there are mechanisms in place to financially support such roles.
Use existing teachers to deliver aspects of the Learner Guide Programme

When discussing the options to sustainably scale up the Learner Guide Programme, SAC members identified that in the event Learner Guides could not be financially supported or sustainably scaled up, school teachers could deliver the My Better World lessons:

*If the government fails to sustain Learner Guides in schools, the remaining possibility is to simply make use of teachers in schools. (President’s Office, Regional Administration and Local Government).*

Adding to this, it was noted that teachers would need to be supported in facilitation methods, patterns of friendly teacher-student relationships, and community engagement skills. The suggestion by the SAC members to support the teachers to facilitate the My Better Word lesson resonates with the experiences of secondary school teachers in Tanzania, with teachers identifying that Learner Guides could benefit from further development in teaching methodologies:

*I think the challenge [with the Learner Guide] may come up during delivering contents, teaching methods and strategies. (Teacher, school visit).*

However, some SAC members also noted that teachers in Tanzania cannot take on peer-to-peer mentoring with their students due to the age difference and the gap in power relations. Such differences would deter students and hinder teachers from engaging fully in the mentorship approach:

*I fear that one of the reasons that it has made it successful it is because they [The Learner Guides] are taken as peer education educators so if they are to be trained to be teachers they will adopt teaching mannerisms and students will start to fear them and will lose that easiness towards the guides as the thing that made them come into agreement is detached. (President’s Office, Regional Administration and Local Government).*

**Conclusion**

This brief has identified that the Learner Guide Programme aligns with Tanzanian national policies, particularly in terms of supporting secondary school guidance and counselling services, the development of soft skills, and access and participation of young women in school and beyond. Government officials agreed that it would be of value to scale up the programme in general. Specifically, they proposed that peer-to-peer mentoring, the My Better World content, and the community arrangement of the programme should be prioritised. However, there remain some key aspects which need further consideration, including professional development of the Learner Guides and the expansion and integration of the My Better World content into the main curriculum. Steps that can be taken forward include looking to ministries beyond the Ministry of Education for sustainable financing options, and the consideration of supporting teachers to deliver the My Better World content.
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References


