RTI INTERNATIONAL

Education Policy Systems and Governance

RTI International provides technical assistance to educational institutions around the world in policy development, systems strengthening, and institutional capacity building. Our single purpose: helping governments support best practices in teaching and learning at scale.

Addressing the political economy of education reform has been an integral focus of our international education work. We gather and use relevant data to conduct targeted policy dialogue, advocacy, and coalition building to help countries make positive changes to deliver quality education.

Some countries struggle to implement national policies, especially at the local level. To ensure that national policies are realized, we help them build their own capacity, while also identifying and addressing the education system's organizational environment.

We apply best practices from the field of social and behavior change to address the sometimes-unspoken issues that keep actors and decision-makers from successfully implementing reforms. For example, we encourage them to consider the social norms, political pressures, and interpersonal factors that serve to maintain the status quo and we help build a sense of shared commitment and collective action.

We focus on strengthening the key elements of an education system that most impact student learning. Our approach to capacity building is based on supporting three core functions that our research has shown to be critical to an education system's success when improving learning outcomes at scale.

Set and communicate learning expectations

Education systems produce positive learning outcomes when they are "coherent for learning." Setting and communicating learning expectations and the actions that support them are central to establishing this coherence. Accountability is a key attribute of education systems, which requires monitoring of progress that goes two ways—holding schools accountable for their performance, and holding systems accountable for providing what schools need.

Monitor progress

Schools and teachers, however, vary greatly in how well they use basic inputs to improve learning outcomes. Monitoring must track progress while also making it possible to target support. Without appropriate, targeted support, disadvantaged schools and teachers will struggle to improve and the students who most need help will fall further behind.

Provide targeted support

The focus of our approach is to address several kinds of shortcomings. Expectations are stated in policy and planning documents, but most systems

Core Functions

Three key education systems functions set the stage for successful teaching and learning:

1. Setting and communicating expectations for teachers and students
2. Monitoring progress against those expectations
3. Providing targeted support, especially to struggling schools, teachers, and students.
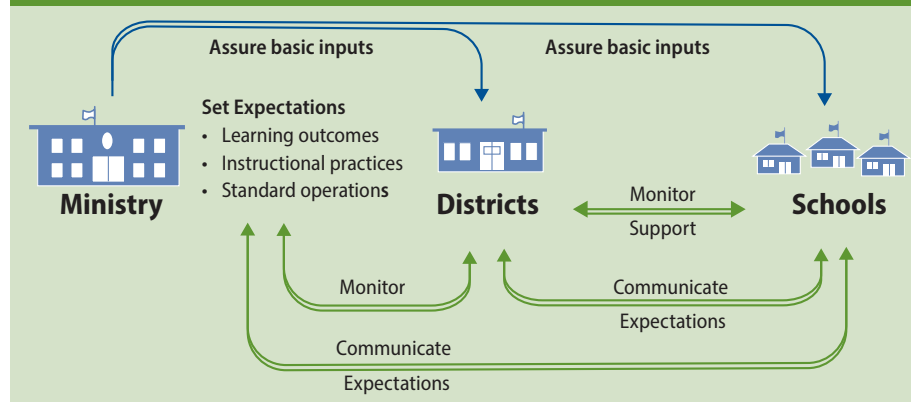
fail to set and communicate specific expectations to monitor progress. Too often, the monitoring that is done does not generate actionable data on teacher practice and student performance. Many schools and teachers go months, if not years, without receiving any outside support, or only have visits focused on school administration and inspection.

Helping education systems improve means recognizing the importance of organizational culture and drawing on social and behavior change strategies. We encourage education system personnel to examine their current situation and then plan specific interventions to facilitate their ability to perform the core functions.

Our technical assistance to ministries of education includes much more than capacity building workshops. We advise them on how to address their beliefs, attitudes, culture, norms, and political economy. These factors determine whether institutions have the capacity to support sustainable improvements in teaching and learning.

Recent Project Highlights

Jordan

For several years, RTI has been supporting Jordan's Ministry of Education (MOE) to improve its early grade reading program. We conducted an early grade reading assessment which resulted in a pilot program to test different approaches for improving reading outcomes. Because of the pilot's success, RTI was awarded the USAID-funded **Early Grade Reading and Mathematics Project (RAMP)** to improve learning outcomes in the early grades. As part of the project, we developed an early grade reading sustainability framework using a core functions approach.

We have used this framework to identify the various institutional, systemic, and organizational gaps and barriers to successful implementation of a national early grade reading program. The core functions helped the MOE assess where coherence and accountability were lacking and develop a sustainability plan. RAMP then supported the MOE to integrate the sustainability plan into Jordan's Human Resource Development Strategy and the MOE's 2018–2022 Strategic Plan.

Tanzania

The USAID-funded **Tusome Pamoja Project** is supporting the implementation of a student information system (SIS) that contributes to the project's efforts at improving early grade reading instruction. The SIS is designed to facilitate efficient and accurate collection, transmission, and centralization of school information. Before designing any capacity building activities, RTI helped Tanzanian government staff conduct a needs assessment helped to:

- Create incentives for more accurate and timely data collection with greater enthusiasm and commitment

- Update the definitions of various actors' roles and responsibilities to address how they should collect, analyze, and use data

- Build on existing redesign processes that help staff at each level discuss and act on data

- Consolidate data collection efforts to focus on information that schools can use, ensuring that the system does not become too cumbersome.

Uganda

There are times when support for national policy begins at the local level and moves upward, mobilizing national policy reforms that reinforce uptake at scale. In Uganda, RTI, under the USAID-funded **Literacy and Retention Activity**, is supporting the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) to implement the Strategy and Action Plan on Violence Against Children, which makes perpetrating violence against children in schools a criminal act. RTI developed the USAID-funded Journeys Program to translate the strategy into action, applying a social change model to shift the school culture so that violence is unacceptable. The MoES scaled-up the Journeys Program to all schools.