RTI INTERNATIONAL

Education Policy Systems and Governance

We provide technical assistance to educational institutions around the world in policy development, systems strengthening, and institutional capacity building. Our single purpose: helping governments more self-sufficiently support best practices in teaching and learning at scale.

In our international education work, we assist countries to address the political economy of education reform. We support education stakeholders to gather and use relevant data to conduct policy dialogues, advocate, and build coalitions, so that they can successfully implement sustainable, long-term solutions.

One obstacle to self-reliant education systems is a lack of capacity to implement national policies at scale. We help develop that capacity and creative partnerships among national and local institutions, actors, and stakeholders. Further, we advise countries as they evaluate the organizational environments within which their education system actors operate. Such reviews often identify strategies to sustainably improve those environments and related systems.

We apply best practices in social and behavior change to address the sometimes-unspoken issues that keep decision-makers from becoming fully self-reliant. For example, we encourage them to consider social norms, political pressures, and interpersonal factors that maintain the status quo. With those insights, they can better share their commitment and collective action.
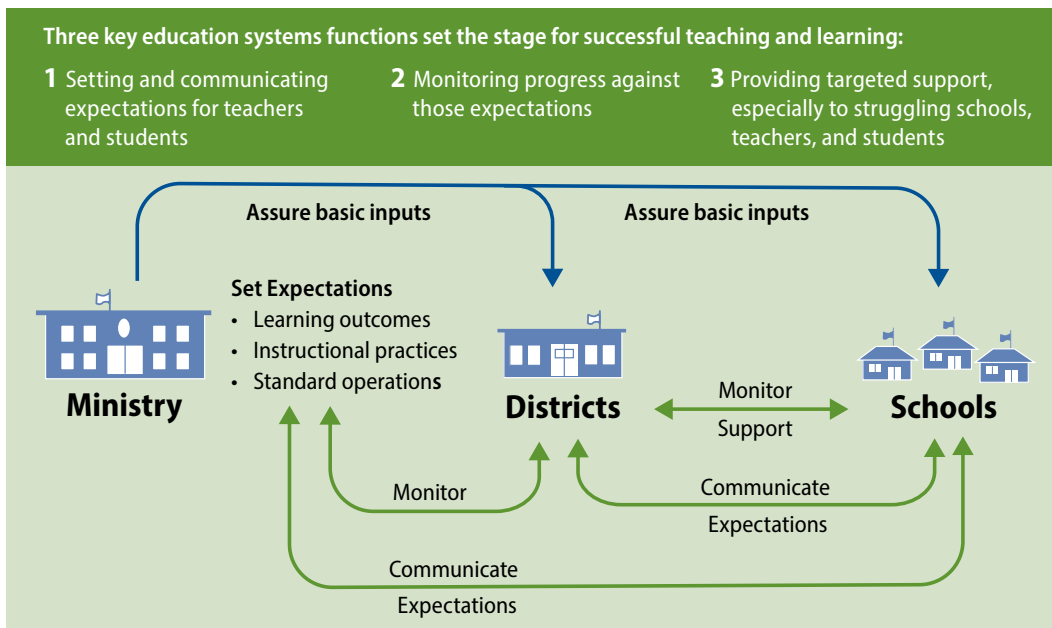
We focus on education system elements that most impact student learning. To build systems' capacity, we support **three core functions** that our research has shown to be critical for improving learning outcomes at scale. Each function is closely linked to the next.

Set and communicate learning expectations

Education systems produce positive learning outcomes when they are "coherent for learning." To establish such coherence, system managers can set and communicate learning expectations and actions. Monitoring progress goes in two directions—holding schools accountable for their performance, and systems 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 facilitating targeted support. Without appropriate support, disadvantaged schools and teachers will struggle to improve, and students who need extra guidance will fall further behind.

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

Assure basic inputs   Assure basic inputs

Ministry

Set Expectations
- Learning outcomes
- Instructional practices
- Standard operations

Districts

Schools

Monitor / Support

Monitor

Communicate Expectations

Communicate Expectations

Provide targeted support

Our aim is to address several kinds of shortcomings. For example, policy and planning documents may state teaching and learning expectations, but the monitoring does not generate actionable data on teacher practice and student performance. Many schools and teachers go months or years without outside support, or they receive visitors who focus only on school administration and inspection.

Helping education systems become self-reliant requires more than addressing technical and managerial challenges that prevent support from reaching schools. It also means studying the organizational culture, determining how individuals behave, and drawing on social and behavior change strategies to improve that culture.

We show ministries of education how to examine and address their beliefs, attitudes, culture, norms, and political economy. These factors determine whether institutions will be able to support sustainable improvements in teaching and learning. They also are critical to advancement on the journey to self-reliance.

Recent Project Highlights

Jordan

For several years, RTI has supported Jordan's Ministry of Education (MOE) to improve its reading program. We conducted an early grade reading assessment that resulted in a pilot program to test approaches for improving reading outcomes. After the pilot's success, RTI was awarded the USAID-funded Early Grade Reading and Mathematics Initiative (RAMP) to improve learning outcomes in the early grades.

RAMP developed a framework to identify institutional, systemic, and organizational gaps and barriers to implementing and sustaining a national early grade reading program. By incorporating core functions such as those named above, the framework helped the MOE assess where coherence and accountability were lacking and to develop a sustainability plan. RAMP then supported the MOE to integrate the plan into Jordan's Human Resource Development Strategy and the MOE's 2018–2022 Strategic Plan.

Tanzania

The USAID-funded Tusome Pamoja Project supports a student information system (SIS) that bolsters the project's efforts at improving reading instruction. Using the SIS,

government officials can efficiently and accurately collect, transmit, and centralize school information. RTI first helped government staff self-assess their needs, and then built their capacity to:

- Create incentives for more accurate and timely data collection with greater enthusiasm and commitment
- Update the definitions of various actors' responsibilities and how they should collect, analyze, and use data
- Build on existing redesign processes that encourage staff at each level to 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

Sometimes support for national policy begins locally and moves upward, mobilizing national policy reforms and uptake. In Uganda, under the USAID-funded Literacy Achievement and Retention Activity, RTI is supporting the Ministry of Education and Sports to implement its Strategy and Action Plan on Violence Against Children. This plan makes perpetrating violence against children in schools a criminal act. In support of this vision of safe schools, RTI developed the Journeys Program to prevent and respond to school-based gender-related violence. Applying a social change model, the USAID-funded program shifts schools' culture so that violence becomes unacceptable. Journeys has been adopted in 3,542 public primary schools in 38 districts, and soon will be expanded to additional districts.

Kenya

In a 2018 paper in the Journal of Educational Change (https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-018-9325-4), we examined how communicating and monitoring expectations throughout the education system in Kenya led to changes in the organizational culture, including in classrooms. The changes enabled the Tusome national literacy program to realize national-scale improvements in early grade reading.