LiNK
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

LINK COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
TRANSFORMING LIVES
THROUGH LEARNING

www.lcdinternational.org

> "EDUCATION PROMOTES EQUALITY AND LIFTS PEOPLE OUT OF POVERTY. IT TEACHES CHILDREN HOW TO BECOME GOOD CITIZENS. EDUCATION IS NOT JUST FOR A PRIVILEGED FEW, IT IS FOR EVERYONE. IT IS A FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHT."
>
> – UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

- Strengthening school management
- Promoting community engagement
- Building teaching quality
- Challenging inequalities
- Improving learning environments

ABOUT US

Link Community Development is a family of organisations working to transform education for children and communities across impoverished rural areas of Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, Rwanda and Uganda through innovative, low-cost and replicable models.

The need for our work:

- Governments and schools rarely have access to accurate data to enable effective use of limited resources. We help **build their capacity to improve data management and application.**

- Reading skills can break the cycle of poverty. Children whose mothers can read are 50% more likely to live past age five. **Link develops effective literacy and numeracy programmes for communities in need across sub-Saharan Africa.**

- Weak school governance reduces community school ownership. Our School Performance Review (SPR) **gives citizens a voice, fostering a culture of transparency, trust and mutual accountability** between communities and schools, enabling greater collective responsibility.

- Teachers are key to learning but receive little professional development or support. We provide **high quality teacher training and mentoring.**

- Unsupportive cultural and societal norms exclude vulnerable children. **We help education leadership develop and sustain inclusive practices.**

- Rural African schools can be over-crowded, unsafe and unconducive to learning. **We help schools to become child-friendly** through safe infrastructure, sanitation facilities and child protection policies.

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HOW WE WORK:

- **'Inside-out'** across whole districts and school systems. We do not set up parallel systems or 'islands of excellence' but rather develop fully tested models for replicable and systemic change.

- **Engaging community stakeholders** to hold schools and governments accountable for delivering a better quality education.

- **Inclusively** by enabling genuine participation of marginalised and vulnerable groups.

- **Using evidence-based solutions** our School Performance Review cycle enables citizens and governments to use data as a meaningful foundation for school and district inputs and accountability.

- **With 100% commitment** to supporting Ministry of Education priorities at national and local levels.

- **Investing in people** by building capabilities for sustainability.

- **Ensuring Value for Money** Link offers a cost effective and credible approach to transparent school improvement that delivers better learning.

- **With long-term commitment** in 'prime districts' leading to trusting relationships and high levels of ownership by district and school communities.

THEORY OF CHANGE

Planning, leadership, supervision and data management	Strengthening school management
Accountability, advocacy, participation and governance	Promoting community engagement
Capacity building, sustainable material development, mentoring and support	Building teaching quality
Support for the vulnerable	Challenging inequalities
Safer, child-friendly spaces	Improved learning environments

IMPROVED LEARNING

STRENGTHENING SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

> "LINK'S DATA COLLECTION SYSTEM ENABLES THE MINISTRY TO MAKE MEANINGFUL DECISIONS TO IMPROVE LEARNING OUTCOMES … WE COLLECT DATA, ANALYSE AND PRODUCE REPORTS TO SHOW WHAT'S HAPPENING AT SCHOOL LEVEL AND SEE HOW THEY NEED TO IMPROVE."
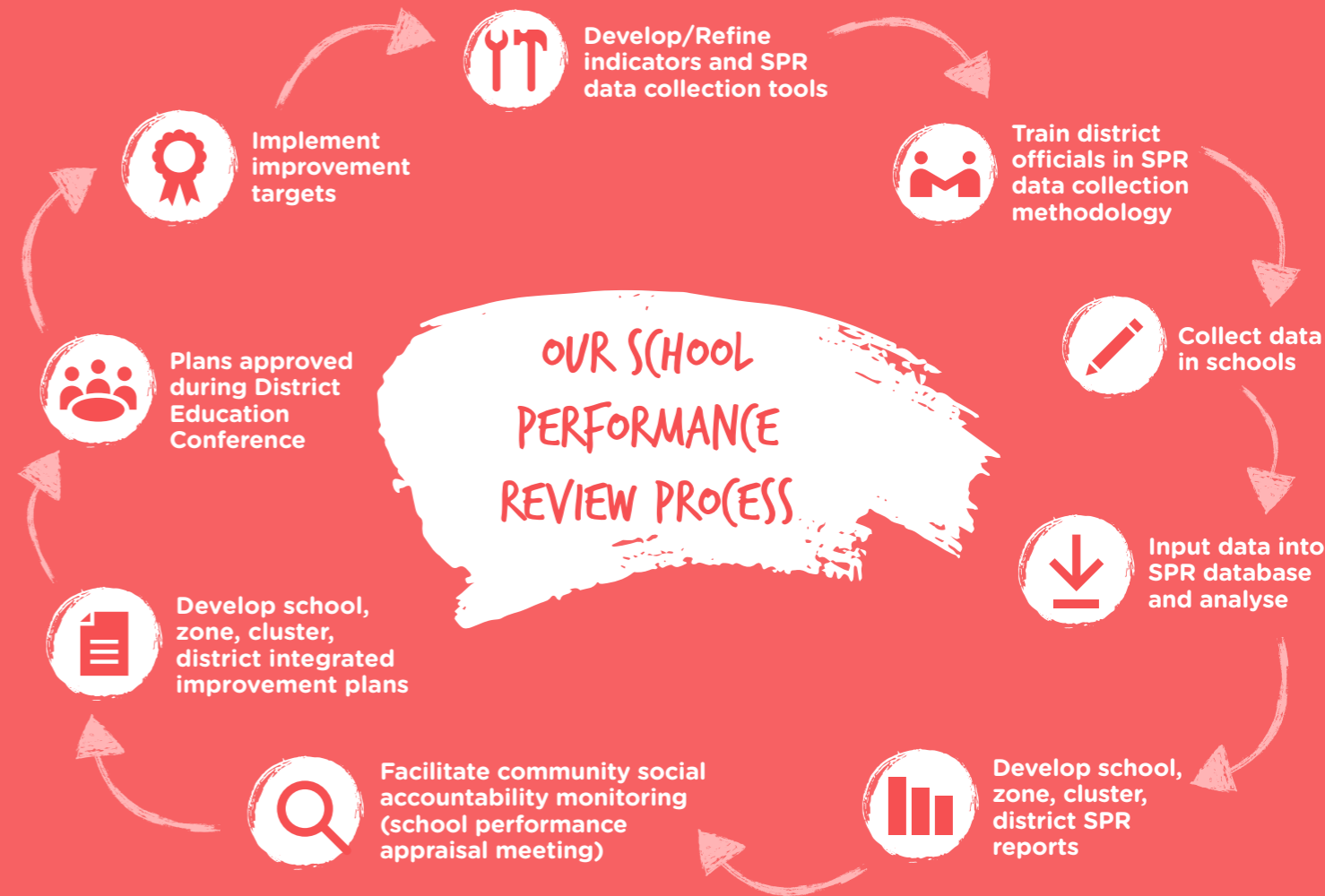>
> (Ministry Director, Malawi)

Strong school management and leadership based on accurate data results in better planning and supervision leading to improved learning.

Effective school management requires strong leaders. Link trains head teachers on resource management, monitoring and mentoring of staff, and data management and usage. School Committee members are trained on roles and responsibilities. In Malawi, our mid-term evaluation showed that, after participating in Link's School Performance Review, community members and head teachers saw a significant improvement in the quality of school management - 85% of community members and 76% of head teachers strongly agreed that the quality of school management was good, compared to 14% and 18% before the intervention.

School Performance Review (SPR) is Link's innovative approach to evidence-based school improvement. It measures individual school performance against common key indicators. Data are collected by stakeholders and transformed into an accessible format that community members understand. Communities then tailor their School Improvement Plans to address their specific challenges enabling the most efficient use of scarce resources. SPR has been adapted and adopted in all our partner countries.

OUR SCHOOL PERFORMANCE REVIEW PROCESS

- Develop/Refine indicators and SPR data collection tools
- Train district officials in SPR data collection methodology
- Collect data in schools
- Input data into SPR database and analyse
- Develop school, zone, cluster, district SPR reports
- Facilitate community social accountability monitoring (school performance appraisal meeting)
- Develop school, zone, cluster, district integrated improvement plans
- Plans approved during District Education Conference
- Implement improvement targets

PROMOTING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Link raises community awareness of the standard of education their children are entitled to whilst building opportunities for holding schools and government accountable for providing that standard.

In Ethiopia, every year 12,000 community stakeholders participate in school improvement planning and monitoring through Link's pioneering School Performance Appraisal Meetings. During meetings to develop their School Improvement Plan, stakeholders recognised girls were under-performing. To address this parents committed to reduce household workloads and provide fuel to enable homework, whilst school managers agreed to provide extra study sessions and meet regularly with school governors. These collaborative efforts saw significant improvements in girls' performance.

Link's School Management Simulation (see photo on the left) supports school improvement planning by training stakeholders in effective resource management. In Malawi 93% of community members rated the tool as very important – it increased knowledge of the impact of financial and resource management on learning outcomes and improved their confidence to take a more active role in decision-making and monitoring school performance.

"WE ALL HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY IN OUR SCHOOL, NOT JUST TEACHERS, BUT THE MOTHER GROUP AND PTA TOO."

(Mother, Malawi)

"THIS HAS BEEN AN EYE-OPENER. NOW WE UNDERSTAND HOW TO MANAGE OUR SCHOOL."

(PTA chair, Malawi)

BUILDING TEACHING QUALITY

Rather than taking a single approach such as developing teachers' skills, stocking libraries or improving school administration, Link uses a holistic child-centred approach which works from the heart of communities.

Our Early Learning Enhancement Project improved learning for 4,795 pupils in Uganda. Teacher training emphasised letter sounds, better use of books, enhanced learner participation, more reading and writing practice in the classroom and regular monitoring to observe teachers and provide one-to-one support. Just **20 hours of individual support for early years' teachers in rural schools was adequate to significantly improve learners' literacy skills.**

In Ethiopia our early grade reading project reaches **41,126 learners**. Activities include intensive language teacher training, monitoring training for head teachers and supervisors, 'resource box' provision including supplementary reading books in English and local language, annual reading open days, and tutorial classes for 7,770 students in need of extra support.

"The Link project improved Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) results due to regular school-based support and guidance which transformed targeted primary teachers into strong literacy teachers. These improvements were not found in larger, national projects."

(EXTERNAL EVALUATOR)

CHALLENGING INEQUALITIES

Child-friendly learning environments and improved teaching methods, coupled with supportive societal norms enable all children, especially the vulnerable, to attend and succeed in school.

Link's **Girls' Education Challenge** project supports 62,700 girls in 123 Ethiopian schools to improve learning, attendance and retention. Our final results* showed a **300% increase in literacy outcomes and 150% increase in numeracy outcomes.**

Our holistic model of support addresses barriers to girls' education from all angles: tutorial classes and gender-responsive pedagogy enhance academic performance, guidance and counselling improve girls' self-esteem, community attitude change encourages girls to learn, and improved district and school capacity supports girls' education.

"There is a change in community attitudes. People start to believe. Girls' education becomes society's education. Education is the only way to overcome poverty."

(ZONE EDUCATION MANAGER, ETHIOPIA)

Complementary Basic Education supports children who have dropped out to return to mainstream education. In Ghana, Link supported **6,375 children in 225 communities** and established **125 community schools**. Over **80% of children enrolled** in these schools have integrated into mainstream primary schools.

"This programme freed me from carrying shea nuts and fire wood and missing school. I am now in school and have a future."

(LEARNER, GHANA)

*The final results presented here have not yet been verified by the Fund Manager and are subject to review.

IMPROVING LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

An environment that is safe and conducive to learning encourages children to attend school and improves their learning.

In Malawi, Link facilitated the first National Education Standards. These define the minimum requirements which every school must meet. The 26 standards relate to learning outcomes, the teaching process, and school leadership and management, all underpinned by the safety of every child.

Girls can miss up to 12 weeks of school per year due to the challenges of menstruation. In Ethiopia Link supports low-cost, community constructed female toilets and 'Sanitation Rooms' providing girls with a space to rest whilst menstruating. Girls say these encourage them to stay in school. Link also supports schools to develop guidelines for reporting child protection issues and to raise awareness of School-Related Gender-Based Violence.

Showing teachers and community members how to develop materials from local resources helps tackle the persistent lack of books. This model ensures the supply of materials in local languages (often overlooked by governments). In Uganda teachers have made simple word charts, matching games and more complex and fun 'Toy TVs' and 'Word Computers'.

"FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY EXPERIENCE ... GIRLS HAVE RANKED FIRST AT ALL GRADE LEVELS WHICH GIVES ME SO MUCH HAPPINESS. THIS IS EVIDENCE THAT LINK'S INTERVENTIONS ARE WORKING."

(Head Teacher, Ethiopia)

OUR PRIORITIES

Go to scale -
Our holistic approach is sustainable, replicable and promotes high levels of ownership by citizens and governments. Our innovations aim to influence policy and best practice.

Develop partnerships -
We collaborate to leverage skills and resources to enhance the effectiveness of our work. Partners include bilateral and multilateral donors, trusts and foundations, governments, the private sector, non-governmental and civil society organisations, universities and research bodies, as well as communities.

Attract core funding -
Experience shows that impact is more effectively delivered through core funding. We keep costs low and impact high.

Short-term project funding can have high transaction costs and risks undermining strategic impact. We seek partners who share our vision to improve learning for all.

Continue to evidence our model -
Demonstrate affordable, scalable and sustainable solutions to persistent problems. Link has a double effect on Value for Money: low unit costs that deliver results plus improved accountability, efficiency and outcomes, which ultimately saves governments money.

Strong leadership and governance -
Our Board of Trustees supports and guides our work and ensures accountability and responsiveness to our beneficiaries, partners, donors and staff.

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WHAT OUR STAKEHOLDERS SAY

"With Link you are always working within the Ministry. Other NGOs present reports with recommendations for scaling up and then leave. With Link scaling up and capacity-building is within the project. Community participation for supporting teaching and learning is enhanced. Tools and instruments are developed with Ministry to meet Ministry needs."

(DIRECTOR, MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, MALAWI)

"From Link's literacy teaching workshop, teachers learned how to help children learn to read and write. The biggest contributor to success is the follow-up. It encouraged the teachers to become committed because they knew someone is concerned about how they did their work and the quality of work they did."

(LITERACY EXPERT, UGANDA)

"Key elements of the [Uganda] project's success are the training of district officers and school management and the regular monitoring and inspection of schools based on a detailed (school performance review) format."

(POLICY AND OPERATIONS EVALUATION DEPARTMENT, DUTCH GOVERNMENT, IMPACT EVALUATION)

"Link's holistic approach supports sustainability and improves social accountability. Link, which is one of the most successful projects in terms of improving learning outcomes for girls, simultaneously decreased gender disparity, developed an increased interest in science amongst girls and improved attendance."

(GIRLS' EDUCATION CHALLENGE THEMATIC PAPERS, SEPTEMBER 2016, P.18)

CONTACT US

INTERNATIONAL

Link Community Development International
Dolphin House
4 Hunter Square
Edinburgh, UK
EH1 1QW
E: info@lcd.org.uk
T: +44 131 225 3076
Registered charity numbers: 1048007
and SCO37959

ETHIOPIA

Link Community Development Ethiopia
PO Box 1647
Hawassa
SNNPRS, Ethiopia
E: lcd@lcdethiopia.org
T: +251 46 220 6497
Fax: +251 46 221 0634
Registered charity number: 1017

GHANA

Link Community Development Ghana
House 18 McCarthy Hill Junction
PO Box Ds 367
Dansoman, Accra, Ghana
E: link@lcdghana.org
T: +233 244 692 786
Registered charity number:
G.4634-21-06-1999

MALAWI

Link Community Development Malawi
P.O. Box 1608, Lilongwe, Malawi
T: +265 999 067 634/ 888 350 482
E: link@lcdmalawi.org
Registered charity number: NGO/R/08/09
CONGOMA Registration: C325/2007

UGANDA

Link Community Development Uganda
Education Standards Agency Building
PO Box 25630
Kyambogo
Kampala
Uganda
E: lcduganda@lcduganda.org
T: +256 31 226 4443
Registered charity number:
S.5914/3476

www.lcdinternational.org
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f /linkcommdev