



# Improving learning and life skills for marginalized children


Scaling the Learner Guide Program in Tanzania

October 2021

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Summary findings





Even before COVID-19 shuttered schools around the world, rapidly expanding access to high-quality learning opportunities for all children was critically needed. The pandemic has only exacerbated the magnitude, inequity, and urgency of this need. While many innovations exist—often emerging outside the formal education system—the question has increasingly become how to scale and sustain those that are most effective at improving learning for all.

In response, the Center for Universal Education (CUE) at Brookings has been investigating efforts to scale and sustain evidence-based initiatives leading to large-scale improvements in children's learning. CUE is implementing a series of Real-time Scaling Labs (RTSL), in partnership with local institutions in several countries, to generate evidence and provide practical recommendations around the process of scaling in global education—encouraging a stronger link between research and practice.<sup>1</sup>

These summary findings<sup>2</sup> focus on one of the scaling labs launched in Tanzania in 2018 in collaboration with the Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED). They examine the process of implementing, adapting, and scaling

the Learner Guide Program, which delivers life skills and mentorship provided by local female secondary school graduates (Learner Guides) to secondary school students as part of an 18-month volunteer program, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MoEST) and the President's Office, Regional Administration and Local Government (PO-RALG).

The Learner Guide Program finds itself at a critical inflection point after eight years of ongoing adaptation, learning, and expansion. It can remain an effective NGO-led program—working in collaboration with government and community stakeholders—or it can transition to a government-led initiative—embedding in the national education system with the opportunity to impact many more lives. The Learner Guide Program's scaling journey in Tanzania to date offers valuable lessons to support further expansion of its impact and reach. At the same time, the Learner Guide Program serves as a case study for the education community into larger questions of how an evidence-based initiative can achieve progress toward national sustainable scale, with insights that are transferable beyond Tanzania.

1. For more information, see: <https://www.brookings.edu/product/millions-learning/>.

2. These summary findings are based on a full report detailing the scaling journey of the Learner Guide Program in Tanzania (Brookings, October 2021). Despite contextual differences across the Real-time Scaling Labs, similar scaling challenges exist and many of the broader lessons learned apply across multiple labs.



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# Learner Guide Program: Improving education outcomes and supporting young women's transition to the workforce

Established in 2005, CAMFED Tanzania has worked in partnership with local communities and government to co-create locally sustainable solutions to address barriers to girls' education, supporting more than 88,000 marginalized girls to attend primary school and 54,000 girls to attend secondary school.<sup>3</sup> Central to these efforts has been the Learner Guide Program, designed to improve education outcomes among marginalized children while simultaneously opening pathways for young women to transition from school to the workforce. The program organically emerged in response to challenges girls faced on their journey through school, alongside a growing and empowered network of young women who graduated with CAMFED's support and were eager to pass the benefits of their education to their communities.

Learner Guides are recent female secondary-school graduates who volunteer in their communities for several hours per week to provide life-skills facilitation, one-on-one mentorship, and links to social services, which in turn improve girls' and boys' attendance and performance in school. In return for their service, these young women receive skills training, interest-free loans to start small-scale enterprises, and an internationally recognized Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) qualification, which serve as a steppingstone to formal teacher training and employment. These incentives are coupled with the increased respect, leadership, and social standing the Learner Guides receive in their communities.

The Learner Guide Program has effectively traversed three phases of scaling to date—pilot, adaptation, and expansion. The

program was first introduced in Tanzania in 2013 through funding from the U.K. Department for International Development (DFID),<sup>4</sup> and over a four-year period, 606 Learner Guides served in 230 secondary schools across 11 districts—reaching 194,395 boys and girls.<sup>5</sup> In 2016, with support from the global education company Pearson, a second phase of the program expanded to four new districts where CAMFED had not previously been—testing not only the program's effectiveness but also its adaptability and scalability. Due to its ongoing positive impact, a third phase was launched in 2017 to continue the Learner Guide Program in existing districts while expanding to 13 additional, largely peri-urban districts in five regions—all without existing CAMFED community support structures—with ongoing support from DFID. The RTSL accompanied this third phase, with funding from ELMA Foundation (UK), which provided an important opportunity to bring together diverse stakeholders to learn alongside and support scaling efforts. By the end of 2020, CAMFED had trained 2,235 young women to be Learner Guides serving in 416 secondary schools.

Throughout these phases, independent evaluations have averred significant and positive impact in schools where Learner Guides are operational, including improvements in students' learning, girls' retention in school, and young women's livelihoods. As a result, CAMFED has received national and international recognition, including a 2017 WISE Award, the 2020 Yidan Prize, and the 2021 Hilton Humanitarian Prize.

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3. <https://camfed.org/what-we-do/where-we-operate/tanzania/>.

4. In 2020, DFID was merged with the U.K.'s Foreign Office to create the Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO).

5. Marian Morris with Dan Hardy and Laurie Zivetz, "A New Equilibrium for Girls: Camfed International 5101 Endline Report," External Evaluation Institution SQW, (30 March 2017, version 2.0).

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# Learner Guide Program's scaling journey: Opportunities and trade-offs in expanding a holistic approach

The Learner Guide Program in Tanzania is an example of an education innovation that emerged organically from outside the formal education system but has increasingly scaled its impact over time by becoming further embedded within it. While always rooted in strong community partnership, the program has intentionally deepened its engagement with the government over the past eight years toward CAMFED's ultimate goal of reaching 1 million girls in Tanzania, and 5 million girls across five African countries, with improved learning outcomes through national adoption and delivery by 2025.<sup>6</sup> The program is now on the threshold of its fourth, most critical phase of transition to national scale. Lessons from the previous phases can inform efforts to further expand the program's reach and impact to many more disadvantaged children.

Many factors have contributed to the Learner Guide Program's expansion to date. The Learner Guide Program's approach to addressing local needs—and the root causes of challenges faced—has fostered strong community buy-in and support for the initiative. Its holistic response to young people's needs, cutting across multiple sectors, has enabled the program to diversify partners supporting the initiative and reduce reliance on a single champion.

At the same time, the scaling story of the Learner Guide Program illustrates the tensions between designing for effectiveness and delivering at large scale. For example, the multisectoral nature of the program has contributed to its effectiveness but also has added complexities to scaling efforts, given that one central coordinating body or lead institution does not currently exist to oversee all education and youth develop-

ment aspects of the program. Nevertheless, discussions within the RTSL have identified clear alignment between the Learner Guide Program and national priorities and plans, including Tanzania's National Five-Year Development Plan (2016-2021), the National Framework for Continuous Professional Development for Practicing Teachers, and the National Youth Volunteerism Strategy.

Additionally, over its scaling journey, CAMFED and partners have continuously revisited and refined the Learner Guide model, based on rigorous research, evolving landscapes, and—perhaps most importantly—feedback from Learner Guides, students, and teachers. This flexibility to adapt the program, while simultaneously identifying core elements to hold constant, has also been central to scaling efforts. Further, data and research have played an instrumental role in demonstrating the program's impact and feasibility to scale. While funding has been critical to the expansion of the Learner Guide Program to date, just as important are how those resources have been structured. Going forward, costing projections undertaken with RTSL members are helping to lay the groundwork for understanding what the Learner Guide Program will cost at scale and identifying where and how the program—or elements of it—can transition from external financing to increasingly becoming part of the existing government budget. Finally, the Learner Guide's journey to date has underscored both the opportunities and challenges that come with scaling a volunteer-led delivery model, strongly rooted in local communities. This will continue to be a point of consideration for CAMFED and partners in the future as the Learner Guide Program is further scaled and integrated into existing systems.

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6. CAMFED, "CAMFED 2020-25 Strategic Plan Overview," (unpublished document, September 2020).





Dotto (Learner Guide) Morogoro, Tanzania. October 2019.  
Photo credit: Eliza Powell.



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# Lessons learned and recommendations to strengthen the Learner Guide Program's expansion and inform future scaling efforts

The Learner Guide Program's scaling journey to date has revealed lessons and associated recommendations centered around three key themes, which will continue to play a critical role in future scaling efforts. These lessons and recommendations can help CAMFED and the Tanzanian government formulate plans to further expand the impact

of the Learner Guide Program, but they also include transferable lessons relevant for a broad spectrum of stakeholders involved in designing, implementing, researching, or otherwise supporting the scaling of an evidence-based education intervention. These lessons and recommendations are further detailed in the full report.



Sophia (CAMFED Association member and Learner Guide), Kilosa, Tanzania. October 2019.  
Photo credit: Eliza Powell.





# Embedding the Learner Guide Program into the formal education system

**Focus on how the program contributes to government policies and priorities:** Given its holistic nature, the Learner Guide Program addresses several educational, economic, and equity concerns in Tanzania with clear opportunities to directly support the government in achieving its goals. In addition, core principles that have contributed to the Learner Guide Program's effectiveness—such as interactive and playful pedagogy, locally-managed recruitment of young volunteers, and supportive mentorship—could help inform relevant policies. Moving forward, it will be essential to ensure scaling strategies center around how the Learner Guide Program contributes to the achievement of these government priorities, while ensuring fundamental elements of the program are not lost. For example, Learner Guide materials, community outreach structures, volunteers, and alumni can inform the implementation of national efforts to develop youths' life skills, such as through the Secondary Education Quality Improvement Project for Tanzania's "Safe Schools Program" where guidance counselors will take on roles similar to those of Learner Guides, providing instruction in life skills, identifying and supporting girls at risk of dropping out, and working with community stakeholders to promote safe learning environments for girls.

**Plan for the evolving roles of government and innovators:** During a scaling process—especially one transitioning from NGO-led to government-led—roles and responsibilities necessarily shift over time, with certain activities that the innovators took on at the pilot stages transitioning gradually to the purview of those delivering at large scale. While essential, transitioning roles and responsibilities can be a tricky process to navigate smoothly, and necessitates not only the innovators' openness to change, but

also forward planning to ensure the handover happens without dilution of quality or impact. This requires a two-pronged effort: 1) sharing practical knowledge for implementation and engaging in open and creative discussions about adaptation for delivering at scale and 2) identifying where ongoing external partnership is required—including what specific role(s) the original innovators, such as CAMFED—can provide. Through the RTSL exercise focused on identifying cost projections as the Learner Guide Program scales, CAMFED and lab members, including from government, started to identify which components might make sense for government to take on, and which CAMFED should maintain control over in the near term, perhaps transferring them to government in the future but maintaining a technical advisory role. Examples of the roles for CAMFED to maintain could include ongoing research and development (R&D), coordinating master training of Learner Guide trainers, and management of the Learner Guide alumnae network, and related activities.

**Utilize financial and non-financial local incentives:** Arguably, what is core to the Learner Guide Program's effectiveness is relying on young female volunteers to deliver the life-skills program, but maintaining this element of the intervention is also potentially its biggest challenge to scale. At the same time, the Learner Guide Program is not the first volunteer-based initiative to successfully scale, and other examples offer instructive lessons to guide future expansion of the program, including the importance of incentives to motivate and sustain quality efforts. These can include not only financial incentives but also intrinsic motivation, civic responsibility, and the opportunity to build an enhanced standing in local communities with recognition of their service leadership.



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Not only must incentives be desirable, but they must also be affordable at scale. Currently, two primary incentives for the Learner Guides are interest-free loans, which enable young women to establish or grow small businesses, and a BTEC Level 3 qualification, which can support them in furthering their education and employment opportunities. Despite the appeal of these incentives (and evidence of their effectiveness in other countries), there have been some limitations to their applicability in Tanzania. Identifying additional, existing loan schemes and accreditation programs that are more applicable in the local context—rather than attempting to retrofit an external model into the national system—may help in the long run to sustainably advance the Learner Guides’ economic empowerment and well-being.

**Support an inter-ministerial coordinating structure with sufficient knowledge and authority:** Scaling through gradual handover to government requires a coordinating structure to make decisions, harmonize efforts, and ensure the work of scaling moves forward—particularly for an initiative like the Learner Guide Program that cuts across various ministries and is beyond the mandate of any

single department. The scope and functions of this coordinating structure must be realistic given the existing system and supported by a mandate at the highest possible political level to help ensure stakeholders at all levels see the scaling process as central to their daily work. When possible, there are benefits to building on existing structures—rather than creating new ones—to avoid duplication or the risk of parallel processes. In particular, a working group could facilitate the integration of specific components of the Learner Guide Program into relevant ministries (for example, the training of youth volunteer Learner Guides sitting with the Prime Minister’s Office, Labour, Youth, Employment and Persons with Disability (PMO-LYED), the implementation of life skills education by youth volunteer Learner Guides sitting with the MoEST, and the identification and training of teacher mentors and other relevant mentors sitting within PO-RALG), while ensuring there is alignment across ministry priorities and availability of necessary resources and support. Further, focusing on a single, multisectoral initiative, such as the Learner Guide Program, can help strengthen cross-ministry collaboration, paving the way to advance future holistic efforts.



## Securing flexible and long-term financing for Learner Guide implementation

**Engage directly with government budget processes and timelines:** While long-term government financing is often needed to support the sustainable scaling of education initiatives, implementers like CAMFED frequently face challenges in understanding the processes by which government budgets are set. Discussions within the RTSL in Tanzania underscored that more clarity is needed on national budgetary processes

and how to align with or integrate with these processes—where, at what stage, and with whom—in order to mobilize long-term resources for sustainable scale. Going forward, CAMFED and other nonstate actors seeking to integrate effective initiatives into formal education systems would benefit from clear and practical information on budgetary processes and timelines to inform plans for scale from the start.





A Learner Guide in Manyoni district facilitating classroom discussion in Tanzania.  
Photo credit: Anna Sawaki, CAMFED Program Manager-Development and Scaling Lab Researcher.



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**Build upon costed scaling analysis to guide strategic decisionmaking:**

Cost data and analysis are critical for making decisions about scaling, including to make the case for investment to government stakeholders, plan for scale, and explore opportunities for cost efficiencies and adaptations to lower cost. The Learner Guide Program's costed scaling plan identified the program's primary cost drivers and actionable next steps to experiment with joint government implementation in new districts. At the same time, the cost analysis underscored the need to support local capacities to collect, analyze, and use cost data to inform scaling projections.

While the lab helped start the process, work remains to continue exploring how and where the program costs could be most effectively integrated within the government budget, and to share these insights in an ongoing way so that other implementers grappling with the same questions might benefit. Because integrating into national budgets is a long-term endeavor, donor support to navigate this fourth phase of scaling will be essential, including flexibility to respond to unanticipated opportunities and challenges, as well as to experiment with different approaches as CAMFED and the government work more closely together.



## Implementing a continuous learning process in support of the Learner Guide Program's expansion

**Continue to test adaptations to the model as it scales and use iterative feedback loops to analyze the impact of adaptations:**

Scaling is an iterative process that requires ongoing adaptations to both the model and approach. An important lesson from the Learner Guide Program to date is the need for flexibility and adaptability among all partners to respond to a rapidly changing environment. CAMFED has implemented numerous changes to the Learner Guide model throughout the years—often in response to feedback from Learner Guides themselves—which has strengthened the approach and made it more contextually appropriate. Moving forward, adaptations made should be systematically planned, monitored, and well documented to ensure they strengthen program impact, inform further refinements, and safeguard learning so it is not lost during the process. Resources

exist to support education actors in this area, including the “Adaptation Tracker” tool developed by CUE in partnership with colleagues from several scaling labs.<sup>7</sup> Some potential aspects of the Learner Guide model to test include the number of training days, training approach, and digitization of data collection and of program materials.

**Adapt and apply a collaborative learning approach to support education systems change:**

The Tanzania RTSL underscored the tangible benefits of a participatory, continuous learning approach to scaling the impact of the Learner Guide Program. The scaling lab helped plant a seed that CAMFED, the government, and other key stakeholders can nurture in the coming years—engaging diverse stakeholders in systematic, data-driven reflection to inform ongoing adaptation and learning. Where possible, this type of

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7. Jenny Perlman Robinson, Molly Curtiss Wyss, and Patrick Hannahan, “Adaptation Tracker: Learning from changes throughout a scaling process,” (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution, July 2021), [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Adaptation\\_Tracking\\_ENG\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Adaptation_Tracking_ENG_FINAL.pdf).



collaborative, continuous learning approach should be embedded into government institutions, such that government stakeholders can own and lead the process and ensure the learning and reflections can feed into decisionmaking. Looking ahead, CAMFED, the government, and other scaling lab members should develop concrete plans for advancing the most effective elements of the RTSL and identifying additional adjustments needed—particularly as they enter this next phase of scaling and confront inevitable trade-offs between quality, equity, and scalability. CAMFED and partners can also draw from this experience in Tanzania as it co-creates a scaling lab-like process in Zambia and Zimbabwe, with recent support from the Global Partnership for Education’s Knowledge and Innovation Exchange.

After almost a decade of managing a tenuous balance between effectiveness and equity while growing in scale, the Learner Guide Program is arguably approaching

its most challenging phase. With its many successes and deliberate attention to sustainability and scale, the Learner Guide Program is well poised to navigate this transition from a government-sanctioned program to a government-owned program supported by communities. This phase will require continued adaptation and learning, particularly around joint implementation with government partners. It will require collecting timely and relevant data—utilizing appropriate technologies—to ensure the Learner Guide Program’s efficacy at improving learning outcomes and girls’ empowerment and well-being is not lost as it expands. It will also require securing external financing for continued expansion in the medium term, while simultaneously identifying opportunities to integrate activities into the existing government budget to reach national scale and maintain the program’s critical impact over the longer term.



My Better World study session with Rashid, Rehema, and Samira, Bagamoyo, Tanzania.  
Photo credit: Eliza Powell.



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# Acknowledgements

Our deepest gratitude to our Real-time Scaling Lab partners and colleagues in Tanzania, who generously allowed us to learn alongside them and who inspired us with their commitment to ensuring marginalized children in Tanzania have access to a quality education. In particular, heartfelt thanks to Barbara Chilangwa, Anna Sawaki, Sandra Spence, Juliana Bwire, and to all the members of the Real-time Scaling Lab. We are also grateful to a wide range of additional colleagues who generously shared their knowledge and feedback on the research and the Real-time Scaling Lab process over the past several years.

These summary findings and full report would not have been possible without the invaluable research and writing contributions from Christina Kwauk, Patrick Hannahan, and Molly Curtiss Wyss. Our sincere gratitude and appreciation to the team at the Brookings Institution's Center for Universal Education who have been instrumental in the report, particularly Larry Cooley, Katie Portnoy, Brad Olsen, Esther Rosen, and Sara Coffey. Lastly, we wish to extend thanks to our peer reviewers Larry Cooley, Utibe Henshaw, and Maysa Jalbout. Special thanks to Christine Harris van Keuren and Lauren Burgess for their support and guidance in the development of the costed scaling plan. To share feedback on the summary findings, please email [CUE@brookings.edu](mailto:CUE@brookings.edu).

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Brookings gratefully acknowledges the support for the Tanzania Real-time Scaling Lab provided by ELMA Foundation (UK), through the Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED), Inc. The team also gratefully acknowledges support for the Real-time Scaling Lab project from the BHP Foundation, Bernard van Leer Foundation, Jacobs Foundation, the International Development Research Centre, Canada through the Foundation for Information Technology Education and Development (FIT-ED), and the International Rescue Committee. Brookings recognizes that the value it provides is in its commitment to quality, independence, and impact. Activities supported by its donors reflect this commitment.

