



Executive Summary

Adapting, innovating, and scaling foundational learning:

Four lessons from scaling Teaching
at the Right Level in Botswana

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In 2019, Youth Impact, the Ministry of Education and Skills Development and the Center for Universal Education at the Brookings Institution launched a Real-time Scaling Labs (RTSLs) in Botswana focused on the process of implementing, adapting, scaling, and sustaining the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach in primary schools across the country. The RTSL is part of Millions Learning, a project of the Center for Universal Education (CUE) at the Brookings Institution, that explores scaling and sustaining effective innovations leading to improved system-wide approaches. CUE is implementing a series of RTSLs in countries around the world to generate evidence and provide practical recommendations around the process of scaling in global education.

Since 2016, TaRL has expanded in Botswana from a numeracy pilot in a single school, to a numeracy and literacy program implemented in over 20 percent of primary schools across five regions of the country. Scaling TaRL

has resulted in impressive learning gains in Botswana. Results from 2022 show that the percentage of grade 3 to 5 students who could not do any basic math operations fell from 34 percent to 8 percent, and that 72 percent of students learned a new numerical operation (addition, subtraction, multiplication, or division) during a TaRL implementation period of 3 to 6 weeks.¹

The case of TaRL in Botswana offers a rich example of how an innovation developed and refined in one context can be adapted to and strategically expanded in a new location by a local organization in partnership with the government. TaRL's scaling journey in Botswana is still unfolding, but the case provides an opportunity to investigate the many key facilitating factors, decisions, and barriers that have contributed to and constrained the scaling process to date. This summary, and the report it draws from, explores four key lessons that have emerged from the work of scaling TaRL in Botswana.



Photo credit: Tendekai Mukoyi

1. Seize opportunity where problem, policies, and priorities converge

In Botswana, TaRL benefitted from a convergence of factors in the broader education ecosystem that led to ripe and ready conditions for its adoption and scaling. TaRL was able to get traction at multiple levels of the education ecosystem because it was:

- A direct response to local education needs and priority problems
- Aligned with existing policies, school structures, and national and international movements around the importance of foundational learning
- A simple, familiar, and cost-effective approach

While all of these factors aligned to form a window of opportunity, this was not just a matter of luck, but also preparation. Youth Impact was able to leverage the situation given their readiness to act and attention to the environment, existing reputation, and relationship with government leaders. Nonetheless, there were challenges around fluctuating levels of support from different actors in government. Maintaining relationships with stakeholders across the system and fostering relationships through meetings and informal conversations were important strategies adopted to address this challenge.

2. Foster a culture of flexible adaptation and innovation

A second key factor in the scaling of TaRL in Botswana has been the focus on continually adapting both the model and the scaling strategy based on real-time data and learning. This included:

- Adapting the TaRL the model to the Botswana context, such as by beginning with a focus solely on numeracy where there was greater need and fewer actors working in this space
- Aligning with the existing school schedule, so TaRL could take place within the “school study hour” block already reserved for remedial education
- Testing three different delivery models to allow for continuous experimentation, leverage existing resources, strengthen system capacity, build engagement at different levels, and institutionalize TaRL in daily teacher practices simultaneously

- Developing a minimum viable product, or the most impactful, cost-effective version of TaRL that can be implemented at national scale, including through rapid testing approaches
- Testing new approaches for engaging with learners through SMS and phone calls through the ConnectEd program when schools closed during the COVID-19 pandemic

Some key challenges to flexible adaptation and learning included constraints in the enabling environment, particularly around training and deploying youth volunteers to implement TaRL in a timely manner, and maintaining a quality, cost-effective approach to training that could operate at large scale.

3. Pursue demand-driven scaling with a focus on regional champions

A key feature of the TaRL scaling strategy has been to create coalitions with leaders across multiple levels of the education system, from the grassroots to the highest political levels, to support scaling TaRL. As Botswana has moved towards decentralization, this strategy has also included a greater focus on building coalitions at the regional level. Several key principles that have supported this work include:

- A “follow the leader” approach to expansion, moving TaRL implementation to follow regional champions when they move to new districts or regions. In addition to leveraging their networks, charisma, and experience, this approach also empowers these individuals to serve as advocates for TaRL to their peers.

- Working at multiple levels of the system with national policymakers, regional education officers, school leaders, and parents.

A key challenge to this coalition building has been the high turnover rates among leaders. There are also equity considerations to this scaling approach focused on champions when it comes to regions or districts without a clear champion or with leadership who have priorities other than TaRL. To address this, Youth Impact is working with the government to ensure equity and need are factored into scaling decisions alongside considerations about champions.

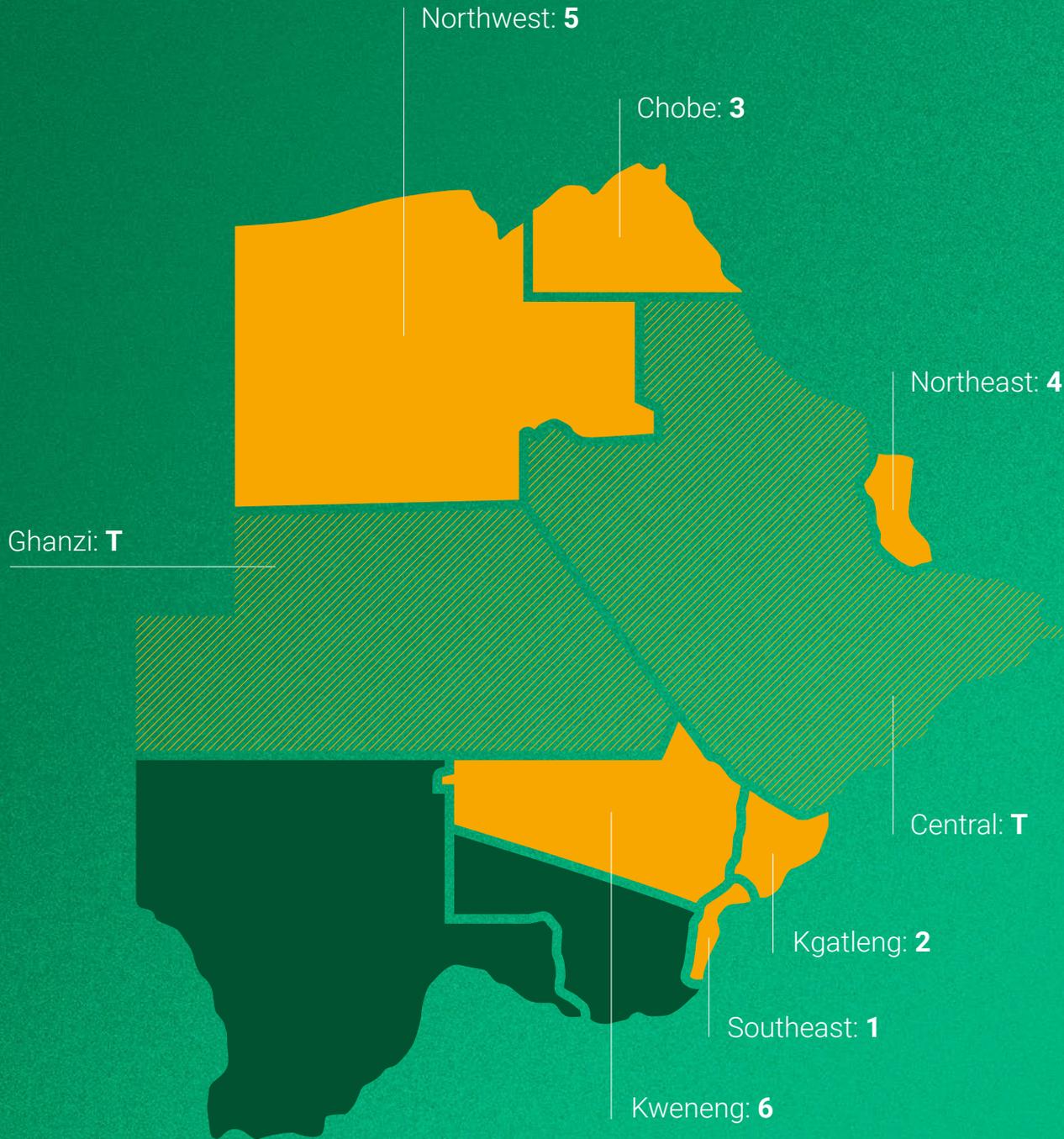
4. Use tailored and timely data as fuel for scaling impact

Data collection, analysis, and sharing have been critical at each stage of scaling TaRL, to inform continuous learning and improvement of both the model and the scaling strategy, including by:

- Employing international and local data to highlight the problem and illustrate TaRL's potential
- Using visible progress and testimonials as data points for generating excitement
- Collecting cost data to improve cost effectiveness and inform the scaling strategy

Some challenges faced included data overload, limited government capacity to collect data at the level and quantity that Youth Impact collects data, and difficulties creating accurate cost analysis for scale due to the range of financial and non-financial inputs included in the approach. Youth Impact has focused on simplifying and streamlining data collection to ensure just enough data is being collected such that it can inform decision-making in a timely way without becoming burdensome.

Scaling TaRL by region (2018 – 2022)



Legend:

Number = Order in the scaling journey;
T = Sensitization training

Where to go from here?

From one school in Gaborone in 2018 to reaching over 20 percent of the primary schools in Botswana in 2022, significant progress has occurred to scale TaRL in Botswana. By 2027, the government hopes to see TaRL in all primary schools in the country. Nevertheless, scaling is a long-term process and there is still a great deal of work to be done to achieve this goal. Over the next few years, the following activities could benefit progress toward national scale and government ownership of TaRL:

- Continuing to refine a cost-effective training and mentorship model.
- Exploring ways to integrate TaRL training into the existing pre-service teacher training system.
- Ensuring TaRL has a realistic budget line item in the Ministry of Education and Skills Development's budget based on a costed scaling plan to cover training, implementation, and monitoring, evaluation, and learning.

- Further strengthening and supporting government capacity and competencies for ongoing MEL.
- Regularly convening a group of key stakeholders to discuss the progress of scaling TaRL and make real-time decisions about the scaling journey, as recommended in the new MoU between Youth Impact and the Ministry of Education and Skills Development.
- Maintaining a focus on reaching areas and schools where there is the greatest need for TaRL.

The lessons learned thus far from scaling TaRL in Botswana provide insight into how the TaRL scaling journey can continue to progress and be further strengthened in Botswana, but also offer lessons that may be useful for other education actors supporting efforts to scale and sustain the impact of TaRL and other education innovations in diverse contexts across the globe.



Photo Credit: Hannah Blair

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End Notes

1. Unless otherwise cited, data is from Youth Impact's own data analysis of TaRL learning outcomes and program implementation statistics, which can be found here: <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/young1ove/viz/TaRLAllTermsMSGSLlevellingResults/FullDashboardStory>.

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