LEARNING WHAT MATTERS IN PERU

WHEN COMMUNITIES ALIGN: SHARED PRIORITIES
AND EDUCATIONAL TRANSFORMATION IN PERU

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ACRONYMS

CBR	Community-Based Research
UGEL	Local Education Management Unit (Unidad de Gestión Educativa Local)
4Ps	Purpose, Pedagogy, Positioning, Power
3Cs	Commitment, Capacity, Cohesion
MINEDU	Ministry of Education of Peru (Ministerio de Educación del Perú)
INEI	National Institute of Statistics and Informatics (Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática)
NEST	Network for Education Systems Transformation
COPALE	Local Education Participatory Council (Consejo Participativo Local de Educación)

ABOUT THIS SERIES

Education systems worldwide face mounting pressure to prepare children and young people not just for academic success, but for meaningful participation in an increasingly complex world (UNICEF 2023). Growing evidence suggests that to navigate the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century, children and young people need a broad set of skills, including but not limited to literacy, numeracy, critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, socioemotional learning, and civic engagement (Dweck, Walton, and Cohen 2014; Martinez 2022; Radó 2020).

The Network for Education Systems Transformation (NEST), a global impact network[1] co-led by the Center for Universal Education (CUE) at the Brookings Institution and ten civil society organizations across Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, and South Asia, seeks to understand how education systems can transform to prioritize a "breadth of skills"—an integrated set of academic, socioemotional, and transversal competencies that enable all children and young people to thrive (Care, Anderson, and Kim 2016; UNESCO n.d.).

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1   Impact networks are complex living systems, made of interacting people, organizations, and ecosystems. In contrast to traditional organizations with linear processes and standard operating procedures, networks are dynamic, interconnected, and variable. For details about the model of impact networks, see Ehrlichman (2021).

Central to our work is a shared exploratory question: How well are education systems creating opportunities for children and young people to learn what matters? This question acknowledges that, while concepts like "education systems," "opportunities," and "what matters" may differ across contexts, what binds the network is our collective commitment to understanding how education systems can transform to prioritize the development of a breadth of skills in all children and young people. Rather than prescribing universal definitions, NEST embraces locally grounded interpretations that honor the historical, cultural, political, and socioeconomic realities of each setting.

FRAMING OUR INQUIRY: THE FOUR Ps AND THREE Cs AS WORKING FRAMEWORKS

Informed by prior research from CUE at the Brookings Institution, NEST draws on two interconnected frameworks that guide our exploration of education systems transformation toward skills development. The 4P framework identifies four high-level domains of change in systems transformation: purpose, pedagogy, positioning, and power (Sengeh and Winthrop 2022; Winthrop, Morris, and Qargha 2023). The 3C framework proposes three catalytic conditions believed to enable and sustain the transformation process: commitment, capacity, and cohesion (CUE 2022; Olateju et al. forthcoming). This study finds greater alignment with the 4Ps and uses it as the key framework for analyzing the findings.

The 4P framework identifies four high-level domains of change in systems transformation: purpose, pedagogy, positioning, and power.

We approach these frameworks not as prescriptive models, but as working theories that require interrogation, adaptation, and potential expansion based on observations in diverse local contexts. Our methodology is deliberately abductive, that is, moving systematically between observation and theoretical inference while remaining open to alternative explanations and framework modifications. This approach reflects NEST's commitment to collaborative inquiry that is iterative, values local knowledge and expertise, and contributes to a broader understanding of education systems transformation. We recognize that meaningful change cannot be externally imposed, but must emerge from genuine engagement with local realities, assets, and constraints.

> The following report should not be read as a final statement, but as part of an ongoing, iterative process of learning and discovery that contributes to an emerging field.

About this report

The following country-level findings represent an early stage of inquiry in NEST's ongoing exploration of education systems transformation for skills development. Exploratory in nature, the insights emerging from Peru's unique context are an initial step toward a shared understanding of its education landscape. While findings of this research may not be directly transferable to other settings, we believe that the patterns, tensions, and possibilities identified in this report can inform broader conversations about how education systems worldwide might better support all children and young people in developing the skills they need to thrive. As NEST continues its collaborative work across ten countries, subsequent studies aim to deepen these insights and further refine our understanding of what enables sustainable education systems transformation toward a breadth of skills. As such, the following report should not be read as a final statement, but as part of an ongoing, iterative process of learning and discovery that contributes to an emerging field.

About Enseña Perú

Enseña Perú (EP) is a non-profit organization member of Teach for All that believes in the power of education and trusts in the potential of all Peruvians. The organization strives for a country where every student has the opportunity to realize their purpose and achieve their dreams. The work is inspired by the vision of ensuring that, by 2032, at least eight out of ten children and young people receive a high-quality education.

Enseña Perú contributes to the construction of a national movement led by agents of change from various sectors for educational transformation.

Through five leadership programs, EP accompanies individuals at different stages of their educational journey—including students—so that they can strengthen their agency and contribute to community-driven educational transformation rooted in trust, shared purpose, and joint responsibility for student wellbeing and learning.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

When transforming an education system, commitment from various actors to advance shared priorities can allow for a reorientation around locally valued goals and ways of knowing. Relationally, commitment is made visible through participation or engagement, including showing up, voicing perspectives, taking responsibility, or co-deciding (Walsh 2010). The study used the term "individual commitment" to refer to the motivations and dispositions anchored in personal histories and experiences, and "collective commitment" to describe the shared orientations, agreements, and relational dynamics that emerge when actors align around a common educational purpose. Specifically, the study examined how enablers and barriers to commitment to an educational priority—established by an alliance between Local Education Management Units (UGELs) and Enseña Perú (EP) in two distinct Peruvian provinces—impacted provincial education systems transformation.

Grounded in a qualitative, case-based design using a Community-Based Research (CBR) approach (Kerry et al. 2003), the study was co-constructed with local advisory committees composed of students, teachers, parents, and local authorities. These committees actively shaped research variables, sampling criteria, and tools while also reviewing and interpreting emerging findings. This collaborative design process served as a space of transformation, demonstrating how commitment to both research and education systems transformation emerges through genuine participation and engagement.

Findings revealed that "commitment" is a relational, emotional, and situated process. In Ascope, there was broad agreement on the legitimacy and importance of children's literacy, which mobilized rapid alignment around this as a local priority, but this strong agreement also limited the questioning of existing practices. In San Marcos, the idea of student leadership as a form of participation, which had been established as the provincial priority by the UGEL-EP alliance, was contested, which sparked dialogue around this type of participation and surfaced barriers for actors who have felt historically excluded from participation.

In each of these cases, commitment took shape through biographies, community narratives, and the symbolic construction of educational priorities. Commitment deepened when students, parents, and teachers felt recognized and saw their knowledge legitimized. Conversely, when actors were excluded from decisionmaking, commitment collapsed. Furthermore, educational priorities functioned as symbolic inputs that organized collective action but also shaped whose participation was legitimized. Lastly, local governance and leadership further shaped how commitment unfolded by influencing trust, role clarity, and supportive practices. When leadership was collaborative and valued diverse perspectives, it fostered lasting commitment.

The study was co-constructed with local advisory committees composed of students, teachers, parents, and local authorities.

When institutions remained rigid, they risked creating exclusion and disengagement.

Ultimately, the study revealed that transformative educational change that is cohesive and community-driven requires deliberate attention to processes, power dynamics, and meaning-making. Strengthening commitment is not only a matter of inviting more actors to participate, but also of reconfiguring how priorities are constructed, how roles are negotiated, and how local knowledge is valued within education systems.

CONTEXT AND CONDITIONS

Peru's education system operates through a multi-level governance structure composed of the national Ministry of Education (MINEDU), 26 Regional Education Directorates (DRE), and 224 Local Education Management Units (UGEL; see Table 1) (Congreso de la República del Perú 2002). Importantly, while UGEL jurisdictions typically correspond to provinces, certain provinces (most notably Metropolitan Lima) are divided into multiple UGELs due to population density and geographic complexity.

In this context, education systems transformation depends not only on national policy frameworks but also on how regional and local actors negotiate responsibilities, exercise agency, and build relational trust to advance shared priorities.

Structural and cultural barriers like adult-centeredness, vertical governance, and devaluation of community knowledge persist across governance levels.

In recent decades, reforms have encouraged broader participation and collective co-construction of education policy. The National Education Project to 2036, formulated with inputs from over half a million citizens, set forth the vision of an active and committed citizenry (CNE 2020). However, participatory frameworks alone have not guaranteed sustained engagement. Structural and cultural barriers like adult-centeredness (Save the Children Perú 2023), vertical governance, and devaluation of community knowledge (Peña León 2024) persist across governance levels. These challenges are often more pronounced in rural provinces where decentralization has not consistently translated into autonomous decisionmaking or local responsiveness (Holler-Neyra 2013).

TABLE 1: PERU'S EDUCATION SYSTEM GOVERNANCE

LEVEL	BODY	MAIN RESPONSIBILITIES
NATIONAL	MINEDU	Defines national education policy and the National Curriculum; establishes regulatory frameworks, learning standards, and evaluation systems; allocates and conditions national budget; provides technical assistance to DRE/GRE and UGELs; approves regional curricular adaptations to ensure alignment with national policy.
REGIONAL	DRE/GRE	Leads the contextualization of national policy at the regional level; formulates, implements, and monitors the Regional Education Project (PER); supervises and supports UGELs; coordinates with Regional Governments; promotes multisectoral articulation and participatory bodies; provides pedagogical and administrative guidance within their jurisdiction.
LOCAL (PROVINCIAL)	UGEL	Designs, implements, and monitors the Local Education Project (PEL); supervises and supports schools; manages human and financial resources at the local level; provides pedagogical and technical assistance to principals and teachers; promotes educational networks; fosters local participation mechanisms; and articulates local actors around educational priorities.

As a result, some provinces have begun to explore alternative ways to foster change within their local systems. EP, for example, works in partnership with UGELs to establish shared education priorities as a strategy to catalyze change (in this study, an educational priority is defined as a collectively defined thematic focus that organizes and gives meaning to a community's efforts toward transformation). Co-constructed by local stakeholders, these priorities reflect the belief that in order to learn what matters (UNESCO Institute for Statistics and CUE 2013), education systems must not only expand access but also reorient toward locally valued goals and ways of knowing.

To pursue collective priorities, local coalitions bring together UGELs, school communities, private sector actors, and other local stakeholders. This coalescence is to align efforts, distribute purpose, and create enabling conditions for change. These locally defined priorities do not replace the national curricular framework, but serve as guides for the coalition's work: strengthening coherence, agency, and action within local systems.

Two provinces, two priorities

This study focuses on two provinces—San Marcos and Ascope —where shared education priorities were collaboratively defined by the UGEL-EP alliance. These provinces offer a window into how transformation is pursued locally in contexts marked by both historical challenges and active change processes. The two provinces were selected because of a previous alliance between EP and the UGEL, an alliance marked by committed local leadership, an identified shared priority for educational improvement, supportive governance for collaboration, and clearly identified educational challenges. The study focuses on the priority that was established by the alliance based on local needs, but that also falls under the umbrella of national education policy.

SAN MARCOS

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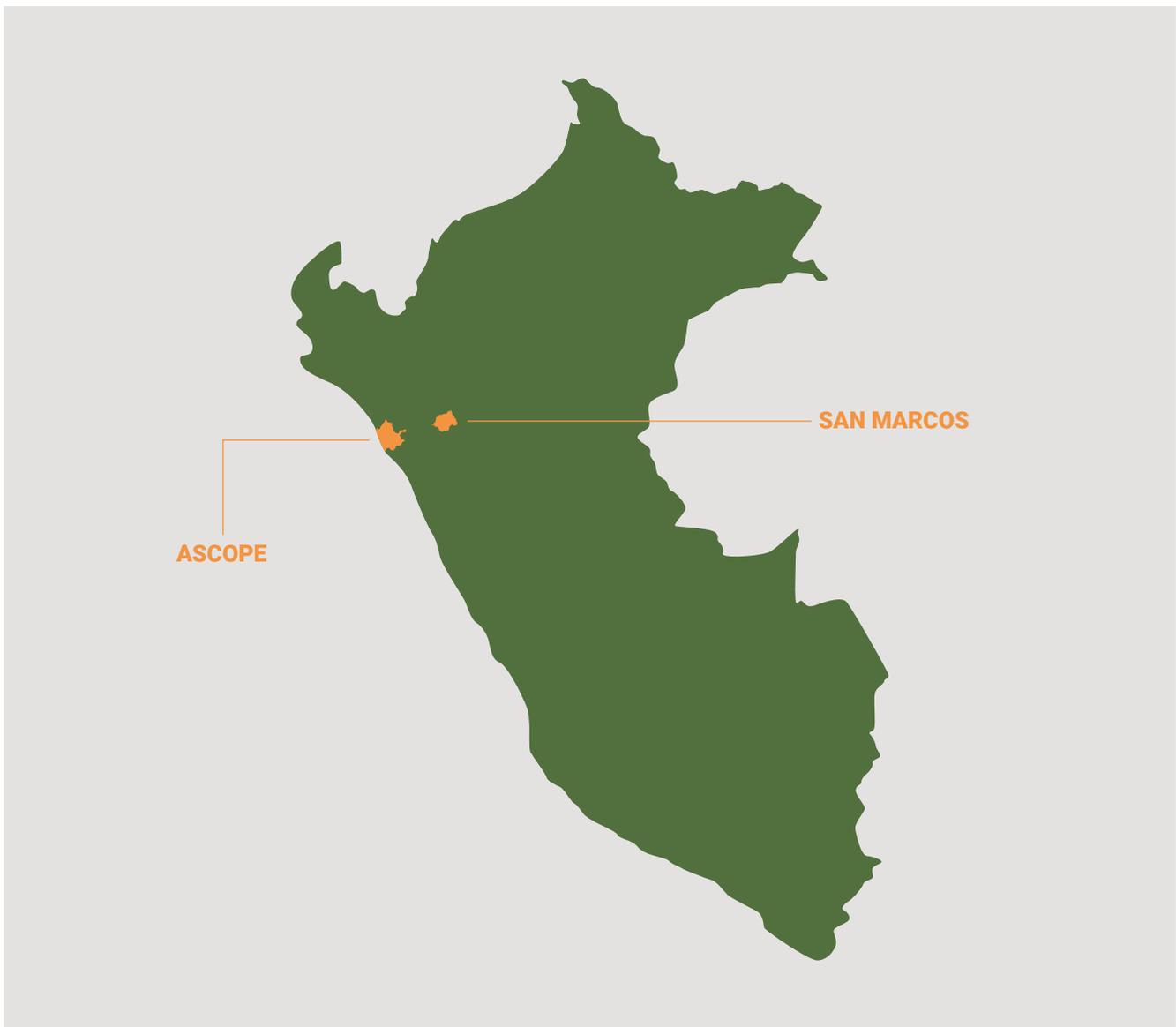
SAN MARCOS

Located in the highlands of the Cajamarca region, the San Marcos province has a predominantly agricultural economy and strong traditions of communal organization, but faces structural isolation and limited presence of national institutions. In this province, 92.5% of the population lives in rural areas, and nearly half (48.2%) face monetary poverty (MIDIS 2023). Limited infrastructure, long travel distances, and a limited state presence constrain access to services and shape how communities engage with education (INEI 2022). The education system reflects this dispersion; the province has 14,546 students (10,895 in rural areas), 1,206 teachers (972 rural), and 385 schools, of which 365 are rural and all publicly managed (MINEDU 2023).

Despite the transformative potential observed in initial school-based pilots that sought to strengthen student leadership, early collaborative exchanges between EP and UGEL in 2022 and 2023 revealed limited opportunities for secondary students to exercise agency, participate in decisionmaking spaces, or recognize themselves as contributors to their schools and communities. These patterns, combined with interest from provincial schools to strengthen students' sense of purpose and voice, led the UGEL-EP alliance to formally adopt student leadership as its shared priority in 2023, which later informed the provincial education strategy.

While the territory is more urbanized and economically integrated, it faces other challenges: high perceptions of insecurity and weak social capital.

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On the northern coast of the La Libertad region, the Ascope province is characterized by agro-industrial activity and urban expansion alongside social fragmentation and weakened community trust. While the territory is more urbanized and economically integrated, it faces other challenges: high perceptions of insecurity (Observatorio de Criminalidad del Ministerio Público 2023) and weak social capital (Enseña Perú 2024). Ascope's education system comprises 29,840 students, 2,045 teachers, and 313 schools, with more than half of the schools located in rural areas (MINEDU 2023). These conditions, among other systemic and institutional factors, directly influence learning outcomes. Only two in ten primary students reach expected levels in reading standards (UMC 2023). These patterns, reflected in national assessments, reinforced a shared understanding among educators and authorities that improving reading comprehension was essential for strengthening student learning. Based on this convergence of evidence and the concerns expressed by school actors, including educators, authorities, and parents, literacy was collectively defined as the educational priority for the provincial UGEL-EP alliance. This alliance was consolidated between 2022 and 2023, leading to initial cycles of co-design and piloting throughout 2023.

METHODOLOGY

Analytical framework

Commitment lies at the heart of EP's theory of change. The organization understands education systems transformation as a provincial, systemic process driven by collective leadership across students, educators, families, communities, and authorities. Within this vision, commitment is not only an individual disposition, but the shared human energy that sustains efforts to ensure that all children and young people can improve their wellbeing, discover their purpose, and lead change in their lives, communities, and country.

Within the broader NEST agenda, "commitment" refers to the interest, engagement, and action of all stakeholders to effectively reorient and resource education systems so they support a breadth of skills for all children and young people (CUE 2022). While the full construct includes institutional signaling and resource allocation, this study focuses specifically on its relational and human dimensions as it is lived and enacted in local education ecosystems. This research explores the enablers of and barriers to such education systems transformation commitment in two Peruvian provinces (San Marcos and Ascope), where local coalitions co-defined shared educational priorities of student leadership and literacy, respectively.

Based on shared UGEL-EP provincial education priorities, the study beginning in 2024 sought to understand the enablers of and barriers to commitment

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(CUE 2025), which are understood in this study as the sustained, co-responsible engagement of diverse actors around a shared educational priority. The study explored the following research question: What are the enablers of and barriers to building commitment in local education ecosystems, which have co-defined and are actively advancing a shared educational priority to transform education in their province? The question is not limited to identifying programmatic outcomes; rather, it seeks to explore the social, political, and emotional dynamics through which collective action is constructed, sustained, and transformed within specific provincial contexts.

The study was qualitative, exploratory, descriptive, and utilized a CBR approach to prioritize co-construction with local actors, recognizing that knowledge production can itself be a transformative process (Cammarota and Fine 2008). This methodological approach was selected because it allows for an in-depth understanding of the social, relational, and political dimensions.

A core component of the CBR approach was the active involvement of local advisory committees. These committees, composed of 60 members across both provinces, reflected a diverse cross-section of the education ecosystem. Approximately 37% were secondary students, 38% were educators (including teachers and school leaders), 5% were family representatives, and the remaining 20% included UGEL officials, territorial

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staff, municipal representatives, and other institutional actors. They co-led the research design via collaborative dialogue, shaping its focus, scope, and tools. For a detailed overview of committee composition, see Annex 1. Although these members did not form part of the study sample, their role in ensuring that the study's focus, findings, and recommendations remained relevant and actionable within each province was essential in shaping the research process (Fals-Borda 1987).

Researcher reflexivity

Although EP has a longstanding presence in both provinces, the research team worked independently from those working directly in the communities. In addition, because the study focused on everyday experiences in the education ecosystem (rather than evaluating EP's programs), the prior institutional presence facilitated trust and access without compromising research independence. At the same time, we acknowledge that these longstanding relationships inevitably shaped aspects of the research process, including how participants engaged with the team and how data were shared. For a timeline of the committee process and the specific decisions made at each stage—including variable prioritization, sampling criteria, and instrument validation—see Annexes 2 and 2B. The participatory process mirrored the very dynamics of collective commitment, functioning not only as a methodological strategy, but also as a generative and relational space.

Data collection and analysis

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 29 participants in each province, representing diverse roles across the local education ecosystem. Local advisory committees collaborated with Enseña Peru on a two-stage purposive sampling process (Patton 2022) to ensure relevance and contextual alignment (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. 2014).

In Stage 1, four schools per province were selected as primary sampling units. Selection was based on contextual factors like geographic location, school management type, institution size, and history of participation with programs and projects related to the educational priority prioritized by the UGEL-Enseña Peru alliance.

In Stage 2, participants were deliberately selected within these schools to ensure that key stakeholder roles aligned with the research questions were represented. This nested approach (Yin 2018) enabled the study to explore commitment across multiple layers (individual, institutional, and provincial), allowing for a rich, situated understanding of local educational ecosystems (Stake 2005). The sample comprised 48 individuals—15 students, 16 educators (including school authorities and teachers), six family representatives, and 21 local and system-level actors (e.g., municipal authorities, education officials, and council members).

For detailed school-level characteristics, see Annex 3. For sample composition, see Annex 4.

A deductive thematic analysis was applied (Braun 2006) using a coding matrix structured around two guiding conceptual lenses: the 3Cs and the 4Ps (Winthrop and KDNLC 2022). The 3Cs helped examine the systemic conditions that enable transformation by exploring how different actors engage with, resource, and align around change. The 4Ps provided an interpretive framework to analyze the political and pedagogical dimensions shaping these efforts. These frameworks served not as rigid categories, but as sensemaking tools to explore how transformation is negotiated locally. While the coding matrix drew from both frameworks, this report centers its analysis on the dimension of "commitment," reflecting Enseña Peru's organizational expertise and long-standing engagement with commitment as a lever for change. This ensured that local insights could be interpreted within a shared analytical language of NEST while preserving the contextual richness of both Peruvian provinces.

Limitations

As a case-based qualitative study, this design prioritized breadth over statistical representativeness, emphasizing depth, contextual relevance, and richness of meaning within bounded settings. Accordingly, the findings are context-specific and not intended for broad generalization. However, case-based designs offer particular value for deepening conceptual understanding and advancing theory-building in social settings. Therefore, the depth of analysis across four schools per province offers valuable insights into provincial education ecosystems (Merriam and Tisdell 2015).

FINDINGS

Commitment grows when participation is legitimized

In both provinces, commitment transcended normative and institutional frameworks. Members of both educational communities described it as an emotionally engaged and proactive presence within the school and local life. "Commitment is to get involved, to be part of, for the benefit of the students," explained a principal in San Marcos. "It means being present at all times." Another principal echoed this sentiment, saying, "If I could change the mindset of my parents … that would be my biggest achievement, because commitment is not just for one person—it's for the entire community."

Educators across both territories agreed with this idea, describing commitment as the willingness to give beyond expectations, remain emotionally present, and build bonds that extend beyond the school walls. Teachers from San Marcos described commitment as "putting forth all our effort … feeling and giving everything we can—more than we can—so that the school moves forward." Another emphasized, "being always present—not on the sidelines—but involved in both the pedagogical and emotional aspects of students, teachers, and families."

However, commitment fluctuated according to context, mutual recognition, and the legitimacy of participatory spaces. The findings showed that commitment was activated when actors felt their lived experience was valid and extinguished when the system denied their knowledge or reduced it to instrumental tasks. For example, when a student in San Marcos was chosen as a representative to the UGEL, she described feeling "important" for the first time. "I was in a room with directors and teachers," she said, "and I got to speak and share my ideas. I thought, 'Wow, I'm here with professionals, and they're listening to me.'" Similarly, when a mother in Ascope saw her daughter's drawing displayed on the school mural, she felt profound pride, saying, "It made all the effort worthwhile." A teacher spoke of how "a kind word means more than anything" when work is recognized, and a student explained that after a teacher affirmed her contribution ("What you said was really good!"), she began enjoying participation more. This dynamic reflected how rethinking power structures and repositioning ecosystem actors like learners and their parents influenced whose participation counted and whose knowledge was legitimized.

But the opposite was also true: when actors felt ignored, excluded, or reduced to operational roles, commitment faltered. Students in San Marcos described giving opinions that no one listened to, leading them to "end up staying quiet." Mothers in Ascope reported being called to meetings where "everything is already decided; they just inform us." A father in San Marcos articulated how educational levels create barriers to participation. "We don't have much education, and

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that lowers your self-esteem," he said. "It makes it harder to express yourself." A student leader in San Marcos described the moment his sense of agency evaporated, not because he disengaged from school life, but because his role was narrowed to a task that left little room for voice or deliberation. He said, "The director told me: 'As school mayor, you have to check if students are wearing their uniform properly.' That's when I felt that my opinion didn't really matter."

These narratives exposed tensions around the types of involvement that are valued within the education ecosystem. When only visible action or constant involvement was valued, those with less time, resources, or legitimacy—such as some mothers, students, or informal community leaders—may be left out of socially accepted definitions of engagement. This reinforces structural inequalities about who is entitled to participate in change and what practices are considered valid. In this light, capacities cannot be understood solely in technical or institutional terms. What becomes activated in the provinces is more complex. It is a question of who has the real possibility of exercising agency, who can dissent without being left out, and who finds in their history and role a legitimate starting point for participation. Neither dimension—the personal nor the situated—is usually at the center of transformation agendas, but they are fundamental to sustain change from within.

Co-creating educational priorities provides a north star for systems transformation

The study's findings revealed that, although collectively defining an educational priority as a province does not automatically determine involvement and commitment, it does shape the mental frameworks from which action can be taken.

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The choice of literacy as a priority was widely accepted across all groups of actors, in part because it was connected to previous processes in the province and responded to explicit institutional objectives. Teachers, parents, and students consistently described it as "the basis of any learning" and "a necessary condition for future success." One teacher explained: "It doesn't matter which subject you're learning—if you don't understand what you read, you won't even be able to solve a math problem." A parent articulated the long-term stakes, saying, "If they don't learn to read well, they won't be able to keep studying later on. They won't be able to pursue a career or get a good job."

This collective sense of legitimacy, anchored in perceived value rather than solely in policy or results, operated as a powerful organizing idea that gave coherence to the province's educational efforts.

This made it possible to align efforts from previously established roles and to activate commitment oriented to technical improvement. However, this level of agreement also reduced the margin for innovation and questioning of existing practices. As school leaders described it, improvement was largely understood as consolidating and extending what was already producing results. One director explained, "The changes that are being implemented are focused only—and especially—on students…and the only thing left for us is to replicate them in other classrooms to increase those results and that level."

Another reinforced this orientation, noting that "the changes that are being made are to improve learning and replicate what already works." Change was channeled more toward strengthening what was already being done, rather than imagining new pedagogical or organizational possibilities. In practice, this meant scaling existing strategies, raising targets, and intensifying monitoring. As one school leader described, "We have seen good results, and this year we agreed to extend those strategies to the rest of the grades," while another added, "Now we want to keep raising those targets." This orientation was echoed at the classroom level, where teachers emphasized continuity over experimentation: "The strategies that were already being implemented have continued, just now with more follow-up."

SAN MARCOS

In San Marcos, student leadership generated more debate as a potential priority than literacy did in Ascope. Although student leadership was present in the national curriculum as a transversal approach for learning (MINEDU 2016), its provincial interpretation was diverse, and its legitimacy was disputed, especially when questioning whether it was necessary to foster leadership in female students in a context where traditional gender roles are prevalent. As one local authority noted, "We have never had a female mayor… machismo is strong. At school they could lead, but in the community it's different," pointing to how gender norms shape the legitimacy of leadership beyond formal school spaces.

The lack of consensus in San Marcos opened up questions about what it means to lead as a student, who can lead, and what such student leadership looks like in practice. Rather than a single model, what began to take shape was a plurality of leadership forms: institutional leadership embedded in structures like student councils; affective leadership rooted in peer support; mobilization of leadership through environmental or cultural projects; expressive leadership in public spaces; and intergenerational or inclusive leadership aimed at bridging divides and integrating excluded students. These forms coexisted, and while not all were institutionally recognized, many had a significant impact on school life and well-being. Students described how recognition often depended less on leadership impact than on symbolic markers of authority. As one student explained, "This year they chose the brigadiers only because they have a strong voice… and sometimes they choose them because teachers have preferences," revealing how informal criteria shaped who was positioned as a leader. Another student reflected on

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how legitimacy shifted once a formal role was attained: "Everyone should be listened to equally… this year they have taken me into account because now I am the mayor." Together, these accounts show how power constructs and the positioning of students can shape which leadership practices are legitimized within schools.

The cases of Ascope and San Marcos suggest that beyond the formal definition of a priority, it is its construction and interpretation that determine its transformative potential. Far from being neutral, priorities shaped what became visible, who was mobilized, and which forms of participation were legitimized. As such, priorities can operate as mechanisms for building cohesion and offering a shared agenda and direction. Their capacity to do so in inclusive and sustainable ways, however, depends on how they are negotiated, by whom, and under what terms.

Power and organizational systems impact the positioning of local actors

The sustainability of commitment also depended on how education systems were organized and led. Institutional and provincial conditions shaped the relational texture of commitment: organizational contexts nurtured or suppressed personal motivations; leadership practices opened or closed cultural narratives; and structural arrangements amplified or silenced

lived experiences. Understanding these intersections was key to examining how commitment becomes sustainable within education systems such as those observed in the study.

In addition to examining commitment with the broader ecosystem, this research showed that commitment also emerges from deeply meaningful personal trajectories. Many interviewees, when explaining why they get involved in school activities, referred to their own experiences as students: experiences of care that they want to replicate, or painful moments they do not want repeated. A father in San Marcos made this explicit: "I've always seen the importance of each parent's commitment. I draw from my own experience, from not having had that opportunity with my own parents." These memories anchor purpose and give emotional weight to participation. When personal history found recognition and space for action, commitment gained direction and meaning.

At an organizational level, certain conditions either facilitated or restricted the ways actors positioned themselves to foster commitment. Conditions that emerged from the study included effective dialogue among actors, prior experience of collaboration across roles, and particularly, a climate of trust and clarity of roles. When a teacher in San Marcos described parent meetings, she emphasized this quality: "Their voices are truly valued. We propose alternatives, but they are the ones who decide. Their opinions are listened to and taken into account." Across interviews, clarity of roles was described as shared understandings, formal or negotiated, about who facilitated, who accompanied, and how collective action was sustained

over time. Rather than guaranteeing commitment, these organizational conditions shaped whether people felt safe, recognized, and oriented toward a shared educational priority. A student leader in San Marcos described a moment when this clarity created space for his voice: "They told me: 'Son, we want to hear your opinion—how can we improve the school?' I went to the office, we all sat down—teachers and I—and they commented on what I said. I felt like one of them, lifted up in that moment."

As the interviews described, perceptions of whose knowledge counts and who is entitled to participate were described as strongly influencing engagement. In places like San Marcos, for instance, agricultural knowledge and community-rooted expertise are often devalued. As one school director explained, "Unfortunately, we invite parents to participate, but they hardly take part because they don't really know, you know? […] They don't know much about education. I mean, most parents have only completed primary school." In this context, participation was less about presence than about whose knowledge was recognized as relevant, resulting in a narrowed spectrum of legitimate engagement.

Leadership, in this sense, also emerged from the data as playing a bridging role between these dimensions. While institutional mandates may outline participation, it is through leadership styles, symbolic recognition, and everyday practices that individuals feel either enabled or constrained to commit. As one student noted, "She (her friend) didn't say anything either, because she knew the principal wouldn't understand." This perception of leadership shaped whether individuals

felt safe to speak, limiting participation even in spaces where involvement was formally expected.

The study revealed that the positioning of UGELs, school boards, and local authorities can open or block shared purpose and cohesion. When leadership was consistent, close, and oriented toward dialogue, it strengthened the institutional trust and shared vision needed to sustain commitment. However, several actors emphasized that even when formal decisionmaking spaces existed, they did not always feel safe or legitimized to voice disagreement or propose alternatives. A mother in Ascope described being called to meetings "decisions are taken from the institutional plan; parents are informed, but we do not decide." Another spoke of how some schools fine parents for being late to meetings: "Many prefer not to go, just to avoid the penalty or the shame." Leadership, therefore, must also create conditions for empowerment, sustain trust, and enable the emergence of collective agency.

These contrasting experiences highlight a central insight: what matters is not only what enabling conditions exist, but how they are negotiated, with whom, and through which narratives they are sustained.

Lessons learned from the CBR approach

During the months of work with the consultative committees in San Marcos and Ascope, the research team observed and experienced how commitment emerged not when "more participation" was requested, but

> As one student noted, "She (her friend) didn't say anything either, because she knew the principal wouldn't understand."

The research team invested time in building trust, rotating roles, and challenging hierarchies of age, gender, and institutional status.

when conditions allowed everyone to be present, understood, and able to dissent. Both practical and institutional conditions made participation viable. These conditions included care and safety provisions (accessible locations, appropriate schedules, and secure transportation), distributed leadership and rotating roles that reduced hierarchical tensions, coordination with local management units to formalize and sustain the spaces, and provincial ownership reflected in the alignment with local calendars and timeframes. At the outset, EP initiated the process by setting the initial research focus and convening participants. As the committees became active, members helped define how they wished to engage at different stages, based on their time, interests, and capacities. While EP continued to coordinate and systematize the process, it remained flexible and was continuously adapted through dialogue to respect the roles, rhythms, and contributions co-defined with the committees.

To sustain this dynamic, the research team invested time in building trust, rotating roles, and challenging hierarchies of age, gender, and institutional status. Horizontality emerged through accumulated shared experience that fostered confidence and connection. In that process, commitment evolved into a collective endeavor—not merely a sum of individual contributions, but a co-construction of meaning.

Finally, this path reaffirmed participatory research requires embracing discomfort in both dialogue and the time it requires. The group collectively agreed to meet six times throughout the year. This meant that the rhythm of the process was intentionally slow, yet deliberate. Designing a viable participatory route was logistically challenging: each session had to be planned with precision, considering the level of engagement the committee wished to assume and the time they could realistically offer. Yet this constraint led to greater clarity and intentionality, reminding the team that care, coherence, and realistic expectations were also part of doing rigorous, ethical, and situated research.

Summary of findings

This study showed that commitment within education ecosystems is emotional, relational, and deeply contextual. Its sustainability does not rest primarily on formal rules or assigned roles, but on the extent to which actors experience purpose, connection, and symbolic recognition within collective processes. Across both provinces, commitment was sustained when participation enabled individuals to feel valued, to connect their personal histories and aspirations to collective goals, and to envision themselves as legitimate contributors to change.

The research process itself further illustrated that participation functions as a site of transformation rather than a neutral mechanism. The work with the Advisory Committees demonstrated that meaningful engagement does not emerge spontaneously, but through deliberate design, care, and relational work over time. Trust, horizontality, and co-construction were not the result of formal mandates, but of intentionally shaped interactions that aligned roles, expectations, and rhythms among participants from the outset.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The study illuminated that commitment is a situated, relational, and collectively defined construction—one that emerges through time, negotiation, and mutual recognition. The study also showed that when an educational priority is genuinely shared and collectively interpreted, it can strengthen the conditions under which commitment becomes possible. In addition, the findings, as well as the participatory process itself, suggested that what is at stake is not only what enabling conditions must be present, but how they are negotiated, with whom, and under what narratives they are sustained over time. Based on these findings, we offer concrete recommendations for education actors at three different levels of the ecosystem to increase and sustain commitment to local priorities in order to transform systems:

FOR SCHOOLS, TEACHERS, AND PRINCIPALS

Inclusive participation processes can be strengthened not only by inviting more voices, but by intentionally redefining how decision-making spaces are structured and facilitated. This means enabling dissent, rotating speaking roles, and creating environments where non-traditional actors—such as students, caregivers, or others—feel safe to contribute. The Advisory Committees demonstrated that meaningful engagement happens when participation is adapted to the capacities and interests of each actor, not standardized by institutional expectations.

FOR LOCAL EDUCATION LEADERS (SUCH AS UGELS)

Strengthen pedagogical leadership that coordinates across areas, values technical voices, and ensures that formal participation mechanisms—like the Consejo Participativo Local de Educación (COPALE), or local education participatory council—do not become mere formalities. Rather than enforcing participation, they can be reimagined as spaces for co-construction, where commitment is cultivated through shared purpose and recognition. Leadership must enable collective agency by distributing authority and validating diverse contributions. Importantly, it must build cohesion while enabling dissent—creating alignment around shared purpose without demanding uniformity of perspective or suppressing legitimate disagreement.

FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

Intentionally design participation strategies that intentionally address power asymmetries within school ecosystems by clarifying purpose, roles, and expectations from the outset. This includes making direct invitations that explicitly communicate why specific actors are being convened and how their contributions matter. Rather than assuming readiness, organizations can support participation by fostering shared understanding of the process

They travel with us into new territories, inform programmatic decisions, and continually reshape what we understand by educational transformation.

at hand, creating, for instance, a common language that allows actors to engage meaningfully. Participation is further strengthened when spaces are designed to sustain trust and relational safety, combining collective reflection with smaller group work, rotating roles to disrupt entrenched power dynamics, and enabling multiple forms of engagement (such as speaking, writing, or observing) so that individuals can contribute in ways that feel accessible to them. The goal is not only to increase participation, but to level the conditions that make meaningful engagement possible.

As part of NEST, Enseña Perú will continue to deepen this line of work. In the coming months, the team will facilitate spaces for the collective design of dissemination and action routes led by the advisory committees. Additionally, broader and more systematic feedback loops will be activated and shared with

the UGELs, with the goal of ensuring that decisions do not only emerge from within the organization but are also owned and driven by the local education system. The questions raised by this research do not remain on paper: they travel with us into new territories, inform programmatic decisions, and continually reshape what we understand by educational transformation.

Although commitment is deeply intertwined with other systemic conditions, such as capacity and cohesion, what is ultimately at stake transcends any single variable. From the analytical lens of this report, it is not only about improving educational outcomes, but about expanding the right to imagine, lead and sustain a different school and education ecosystem—one where commitment is not demanded, but cultivated locally through the voices of diverse ecosystem actors.

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ANNEX 1
Local advisory committee members

ROLE	FEMALE	MALE	TOTAL	INSTITUTIONS
DEPARTMENT OF LA LIBERTAD; PROVINCE OF ASCOPE				
Head teacher	3	1	4	Niño Jesús de Praga
				Leoncio Prado
				81534 Iris Barriga
				Santa Teresita del Niño Jesús
Deputy director	-	1	1	Casa Grande
Teacher	6	2	8	Santa Teresita del Niño Jesús
				Jesús Nazareno
				Cartavio
				Casa Grande
				80020 Santa Rosa de Lima
				80689 Daniel Alcides Carrión
				Leoncio Prado
				Ramón Castilla
Secondary student	7	2	9	Chiquitoy
				Cartavio
				Santa Teresita del Niño Jesús
				Casa Grande
				80689 Daniel Alcides Carrión
				Ramón Castilla
Parent	2	-	2	Chiquitoy
Psychologist	1	-	1	Chiquitoy
Advisor	-	1	1	-
Territorial Staff	4	-	4	Enseña Perú

DEPARTMENT OF CAJAMARCA; PROVINCE OF SAN MARCOS				
ROLE	FEMALE	MALE	TOTAL	INSTITUTIONS
Head teacher	1	2	3	VAB Chancay
				IGV Huayanay
				Chuco
Teacher	6	1	7	JEC San Marcos
				San Marcos
				Alberto Bueno Tirado
				82176
				Amalia P de Lozada
				IGV Huayanay
Secondary student	8	5	13	Alberto Bueno Tirado
				JEC San Marcos
				Chancay
				Chuco
				IGV Huayanay
Alumni	1	-	1	Chuco
Specialist	4	-	4	UGEL San Marcos
Council member	-	1	1	Municipality of San Marcos
Director of the Ichocán Microred Headquarters	-	1	1	Red de salud
Parent	-	1	1	Víctor Andres Belaunde
Territorial Staff	1	-	1	Enseña Perú

ANNEX 2

Participatory research design summary

ROLE	FEMALE
Number and duration of sessions	A total of nine in-person sessions were held with each Local Advisory Committee during 2024 and 2025. Sessions ranged from 1 to 6 hours, depending on the stage and objective.
Key moments of co-decision	The Committees actively participated in: – Defining research variables aligned with local concerns – Validating and adapting consent forms and interview guides – Establishing purposive sampling criteria by actor type – Mapping key local stakeholders to understand power dynamics – Co-designing the 2025 work plan and setting engagement expectations
Process adaptations	The methodology was adapted to each territory's school calendar and participants' availability. Committee members chose how and when to engage. Participation was non-uniform but intentionally flexible, shaped by each actor's capacity, role, and interest.
Guiding principles	The participatory approach was grounded in principles of: – Co-responsibility (shared ownership over decisions and results) – Contextual relevance (adapting to local rhythms and priorities) – Ethical reflexivity (constant questioning of power, inclusion, and voice) – Relational care (nurturing trust among participants)
Role of Enseña Perú	Enseña Perú convened and facilitated the process, especially in early stages. However, the structure was progressively co-owned by participants, who co-defined engagement rules, contributed to decisions, and shaped their own roles over time.
Pacing and rhythm	The process was intentionally slow and deliberative, recognizing the time required to build trust and enable genuine participation. Sessions were spaced out over the year to accommodate other responsibilities and ensure depth.

ANNEX 2B

Local advisory committee timeline

N°	PROVINCE	DATE	DURATION	PURPOSE OF THE SESSION	AGENDA AND ACTIVITIES
1	San Marcos Ascope	25/03/2024 27/03/2024	1 hour	Jointly analyze the findings from the implemented instruments and identify core ideas that frame the drivers and barriers around the priority commitment (focus on drivers).	The session began with a symbolic reconnection through personal storytelling about past leadership experiences, using paired interviews to surface memories and insights. This was followed by a collective analysis of findings, where participants worked with printed quotes from the fieldwork and organized them on flipcharts under categories such as "drivers," "barriers," and "other patterns." Participants critically interpreted the quotes and discussed which ones best represented the local reality. Through consensus, the group built core thematic ideas that reflected shared meanings around what enables commitment to the priority. The session concluded with an introduction to the reflective field notebook and a guided emotional closure using the prompt: "I saw / I thought / I felt / I decided.
2	San Marcos Ascope	02/05/2024 07/05/2024	3 hours	Collaborative prioritization of research variables	We opened with a socio-emotional activation to strengthen trust among participants, using playful dynamics to create a safe environment for dialogue. The core of the session focused on discussing and identifying the most relevant variables for the research, ensuring alignment with local realities. Through group work, participants prioritized key themes, fostering collective decision-making. The session ended with a reflection circle to consolidate agreements and highlight the importance of each voice in shaping the research focus.
3	San Marcos Ascope	03/06/2024 13/06/2024	6 hours	Validate research instruments, consent forms, and co-develop interview guidelines	After a warm-up activity to reconnect, we engaged in collaborative review sessions where participants analyzed the proposed research instruments and consent forms. Using playful methodologies, we encouraged critical feedback, ensuring the tools were culturally and contextually appropriate. The committee co-constructed key interview guidelines, ensuring ethical coherence and relevance. The session concluded with a collective reflection.
4	San Marcos Ascope	17/09/2024 27/08/2024	2.5 hour	Map key stakeholders involved in the priority of each educational ecosystem	We initiated the session with a dynamic pair activity to foster interpersonal connections. Participants then engaged in a collaborative mapping exercise called "La Caravana" to identify actors within the local educational landscape, discussing their roles, influences, and potential contributions to the transformation process. This allowed for a deeper understanding of community structures and power dynamics. The session closed with shared reflections on which stakeholders we would like to listen to.

N°	PROVINCE	DATE	DURATION	PURPOSE OF THE SESSION	AGENDA AND ACTIVITIES
5	San Marcos Ascope	04/11/2024 05/11/2024	2.5 hour	Define sampling criteria and participant selection	A group dynamic—Jan-Ken-Po—served to energize participants and promote teamwork at the start. The session then focused on defining clear and inclusive sampling criteria through open discussion, ensuring diverse representation in the research. Together, the committee agreed on participant profiles, considering factors such as gender, age, and community roles. The session concluded with a collective reflection emphasizing the importance of fair and meaningful inclusion.
6	San Marcos Ascope	02/12/2024 04/12/2024	2.5 hour	Design the Advisory Committee's work plan for 2025 and celebrate the achievements of 2024	The session fostered emotional connection through guided meditation and the "purpose tree" exercise, allowing participants to reflect on the transformative role of education and consolidate a shared commitment. A participatory self-assessment using collaborative murals encouraged critical reflection on inclusion, representation, and strategic focus. This was followed by the co-design of the 2025 work plan, where methodological stages, roles, and capacity-building needs were defined collectively. The session closed with a symbolic exchange of personalized messages, creating a positive atmosphere of recognition and continuity.
7	San Marcos Ascope	24/03/2025 31/03/2025	2.5 hour	Reconnect with the Advisory Committee, review key research learnings, and validate the final 2025 work plan	The session began with an ice-breaking group activity to foster personal connection and ease among participants. This was followed by a collective reflection dynamic, where members revisited their knowledge of the research through interactive exercises, identifying well-established points and areas of uncertainty using a collaborative "certainty traffic light" method. The proposed 2025 work plan, developed based on previous committee input, was presented and validated through open discussion and feedback. As part of the incentive strategy, participants received a researcher's kit, reinforcing their role and commitment. The session concluded with an emotional closing, where members reaffirmed their dedication for the year ahead.
8	San Marcos	12/05/2025	2.5 hour	Jointly analyze the findings from the implemented instruments and identify core ideas that frame the drivers and barriers around the priority commitment (focus on drivers).	The session began with a symbolic reconnection through personal storytelling about past leadership experiences, using paired interviews to surface memories and insights. This was followed by a collective analysis of findings, where participants worked with printed quotes from the fieldwork and organized them on flipcharts under categories such as "drivers," "barriers," and "other patterns." Participants critically interpreted the quotes and discussed which ones best represented the local reality. Through consensus, the group built core thematic ideas that reflected shared meanings around what enables commitment to the priority. The session concluded with an introduction to the reflective field notebook and a guided emotional closure using the prompt: "I saw / I thought / I felt / I decided.

N°	PROVINCE	DATE	DURATION	PURPOSE OF THE SESSION	AGENDA AND ACTIVITIES
8	Ascope	13/05/2025	2.5 hour	Jointly analyze the findings from the implemented instruments and identify core ideas that frame the drivers and barriers around the priority commitment (focus on barriers).	We started with a movement-based activation and transitioned into a deep exploration of barriers to commitment using the "1-2-4-All" method. Participants received selected quotes from fieldwork, discussed them in pairs, and progressively built toward group interpretations. They identified recurring barriers and related structural patterns. Next, we implemented a territorial relational analysis using the "Drawing the System" technique, where groups visually mapped out power dynamics and connections between actors in the educational landscape. The aim was to understand how relationships foster or limit engagement with the priority. The session ended with a reflective circle and an invitation to begin using the bitácora.
9	San Marcos	06/06/2025	2.5 hour	Critically strengthen the drivers and barriers to student leadership commitment identified in the previous session. Recognize the structural conditions that currently limit the legitimacy and sustainability of this educational priority in the territory.	After a physical and playful group warm-up, participants engaged in a critical re-reading of findings, focusing on refining the insights from the previous session. We revisited the "drivers" and "barriers" maps and layered them with a critical lens using quotes and thematic categories. Then, we introduced the TRIZ method, prompting participants to challenge their own assumptions through the question: "What would we do if we wanted to ensure the failure of commitment to this priority?" This prompted a discussion on structural limitations, local legitimacy, and sustainability. As a group, participants built a refined list of barriers linked to structural conditions such as resource access, gender roles, and leadership gaps. The session closed with a circle reflection, emphasizing collective responsibility and long-term vision.
9	Ascope	03/06/2025	2 hours	Critically strengthen the drivers and barriers to literacy commitment identified in the previous session. Review the identified elements from the perspective of participants' roles.	The session began with a collective re-reading of quotes from the fieldwork, focused on literacy. Participants organized and discussed them on flipcharts, identifying which ones captured key tensions and which ones remained ambiguous or less relevant. Then, through structured group work, they analyzed the findings from their own roles—as teachers, principals, students, or parents—to reflect on their agency in addressing or reproducing these barriers. The groups built narratives of positioning and engagement. Finally, we held a large-circle closure to break away from the group dynamics and reaffirm the shared commitment, envisioning the future actions needed to strengthen literacy from within the ecosystem.

ANNEX 3
School profiles

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS' CHARACTERISTICS							STUDENTS AND TEACHERS' DATA			RELEVANT CHARACTERISTICS
N°	DEPARTMENT	PROVINCE	DISTRICT	MODULAR CODE	EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION	EDUCATIONAL LEVEL	AREA	STUDENTS	TEACHERS	STUDENTS PER TEACHER	CONNECTION TO EDUCATIONAL PRIORITY
1	La Libertad	Ascope	Ascope	0214130	Santa Rosa de Lima	Primary	Urban	495	24	16	Experience in reading and writing programs led by EP
2	La Libertad	Ascope	Chicama	0418467	Rafael Larco Herrera	Primary	Urban	304	14	22	Experience in reading and writing programs led by EP
3	La Libertad	Ascope	Paiján	0347856	Juan Ignacio Gutiérrez Fuente	Primary	Rural	36	16	14	Experience in reading and writing programs led by EP
4	La Libertad	Ascope	Chicama	0366401	Daniel Alcides Carrión	Primary	Rural	84	8	11	Experience in reading and writing programs led by EP
5	Cajamarca	San Marcos	Gregorio Pita	0653410	Santa Catalina	Secondary	Rural	70	7	9	Experience in EP's leadership programs
6	Cajamarca	San Marcos	Chancay	1528934	Federico Chandiano Navarro	Secondary	Rural	127	7	16	Experience in EP's leadership programs
7	Cajamarca	San Marcos	Pedro Gálvez	0788414	Eva Albina Cruzado de Mendoza	Secondary	Rural	62	7	8	Recent involvement in EP's leadership programs
8	Cajamarca	San Marcos	José Manuel Quiroz	0695973	Pauca Santa Rosa	Secondary	Rural	62	8	7	Recent involvement in EP's leadership programs

ANNEX 4

Sample overview by actor type

DEPARTMENT OF LA LIBERTAD; PROVINCE OF ASCOPE														
	GENDER			DISTRICT					INSTITUTION					
ROLE	FEMALE	MALE	TOTAL	CHICAMA	PAIJÁN	ASCOPE	SANTIAGO DE CAO	RAZURI	RAFAEL LARCO HERRERA	JUAN IGNACIO GUTIÉRREZ FUENTE	SANTA ROSA DE LIMA	DANIEL ALCIDES CARRIÓN	MUNICIPALITY OF SANTIAGO DE CAO	MUNICIPALITY OF RAZURI
School's authority	2	2	4	2	1	1	-	-	1	1	1	1	-	-
Teacher	4	1	5	2	1	2	-	-	1	1	2	1	-	-
Parent	3	-	3	1	1	1	-	-	1	1	1	0	-	-
Student	5	4	9	4	2	3	-	-	2	2	3	2	-	-
Head of Education, Culture, and Sports	1	1	2	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	1	1
Council member	1	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	

DEPARTMENT OF CAJAMARCA; PROVINCE OF SAN MARCOS														
	GENDER			DISTRICT					INSTITUTION					
ROLE	FEMALE	MALE	TOTAL	PEDRO GALVEZ	CHANCAY	JOSÉ MANUEL QUIROZ	GREGORIO PITA	SAN MARCOS	EVA ALBINA CRUZADO DE MENDOZA	FEDERICO CHANDIANO NAVARRO	PAUCA SANTA ROSA	SANTA CATALINA	MUNICIPALITY OF SAN MARCOS	SAN MARCOS HEALTH CENTER
School's authority	1	3	4	1	1	1	1	-	1	1	1	1	-	-
Teacher	2	1	3	1	1	1	-	-	1	1	1	-	-	-
Parent	1	2	3	1	1	1	-	-	1	1	1	-	-	-
Student	3	3	6	2	2	2	-	-	2	2	2	-	-	-
Head of Education, Culture, and Sports	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	-
Council member	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1