THE WISDOM OF THE INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION SECTOR'S ELDERS: LESSONS FOR HOW TO IMPROVE LEARNING

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INTERVIEW STUDY

- 61 structured interviews with experts across the sector

- Research questions

  - What are the characteristics of an effective donor?

  - What should the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation improve or change in our work in the sector?

  - What are the key technical things that we should or should not support?

  - Who are the technically strong local education partners in Sub-Saharan Africa?

KEY FINDINGS

1. Support for prioritizing improving learning outcomes in lower primary

2. Meaningful guidance on the attributes of effective grantmakers

3. What the sector needs to continue: Supporting teachers, connecting research and implementation, embedding change into systems

4. What the sector should stop: Ineffective teacher training, short program cycles, imposing Western/Northern perspectives

1. CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EFFECTIVE DONOR

Respect that those on the ground have better knowledge on the ground, leverage the donor's global knowledge

Be clear about the thesis about what change you are trying to make in the sector. Be consistent in that and work around it

Whatever you say as Gates has undue influence. How do you acknowledge that dynamic and find how to be humble

Don't move the goalposts or change the rules of the game. At least not without fair warning

[the foundation's] influence is more likely to be through ideas and capabilities than through grant aid for physical inputs

What is dysfunctional in development is that a lot of people work in silos. Programs are run independently of one another

Understand what you can do that others can't

Working out how to bring people together collaboratively. Create a community of practice on the issues

2. WHAT SHOULD THE BILL & MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION IMPROVE OR CHANGE IN OUR WORK IN THE SECTOR?

Support for focus on learning

- If you have 100 priorities, you have zero priorities

- Stop teaching things that aren't reading if they can't read

- Focus on FLN is good - if you do well on that, you give life skills to young people
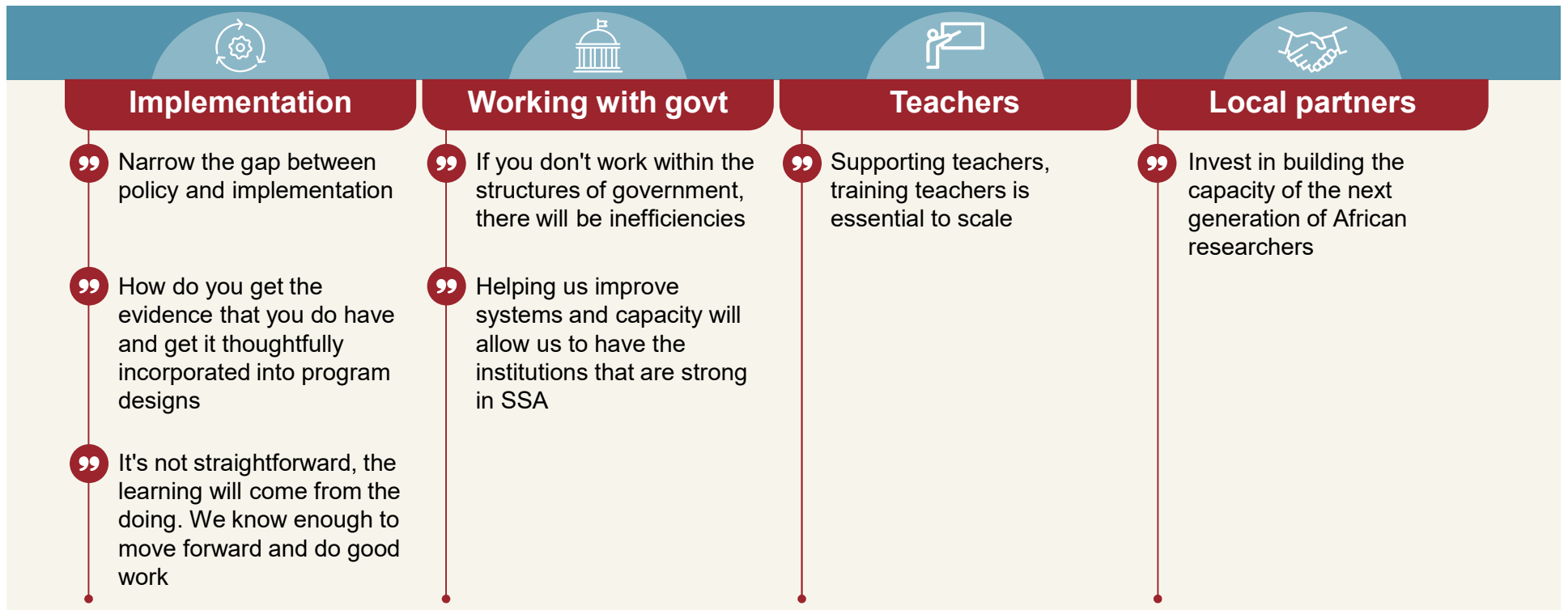
- [a] well-functioning education system needs data

Challenge

- Within FLN - there is too much focus on reading, but could push more for numeracy

Others raised concerns about positioning FLN as the only priority; the need to link FLN to other outcomes; FLN as a steppingstone to improving upper primary and secondary

3. WHAT ARE THE KEY TECHNICAL THINGS THAT WE SHOULD SUPPORT?

Implementation

> Narrow the gap between policy and implementation

> How do you get the evidence that you do have and get it thoughtfully incorporated into program designs

> It's not straightforward, the learning will come from the doing. We know enough to move forward and do good work

Working with govt

> If you don't work within the structures of government, there will be inefficiencies

> Helping us improve systems and capacity will allow us to have the institutions that are strong in SSA

Teachers

> Supporting teachers, training teachers is essential to scale

Local partners

> Invest in building the capacity of the next generation of African researchers

3. WHAT ARE THE KEY TECHNICAL THINGS THAT WE SHOULD NOT SUPPORT?

Short term program cycles

> The short sprints don't work

> Build the ownership and capacity of the people with the capacity and mandate for the systems over the long run. How do you work in a way that builds their capacity rather than takes it away

Northern/Western ideas

> We should stop pushing an agenda for education development that is defined by the North

4. WHO ARE THE TECHNICALLY STRONG LOCAL EDUCATION PARTNERS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Underrepresentation of African researchers and implementers in global education

A small number of organizations were mentioned multiple times

Organizations had an Anglophone bent

How can we do a better job of connecting with organizations working on FLN across the continent?

CONCLUSIONS

- Increased focus on improving learning outcomes, with a particular emphasis on responding to learning loss in the short term
- Evidence of what works to improve outcomes (GEEAP, Learning @ Scale, others)
  - Structured pedagogy
  - Teaching at the Right Level
  - Remediation
- Research focus for Global Education
  - Measurement and comparability of 4.1.1a and 4.1.1b remains important
  - Focus on research that can help respond to implementation challenges
  - Consider scale and systems
  - Ongoing eye on the typical teacher in a rural school

WHAT'S NEXT

In terms of what is next for the Global Education team at the foundation, supporting the good work and ideas of our **partners in FLN** will continue to be at the core of all that we do. As part of this FLN focus, we are keen to work on better **supporting teachers to deliver** FLN, and to increasingly integrate technical expertise around the details of **classroom pedagogy** into our programming. We also expect to shift our emphasis from identifying what methods work to improve FLN, to more research and public goods designed to increase our ability to respond to **inevitable implementation challenges** and considering how to apply these learnings within and through **government systems**. At the heart of our work will be an increasing emphasis on understanding how learning outcomes can be increased **at scale** in primary schools, and the steps we need to take to get there.