

Taylor Robinson

The development of the PROMISE3 mobile app: Supporting schools to understand and respond to challenges to quality teaching and learning

Despite the billions of dollars spent annually to strengthen education systems, we still lack critical information to answer three important questions for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4, Education by 2030:

1. Are our children going to school?
2. Are our children staying in school?
3. Are our children learning?

School leaders, education ministers, and international development practitioners lack the tools to collect, analyse, and act on, real-time, contextualised education data. We need this data in order better to design and scale more evidence-based, community-driven, inclusive solutions to education disparities, worldwide.

With the help of Vera Solutions (Vera), The Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) is developing a community-driven application called PROMISE³ -- a new **PRO**gramme **M**anagement **I**nformation **S**ystem in **E**ducation for **E**veryone **E**verywhere -- offering the global community a robust, online, mobile-friendly one-stop-shop for tracking locally determined indicators of educational access, quality, equity, and equality across geographies, especially in hard-to-reach and conflict-affected areas. The objective is to place this data, and ways to analyse it, in the hands of teachers, school leaders, and the wider community.

Development began with a consultation process, to understand needs and constraints for such an application in these kinds of contexts. Interviews were held with teachers, head teachers, students, and parent representatives in 24 government schools in Afghanistan, Tajikistan, India, Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. Participants were asked what they think about the three questions laid out above, as well as what information is currently collected to answer these questions. Their answers are being used to define the useability and functionality of the prototype app, which will later be modified following trial feedback from the same respondents.

In interviews we have learned, for example, that:

- Students miss school for various reasons, including sickness, work in the fields, the rains. However this information is not adequately recorded, making it difficult to use it to better understand barriers to students attending school, and therefore to address them.

- Teachers seek an administrative solution that will help them to save time on data collection, including taking the attendance register – we found that in some places this can take ten minutes out of class time. This would allow teachers to focus on quality instruction, including learning assessments.
- Interviewees would like to be able track learning outcomes at regular intervals for students across subjects, as well as their participation in arts and sports activities, and their overall development.

We hope there will be a final version of the app by the end of 2017. AKF and Vera remain committed to identifying ways in which the app can be customized at the local or country level to better meet the needs of school communities.

In an uncertain world, educators and development practitioners can only operate based on the information they have at their fingertips. The school level consultations have confirmed that the actionable information that exists today is not enough. With PROMISE³ we hope to change that -- by enabling students and parents, teachers and head teachers, district-level staff and ministry officials to better understand whether their children are going to school, whether they're staying, and what they're learning there.