




RESULTS FOR  
DEVELOPMENT



# Education Strategy

Supporting Partners to  
Strengthen Education Systems



**Results for Development (R4D)** is a leading non-profit global development partner. We collaborate with change agents around the world — government officials, civil society leaders and social innovators — to create strong systems that support healthy, educated people. We help our partners move from knowing their goal to knowing how to reach it. We combine global expertise in health, education and nutrition with analytic rigor, practical support for decision-making and implementation and access to peer problem-solving networks. Together with our partners, we build self-sustaining systems that serve everyone and deliver lasting results. Then we share what we learn so others can achieve results for development, too. [www.r4d.org](http://www.r4d.org)

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# R4D Education Strategy

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## Education Systems Around the World: Cause for Concern and Hope

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Education systems face significant challenges in many countries, especially in developing contexts. Starting at the earliest ages, children aren't getting the stimulation they need to set them up for a lifetime of learning, and despite massive efforts to get kids, especially girls, into classrooms, large percentages of students leave school without basic literacy and numeracy skills. And growing youth populations don't have the skills they need to be successful in life or the workforce.

**The consequences of not addressing these challenges** can be devastating. Large youth populations that are not equipped to fulfill their full potential or contribute to emerging economies will exacerbate the world's biggest challenges including poverty, unrest, radicalization and migration. On the other hand, countries that overcome their education challenges will instead empower millions of young people to find creative solutions to these problems, to fuel economic prosperity and to achieve more equitable outcomes for girls and vulnerable communities. Strong education systems are engines of progress.

**The good news is that across the globe** many local and national policymakers are working to improve and transform education systems. Meanwhile, civil society and private sector innovators are creating and testing new solutions to override the inertia that often plagues large education systems. These leaders – both inside and outside government – understand the need to create stronger and more relevant education systems for children to achieve their potential. But almost all of them grapple with the complexities of *how*.

## Results for Development: Global Perspective in Support of Local Stakeholders

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Working with partners across the globe, Results for Development (R4D) works with change agents in low- and middle-income countries — government officials, civil society leaders and social innovators — to untangle the “how.” How can communities ensure that a well-trained and supported teacher workforce has the knowledge and skills to deliver high-quality instruction? How can the private sector partner with government officials to ensure students graduate with an education that prepares them to find meaningful employment? How can government officials pay for critical early childhood development services? How can parents and communities be engaged to improve children’s learning? How should play-based learning be introduced into early education programs so that young minds can thrive?

*At R4D, we combine the lessons we’ve learned from working across contexts with our track record for tackling tough how-to questions with analytic rigor and real-world practicality.*

**Making progress at the system-level in education requires strong leadership from a variety of stakeholders.** Leadership responsibility rests most heavily with government officials and policymakers, but can be radically improved when the public sector finds solutions in partnership with civil society and social entrepreneurs in the private sector. At R4D, we work closely with partners across this spectrum and, increasingly, aim to bridge the gaps between them.

We find these groups are often wrestling with their unique version of common challenges, so to support them, we combine the lessons we’ve learned from working across contexts with our track record for tackling tough “how to” questions with both analytic rigor and real-world practicality.

R4D’s years of experience working with partners across the world on the critical issues of **early childhood development, out of school youth, education financing, skills and employability, education innovations, community engagement, and non-state education** offer a global perspective that local change agents value. They appreciate our approach of using their priorities to drive our work together, and they benefit from our ability to connect with and convene key global and regional stakeholders in support of their work. R4D’s extensive work in the fields of health and nutrition also amplify our ability to learn from and pursue collaboration between these complementary sectors.

## R4D's Model: Supporting Partners to Strengthen Education Systems

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Change agents face a number of challenges as they work to strengthen education systems. Some of these challenges are similar across countries, which creates opportunities for co-development of solutions and learning across contexts. R4D's model seeks to generate lessons about what works through deep engagement with partners — ranging from small-scale implementers to governments to large multilaterals. We support them to better understand the nature of the problems they seek to address, to experiment with various solutions and to connect them with others wrestling with similar challenges.

Our starting point is to listen to and understand the questions our partners have about how to improve the education systems in which they work. Then, we support them in answering those questions using three distinct but complementary approaches:

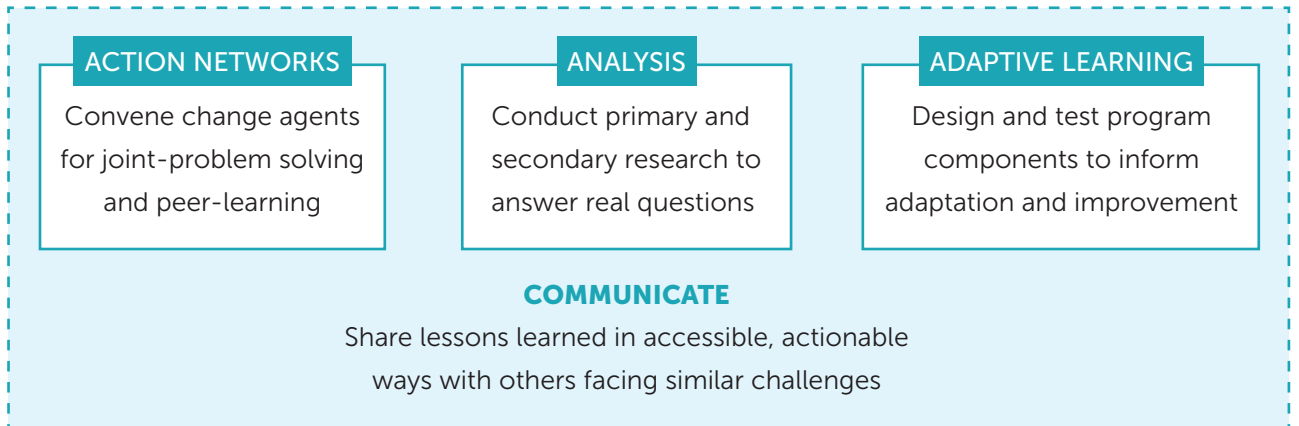
1. **ACTION NETWORKS**. We build and support action networks to convene practitioners and policymakers and facilitate opportunities for them to learn from one another's experience and jointly develop new solutions. Then we share widely the lessons learned and tools they have generated.
2. **ANALYSIS**. We conduct new, rigorous analysis requested by our local partners to support them in making evidence-based decisions to pressing policy or programmatic questions. We present our findings in accessible, actionable ways that can be relevant to others facing similar challenges.
3. **ADAPTIVE LEARNING**. We use rigorous methods to directly support local partners as they design and test key elements of their programs, helping them design experiments, adapt their activities based on results and ultimately get to better programs faster. We make sure the evidence we generate gets into the hands of other change agents in different contexts working on related issues.

### The kinds of questions our partners are asking:

- How to train and support an early childhood workforce?
- How to integrate technology into classrooms at scale to promote learning?
- How to increase parent and community engagement with schools and education?
- How to equip students graduating from secondary school with relevant skills for employment?
- How to provide high-quality, universal early childhood education through multi-sector partnership?
- How to get quality books in the right language into the hands of young children to achieve greater literacy?
- How to increase financing for universal basic education?



**Supporting these three activities is a commitment to communication:** we share the knowledge we generate with the global education community — not just the partners with whom we work on a specific project. We aim not only for wide dissemination but intentional, targeted outreach to make sure our work with local change agents is reaching those to whom it is most applicable. We do this through the Center for Education Innovations (CEI), our global network of innovators, policymakers, researchers and funders.



*Photo ©Rising Academy Network*

## Build and support Action Networks

Based on demand and interest from local partners and funding partners, R4D builds goal-oriented “action networks.” Action networks are designed and led in partnership with local change agents who commit to working together to identify common challenges, collectively test solutions, and share their findings with each other and the world.

Some action networks may be global or regional, while others may be national or sub-national. Their membership is determined by their goals and the particular challenges they seek to address. Each action network develops its own agenda with R4D facilitating the development and execution of the agenda, ideally over a sustained period of time. Our approach is unique from other network models because it goes beyond information-sharing among peers to focus on generating new tools and knowledge through systematic identification of challenges, design and testing of tools to address those challenges and implementation in varied contexts to understand what adaptations are needed for success.

We aim to design action networks where lessons learned in both the public sector and the innovator community can be shared and integrated, and effective approaches can be recognized and scaled within systems.

### **R4D ACTION NETWORKS**

R4D is working closely with key global partners to design and launch an international peer action network to support ministries of education in the Global South as they co-create solutions and work towards education systems of the future. Education ministry teams will work together to identify and solve common challenges by unlocking tacit knowledge, co-creating solutions, sharing what works (and what doesn't), and adapting solutions in-country.

We will leverage R4D's experience designing and supporting the Joint Learning Network for Universal Health Coverage ([www.jointlearningnetwork.org](http://www.jointlearningnetwork.org)). This network began in 2011 and is now comprised of health officials from 30 countries who work together within

13 distinct technical working groups to solve common challenges. This successful model has great potential to be adapted to the education sector.

R4D also supports several working groups within the Project Literacy community of practice, a global network of organizations working on a diverse range of literacy-related topics. The working groups focus on issues including parent engagement, measuring impact, and accelerated literacy programming for out of school children. R4D is supporting each working group to define its own objectives by identifying common challenges, and then co-develop resources and tools that will help members and others in the global literacy community.

## Conduct rigorous, demand-led Analysis

Another way that R4D supports change agents is by conducting rigorous analyses to answer questions and improve decision-making. This can include analysis needed to answer policy-related questions (e.g., what are examples of quality vocational training being implemented at scale and what is the evidence about how well they have worked in which contexts) or supplying evidence to make the case for greater investment (e.g., how much funding is available for early childhood services and how can we mobilize more funding). We seek to analyze topics for which there is authentic demand and where others wrestling with similar questions can benefit from such analyses.

### R4D ANALYSES

In order to support the Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity to make the case for enhanced investment in global education, we developed three background papers: one analyzing the state of early childhood development financing, another exploring ways of increasing access to digital and print books, and a third examining investment in education global public goods. These analyses provided evidence that informed the Commission's recommendations.

R4D also conducted analysis in El Salvador and Nigeria to map and better understand the role of affordable non-state schools, particularly in the high-conflict regions of the countries. The analysis included recommendations on how the governments and global donors could engage educators in contexts of crisis and conflict. These analyses have helped the USAID missions in both countries better understand the opportunities and tradeoffs associated with working with non-state schools, in the service of expanding access to quality education for all.





## Design and test using Adaptive Learning

R4D employs an adaptive learning approach to work with local change agents to generate new evidence about what works, what doesn't and why. We serve as a strategic learning partner for local change agents, using rigorous methods to help them design and test key elements of their programs. We focus on measuring short-term outcomes to inform programmatic decisions — allowing implementers to get to better programs faster. R4D's approach is tailored to the needs of individual partners, but it always includes the following components:

1. **Understand problems:** Understanding performance challenges and defining impact goals.
2. **Identify solutions:** Reviewing existing evidence, researching potential solutions and defining a defensible theory of change for the program or intervention.
3. **Design and experiment:** Prototyping, piloting and refining solutions based on ongoing and regular qualitative and quantitative feedback.
4. **Incorporate learnings:** Presenting experiment findings and their implications for program refinement and redesign.

### R4D ADAPTIVE LEARNING

We partnered with the Rising Academies Network in Sierra Leone to help them reach students who are struggling to read. This included the design and testing of three approaches to remedial reading instruction, ultimately resulting in the development of a cohesive approach to be scaled up throughout the chain of schools.

We also worked with Worldreader to pilot its Read to Kids program in Delhi, India. This included testing which approaches were most effective at changing parent behaviors related to reading to children. We worked with local NGOs already working in low-income communities in Delhi to design and test outreach and follow-up activities with parents, refining those activities over the course of the pilot based on rapid cycles of data collection and analysis.

## Combining Approaches

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We see each of these pillars as important on its own. However, we believe that when we partner with local change agents and combine two or more of these approaches, we can accelerate the strengthening of education systems. For example, an initial phase of an engagement with a partner might focus on conducting analysis to influence the development of a revised teacher development strategy, with a subsequent phase dedicated to adaptive learning in which we work with the partner to design specific activities for putting that strategy into action and conduct pilot testing in a small number of districts before finalizing the program design.

Another example of combining approaches for greater impact is combining all three. An action network focused on improving parent engagement in education might identify the need for analysis to understand the potential for impact of parent engagement interventions as compared to school-based interventions. Based on that analysis, members of the action network would engage in adaptive learning engagements to design and test approaches to parent engagement in their contexts, iterating based on findings from ongoing experimentation and feeding those findings back to the action network.

## Working With Partners

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We work with programmatic and funding partners who share our values and are committed to taking the long-view. Because our goal is to serve the change agents on the front lines of systems improvement and support them in their efforts to get to better outcomes faster, we consider it critical to work with local organizations and stakeholders in any project.

Importantly, we also engage leaders of the global education ecosystem (including past and current partners like the Global Partnership for Education, the World Bank, the Association for the Development of Education in Africa, the Global Book Alliance and the International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity) to ensure that locally-generated evidence is disseminated to decision-makers in the global community, to influence global agendas and to uncover barriers to improving education systems.

## Hopeful Urgency

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**Despite the magnitude of the challenges facing today's education systems, we are hopeful.**

We know that change agents working in countries have the ideas and determination to provide children with the education they need and deserve. We strive to amplify their impact through rigorous and systematic approaches to building communities, conducting new analysis and testing new approaches. We know we will generate as many new questions as answers, and yet, together with our partners, we feel confident in tackling new challenges as they come.



Healthy,  
educated  
people — the  
foundation of  
prosperous  
societies.

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