

INCLUSIVE INNOVATIONS

Evaluating Schools and Helping School Management Improve Education

Evidence-based school assessments and advisory services are driving improvements in school quality

HIGHLIGHTS

- Publicly available school rating systems allow parents to compare schools, helping them choose the best school for their children.
- A holistic approach to school quality improvement replaces piecemeal approaches.
- Data-driven evaluations replace proxy measures of school quality.



Summary

Schools that serve children at the bottom of the pyramid (BoP) usually lack reliable measures of quality and comprehensive strategies for improvement. To fill this gap, social enterprises conduct evaluations, present school management with evidence-based results, and craft action plans to improve the quality of the education they provide

Development Challenge

Schools and education authorities in developing countries often lack the skills and resources to systematically monitor, evaluate, communicate, and subsequently improve the quality of the education they provide to children at the BoP. Hence, parents have little way of knowing which schools are best, relying on proxy measures, such as a school's physical facilities. These shortcomings contribute to a situation in which, despite completing four years of primary school, more than 125 million children worldwide do not achieve minimum standards of numeracy and literacy (UNESCO 2015).

Providers of school evaluation and management support services assess school quality and learning outcomes using multiple data-based indicators, such as grade-level tests and comparisons of attendance and enrollment figures, to generate school ratings or student report cards. They then work with schools to develop and implement whole school improvement plans (WSIPs). Assessments focus on school leadership, learning outcomes, financial and staff management, long-term planning, monitoring, and community relations. The goal is to improve learning outcomes, empower parents to make better decisions in choosing the best schools for their children, and help school management improve the quality of the education they provide.

Business Model

Components of the Model

Services are typically offered by education-focused NGOs as one element of their project portfolios, although some for-profit enterprises, such as Gray Matters India (GMI), are also active. Providers conduct school evaluations and offer advisory services and school management consultancy to private schools in return for fees or to public schools under public-private partnership (PPP) arrangements funded by donors.

Several providers charge low- to medium-cost private schools for assessments. GMI has developed an innovative school rating system that parents can use to compare schools. Idara-e-Taleem-o-Agahi (ITA) has replicated this model in Pakistan. CfBT India offers private schools customized improvement plans and training packages. The Teacher Foundation's Whole School Turnaround program targets affordable schools.

Providers typically follow a four-phase approach (see Figure 1):

- 1) Providers collect data on standardized indicators, including student and teacher tests, classroom observations, management interviews, infrastructure audits, and parent satisfaction surveys.
- 2) They analyze the data to generate school performance diagnostics, recommendations, and school report cards or ratings.
- 3) They craft action plans, which they present to school management and other stakeholders, and help formulate and implement school improvement plans.
- 4) They monitor implementation of action plans. Some enterprises also provide teacher/management training and other capacity-building support. Others introduce schools to third-party providers, such as microfinance institutions or specialists.

Figure 1. Features of school evaluation business model



Cost Factors

Link Community Development International (LCDI) reports that training of data collectors, school assessment, and community engagement services cost about USD 107 per school. The Teacher Foundation's proposal for funding includes a cost of USD 12,600 for a two-year intervention, of which the school pays 25 percent. In its first year of operation, GMI spent about USD 1,000 to assess a 400-student school.

Revenue Streams

An individual school of 300–400 students pays USD 600–1,200 for GMI's school assessment according to a pricing scheme based on the number of students tested. GMI reports that its revenues largely covered its

operating costs in 2014–15. However, some contracts generated losses when schools did not submit enough students for testing, forcing GMI to rethink its fee structure, introduce a minimum charge, and change its focus on individual student assessments from school assessments.

A key variation on the model is for providers to supply school administrators with self-evaluation tools or training designed to build local capacity to assess progress without external intervention. Examples include JET Education Services' monitoring dashboard, the GM South Africa Foundation's Learning Schools Initiative Self-Assessment Instrument, and Fundación Chile's free online self-evaluation tool, which allows all stakeholders, including parents and children, to contribute feedback on school performance. LCDI trains district education officers and head teachers in rural Africa to collect data for its School Performance Review and facilitates stakeholder meetings to formulate school action plans. The objective is to build the capacity of school districts to self-evaluate and to encourage government adoption of similar systems of school assessment.

Another variation of the consultancy model is the Impact Network's eSchool360 package. It provides Zambian schools with a whole school management kit that includes e-learning hardware (projectors, laptops, and tablets); lesson plans; a solar electric system; operating manuals; and logistical support.

Financial Viability

Most providers are NGOs dependent on donor funding or government grants for specific projects, although some also charge fees to help cover costs. Recent interventions by JET Education Services in government schools required 95 percent funding from donors.

Limited funding and revenues from fees is frequently cited as a key constraint on viability. Many low-cost private schools lack the funds to pay for evaluations. GMI has developed an alternative revenue stream by conducting multi-school impact evaluations on behalf of corporate clients and researchers who are piloting education solutions. Its experience suggests that for-profit enterprises serving the BoP may struggle to sustain the training and capacity-building programs that donor-funded NGOs with large project portfolios are providing.

Partnerships

Investors and foundations provide grants, loans and equity financing to service providers primarily to cover capital expenditure and start-up costs. For instance, Gray Ghost Ventures' investment enabled GMI to build its management team, develop their products, conduct pilots, and support overheads. In 2013, Michael & Susan Dell Foundation also invested USD 750,000 in GMI which helped them further develop products, build analytics framework, and scale their services across more states and schools in India.

Implementation: Delivering Value to the Poor

Awareness

Providers share and publicize the results of their evaluations to advocate for school evaluation as a means of improving accountability and quality (see Table 1). GMI publishes school ratings on its website; it releases individual student learning outcomes in a detailed report card. LCDI presents the findings of its School Performance Reviews to stakeholders and at conferences. CfBT India offers orientation sessions on key learning milestones as part of its program. Providers with large education project portfolios or networks of partners leverage these results to promote evaluation services. GMI positions itself as a key player within the community of private schools, hosting free workshops featuring vendors of education solutions and dedicated workshops for parents and sponsoring school association meetings. ITA invites schools to attend "solutions marketplace" events and customizes a website for each school client.

Acceptance

Providers serving public schools align with government policies targeting systemic improvements in school quality; they target entire districts of schools to demonstrate the scalability of their solutions. Providers

serving private schools suggest ways for their clients to differentiate themselves for their competitors, primarily through improved student achievement and increased parent satisfaction rates.

In both cases, evaluation and school improvement is a participatory process, which facilitates acceptance of these initiatives. Students, staff, governing bodies, and parents all contribute inputs. Although providers prescribe remedies, schools discuss and ratify action plans. Self-evaluation tools supplied by providers allow schools to build their professional capacity and take greater ownership of the process.

Accessibility

Many providers work to secure government recognition or adoption of their solutions. They collaborate with education authorities to affect large numbers of schools by rolling out district-level interventions. Self-evaluation instruments build schools' capacity, allowing better access to school information by parents. CfBT trains schools on School Self Reviews, the GMSA Foundation has made its Whole School Self-Evaluation instrument freely available online, and Fundación Chile has developed an online self-evaluation tool.

Affordability

Fee-charging consultancy providers like GMI, ITA, and CfBT offer stand-alone services as well as their WSIP, which they sometimes cross-subsidize depending on their service packages with individual schools. This flexibility allows budget-constrained schools to limit their expenditure to school audits or student assessments. Providers try to restrict their school action plans to the most pressing needs and avoid recommending large investments, focusing instead on optimizing the use of existing resources. LCDI, for example, trains district education officers to collect school data. JET trains government teachers in schools in which it intervenes.

Table 1. Clients, revenue models, and services of selected providers of school assessment and advisory services

Provider	Countries	Clients and revenue model	Services
Fundación Chile, Gestión y Liderazgo Escolar initiative	Chile, Brazil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public schools and principals receive services for free PPP with Ministry of Education Donor funded Non-profit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online school self-evaluation surveys and tools School leadership and management training for school principals Online resources for teachers
GM South Africa Foundation, Learning Schools Initiative	South Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public schools and school staff receive services for free PPP with Ministry of Education Donor-funded by private foundations and trusts Non-profit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School self-evaluation tool and database School management and teacher training Financial aid for improvements Advisory services and monitoring
Gray Matters India	India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Affordable private schools purchase services School administrators purchase multischool evaluations For-profit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whole school evaluation Student and teacher testing Data analysis and school rating Advisory services and monitoring Recommendations on solution providers
Idara-e-Taleemo-o-Agahi (ITA) School Assessment for School Improvement Program (SASI) and Whole School Improvement Program (WSIP)	Pakistan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private schools pay fees for SASI program; public schools receive WSIP services for free under PPP arrangements Donor-funded by NGOs, companies, and individuals Non-profit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whole school evaluations and needs assessment School development planning School management and teacher training Advisory services and monitoring Facility renovation

Link Community Development International (LCDI)	Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, Uganda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural public primary schools receive services for free • PPP with school districts, which provide staff and in-kind support • Grant-funded by overseas development agencies • Non-profit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Performance Review (SPR) (whole school evaluation) • Training for school district staff and teachers to collect SPR data • Data analysis and advisory services • Solar Connect information and communications technology (ICT) program to build reporting capacity
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Results and Cost-Effectiveness

Scale and Reach

Most school evaluation and management providers emerged only in the past decade, in part in response to the need to evaluate emerging low-cost private schools. They have scaled rapidly in a short period of time by tailoring their services to the needs of low-cost schools. Since 2009, for example, GMI has worked with more than 1,000 schools, both private and public, assessing more than 350,000 students in nine Indian states (Kanth 2015). Between 2000 and 2012, ITA's WSIP benefitted 3,000 head teachers, 15,000 teachers, 15,000 school management committee members, and 350,000 students. JET's current projects (active 2009–17) include the District Intervention Program, which is working with 3,462 schools, which serve about 2 million students. LCDI is currently affecting 215,000 students in more than 230 schools in Malawi alone.

Improving Outcomes

There is evidence of improved student achievement in schools that use these services. LCDI-supported schools in one Ugandan district performed 45–55 percent better on examinations than control group schools, according to an independent evaluation (Government of the Netherlands 2008). Students in JET's Khanyisa Project performed 5 percent better in mathematics and literacy than students in nonproject schools, with scores at 59 percent of project schools improving by 5–42 percent (Joint Education Trust Education Services. 2012). GMI reports that client schools assessed over two consecutive years show double-digit improvements in English and math. A self-evaluation of Impact Network's eSchool360 package found that over an 18-month period students' standardized test scores rose 7 percent in literacy and 25 percent in numeracy (Impact Network International 2014).

School management has also improved in response to interventions and recommendations. ITA observed higher rates of tuition collection among low-cost private schools after it recommended that schools introduce tuition fee vouchers and direct bank transfers. After LCDI conducted School Performance Reviews, all 368 primary schools in the Dedza and Mulanje districts of Malawi developed a school improvement plan and almost 1,000 teachers and head teachers received school management and teacher training. GMI found that in more than 650 schools assessed for two consecutive years there was an average 15 percent increase in student enrollment and a 24 percent increase in parent satisfaction, indicating improved management. JET reports that a UK Department for International Development assessment of its Khanyisa Project observed improved curriculum management practices among more than 60 percent of teachers (Joint Education Trust Education Services 2012).

Cost-Effectiveness

There is limited data regarding the per-unit costs of most projects. LCDI's management reports that training of data collectors, school assessment and community engagement services cost approximately USD 107 per school but provide no further data. Likewise, a Teacher Foundation proposal for funding assumes a cost of USD 17,000 for a two-year intervention. The Impact Network reports the cost of operating an eSchool360 is USD 3 per student per month, less than a third the cost of government schools. Gray Matters India reports its revenues largely covered operating costs in 2014–15. However, some contracts made a loss when schools did not submit enough students for testing, forcing the company to rethink its fee structure and introduce a minimum charge.

Scaling Up Challenges

Acceptance remains a major challenge. ITA found that less than 30 percent of private schools want to be evaluated. GMI observed that only about 10 percent of school leaders fully accept evaluation as a tool for school improvement. JET reported that school managers perceived the assessment process as a bureaucratic requirement. The GMSA Foundation found that some schools find the scope of evaluation and remedial measures overwhelming. There may also be political resistance to private sector interventions in public schooling.

Some providers rely on time-limited grant funding to sustain large-scale interventions. Lack of funds forced one JET program to end two years early. LCDI notes that project funding cycles are typically too short to adequately assess impact. GMI reports that many low-cost private schools lack sufficient funds for evaluation. In three Pakistani provinces, the majority of private schools refused ITA's evaluation services because of lack of funds.

Human and technical resources are limited. JET found that most schools lack data-gathering systems, leading to unreliable school data. Both ITA and LCDI observed that finding good data analysts is challenging. LCDI also note the lack of efficient data storage and communications facilities in poor school areas.

Role of Government and Public Policy

The government can do much to improve the quality of education of children at the BoP. It can provide school quality frameworks, adopt policies that promote school evaluation, support provider solutions, and partner with providers.

Governments can establish indicators of school quality and improvements to guide providers' solutions. LCDI consults with national governments to help adapt its School Performance Review process. South Africa defines guidelines for nine areas of school evaluation including leadership, management and governance. To further enhance quality frameworks, governments could augment guidelines by creating formalized accreditation or rating schemes for schools undergoing evaluations and improvement programs or by sponsoring independent research on cost-effective improvement solutions in order to establish a robust knowledge base.

Government adoption or promotion of WSIP principles can be an effective means of improving learning outcomes and school standards. South Africa's Whole School Evaluation policy places responsibility for quality assurance with school principals and governing boards; its strategy requires annual reviews. In India the state of Haryana has introduced a school Quality Improvement Program (QIP) and monthly tests (Daily Pioneer 2015; Economic Times 2014). Ethiopia, Malawi, Pakistan, and Uganda also have policies promoting evaluation and school improvement packages. Such policies are catalysts for wider acceptance of school quality as the key indicator of success in education systems that traditionally measure success by inputs such as enrolment figures and school construction.

Some governments are integrating evaluations into their systems. The Ugandan government's Monitoring Learner Assessment is an adaptation of LCDI's School Performance Review. Malawi is developing its own version. The South African authorities adopted the GMSA Foundation's school self-evaluation instrument and database, piloting them in more than 350 schools. The government of Chile adopted the Fundación Chile's online self-evaluation, which was being used in 37 percent of urban Chilean schools as of 2013. L'Hermitage Foundation is replicating the Chilean model in Brazil.

PPP arrangements underpin some programs in public schools. Legal arrangements define expectations, goals, and cancellation terms and may mandate participation of government officials. The government acts as regulator and enforcer. In some cases (LCDI, JET), it provides in-kind support covering some project expenses.

Table 2. Examples of social enterprises in school evaluation and management

Company	Country	Website	Description
CfBT Education Services India	India	www.cfbtes.com	Offers customized Whole School Improvement Program (WSIP) for schools and training packages for managers, teachers, students, and parents. Baseline school evaluation guides designs and action plans.
Fundación Chile	Chile	www.gestionescolar.cl	Offers schools free online self-evaluation tool that solicits input from all stakeholders, providing diagnostic that informs school improvement plans. Also provides teacher training programs.
GM South Africa Foundation	South Africa	www.gmsouthafricafoundation.com	Three-year program of support offers free school evaluation instrument. Also offers capacity-building training programs and in some cases funding.
Gray Matters India (GMI)	India	www.graymatters.in	Conducts data-driven school evaluations, testing students and teachers and surveying school leaders and parents. Produces diagnostic reports and school ratings, offers advisory services and WSIPs, and recommends providers of education solutions.
Idara-e-Taleemo-o-Agahi (ITA)	Pakistan	http://www.itacec.org www.sasi.org.pk (SASI)	School Assessment for School Improvement (SASI) program charges schools for assessments, which include student tests, teacher competency, interviews with school leaders, parent satisfaction surveys, and financial and infrastructure audits. School management uses Strength-Weakness-Opportunities- Threats (SWOT) analysis to guide improvement plans. SASI introduces schools to providers of solutions, including microfinance providers.
Impact Network International	Zambia	www.impactnetwork.org	Provides community schools with comprehensive eSchool360 kit, which includes e-learning hardware, lesson plans, and a school management manual.
JET Education Services	South Africa	www.jet.org.za	Partners with public education authorities to implement school improvement programs utilizing JET self-evaluation tools and processes, which guide remedial measures and monitor progress, particularly in curriculum management. Surveys parents and students on their views of school management.
Link Community Development International (LCDI)	Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, South Africa, Uganda	www.lcdinternational.org	Partners with rural school districts to train educators to gather and analyze data to produce recommendations school uses to formulate action plan. Process conducted for all schools in a district, building a systemic picture of school quality. LCDI co-facilitates meetings to formulate district-level improvement plans and offers a Solar Connect program that enables schools to use ICT and share data.
The Teacher Foundation (TTF)	India	www.teacherfoundation.org	Whole-School Turnaround program offers private schools audits based on 67 indicators. Over a two-year period it provides teacher training, advice on curriculum design, and a leadership and management program. It has also developed a self-evaluation tool enabling schools to interpret their own performance data.

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PROFILE: Gray Matters India

Helping to transform the quality of low-cost private schools through data-driven school assessment and evidence-based analytics



GRAYMATTERS

Challenge

India has more than 300,000 private schools, most of them catering to low- and middle-income families. Because there is no reliable system to assess school quality, parents and schools rely on word-of-mouth and proxy measures—indicators that provide only a partial view of quality. Moreover, schools at the base of the pyramid typically lack the resources to self-evaluate and measure quality, hindering their ability to make systemic improvements.



Innovation

For-profit Gray Matters India (www.graymatters.in) provides school assessment and improvement services to two key target markets: individual “affordable” private schools (which typically charge USD 10–24 per month) and education enterprises (companies, foundations, and research bodies) piloting educational solutions in multiple schools. Gray Matters India charges approximately USD 2.40–3.00 per student for a one-time school assessment and USD 1.50–2.00 per student per subject for student assessments.

Gray Matters’ model features key innovations:

- **Data-driven diagnostics tools** that assess schools and provide guidance on remedial measures to enable whole-school improvement in five areas: student learning, teacher competency, school management, learning infrastructure, and parent satisfaction.
- **School ratings database**, made publicly available on the Gray Matters India website for a comparison of schools. An automated platform analyzes the data and generates a school rating.
- **Recommendations and an action plan** based on the data and a planning workshop with school leaders and teachers. The school implements the action plan, monitored by Gray Matters India at certain intervals.

Impact

Gray Matters India has worked in nine Indian states, with 1,000 schools assessed, which has affected more than 15,000 teachers and 320,000 students. In 2014, it assessed 452 schools, affecting 50,000 students. A year after implementing the recommendations, schools surveyed showed average improvements of 19 percent in English and 10 percent in math, a 15 percent increase in enrolment, and a 24 percent increase in parent satisfaction.

Scaling Up

Several factors are driving expansion, including demand among school leaders for credible ways to differentiate and improve, the company’s modular solutions and automated diagnostics, and a focus on using existing and free online resources.

The company also faces several constraints. Convincing school leaders of the need for external assessment and feedback is often difficult. Some question the company’s credentials, since there is neither an accreditation system nor an established market for school assessments. Parents lack awareness of data-based methods of evaluating schools. In addition, most low-cost private schools lack the budget for assessment solutions and capacity-building interventions.

PROFILE: Link Community Development International

Enabling African public primary schools to evaluate their performance and plan improvements



Challenge

Many African countries lack reliable data about primary school quality, hindering efforts to improve learning and completion rates. Teachers and administrators lack the data, skills, training, and resources to monitor schools. These deficits make improving schools challenging.



Innovation

The non-profit Link's School Performance Review (www.lcdinternational.org) process gathers and evaluates school data, enabling local educators to improve schools based on better information than government statistics provide. The reviews build the capacity of school communities and district education authorities to conduct evaluations and create and implement school improvement plans. The long-term goal is for governments to adopt their own data-driven evaluation systems.

First introduced in Ghana and South Africa and then replicated in Ethiopia, Malawi, and Uganda, the Link model introduces four innovations to rural schooling systems:

- 1) Whole-school evaluation, analyzing data collected from all stakeholders
- 2) District-wide school system evaluation and improvement
- 3) Stakeholder-driven school and district-level improvement planning
- 4) Solar-powered Internet connectivity through the Solar Connect program, enabling school reporting and data exchange

The training of data collectors, delivery of School Performance Review, and convening of community and district meetings costs approximately USD 107 per school. The Solar Connect system costs approximately USD 3,300 per school to install.

Impact

Since its founding, Link has worked in more than 3,000 schools and improved the education of more than three million children. Approximately 213,000 students in Malawi and 109,000 students of Ethiopia were reached in 2015. Link has established student computer clubs and generated income for schools from mobile phone-charging stations. Anecdotal evidence suggests that Solar Connect has helped to reduce teacher absenteeism, increase student attendance, and familiarize students with information communication technology (ICT) and printed examination papers.

Scaling Up

Ethiopia, Malawi, and Uganda have embraced the principles of the School Performance Review, adopting policies promoting whole-school evaluation and improvement. A key factor for acceptance is that the School Performance Review measures performance against government-approved indicators of school quality.

Several factors constrain prospects for expansion. The three-year project funding Link typically receives is inadequate for measuring long-term impact. For governments implementing School Performance Review-like systems, the challenge is covering the expenses Link currently funds. School Performance Review requires a corps of data collectors that have knowledge and experience to make value judgments and score schools against indicators. Also, stakeholders in rural communities sometimes lack the skills, confidence, or motivation to participate in the review process and take responsibility for school quality improvement.