

SCHOOLS RESEARCH SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to show a summary of the research conducted by iPF on four schools to identify challenges faced by school management and parents in school fees payments and collection, school management-parent communication, the impact and challenges of using digital systems for those who have them.

During sessions with school management, schools were represented by at least two key members of school management and iPF was represented by two researchers.

iPF team also conducted separate discussions with parents to understand their experience on school payment process and the type of communication they had with school management concerning their children progress.

SCHOOLS SUMMARY

Number of schools visited	4
Number of schools with digital information and management systems.	2
Number of schools without digital information and management systems.	2
Range of students per school	180-300
Level of schools	Primary and secondary schools

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION WITH SCHOOL MANAGERMENTS.

The following section summarizes the discussion iPF team had with Schools with no digital information and Management systems

On school fees payment and collection

- All School managements indicated that they only had two ways of collecting fees from parents, Cash payments and Bank payments but they prefer payments through banks because they believe it is a safe way, mobile money payment was a new thing to them and their opinions were divided but they would welcome any solution which would help them reconcile easily.
- In one school, in rare occasions some parents sent their payments through mobile money to individual school staff (Teachers in most occasions), a way which proves to be least popular with school management as it is difficult to maintain payment records and do reconciliation.
- School managements also indicated there is a big challenge when reconciling, especially with individual parents who claimed they have paid school fees but their records showed otherwise, so they have to pay a visit to the bank concerned for payment proof every time a parent raise a claim.

On school management-parent communication

The general understanding from discussions with school managements is that the most important communication to a parent for them is to remind them on paying their dues, communication about academic progress of a student seems to be not of huge importance and the only time they do so is at the end of the year or term through a simple academic report.

On using digital Information and management systems

Since this group of schools never had any digital systems to aid their operations before, they didn't seem to understand the importance of having one, but they all have mentioned the common challenges in doing operations manually, which are, in order of importance:-

- a. Difficult payment reconciliation process.
- b. Easily losing important records stored in physical files.
- c. Difficulty in reminding parents on settling their dues.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION WITH PARENTS/GUARDIANS.

Discussion with parents involved two different groups of parents, those located in the same town as the school and those who were far from school.

On school fees payment.

- The general feeling from the two groups is that during the season on which they usually pay school fees there are always big queues at the banks so they would be happy to have an easier payment method.
- Group of parents located far from school particularly complain about the bank payment method because they either have to give their children payment proof documents so they can present them to school or they send details to school through mobile phones, in both cases the payments receipts are always delayed which makes parents anxious and in some cases they have to wait for children to come back from schools to give them back the receipts, and children always lose those receipts before they come back for holidays.

On student's progress

Both group of parents indicated the difficulty of getting detailed analysis of their children academic performance because most of the frequency school management communicate with them, the discussions seem to be based on fees payments, a case is slightly less severe to a group of parents located near school as they can physically visit schools whenever they can to access those information.

IMPACT OF RESEARCH ON SOLUTION

After several discussions with school managements and parents, iPF team came up with the approach which put into consideration some common challenges mentioned

above, especially in the case of parents involvement, and close support to users after deployment.

- On parents involvement iPF decided to expand the channels through which parents can access their children academic performance and financial status easily, hence plan on developing mobile apps for parents.
- Schools with Information and management systems already in place still not using them as they should because of lack of support when they face challenges and lack of enough resources to facilitate the use of the current systems, hence the approach of providing schools with initial installation package which includes computers and networking devices but also provide constant support and training after deployment.
- The payment process is still cumbersome to parents while school managements seems to have a lot of challenges in reconciliation process, iPF aims to introduce newer and better option to parents for paying school fees, ensure they are notified on timely manner on the receipts and dues, while also ensuring the reconciliation process on the school side is easier and payment records are properly stored and easily accessed.