

CAMEROON

Can School Grants and Teacher Incentives be Used to Increase School Access and Improve Quality?

FEBRUARY 2019

REACH funded a Feasibility Study and a pre-pilot of performance-based school grants and teacher incentives among 20 rural primary schools.



Limited access to quality education, high dropout rates and low learning outcomes are acute problems in many areas of Cameroon.



Stakeholder Accountability

RBF can be used to incentivize stakeholders and provide an accountability mechanism for schools to perform better.

The Results in Education for All Children (REACH) Trust Fund supports and disseminates research on the impact of results-based financing on learning outcomes. The EVIDENCE series highlights REACH grants around the world to provide empirical evidence and operational lessons helpful in the design and implementation of successful performance-based programs.

Many developing countries have invested substantial resources in expanding their primary and secondary education systems, resulting in large gains in the number of existing schools and the number of students enrolled. However, this has not always guaranteed that all students can access or stay in school, especially the most vulnerable students. Furthermore, while the quantity of schooling has increased dramatically, in many countries this growth has not been matched by any improvement in the

quality of schooling. Several factors such as limited resources at the school level, high monitoring costs, a lack of performance incentives, and weak accountability mechanisms have meant that many education systems do not perform well on important indicators of education access and quality such as student retention, teacher attendance, and classroom teaching practices.

Results-based financing (RBF) has been used in many developing countries to attempt to address

these challenges by creating stronger incentives for various stakeholders such as students, parents, and teachers to achieve better results. RFB mechanisms work by providing financial incentives to achieve measurable results, such as increasing teacher attendance, widening access to schooling, or reducing student dropouts. Performance-based school grants and individual incentives are two examples of RFB mechanisms that have been used in many developing countries to incentivize various stakeholders such as teachers, principals, or school administrators to make greater efforts to increase education access and improve its quality. Performance-based school grants work by giving schools a cash transfer if they succeed

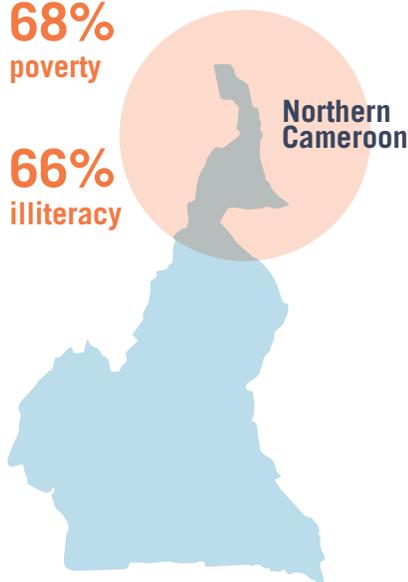
in performing better on one or more of the indicators that the financial incentives are designed to improve. Similarly, teacher incentives work by giving bonuses to individual teachers based on their own or their school's improved performance on one or more indicators.

The Results in Education for All Children (REACH) Trust Fund at the World Bank funded a feasibility study and a pre-pilot of performance-based school grants and teacher incentives among 20 rural primary schools in Cameroon. The purpose was to assess whether these RFB mechanisms could feasibly be used to improve transparency, financial management, and monitoring at the school level, increase

community satisfaction, and draw lessons from the implementation of these RFB mechanisms to enable the initiative to be scaled up throughout Cameroon. While it is not possible to draw conclusions about the effect of this RFB program on education access or quality given the short time period and small sample size, this pre-pilot demonstrated that RFB is feasible in rural primary schools in Cameroon and highlighted the importance of several critical preconditions that must be in place for RFB to be effective. These preconditions include a simple and context-appropriate design, clear communication with key stakeholders, effective monitoring tools to assess school and teacher performance, and community involvement.

68%
poverty

66%
illiteracy



CONTEXT

Cameroon has made progress in the past 10 years, and almost doubled enrollment in the primary schools. But despite efforts by the Government of Cameroon and its partners in the education sector to achieve the goal of ensuring quality education for all, significant challenges remain. In particular, there are strong regional disparities throughout the country. Several designated priority areas of Cameroon face the most acute challenges, including the predominantly rural Northern region where 68 percent of the population

lives in poverty and 66 percent are illiterate.¹ These areas suffer from a lack of access to quality education, high dropout rates, particularly for girls, and learning outcomes that are significantly worse than in the rest of the country. According to a government report,² the education sector is subject to consistent under-funding, with a low proportion of the national budget being allocated to basic education. For example, 42 percent of Cameroon's education budget is borne by private household expenditure, which is nearly double the share in comparable countries.³ This funding shortfall manifests

itself in very limited financial resources at the local level, thus hampering the ability of schools to provide services to all children in their communities and to invest in improving their quality.

The pre-pilot was conducted in 20 primary schools in the Lagdo sub-division, a poor and rural area in Cameroon's Northern region. Following the completion of the feasibility study in March 2017, the Ministry of Basic Education selected these schools to participate in the pre-pilot during the 2017–18 school year beginning in September 2017.

PROJET ÉCOLE ANNÉE SCOLAIRE: 2017-2018

projet d'école: quels sont les points clés de l'école et comment peut-on les améliorer?

Description de l'environnement de l'école

Quelles sont les caractéristiques principales de l'environnement de l'école?

Environnement physique
Population dans la zone de recrutement des élèves (minorités, pauvres, déplacés, autres)
Autres faits particuliers

- L'école enclavée par des montagnes (fort ensoleillement)
- Présence de la route au sein de l'école
- Point d'eau

Actions à mener au niveau de l'école
- Planter les arbres à ombrage (100 plants)
- Entourer d'une clôture
- Sensibiliser les élèves à apporter les bouteilles d'eau
- Mettre les canaris dans les salles de classe

WHY WAS THE INTERVENTION CHOSEN?

While increasing resources for the education sector in the medium and long term is critical, in the short term it is equally essential to make more efficient use of the limited available resources at the school level. With both these goals in mind, the Ministry of Basic Education in Cameroon decided to experiment with RBF mechanisms to improve governance at the school level, to address the chronic problem of poor accountability among teachers and school administrators, and to create a culture of results and accountability in education. This was prompted by the successful results produced by RBF initiatives in the health sector in Cameroon and in other countries and the desire to adapt these effective programs to the education sector.

The RBF feasibility study and pre-pilot were designed to achieve several objectives: (a) to increase transparency and improve financial management at the school level; (b) to improve the monitoring of schools by head teachers and local inspectors; (c) to increase community satisfaction with the quality of school services; and (d) to learn lessons to inform the scale-up of RBF throughout the school system in Cameroon. Specific issues that this RBF program was designed to address included the need to increase student attendance and retention, to ensure universal school access, even among the most vulnerable students who are unable to pay parent teachers' association fees, to increase teachers' attendance and improve

their preparation, and to increase the availability of appropriate teaching materials and improve learning conditions in the classroom.

Objective 1

School level—Increase transparency and improve financial management

Objective 2

School level—Improve monitoring of schools

Objective 3

Community level—Increase community satisfaction

Objective 4

System-wide—Learn lessons to inform the scale-up of RBF

HOW DID THE INTERVENTION WORK?

The pre-pilot implemented in the 20 primary schools consisted of two main RBF mechanisms: (a) school grants allocated to the School Management Council (SMC) of each school based on its achievement

Incentives

Incentives were introduced at multiple points to encourage and improve implementation of annual school action plans. These included:

1. Entry payments
2. Equity bonus for disadvantaged schools
3. Performance bonuses
4. Improvement bonuses



of a set of simple, well-defined outputs and its performance on a set of indicators and (b) the possibility of introducing incentives to teachers and administrative staff. Altogether the RBF project allocated four different types of payments to the schools and their teachers. Depending on school size, the additional allocated amount under RBF reached US\$500 to US\$1000 per school and per year, to be compared with a regular national budget provided by the state of less than US\$200. The average amount transferred to school was calculated to be sufficient to make a difference, but also sustainable for national budget. First, at the start of the school year, those schools that fulfilled basic entry conditions, including signing contracts to participate in the pre-pilot and submitting annual action plans, received initial *entry payments* to help them to begin to implement their plans. Second, an *equity bonus* was allocated at the start of the school year to the most disadvantaged schools, with higher payments going to schools with fewer state-paid teachers. Third, at the end of each trimester, *performance bonuses* were awarded to each school based on their achievement of predefined indicators that were under the control of the SMC and school administrators (and proportional to the size of each school). These indicators covered aspects of school access, quality, and governance, including teacher attendance, lesson preparation, student retention, budget transparency, textbook

use, community satisfaction, and adherence to the policy of providing free education for all students. The achievement of the performance indicators was monitored and verified by each school's SMC (in a self-evaluation) in conjunction with school inspectors, an independent verification organization, and local administrative staff from the Ministry of Basic Education. Finally, at the end of the year, schools were allocated *improvement bonuses* based on the number of indicators on which they had achieved significant improvements over the course of the school year.

Before the intervention, the money collected by parent's Teacher Association was essentially used to finance teachers which are not paid by the state. The additional funding provided allowed SMCs to effectively improve schooling and learning conditions: the SMCs used these payments for two purposes. They used 70 percent of the total grant to fund the implementation of the school's action plan, although there were some restrictions on what types of expenditures could be included. Typically, SMCs spent these funds on books and worksheets, learning materials, tables and benches, supplies for vulnerable children such as shoes, and light infrastructure. The remaining 30 percent of each school's grant was divided evenly among teachers and head teachers as incentive payments for their efforts in helping the schools achieve the performance indicators.



WHAT WERE THE RESULTS?

Overall, the implementation of the school grants and teacher incentives pre-pilot coincided with improvements in several key indicators at the school level.

Although this cannot be interpreted as the causal effect of school grants and teacher incentives, schools appeared to have improved their performance on several indicators over the course of the school year. On average, schools showed some improvement in 10 of the 16 performance indicators (62 percent) between the first and the third trimester.

This progress might be attributable to stakeholders' understanding of incentive mechanism, given that there were only 20 schools in the pre-pilot.

However, there was considerable variation among schools in terms of how much they improved. There was a large variation between the improvement made by different schools, with the top school

improving in 15 of the 16 indicators and the bottom school improving in only six indicators. Thirteen schools improved in more than half of the indicators, while the remaining seven schools improved in only half or fewer of the indicators. Preliminary analysis tends to show that larger schools, and schools having a committed Director performed better.

There was also high variance in the performance by indicator.

There were large improvements in the average school performance on several indicators. For example, the presence of teachers in the classroom, increased from 64 percent in the first trimester to 97 percent in the second trimester, but this was followed by a decline to 85 percent in the third trimester. Also, the share of teachers who prepared lessons rose slightly from 85 percent in the first trimester to 90 percent in the second trimester, only to decline dramatically to 60 percent

in the third trimester. Some teachers expected more than they got after the first trimester, particularly in small schools as the total amount granted was linked to schools' size. The lessons to be learned from this are: (a) to reduce the correlation between the size of the grant and the size of the school to ensure that every school receives a minimum allocation and (b) to inform schools upfront of the potential gains, in order to avoid demobilization effects.

Community satisfaction with school management during the pre-pilot was high. Overall, based on a survey of those communities in which the 20 pre-pilot schools were located, their satisfaction with school management averaged 82 percent. The communities became more involved in school management, which may have increased the transparency of schools' financial management and of the implementation of school action plans.



WHAT WERE THE LESSONS LEARNED?

Several key lessons emerged from the implementation of the school grants and teacher incentives pre-pilot. **The first lesson relates to the need for the design of the scheme to be simple and context-appropriate.** Given the relatively limited capacity of rural primary schools, it was important to simplify the design of the RBF scheme in Cameroon in terms of its objectives, the eligibility criteria for schools, the performance criteria, monitoring procedures, and funding mechanisms. In particular, the performance indicators that were selected were chosen because they were easy to understand and to monitor, were attributable at the school level, and measured

characteristics that were under the school's control. In the pilot phase and the subsequent scale-up of the scheme in Cameroon, the indicators will be further simplified and reduced in number from 16 to 10. The design of any RBF scheme must also be customized to the circumstances of the country in question and to the context of the education rather than assuming that the features that worked in the health sector will work in education. For example, primary schools differ from health facilities in that they do not generate revenue, so the amount of money available for RBF is lower for education. Costs must also be factored in to ensure the scalability and sustainability of the incentive scheme.

Second, it was extremely important to communicate the specifics of the RBF model to all concerned parties, including the local authorities, local school administrators, teachers, parents, and other members of the community. Unless they have a clear understanding of the incentives and the indicators being measured, particularly those who can influence the performance indicators, there is little chance that the incentives will be effective.

Third, it was critical to have simple, effective, and ready to use monitoring tools with which to monitor the activities and performance of each school. These operational tools were developed

and technically validated during the feasibility study in 2017 and were instrumental in collecting reliable data on each school's performance.

Fourth, one of the major challenges of the pre-pilot was the low value of both the school grants and the incentives received by teachers, which may explain the failure of some of the schools to improve their performance on certain indicators.

The amounts paid to teachers were low for several reasons – they represented only 30 percent of the school grants, which were already limited, plus they had to be divided between all teachers at each school, and they were proportional to the size of the school, which meant that teachers at smaller schools got lower payments than those in bigger schools. However, this added 30 percent was significant when the overall size of the grant was sufficient, which was not always the case in smaller schools. This will be taken into consideration when reworking the grant allocation formula. The incentive payments to teachers were lower than comparable incentives being paid to health workers in the same communities, so there was a perception that these amounts were insufficient to change teachers' behavior. For this type of school grants program to be effective in encouraging teachers to put in more effort, the amount of funding available for individual teacher incentives would need to be higher than the amounts that were paid during this pre-pilot, especially in smaller schools. Also, the school grants themselves may

not have been large enough to offset the generally poor school conditions caused by the historically limited resources budgeted for education in Cameroon. However, such a program must strike a balance between an incentive amount that is high enough to change teacher behavior or improve school conditions but is modest enough to be financially sustainable.

Fifth, there were a few notable cases of fraud in the monitoring of the schools' performance indicators.

To ensure the validity of any RBF scheme, it is important for inspectors to be vigilant in identifying such cases, there should be multiple parties involved in monitoring and verification, for any perverse incentives of the monitoring parties that might encourage fraud to be removed, and there should be a well-defined system for addressing fraud when it arises. All cases of fraud were sanctioned by cancelling the relevant indicator for that school.

The sixth and final lesson learned was that head teachers played a key role in the success of the RBF pre-pilot as they were responsible for many aspects of the implementation of the scheme at the school level, including training teachers, coaching them on their performance, managing the SMC and ensuring that it functions well, and ensuring that school funds are properly used. Variations in the quality of head teachers played a big role in explaining variations in performance across schools.

Lessons



1. Design must be simple and appropriate



2. Wide-spread communication required



3. Reliable and easy monitoring tools needed



4. Grant allocation formula needs reworking



5. Fraud must be monitored and eliminated



6. Head teachers played a major role

The pre-pilot demonstrated that with appropriate preconditions in place, RBF was feasible in rural schools in Cameroon and yielded useful lessons that informed a scale-up of the intervention.

CONCLUSION

Following the successful feasibility study and pre-pilot of school grants and teacher incentives in Cameroon, these RBF mechanisms—with modifications based on lessons learned from pre-pilot—were approved to be scaled up nationwide. This RBF scheme will initially be piloted at 400 schools, and then scaled up to approximately 3,000 schools in 2019–2024, and an impact evaluation will be conducted to determine the efficacy of the nationwide scheme. While it is not possible at this stage to come to definitive conclusions about the effect of this RBF program on education access or quality, the pre-pilot demonstrated that RBF is feasible and effective in rural

primary schools in Cameroon and yielded useful lessons to inform the pilot and scale-up. In particular, these lessons highlight the need for several critical preconditions to be in place for RBF to be effective: (a) a simple and context-appropriate RBF design; (b) clear communication to all key stakeholders about the purpose and implementation of the scheme; (c) effective monitoring tools to assess school and teacher performance; (d) sufficient levels of financing for school grants and teacher incentives; (e) systems to deal with fraud and perverse incentives; and (f) training and capacity development for head teachers because of their critical role in ensuring the success of the scheme.

1 Institut National de la Statistique (2015). *ECAM 4. Enquête Camerounaise auprès des ménages. Tendances, profils et déterminants de la pauvreté au Cameroun entre 2001-2014.*

2 République du Cameroun, MINEPAT (2015). *Elaboration de la Stratégie Nationale de Gouvernance.*

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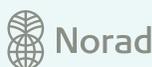
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REACH is funded by the Government of Norway through NORAD, the Government of the United States of America through USAID, and the Government of Germany through the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development.



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