Dear Community Member,

The Monitoring and Evaluation colloquium focused on the e-Textbook Initiative which is running in the Eastern Cape Province, Cofimvaba school district. One of the evaluators, Benita Williams, joined the focus group to give an overview of the project and share the monitoring and evaluation approach being applied.

Zarina Khan facilitated the session with support from Carlene Gonzo and Tshego Thulare of BRIDGE. This meeting was attended by a variety of stakeholders including:

- Barloworld
- Benita Williams Evaluators
- BRIDGE
- Click Foundation
- Consultant
- Edunova
- Facilitator
- Google SA
- Khulisa Management Services
- Khulisa Management Services
- Macmillan South Africa
- OLICO
- Pearson
- PROTEC
- Sci-Bono Discovery Centre
- Sci-Bono Discovery Centre
- Telkom Foundation
- ThinkAhead Education
- Tshikulu Social Investments
- Zenex Foundation

Nolundi Ningi
Benita Williams
Barbara Dale-Jones
Kirsty-Lee Dell
Mmatsatsi Phadime
John Thole
Zarina Khan
Karen Walstra
Byron Smit
Katharine Tjasink
Rachel Goldstuck
Andrew Barrett
Mandi Icy Modiba
Fannie Matumba
Trust Nkomo
George Nkogatse
Monese Waga Puso
Astrid van Wyk
Yvonne Pennington
Lettie Miles

An overview of the ICT4RED

In order to understand of the Monitoring and Evaluation methodology applied in the e-Textbook Initiative Benita explained that it would be helpful for the focus group to be familiar with the actual project.

The Cofimvaba Rural Education Intervention is part of a larger project that touches other aspects of life including health, nutrition, water and sanitation among other areas, in this part of the Eastern Cape. The education aspect has many stakeholders and contributors and is designed to investigate the viability of providing electronic textbooks and other educational digital content resources to 26 schools in the Nciba
Circuit of the Cofimvaba School District. The lessons learned in this initiative will inform recommendations for models and scaling such interventions to other parts of South Africa.

The project objectives are as follows:

1. Design systemic and sustainable approaches and models to provide access to digital content by learners at poor and marginalized rural schools in South Africa;
2. Design, develop, test and improve new and evolving educational technologies, mobile devices, platforms and pedagogies that support the use of digital content for rural school environments;
3. Measure the effect on the 21st skills of learners; and
4. Use the evidence from the research within this context to inform policy in an integrated and coherent manner.

The project includes nearly 700 people including learners, teachers and district officials. The project should improve learner performance by testing various models including the provision of content, infrastructure and teacher training. The e-textbooks are meant to work alongside the traditional textbooks.

There are a number of stakeholders all working in collaboration to make this project possible. It supports access to twenty first century skills by supporting access to digital content. The project touches learners, parents, teacher, and government officials in a co-dependent way that changes the way people view how content and engage with it. The principles of this initiative include open standards, inclusivity, and sustainability. It generates new technology solutions that include a mobi-charger linked with renewable energy sources such wind and solar power and a mobikit that will allow multiple devices to be charged at once. A mobi hub is then used to create a localised access point that is linked to a local content repository (intranet) from which digital content used in the classes can be extracted and used for teaching and learning.

Participants noted that the implementation model used in the ICT4RED project (noted above) enables big picture thinking about all aspects of the intervention and should be shared widely. It is also a great model because it enables an “actor” in any one component of the project to see how they impact or are impacted by others within the intervention.
Evaluation of the ICT4RED initiative

The monitoring and evaluation approach employed takes into account the fact that this initiative is a constantly evolving, complex and innovative. In the end evaluators have settled on a combined approach that uses the Developmental Evaluation and principles of Utilisation Focused evaluation.

Benita explained that it is important to keep the project aims in mind when designing evaluations. In the ICT for Rural Education project (ICT4RED) the aims are to

- improve the teaching and learning environment
- contribute towards improved learner results and the development of 21st century skills among teachers and learners.
- Document a model for e-textbook roll out in schools, which could potentially be sustainably replicated in other educational districts.

The framework used comprises two parts. The first part of the framework looks at Model Development which incorporated the documentation of the Theory of Action and the Theory of Change and a Cost Study. During the project’s implementation, monitoring and learning takes place, feedback from this level are among the successful practices spread through and after this colloquium. A comprehensive results review carried is out to get a in the Evaluation and Learning phase of this work. It looks at a variety of issues including learning, teacher, school, district and other.

The second part of the evaluation considers the evaluation component, the evaluation question it provokes and the methods that will be used for evaluation. The methods used include a variety of avenues that enable the collection of data; as noted in the Implementation monitoring component noted below:

![Framework Part 2](image-url)
**Discussion**

This evaluation taught that one has to be very careful when outlining the project aims. For example, in teacher development initiatives it is important to note whether educators are changing practice based on what they have been trained to do; not to focus on shifts in learner outcomes, because the latter is influenced by so many factors. It is very difficult to link teacher development, alone, directly with learner support.

In order to conduct successful teacher training it is important to stimulate a teacher’s interest in the subject matter of the training. The “Earn to Learn” model shared here goes a long way in ensuring this interest. The approach taken on teacher buy in and support speaks to sustainability and the whole approach to knowledge management is very useful and proactive in maintaining the project’s institutional memory.

The evaluation has a comprehensive framework that changes according to the development of the project and the role of evaluators in the projects is important. The evaluators are immersed in the ICT4RED project and involved from the beginning. One person commented that an evaluator’s presence provides the project with constant “course correction” that implementers may be unable to do on their own because they are so steeped in doing the work.

One key lesson participants agreed on is the fact that learning is a process. Evaluation of implementation work brings the awareness that one learns to learn while doing the work.

It is also very useful that the evaluation approach caters to the needs of a variety of stakeholders.

The scope of the ICT4RED project is interesting in that it was not targeted at one group of stakeholders, such as learners or educators but touched on all those working in one district. This project touches the entire learning context in that region.

**Community of practice outcomes**

The Monitoring and Evaluation focus group aims to contribute to the creation of more maths, science and technology graduates by sharing lessons learnt in evaluations of projects and programmes. Working with communities for effective practice, BRIDGE has the following objectives:

- The contribution of the community to the whole system;
• Creating common purpose, peer support and trust among stakeholders;
• The maximising of resources by the community;
• The spread of effective practice within the community and its associated stakeholders (horizontal integration); and
• The vertical integration of policy and practice.

In terms of maximising resources the ICT4RED programme manager are open to sharing resources and knowledge and have dedicated pages for sharing this information. Participants were encouraged to visit The ICT4RED blog where ongoing updates of the project and resources are available. Benita also shared a number of resources with the colloquium participants including:

• The DG Murray Trust learning brief overview
• ICT4RED Overview Presentation
• ICT4RED Evaluation Methodology Presentation
• ICT4RED Impact Story Template

Community members can also access resources from the BRIDGE Online Community and Benita’s blog.

After the presentation, John Thole from Edunova indicated that his organisation has funded a project in the Queenstown area, which is working very close to the ICT4RED project schools in Cofimvaba. Given that it is likely that the same District officials involved in the ICT4RED project may be involved in the Edunova project, John expressed an interest in seeing how the contacts can be leveraged, and how the new Edunova project can draw on the ICT4RED work already done to support their goals. Benita then referred John Thole to Sandy Malapile - ICT4RED stakeholder engagement person and Merryl Ford, project owner. BRIDGE will continue to observe this potential collaboration with interest.

This presentation emphasised the spread of effective practice through the ICT4RED project and its evaluation; and to the wider Maths and Science Learner Support community. The way the project is documented is focused and detailed. Icy Modiba from Pearson, in particular noted that she would be following up on the documentation processes used for application in her work. Andrew Barrett noted that the learning briefs are particularly useful for OLICO, being used a first line documentation note which can be expanded into detailed reports, when required.

Participants highlighted that they are impressed by the candid input shared by Benita in this colloquium. One gentleman explained that it was interesting to note that even in the presence of substantial funding it is challenging to pin down the evaluation and project design. His comments speak to the presence of common purpose, peer support and trust.

This project may be considered a template for designing interventions with the integration of policy, practice and going to scale from the onset.

Best wishes,

The BRIDGE Team
September 2014