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CANADIAN TEACHERS' FEDERATION TRUST FUND

Mobile Technology: Mentoring and Professional Learning Communities for Women Teachers in Gambia

Context

Throughout Africa there is a shortage of women teachers, particularly in rural and remote regions. According to Education International, the percentage of women and girls who complete primary school is lower in African countries than any other area in the world. This lack of education ultimately leads to a smaller pool of qualified women candidates for teaching positions. When women do become teachers, they are less likely to accept postings in rural or remote regions for many reasons including: a lack of personal and professional opportunities; limited leisure activities; feelings of isolation; less access to healthcare; and more. The presence of women teachers is recognized as a key factor for encouraging girls' school enrollment and retention. Women teachers serve as positive role models for girls and are considered less threatening by parents.

The Innovative Solution

Supported by FIT, the Canadian Teachers' Federation and The Gambia Teachers' Union tested an innovative technology-based solution that aimed to retain women teachers (all in the first five years of their teaching career) in rural and remote locations by connecting them with mentors, support networks and professional development opportunities. Participants were given mobile phones that allowed them to connect with professional learning communities (PLCs) that offered content delivered through WhatsApp, Zoom, Podcasts, video and more. The purpose was to mitigate feelings of isolation and professional stagnation among women teachers.

Advancing Gender Equality

At baseline, two strategies were proposed to ensure the incorporation of gender equality learnings: the development of a gender equality guide for the project team, partners and participating school communities; and the inclusion of these learnings into the design of project activities. Major issues that came out of the in-depth gender scan included: Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV); reproductive health education and counselling; mental health; professional identity vs gendered identity; and the lack of senior female teachers and regional staff. These formed part of the core agenda of the formal activities (Professional Learning Community Sessions and face to face meetings) and ensured they and were addressed in the informal interactions between mentors and mentees and/or in meetings with district and government personnel.



COUNTRY	AMOUNT
The Gambia	\$226,670

TESTING PERIOD
15 months
Ended August 2022



GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE (GE3)

THEME: EDUCATION

Testing Framework

Data was collected through a combination of self-assessment surveys, key informant interviews (both during baseline and midline), and in-person focus group discussions (at endline). This methodology captured changes in participant thinking related to their experience as teachers throughout the testing period, reflections on their professional competence and confidence, their thinking about likelihood of staying in the profession long-term, and feedback on the project. Surveys for head teachers focused on their observation of changes among the women teachers. All interviews and focus groups were conducted on the phone by the Gambian MEL (Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning) Consultant and his team of female researchers, using the guide/questions co-designed by our Canadian MEL Consultant, Gambian MEL Consultant, and Gambian Gender Specialist. A final round of interviews was conducted with a control group of women teachers of the same demographics (who did not participate in the test) to strengthen and validate results. A pre-post approach was used as the main method, but to improve on analysis of the results, CTF added a control group after the midterm.

Results and Impact

At endline, 84% (40/48) of the mentees indicated being more likely to stay in the teaching profession long term, compared to the 70% of the control group. Additionally, 79% (38/48) of the mentees reported feeling less isolated and disconnected in their teaching communities compared to the 75% (13/18) reported by the control group. Notably, 84% (50/60) of the participating mentees and mentors reported increased comfort in the use of mobile phones for professional use which exceeds the 60% project target.

Key Lessons

1. Head teachers were initially excluded from mentee support groups but were later added as per the advice of the project officer. The head teachers (all male) interact often and oversee teachers in their respective schools, playing a key role in the mentees' careers. Earlier involvement of the project officer would have mitigated this oversight.
2. The 12 women selected would have benefitted from more training and more detailed and clear expectation setting.
3. Listening to the local partner and being flexible and sensitive to the needs of participants is critical. The local knowledge of GTU General Secretary, Marie-Antoinette Corr was crucial.

"The phone was a source of motivation for me. I learned many skills and gained confidence from my involvement in the FIT program. I can now speak confidently about many things and have the courage to face elders. As a peace advocate, I can now use my voice, speak with parents, and continue to advocate for what I believe in. I even organized a three-day training program which focused on topics of peace, conflict, non-violence and diversity. I not only offered this program to my students, but also invited other schools to join."

- Woman mentee

PARTNER ORGANIZATION

Gambia Teachers' Union (GTU)

TARGET PARTICIPANTS

48 women teachers in the Gambia, 12 women mentor teachers, 5 head teachers (4 men, 1 woman)

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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ABOUT FIT

The Fund for Innovation and Transformation supports Canadian small and medium-sized organizations (SMOs) testing innovative solutions that advance gender equality in the Global South.

