



“Without mentioning names and with no intention to shame anybody ...” “Without sounding defensive, I wish to point out that ...”
(cordial discussion at a community meeting)

KEY FACTS

Link knows that community support is crucial for school improvement.

Link has been mobilising communities in Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi and Uganda for over 10 years.

Link’s innovative School Performance Appraisal Meeting (or SPAM) gathers up to 100 school stakeholders to discuss how to improve their school.

Participation in SPAMs enables citizens’ voices to be heard leading to stronger accountability and improved education.

Participatory data collection aligns to Ministry of Education indicators.

Link’s projects work from the ‘inside-out’ using existing school and district systems.

How Link mobilises communities to support school improvement

Access to accurate information, used well, empowers communities, schools and local government to improve the quality of education. However, this information, alongside good management, is not always available. Our School Performance Review (SPR) process supports districts to collect, analyse, share and use information to improve the education which schools deliver. With this information, schools know where they should focus to improve, and where they should celebrate achievements. A School Performance



Appraisal Meeting (SPAM) led by the headteacher and supported by a local government education official, enables schools and their communities to use this information to consider their strengths and weaknesses, jointly agree on targets for their

School Improvement Plan and decide who is responsible for leading, supporting and checking progress.

Avoiding conflict

Meetings to discuss performance can be sensitive and lead to positions of defence or blame. With training, understanding and support, conflict can be avoided. The SPR process is collaborative with information gathered and triangulated against a range of sources. The headteacher signs off the results and presents a balanced reflection on the school’s strengths and weaknesses at the SPAM. Communities challenge poor performance and consider how they can work alongside teachers and school managers to improve. Schools and their communities appreciate the need to support each other which generates shared positive feeling and mutual accountability. In largely non-literate societies opportunities for verbal discussion are appreciated, respectful and formal. This structure, courteous behaviour and the impartial nature of SPR, empowers community stakeholders and school staff to challenge as well as commit to deliver more effectively on their roles resulting in strong SIPs supported by engaged stakeholders. In contrast, non-project schools stated that they found holding community meetings challenging and suggested they could be improved if schools “involve parents and the entire community in identifying problems affecting the school and solutions to the problems.” Link’s role is to ensure government officials are well trained in how to structure and support these meetings to the benefit of all.

**“There is a higher quality of education because of a good relationship between the school and the community”
(headteacher)**



In a rural school located on the Kamwendo – Mchinji road in Malawi, community engagement with the school is poor as a result of protracted chieftaincy wrangles. The catchment area is a battle ground for rival claimants to the position of Group Village Headman. This rivalry creates an indifferent community who avoid siding with one claimant over another, and thus do not get involved in local development work. The government education official’s termly support visits were unstructured due to a lack of data on how the school was performing and the headteacher did not recollect any suggestions for improvements.

Link conducted the school’s first School Performance Review (SPR) in May 2016 which showed that the school did not meet minimum standards. The school called a community meeting to plan the way ahead. The initial meeting attracted few parents so the government official suggested approaching the current Group Village Headmen to present SPR findings and to recommend that parents *must* be active. The next community meeting (i.e. SPAM) attracted greater participation (242 in total) where they discussed key issues from the SPR Feedback Report and made plans to address the recommendations. The government official undertook six follow-up visits to support the development of the School Improvement Plan (SIP) and to monitor implementation. By November 2016 all 11 recommendations were achieved or partially achieved, and the community had organised themselves to make additional improvements. Lack of clean, safe toilets and poor sanitation was noted as a serious failure during SPR, which was known in 2015 when the school had been threatened with closure. However, no action had been taken. Following SPR and SPAM, five additional toilets were constructed in three months at the initiative of the community.

SPR led to significant benefits - the structured nature of SPR and the Feedback Report enabled the school to focus on its shortfalls, whilst **community participation improved considerably**. Parents felt that the SPAM was instrumental in mobilising them to rally around the school without becoming involved in the chieftaincy dispute. They also felt that the attendance of a government official at the SPAM signalled to chiefs the importance of supporting their school instead of using it as a bargaining chip in the power dispute.



Community members are taking a more informed and active role in the school, including developing and implementing the SIP, ensuring their children are prepared and attend school, holding committee positions and participating in meetings, and engaging with the teachers. 75% of teachers and 86% of community members strongly agreed that the local community is now effectively involved in school management compared to 23% and 25% previously, and just 16% in non-project schools.

In contrast, a high-achieving school in the same district which met minimum standards also benefited from a mobilised and informed community. The roles and responsibilities of the School Management Committee (SMC) were clarified during the SPR process. Six months after SPR, the SMC was implementing a programme for ongoing school supervision, having learnt through SPR that this was their responsibility. In the first term alone the school was supervised three times by SMC members – they checked the library to ensure that resources are being cared for, monitored classes, and talked to staff to see how they can help further. Link’s School Management Simulation Training also provided community members with a clearer understanding of their roles as it directly addressed **“what is happening on a daily basis in our work”** and helped them **“to find their place”** in managing the school.

Delivery Partners



Ministry of Education, Science and
Technology, Malawi



Ministry of Education,
Ethiopia



Ministry of Education &
Sports, Uganda



Ministry of Education,
Ghana