

Marcia Davidson: I want to welcome everyone here. We are going to be talking with some amazing people who will be presenting and sharing the results, their experiences, and some exciting innovations in education. My name is Marcia Davidson and I'm going to be moderating this panel and providing some of the questions just to get the discussion started and this is a panel on scaling evidence based innovations in education with government partners.

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Okay, so let me introduce our panelists today. We'll start, the first person is Chris Neilson, who's an assistant professor of Economics and Public Affairs at Princeton and he's going to talk to us about a project that he's been working on called Learning the Value of Education AVE Tree Ed.

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Our second presenter is Laura Poswell who is the Executive Director of J-PAL Africa and she's going to talk to us about her partnership in the research on teaching at the right level which is [inaudible 00:01:14] program.

We have Susannah Hares who is the International Director of ARC and the lead coordinator of Liberia's partnership schools program, the PSL for Liberia.

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We have Sridhar Rajagopalan who is from Mind Spark. He is the co founder of educational initiatives that developed Mind Spark. I'm really excited that they're here to talk with us and I'm going to start the questioning with a question for both Sridhar and Chris.

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For years, the education sector has focused on how to get more kids in school and as we know, the question is no longer about access. It's really about learning. One of the first question I want to ask is for both of you, how is adaptive learning or nudge based learning a departure from a more traditional approach to educational policy and programming that might help feed into this new focus on quality education? Let's start with Sridhar.

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Sridhar Rajago:

Thanks Marcia. I think that's a great question and it's something that is really relevant for policy makers because the usual approach is to say, "I need to have the school there. I need to have the teacher there. I need to have the children coming to school." Countries have tried this for years. You've done all those things and then you've found that that has not led to the kind of results that you wanted.

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It turns out that this problem of getting children to learn effectively is not news to us but it has been much, much more difficult than we would have thought. You thought of it as an administrative problem, saying, "If I do these things right, it's going to happen." But it's not. It turns out to be, what we call a technical problem but technical not in the technology sense but in the sense of education, mastering some of those spaces.

Now, one of the technologies that we find seems to work effectively is when you recognize the fact that the students whom you are trying to address and trying to

[00:03:30] get them to come to a certain level are starting off at extremely different levels. This is very common. We see this if you go to a grade five classroom, you will find that there are children who are not able to recognize letters or recognize numbers. There are also some children who are able to operate, more or less, at a grade five level.

[00:04:00] This is just a grade five classroom. Your actual classroom may actually have a mixed grade classroom which means that there are children of different grades. In that context, teaching at the right level is a term that we use when we are not using technology, adaptive learning where the technology itself can go to the level the child based on their answers.

That seems to be getting much more effective results than a one size fits all or an approach where you say that, "I'm going to train the teachers and leave it at that." This is what we are finding in an after study. Even in context, which varies quite a bit.

[00:04:30] Even in high performance schools where you find that learning levels are already high or what we call the elite private schools in India, we find that even there, the range of learning levels varies quite a bit and adaptive learning, which actually says that I'm going to determine the level of the child and then teach at that level, seems to cause a much more impact in terms of what kids are learning than something which says, "This is grade five and we are doing this for grade five."

Marcia Davidson: Great. Thank you. How about nudge based learning, Chris?

[00:05:00] Chris Neilson: I think the switch from quantity to quality, I think we still have to continue to invest in inputs. I just want to say that first. I think having teachers that have been invested in and having infrastructure are important. I think that through the extent that those are things that people have invested more in, up until now, I think the move towards raising efficiency is something that I think is where we're in the scope where we're trying to raise efficiency of the things that are already there, take advantage of the resources we already have.

[00:05:30] There, I think information and the provision of information and using what you already have more efficiently has a lot to offer. The particular work that we've been doing in several countries in Latin America has to do with, to some extent, getting kids to want to learn more for different reasons or maybe realize that they have opportunities in the future that would require them to have this education or basically, that teachers are the same. The schools are the same but the kids are getting more motivated.

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There's a lot of different ways that this could happen. At a higher level, you could imagine that there's a lot of information that's dispersed out in the economy outside, maybe say things about labor markets or things about scholarships and financial aid or things that kids would need to know to be able to make good decisions regarding how much effort to put in or teachers ... What types of things

to teach and what type of things to do.

[00:06:30] Technology today, is giving us an opportunity. It's like there's technology being developed that's being used in organizations everywhere, private sector and public, to harness this information and make the people that are in that organization make better decisions and make it more efficient.

[00:07:00] I view it as a complementary type of policy. They're complimentary to any other types of investments that would just make your prior efforts just give you more bang for buck. I think that there's a lot of scope and that's a wider, higher up view than just the particular nudge here or convincing someone to do something here. It's just thinking about it broader and empowering people with better information to make better decisions.

Marcia Davidson: The nudge based innovation that we saw here, had to do with convincing students to stay in school?

Chris Neilson: Right. Yes, we saw ... We were lucky enough to work with the government and evaluate the set scale where 50 percent of the schools in the country ran this program in the schools as part of their curriculum. The school districts implemented it. The teachers did it. We just developed it over three years together with them.

We saw that they have higher learning as well. It's not a super big effect. It's not as nearly as big as say, for example, the effects we see from Mind Spark, for example. These are things that we just get kids to have information about things that they might have not thought about.

[00:08:00] In a class that you think about the future, you talk about ... There's a curriculum that says, "We're going to talk about what you're gonna do when you grow up and what are the things you're going to need to have. The skills you're gonna need to have."

This is empowering the teachers by giving them a media tool to do it but also, in that tool, we've condensed information about labor markets and about all these statistics that might be hard for someone to go find on their own or find out from their family if nobody from their family is more educated.

[00:08:30] We just make it easier for people in the classroom to do what they want to do anyway so they adapt it and they do it and it works. Of course, it was a lot of work after many years of working with the school to find something that they like. I think that was one example of what I was saying earlier.

Marcia Davidson: Exactly. Thank you. When you think about adaptive learning and nudge based learning for Laura, how does that work with teaching at the right level and the skill grouping that occurs in that particular model that has been or shown to have a great impact through a number of RCT's that J-PAL has been involved in?

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Laura Poswell: Yeah. I suppose the question around the system and trying something new has been a really interesting thing we've been working on. What we've been doing as J-PAL Africa, is trying to take the generalized lessons we're learning about teaching at the right level and adaptive learning and bring an evidence informed program to Zambia, and to work with the government there very closely to try and build a program which uses the lessons that we've learned from the evidence but makes it a Zambia program that is sensible for the local context.

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Marcia Davidson: Great, good. Thank you. Susannah, how about the public, private partnerships projects that's going on in Liberia and how does adaptive learning, for example, I don't know if there are nudge based innovations included in those interventions but the adaptive learning, I think is part of what probably you're seeing in your support and coordination of the different models that are being implemented in that particular project.

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Susannah Hares: The partnership schools for Liberia program, as some of you may know, involves eight private operators, for profit and non profit who were, in the first year, were running 93 schools in Liberia. 93 primary schools. These were government schools. The teachers remained on government contracts. The schools remain public. These organizations came in to try to turn around, essentially dysfunctional schools.

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The eight operators had between four and 25 schools each and part of their [inaudible 00:10:37] evaluation that colleagues APA and together with [inaudible 00:10:42] was to look at sort of, first of all, does the program as a whole work to improve learning games in Liberia. But secondly, to look at some of the models that those eight different operators implemented and to scrutinize whether or not there were particular ones that work better than others.

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To be very clear, the main purpose of the [inaudible 00:11:01] evaluation was to look at whether or not partnerships schools, as a program worked. Not whether individual pedagogies or models were more effective. That said, it's fascinating to look at the different models that the eight different organizations did run in their schools, ranging from bridge academies that has a very technology based approach through to some of the local Liberian organizations that really worked hard on teacher development and community engagement.

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Lots of really interesting things including adaptive learning coming after that process. As some of you may know, in Liberia, the overage enrollment is a huge challenge so the average age in early childhood education is eight so about four years above what it should be. So actually, trying to figure out how you deal with teaching at the right level and that situation is really quite challenging.

Marcia Davidson: Yeah, good point. Thank you. Alright, this question is for Laura, although teaching at the right level model has been rigorously tested multiple environments in geographies, the critical details of implementation, as we were talking earlier actually, could be very context specific. If we find something that works in a given context, how confident can we be that it will work in other environments and could even be taken to scale elsewhere? In scale or replicating a program, in what ways

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can you afford to be adaptable?

Laura Poswell:  
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I think we're really fortunate when it comes to the teaching at the right level evidence because there's a real body of evidence now that has been generated over many years and through an iterative learning process. What we've learned is that there's a number of core principles, and this is how we like to see it, that need to hold and be implemented well for the program to be lucky to have impact.

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That's the first piece. It's less about the specific detail of the program that was delivered in India, but rather, what the detail in some sense, was trying to achieve. If we take an example, the first principle is that we have this idea that as had been said before, it's very hectic if you must learn this in the classroom. Teachers have very dense curriculum under pressure to deliver these.

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Lots of children get left behind and we find, by the times we get to grades three, four and five, we may have half a class where learners haven't been able to master basic literacy or numeracy. This technology, in some sense, with pedagogical tool has come in to try and address the situation and say, "How do we help learners, who have now missed the chance to focus on these basic skills, acquire these basic skills so they can then again, take advantage of the curriculum."

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One of the things you have to do in this model is be able to identify where the learners are at, so assess them and group them by level so that then, you can focus on their level. In India, that's gonna happen in local languages in Indian schools and even so they'll be assessments that are localized to India. But even the way you group your learners during your teaching at the right level term, will operate in a different way and different environments.

What we did in Zambia was to go and with our local partners there, help develop the tools, first the tests, that are right for Zambia that can discriminate at those different levels in the local Zambian language. Then, we had to work through piloting in the system to say, "How do you group learners within the Zambian education system during this time of the school day across grades in a way that works for you and the Zambian schooling system."

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We're less worried that this done exactly the same way as it's done in India but rather, that we ultimately achieve this goal of groups of learners who are then able to absorb the teaching at the right level. There's multiple examples of this and it's something we've learned through spending a lot of time with the evidence. It's how to pull out what these key principles are and how to share these with our local partners so that we almost keep our focus on what it is that we're trying to achieve.

Marcia Davidson:

Can you share any local principles that you ... As examples?

Laura Poswell:  
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We were laughing about this earlier. One of the things that comes up is this idea that in India, the teacher sits on the floor for many reason. It's a way to connect with learners. It's a way to use the floor as a space to do work, et cetera. First thing many people will say to you is, "In an African context, the teacher might not sit on

the floor, right?" The principle here is to connect with the learners to have a space to be able to do your education work.

[00:15:30] There's different ways you can achieve that. In Zambia, you will try and understand how you do that with your teachers and maybe they put a little chair on the floor and the learners sit around them. Maybe there's other solutions.

I think the other key thing that comes through these programs is that you really need strong mentoring and monitoring support. That's a really important piece that one needs to hold. You ask how confident are you that this can be taken to another context. While we're confident that if you can deliver these key principles of the teaching at the right level program, you'll get the impacts on basic numeracy and literacy.

[00:16:00] What we're less sure about is where the new systems can implement these well. We've done a lot of process monitoring in an 80 school pilot we've been doing in Zambia to try and understand, can you actually deliver these pieces? We actually formed pretty good implementations so the core principles of teaching at the right level.

[00:16:30] The other thing we've been testing which goes more to the bigger scale argument is, can the mentoring and monitoring systems that we've put in place deliver good mentoring and monitoring? If they can do that and we can grow that in the system, we feel more confident that the system itself can deliver this at an implementation level quality and with fidelity that you need for impact.

Marcia Davidson: Thank you. Chris, there's a question that is about the RCT that you conducted in the Dominican Republic that shows that integrating information plus the nudge based innovations and education into government programs has a substance of impact on the retention rates. We were talking about that a little bit earlier. My question is, how would you advise a government official and another country who is looking to achieve similar outcomes?

[00:17:00] Chris Neilson: I think, actually, what was just being discussed about core principles and what you can translate and what you can't. I think here, the core principle is that you could think about that students might not have the ideas about what they need to do to succeed or they might not be thinking about what they need to do to get to the next step.

[00:17:30] This idea that they might not see the value in education if they think that later on, they're not going to be able to use it or they don't have role models around them. This idea that they might have less access to information about why these things are useful because of their social network, that's the starting point. That's within the narrow particular treatment. The thing that we did.

[00:18:00] I think the broader principle could be once you have a way to communicate with students using technology, you can funnel in all kinds of other messages that you might want to have the kids know. You might have a new scholarship program that

you want to explain eligibility or requirements to the kids and you could just add that on to something that you already have because you've built this infrastructure that allows you to communicate directly with students.

[00:18:30] To some extent, you want to take advantage of the fact that they have to go to school. You're sitting them down and you have somebody that you could ... It's a platform to give them information. To some extent, I think well if corporations spend millions of dollars to try to get you to drink Coca Cola or Pepsi, this is to some extent we're trying to get a message to kids and if we have this platform, we could do it to do lots of things and support the efforts are really doing. You could do it for learning but you could do it for just other decisions that have to do with being consistent with a plan to move on and use education to further your human development.

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Marcia Davidson: It's pretty adaptable across contexts?

Chris Neilson: I think yeah. I think, for example, we go to this project basically because there was prior evidence in the Dominican Republic, RCT evaluation by Robert Jensen published showing that when you gave the kids information about returns of education, they got more education.

[00:19:30] The question was, can this work at scale and what can we do? Why hasn't anybody implemented this? This was a couple years ago now. We ended up doing something quite ... Not exactly the same. We did it through videos. We told kids about other things like non monetary benefits of education. Financial aid, role models. Things that other people had written papers that thought that could be good but also things that the Dominican government thought was important.

[00:20:00] We took the core principles. Maybe kids are making decisions that aren't optimal because they don't have access to information or access to someone to give them advice to talk about these things. If that's the general point, let's try to go in and do the best job we can with something we think might work.

[00:20:30] The academic part is you try to tease out what worked better, what didn't work as good to then think about how it could go somewhere else. I think the points you raised, which were what are the things we think that are the main key core things, that's some of the things we're trying to learn. Are the statistics really important? Is it really relevant?

We had different treatment arms that were the exact same thing with no numbers. We don't know. Maybe those numbers are hard to get. I don't know if maybe in other countries, they might not have good statistics to provide students. These are the steps that we took to try to get these core things that we could translate and working together with the government to figure out what they think works.

[00:21:00] They were adamant about not giving kids statistics only on a sheet of paper like Robert Jensen did in his paper. That was a terrible idea. We were like, "Fine, let's do something else." I'm happy we did go that route.

Marcia Davidson: Yeah, very good. Alright, thank you. Sridhar, we've recently seen references to the science of learning in your work and in the broader literature. What do you mean by that and how is it relevant to policy makers to understand about the science of learning?

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Sridhar Rajago: Great. I think that's ... In fact, even on the earlier question of these principles. What are the principles that apply? For example, suppose somebody says that we want to implement an adaptive learning program. We are going to put in computers and we will do this. We were just discussing it before this talk. What if a government says, "No, we have seen studies which say that when countries put laptops, it didn't work." Or somebody else says, "Tech results are all of the place but not overall impressive." Or somebody else says, "No, this study showed that it worked."

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Each of these are true. You are putting laptops. You are using tech. We find that the reasons ... Why does something work? Even things like adaptive technology or teaching at the right level, we are the first to say that that's a term that can be used quite easily but what aspect of it really works?

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To us, the science of learning is actually a more rigorous scientific look at pedagogy. Sometimes even for teachers and education, we have this feeling that education cannot be ... It's very ... It's different. I cannot ... What a teacher does in a class is something that we can't define. The teacher has to just handle that.

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We sometimes give an analogy with medicine. We say that medical science ... There's an interesting talk. There was a TED Talk where I learned there was a book by a doctor called Lewis Thomas who was a doctor in Boston. He says that virtually everything that weakens the modern medicine has been developed post the 1930's. That's because two important discoveries or inventions. Anesthesia and antibiotics that were created around this time.

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That literally led the development of medical science. Today, the kind of medical science we follow the diagnostics are pretty standardized, whether you're doing it in Washington, DC or in India or in a village in Africa. You'll probably get tested for Hepatitis B in a similar way. That has become a scientific process and you build on it.

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There are literally thousands of these when literally zero existed in 1920. Now, if I try to take this education and I say that, "How does a teacher deal with a child who is struggling to learn decimal comparisons?" Or even something like reading which is much better documented and studied. We find that there's a gap between if we could provide teachers with ... This is the kind of information that is available and not just teachers but technology programs. That to us, that body of knowledge is the science of learning.

Now, often policy makers ... Again, this related to this point of, "I have this educational challenge in my country. Is it an administrative problem or is it

[00:24:30] something else?" Often, the conclusion is probably because it's being seen and looked at by administrators and policy makers. We look at it as an administrative problem. We find that if this kind of science. I don't even want to call it technology. If this kind of science were available, it could be used. Our experience has been that this is pretty universal.

[00:25:00] The kind of problems or mistakes that children make while doing multiplication in grade two and three turns out to be pretty uniform in a class. There could be some elements which are local to the way the language is used in that country or something is taught. A lot of the errors they make that need to be diagnosed and then corrected, turn out to be pretty universal and many are not widely known. That is the science of learning that we think needs to be focused on.

Marcia Davidson: Okay, thank you. This question is for Susannah and then Laura. You've both built strong partnerships with key public sector champions to bring evidence based education interventions to scale. In your respective collaborations, how have you developed government partnerships and encouraged policy makers to take the current evidence and best practices to heart when designing and working with this large scale programming?  
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Susannah Hares: I think that's a great question. I think many of us who work in this space that sort of the theory of evidence based policy making is more straightforward than the reality and to particularly scaling evidence based models within a government system is really challenging.

[00:26:00] One of my colleagues in the UK says that even in the UK, trying to scale an ed tech product for example, the plumbing for the schools in the UK doesn't absorb ed tech products effectively. Wifi doesn't work and tablets get stolen. The absorptive capacity of systems, particularly in the developing world who take on innovations, evidence based innovations and scale them is really challenging.

[00:26:30] I'll talk about a couple of examples here. We worked in [inaudible 00:26:26] in India, actually together with colleagues from [inaudible 00:26:28] who evaluated it and to test and scale up a school collective share program so basically a school inspection program which are not correct for the government to design it and to test it around 200 schools. It actually worked pretty effectively. We didn't have RCT data on it but actually, the process was working and the schools were being visited and inspected and the follow ups were happening.

[00:27:00] When it then scaled with the government into 22 thousand schools because everything in India happens at massive scale, those kinds of links in the chain break down and the schools weren't visited and they weren't followed up and the school improvement plans didn't happen.

I think how you think about the plumbing in an education system to actually make sure that a program can be scaled up effectively is something that all of us are trying to grapple with.

In partnership schools for Liberia, in a sense, that challenge is overcome by the nature of the program because the government isn't actually delivering the scaled up product that private operators are.

[00:27:30] I think if you look at that, while we were all still really proud of the strong learning gains in the first year, we only really know what happened in that program because of the randomized control trial which IPA and the PI's ran. The only real accountability for those private operators was through the RCT. If the RCT hadn't taken place, we wouldn't know whether the teachers had turned up or whether kids had been excluded or whether learning gains have been achieved so actually the mechanics and the government system, the plumbing just to oversee and quality assure and hold accountable those private operators wasn't yet there.

[00:28:00] Talking about private partner partnerships in particular and how they're scaled within government systems, I think there's generally a bit too much focus on the private P in the PPP and not enough on the public P. I think this is actually very nicely in the recent world development report. It's just as hard to oversee private operators, potentially as it is to actually run the schools yourself.

[00:28:30] I think we all have to think really hard about how we make sure that we get those mechanics and the plumbing right in government systems to be effective partners to them as they try to scale evidence based models.

Marcia Davidson: Alright, thank you. Laura, do you want to speak to that as well?

Laura Poswell: Great, yes. Just to say our partnership with the Zambian government is currently at 80 pilot scales. We're not yet at scale but they're committed to running up to 1800 which is a good share of the schools in Zambia. I can talk to the partnership development that we've been doing with them and how we've engaged with them with the evidence piece because I think that's been really interesting and we've learned a huge amount.

[00:29:00] The first thing is we came to Zambia to a country to actually share some education evidence but they were really grappling with this problem, the government and development partners that have identified this issue and said, "We have all these children who are already in grades three to five who are falling far behind and we want to do something with them." That already actually constituted a catch up working group which had its own name.

[00:29:30] What they didn't know was really what to do and they were really interested in learning from the evidence. How can we help these children catch up? That's a really lovely policy window to be presented with. For us, we said, "We've got lots of interesting evidence to share with you and our first lesson here was, how do we bring this into a format that's tractable for them to work with and to make decisions.

We actually spent a lot of time realizing that we needed to convert the evidence in the forms it was in to where which we could work together to help make decisions.

We did a lot of meetings and workshops and interactions where we worked with them to grapple through what does the evidence mean for the Zambian context?

[00:30:00] We actually did an executive education course on impact evaluation of social programs to help them understand where the evidence comes from but within that, we booked case studies that were relevant to the Zambian context and asked them to work through these problems from a Zambian perspective.

[00:30:30] We had high level decision makers in these meetings and so they were able to think through, "How would I do this in Zambia?" We then had many meetings with decision makers looking at the different options that might work in Zambia. Because again, there's a big wealth of evidence in this area, there's almost a menu you can choose from.

There, the government made choices and chose from this menu in some sense based on the evidence that was there and based on what they thought would be sustainable for them. The evidence piece has really been built into the pilot that they then chose to deliver. We were very firm with them to say, "If you choose this model, you have to make sure you've got this metric monitoring piece and like that."

[00:31:00] We found ways to build in what we think are models if delivered well would hold impact. The other piece, just as you said, we're building this learning into the model that pilots all the time. We come back together with the data that we've been collecting to adapt, update and to use this so that we can strengthen that rules that.

Marcia Davidson: [00:31:30] Alright, thank you. Let me ask this and again, this is to Laura and Susannah but I think Chris and Sridhar, that you also can chime in on this as well. Once your piloting and innovation or getting the innovation started whether it's with public private partnerships or partnership schools or through the teaching at the right level or if you're doing an invasion that's in partnership with the government or you're doing adaptive learning through Mind Spark with the government.

[00:32:00] How do you ensure that the decision makers at the government level continue to incorporate once you have finished your pilot or your work, what kinds of efforts are required to incorporate this on the ground learning into policy directives to keep this moving forward? How many times have we seen these kinds of pilots really affect a very successful initiatives just sort of fade away with changes in the government staff or elections and everything starts over again and over again.

[00:32:30] What have you learned in your experiences that might help us understand a little bit about how ... What kinds of work that we need to do to improve the probability that these really successful and important efforts can continue?

[00:33:00] Susannah Hares: I can say three brief things to that. One is I think, we work with seven or eight ministries of education on public policy reform. I think there's a far greater appetite for evidence than people often think so actually policy makers do generally want to

do the right thing for children under their jurisdiction. They are hungry for evidence based on the outside but also in context for the irrelevant evidence.

[00:33:30] I think leveraging that and trying to build a multi layer relationship with ministry bureaucracies and so on, to make sure there's that understanding of the evidence at every level and I know colleagues that [inaudible 00:33:30] do that really well.

Secondly, I think, without wanting to sound like a broken record, going back to the structure of the system and making sure there is that capacity within the system itself to collect data from schools and to make sure there's proper channels to feed it up with.

[00:34:00] The ministry of education in Ghana is such a super, really pro evidence and it's kind of horrifying to come into his new job and find he's not getting the kind of data he wants to see from the schools under his jurisdiction, despite the fact there's actually quite a lot of human resources in the districts who are visiting schools and are collecting data. It's just not coming through in a form that he finds useful and accessible.

I think thinking about how we can help reconfigure those kind of data collection and management structures to actually provide policy makers with more useful evidence. Finally, I think this is a point that Laura made, just making sure that that evidence is presented in a way that people can understand and sort of really engage with sounds simple but often isn't.

[00:34:30] I think we're trying to get much better at sorting data stuff that we do so policy makers can really properly engage with the evidence that we're finding in the short term long term.

Marcia Davidson: Alright, Chris or Sridhar?

Chris Neilson: I'll jump in. I think actually one thing is a complimentary vision. One way is we find things that work somewhere and we want everyone else to adopt them. Another way to approach this could be you talk to the people ... The policy makers. You can of kind of get a sense ... You figure out what they want to do already.

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Generally, they're pretty broad and then there's a moment when they decide all the specifics but nobody was politically super stuck on any of the specifics and that's where evidence based policy making can make a real dent and we don't have to worry about trying to convince everybody that it's good to do whatever the policy is ... The board policy.

[00:35:30] Maybe they want to do invest in infrastructure or maybe they want to give kids laptops. You could take that and then you bring in your knowledge of policy evaluation and building on what we were just saying, thinking about all the different plumbing that needs to get fixed. All the data, all the reinforcement things that need to happen so that we don't mess this up.

[00:36:00] The steps maybe piloting and then trying and going. That is something that potentially, we know how to do generate rigorous evidence on what is working and what isn't. Instead of being like, do this policy and this other sphere, totally different from what the minister already said publicly in a speech.

Just use your tools to find within the framework of things that already want to do the best version and that's a way that is super easy once you find a version that's more efficient than the others.

[00:36:30] I think one is you don't have to worry about convincing them to do it because they're going to do it anyway. But two, it's an easy way to get in and then you can develop their infrastructure to collect data and you develop that plumbing that's going to be useful for other things too. Now, we've got our foot in the door and maybe next time, they say, "That was really useful."

[00:37:00] One of the ministers in Dominican Republic, at the very beginning, he said, "I'll sign onto this thing to do these videos, whatever. This is a cannon to kill a mosquito," he said. He's like, "You're coming in with all this USA money and all the PhD's and all this army of awesome technology and stuff. I'm spending four points of GDB building schools. You're not helping me figure out how to do that. You're doing the video. I want the videos to work."

[00:37:30] In that sense, I'm like, "Well, if you want me to help you with schools, I can help you with schools." There's an easy window. Now, that same minister with a different government, they're spending a lot of money giving laptops to everybody and he called me up, he says, "I want you to come do that thing you did last time for the other thing but can you do it on this now?" Now, we were showing that the model works.

[00:38:00] That's a way to get people to adapt, take evidence to some extent. They saw it worked and they saw the process worked more than the specific evidence like this T stat on this particular intervention was significant. No, he just saw the process. I think that that's a thing that for example, US Aid puts money and people do things in a country. If the process and the learning of how things get done is something that is successful, that's something that just is useful for other policies going forward. That's a spillover, I think as an advantage.

Marcia Davidson: Alright, thanks. Sridhar, did you want to add to that?

Sridhar Rajago: Yeah, it's probably the same points but the first thing I would say is that those of us who have either implementing it or studying ourselves, feel convinced or confident that this has reached a certain level of outcome.

[00:38:30] I have seen our own programs where there's a stage where we feel that this is ready for a larger pilot but not yet ready for asking for a larger thing. That really helps having that and having that in the form that people can see. Whether that's case studies or videos. That is step one.

[00:39:00] Step two, I find is policy makers ... A kind of capacity of policy makers where you actually explain both the philosophy and the data. I find that works the most. In fact, even more than the data, sometimes when they really see that why does this thing make sense and that's usually a matter of engagement and answering their questions and explaining it to them.

[00:39:30] The third is at the teacher or the implementer level where, how do you do it? If those pieces are ... Again, I think this is a product challenge which is that if you have a great idea, everyone is convinced but you haven't worked out those pieces that are going to make it work for the teacher. If you were a teacher in that place, you would actually struggle with those pieces. It's not easy but it possible to address that.

That fourth, rare relevant but I think that's relevant in a lot of cases is parents. We find that if the .. If the benefits are communicated to them, it kind of helps put things in place because they exert a certain amount of pressure. It's not very large on the teachers and that the government or the policy makers sense that kind of demand. That this is there or there is excitement about it.

[00:40:00] That's the parts I find. I personally find the first part, which is ourselves being convinced that this is working well and we can communicate it is the biggest of the four.

Marcia Davidson: Okay, thank you. All of you have talked about building system being having not only to do with what you're doing with that system but making sure that the system understands why and is able to see the process as something that is integral to their government system, not something external that you're doing this one thing but you're building their capacity by showing them a process that can work or cross. You were suggesting Chris, across ideas not just in the one thing that you're working in.

[00:41:00] That would be essential and that you have to also ... We haven't talked about this pay attention to the community and the parents, Sridhar. You mentioned that and that's something across the board from all of the work that you're doing in the field. Can each of you just speak briefly about the community engagement piece of the work that you're doing. How do you see that situated in the context of the projects that you're working on? We'll start with Chris.

Chris Neilson: Yeah, I think that my perceptive on the different projects that I've been working on, I think the community has all the stakeholders ... I think what has been the guiding idea has been if from the very beginning to think, if I want this to actually be a policy that is actually going to affect a lot of people then I need think about all the possible people that are going to be involved along the way, all the way to the end that will support this and keep it going.

[00:42:00] I think that one thing that we did with basically through J-PAL was these ideas of having almost a board of directors. It wasn't really like ... People that are involved or maybe they're not involved. There are actually people that might stop it later.

Have them be there from the beginning and then they feel it's their thing now because they gave their input and we adapted it to what they thought. Later they were like, "No, no. That's our thing. We don't wanna ..."

[00:42:30] In our case specifically, the one thing we're talking about here. Teachers need to be involved and need to like this. For example, the minister of whatever, in charge of the teachers. We can't go in there and say, "Teachers, you have more curriculum you need to learn." Because the teachers are gonna not like that.

[00:43:00] If we show a video covering similar curriculum they already do, then they're gonna not oppose it and they'll love it. That process of working with the teachers, them being like what they like and what they don't like, that wasn't necessarily something that I would have thought of initially. Thinking that they could stop it later on was something that was useful.

We did do a lot of work with parents. We went out and we did a lot of work with parents. I was mostly interested ... We were mostly interested from an academic perspective, we want to understand the role of parents. In the practical, can we scale up anything with visiting homes? It was like we don't think so.

[00:43:30] That was the investment was to understand what was going on. I think that's something within maybe another country that they have a system where they visit home through social workers or some other program, maybe they can discuss transfers and maybe there's something you could layer on with parents there. It would be great.

In this case, we didn't. I was basically thinking to do that scale, who's gonna ... Who are we gonna need to support this or not oppose it, was the guiding principle.

Marcia Davidson: Right. How about Laura?

[00:44:00]  
Laura Poswell: I think in a similar vein, our focus is the school community so we certainly let parents know. I think there were parent meetings around wherever the new program was coming in because it was important for them to understand what their children are learning. The core mission of what we're trying to do as a school based program and really emboldening champions at multiple levels where the teacher is in some ways, our greatest advocate for the program and the greatest champion for the program.

Marcia Davidson: Yeah, I think both of you then are speaking to the importance of making certain that teachers are on board in the process of understanding the new program and seeing it as valuable that it isn't imposed on them but it's a process of harnessing their support for it. I think that's something that we often just go in and say, "This is really good for you. This is gonna help the children learn and you need to do it." Or the government says, "That's what you're going to be teaching." But taking that time, it seems like there's some really great payoffs for that.

[00:44:30]

Laura Poswell: [00:45:00] If I could just quickly add to that, we have been so heartened by how enthusiastic the teachers in Zambia have been about this program. They enjoy it and that's been something that we've seen. It's been almost surprising how enthusiastic they've been.

Marcia Davidson: [crosstalk 00:45:12].

Laura Poswell: They've become the greatest champions.

Marcia Davidson: Yeah, that's great. Susannah, how about you?

Susannah Hares: [00:45:30] I would echo to what my colleagues said. When we work on public private partnerships, it's often a controversial space so we need all the champions we can get and actually both in Delhi and the Western Cape in South Africa, one two occasions, parents have saved our program.

The Western Cape example, there was some rumor spread by civil society and unions that this program was going to be charging fees and bringing in for profit operators and firing teachers and actually, the parents and three of the schools petitioned to keep the PPP in their schools. That was actually quite a seminal moment for the program was when the teachers were on strike and the parents came in and saved the program.

[00:46:00] I think making sure that you are really engaging with the community so they understand what's happening and they support what's happening because it's their kids and they're the ones that care most, ultimately.

Marcia Davidson: Yeah, okay. Alright.

Sridhar Rajago: [00:46:30] I'll just maybe add one point that is slightly related to the capacity point which is we think of capacity as training the teachers. Obviously, it's important. Again, in a country like India, we find that, "Okay, who is going to train the teachers?" You need to have the capacity to do that training which typically is an institution and often these institutions exist but the institutions do not have the capacity.

We say that institutional capacity is a prerequisite to this kind of training and whether it's at the district level or even at the national level, that capacity needs to exist. For a prerequisite for that institution capacity is that expertise or boarding of knowledge.

[00:47:00] For example, one of the topics that I think people agree on more easily is if you look at capacities to do certain types of assessments for example. This something that we say that unless this capacity exists at a system level, which again, comes back to research or whatever you call the science of learning, you cannot have the institutional capacity.

Again, from policy makers point of view, they often say, "Okay, train the teachers. We need to train the teachers." But the reason why it often doesn't happen is that

[00:47:30] these earlier two pieces are missing. I want assume that if I want to do something on reading or on primary map, I will train the teachers and they will do it.

But these two pieces on having that capacity in the system as a whole and then, embodying that or housing that in an institution which is nurtured and which kind of builds on it are very, very ... That kind of requires long term thinking. Doing a training for teachers is easier. I say I need to do it. I put it in the thing. I plan it out and I do it.

[00:48:00] The earlier two pieces require me to think at least 10 years ahead and say this is gonna build. That's obviously difficult everywhere but we find that these two pieces are really critical if the change has to happen.

Marcia Davidson: But you'll still teach the teachers if it's the right ... While you're building that.

Sridhar Rajago: Absolutely.

Marcia Davidson: It's the airplane in the sky, kind of building it. Okay, great, thanks. Alright, everyone I can see that time is passing very quickly. I think I could certainly sit here for hours and listen to this conversation but I wanted to ask everyone, this panel is representing a wide variety of operational models and it includes private enterprises. It includes non profits. It includes public private partnerships and research partners.

[00:48:30] For each of you, if you could think about whether in your thinking, whether there's an ideal business model when you're scaling up innovations. How might this differ or would it differ for technology and education versus traditional education models? Anyone can respond first.

[00:49:00] Sridhar Rajago: I'll jump in. I think it's an interesting question and I think we hadn't realize that all these are representative of the panel and I think it's amazing. We find in our own case, we are a private company with a for profit company but with a very strong mission and we always worked with both the elite private schools and the public schools. We always said that we will work with both and we see value in learning across them.

[00:49:30] At the same time, I find that each of those debates that we've had is that is a non profit model going to be more effective in working in the space? We are often told, we've actually faced it less but we are often told that government would say that this sector, we will not allow for profits to come in them. You do hear it happens a bit.

[00:50:00] What I found is that the one common piece that works through all this is depth of expertise. It's building that expertise and secondly, this expertise is not expertise of a private organization or a non profit or research organization but it is kind of a systemic ... It's like the tide that lifts all boats. Hence, you find that each element of it.

[00:50:30]

We partner with J-PAL for example, for some of the work. For each, how do you push the level of expertise in the system as a whole and it turns that there is something that each of these models works very effectively with. We've seen that when we work in a very small scale. It's enough that we are able to do it in partnership with a few schools.

[00:51:00] Once we have to go to the next level, we need to have somebody, not because J-PAL has a reputation but because the tools that they use and the expertise that they have, we ourselves find that we must work with that. We literally find that on the route to going from a smaller program to one that goes to scale. There is actually a role for each of these types of setups and I think that role is in expanding the larger expertise and understanding for the system of a whole. If that makes sense.

Marcia Davidson: Great, thank you. Who'd like to go next?

[00:51:30]  
Susannah Hares: I think in theory, the legal incorporation of an organization shouldn't matter. It's the management capacity, the mission alignment, the theory of change that matters. I think you alluded to this, the political economy reality that we work in often, it does matter more than it should.

[00:52:00] That's sad and speaking just from our perspective here, I think that I do believe that it's the governments duty to make sure that every child can access a quality education. It's not necessarily the duty to provide it in every case but it's our duty to guarantee it.

[00:52:30] Therefore, to me, I think we all have a responsibility working in the education space to make sure there is that capacity within the bureaucracy to play that role effectively and I often feel sad when I see all these amazing opportunities that are out there for private sector entrepreneurs, sort of the [inaudible 00:52:21] and Echoing Green and all these wonderful fellowships that you can do and you have these bureaucrats sitting in ministries of education who are really responsible for overseeing hundreds of thousands of schools in their jurisdiction and there's not that sense of let's try and build up that capacity of entrepreneurial bureaucrats, if you wanted a better phrase.

I do think thinking about how we can make sure that we all contribute to those public sector objectives in whichever way we can, whichever legal incorporation we have is really important. I believe that the nature and structure of each organization shouldn't matter.

[00:53:00]  
Laura Poswell: If I can come in quickly, I think for us because we partner with all different organizations to learn, we think of an organization as set up for scale and has a vision for scale that often, the best person to scale through. I think as a research organization, we are really interested in the public grid of what we're learning more generally.

What we found in trying to take all these lessons to a new context is a real gap, actually around who should be really helping bring this into a system. That has been a big lesson for us about how do you think about taking evidence to scale more broadly.

[00:53:30] In fact, what we've learned is that it takes a whole lot of effort, energy and honest sophistication to be able to straddle the world of academia and the complexity there and the world of governments and complexity there. We found this to be a new space that almost needs investment and work.

Marcia Davidson: Yes, great. Thanks. So we've got one minute.

Chris Neilson: Yeah, I would follow up ... I am also a member of J-PAL and I'm academic but I think that the institutions that could potentially make the government sector potentially more efficient or more quick to have investments in this infrastructure to have data, to do evaluation, the pilot. I think are actually a lot of this partnerships to do thing at scale, these efforts are generating relationships between researchers that push all these inputs that are necessary to do an evaluation.

[00:54:30] Those inputs are useful more generally and I think that in some initiatives like an initiative with J-PAL back in Peru, it ended up being an office that was called the [inaudible 00:54:37] Lab which was basically, it's you're gonna take ideas the government has and evaluate them rigorously.

[00:55:00] That generates a moment where researchers are talking to the government when they're thinking about what to do. That's a perfect moment for a researcher to say, "Actually, that's a good idea. I've seen some work on that. Let's talk to the researcher that's the world expert on that." The next day, the government hasn't really worked out all the details but now they have access to the evidence really fast.

Before, they've [inaudible 00:55:09] around a specific implementation. I think that type of partnership has a lot of potential. I think there's a lot more investment that needs to be done there. That's kind of going to your point earlier.

Marcia Davidson: Yeah, thank you. Well, I see that our time is running down. We have about one minute left so I want to just take this time to give a really, very heartfelt thank you to our panel members. This has been an extraordinary session for me and all of the amazing work that you're doing in the field and the difference that you're making in the places where you're working is greatly appreciated.

[00:56:00] We know that we will continue to learn from you and keep looking for your papers and reports on the work that you're doing. I always want to thank the audience for joining us today on this panel. I know you all, as well, will be looking forward to hearing more from our colleagues. Let's give them a really warm thanks.