In Zambia, community schools operate along the formal education system and have increased by 45-fold in the past 20 years to meet the demand for education, especially in rural areas (Ministry of General Education, Republic of Zambia, 2018). Many of these community schools are staffed by committed, but untrained educators. The eSchool 360 program model, implemented by the Impact Network and supported by the American Institutes for Research, is designed to increase access to, and the quality of, education, by focusing on technology, training and teacher professional development.

Impact Network hires teachers locally, providing job opportunities in rural areas for people who are vested in the community. Each teacher is supplied with a Mwabu tablet and projector to deliver interactive eLearning lessons that move away from traditional rote learning. The curriculum content includes literacy, numeracy, health, environmental conservation, among other practical lessons for life in rural Zambia. As these schools are rural, Impact Network installs solar panels to power the equipment.

The program started as a pilot in 9 schools. The initial assessments showed promising results in both learning outcomes and cost effectiveness. Building on the initial success, Impact Network with the American Institutes for Research launched a 35-school expansion in 2017. The program now operates 43 schools and is staffed by 180 teachers who engage 6,000 students each year.

To ensure quality and fidelity to the program design, Impact Network hires Teacher Supervisors to provide teachers with comprehensive training, systematic oversight and coaching, and learning technology resources and support. Subsequent to the onboard training at the beginning of the school year, staff give teachers weekly coaching and monthly professional development interventions to help them improve their pedagogical and technology skills. Teacher Supervisors spend time observing lessons and coaching teachers to figure out how they can collaborate on improving instructional practices. During monthly training sessions, teachers come together from across the schools to participate in a series of workshops and build a community of practice. Teachers are also supported by a team that ensures that the equipment is working as intended and is secure.

We learned that scaling-up effective teacher practices requires a combination of technology, coaching, and support. Relevant learning technology provides structure and consistency to teaching and plays a part in motivating teachers. Technology support is required to make sure the equipment is secured, and functions as intended. Coaching is critical to help teachers contextualize the methods and make the processes routine.

Through these three approaches Impact Network and American Institutes for Research have been able to expand the program effectively to 35 more schools and serve 3,500 more students. Mid-term results have shown that the opportunity to attend an Impact Network school positively affected children’s learning in reading/literacy, mathematics, and vocabulary. The learning gains are equivalent to 22 additional months of education for reading and 12 additional months of education for mathematics.

The Impact Network and the American Institutes for Research have scaled-up effective teaching practices through the eSchool 360 Model. Through our efforts and the use of technology we were able to provide meaningful and rewarding job opportunities in the rural areas that improved student outcomes in rural Zambia.