

Impact Summary

Name of Organisation: Impact Network

Website: <https://www.impactnetwork.org/>

Contact Person: Reshma Patel

Ask: \$50,000–\$150,000

Innovation summary	
<p>The Read Smart innovation is a visual phonics program to teach early literacy. It was piloted under Impact Network’s eSchool 360, a holistic education program centred on empowering teachers with tablets, activity-based lessons, teacher support, and weekly coaching.</p>	
Organisation	
<p>Impact Network believes every child deserves a quality education. They transform lives in rural Zambian communities through education and innovation, serving over 6,000 students across 40+ schools, from early childhood through seventh grade. With the school as a starting point, Impact Network makes broad changes across families and communities to improve not only their educational outcomes, but also their overall wellbeing.</p>	
Innovation at a glance	
Countries	Zambia
Target group	Grade 1 and 2 students
Number of users	935 students in Grades 1 to 2, including 18 teachers and 23 classes.
Year established	Impact Network was established in 2009. Read Smart Cinyanja was first piloted in 2021.
Type of organisation	School Operator
Implementing Partner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zambia Impact Network Limited • Ursula Rickli • Ministry of General Education in Zambia
The problem	

Education quality in rural Zambia has been dismal, especially regarding literacy. A recent assessment by USAID-funded Let's Read Zambia shows that 70% of Grade 1-3 students performed at minimum or below minimum levels of proficiency in literacy. Delays in the age and grade at which students attain functional literacy skills make future primary years that much more challenging. COVID-19 has exacerbated this crisis, as incoming grade 1-3 students have not had a school year without school closures. The combination of an inadequate literacy foundation and less time in schools due to COVID-19 means we have a truncated period in primary schools to catch up on these skills. Impact Network piloted Read Smart in 2021 to create a structured approach to literacy that ensured all students acquired foundational literacy skills by the end of grade 2.

The solution

Impact Network piloted an innovative project to combat COVID-19 learning loss and improve early literacy outcomes called "Read Smart". This is a literacy intervention for early grade learning based on the use of phonetic charts, illustrating the mouth positions associated with each sound.

Students have access to Read Smart materials for the visual phonics program and teachers have access to comprehensive training and support on visual phonics teaching methods and the Read Smart phases. This has resulted in improved early literacy skills by students, as measured by EGRA, an accelerated timeline for acquisition of basic literacy skills, and an improved long-term educational outcome based on foundational literacy skills.

In 2022, the Read Smart project expanded to eight schools in the cluster and currently serves 935 students in Grades 1 and 2, including 18 teachers and 23 classes.

Impact

- In 2021, Impact Network piloted the program across 2 schools, reaching 135 students
- In 2022, Impact Network scaled up to 8 schools, reaching over 900 students
- Across Zambia, the proportion of first grade students at "desirable" or "outstanding" levels was 75% at the pilot schools compared with 32-35% of students nationally. This is from assessment data from the USAID-funded Let's Read Zambia project.

Highlights - any standout details such as awards, milestones

- For the eSchool 360 programme:
 - Selected by 2022 HundrED as one of the Inspiring Innovations that is changing the face of education around the world
 - Shortlisted for 2023 HundrED
 - Midline results from 2018 RCT conducted by American Institutes for Research showed their schools increased math achievement by 55% and literacy achievement by 103% compared to the control schools
- For the Read Smart programme specifically:
 - 2022 Successful Practices Honoree Award from The Library of Congress Literacy Awards Program for Read Smart

- Shortlisted for 2023 HundrED

Sustainability/Revenue Model

Financially, Impact Network has consistently demonstrated capacity to raise funds, allocate efficiently, and spend accurately. They raise funding through grants from foundations and governments, individual donors and events. Impact Network is successfully operating in this region, with funding from over a dozen different organizations ranging from a few thousand dollars to over \$2 million. They are extremely experienced with operating schools and testing pilot programs in a rural environment and tough conditions.

Investment status

Funding to date	Raised \$15,500 from two European foundations to pilot this program at two schools. Scaleup to eight schools was funded from their 2021 Chefs for Impact event.
What they're looking for	50,000 - 150,000 USD
Why they need funding	We are scaling Read Smart to eight (8) Impact schools in 2022. Additionally, we will work within Eastern Province to expand to 3,000 students in early childhood centers, community schools, and government schools in 2023. We want to explore adapting to 1-2 other Zambian languages (Bemba or Tonga) within the next three years, allowing us a broader reach across Zambia.

Why they made our shortlist

Impact Network's innovation was highly innovative and effective, and they have strong scale channels. The intervention was carefully designed for the intended target, and the organisation exhibited strong leadership needed to deliver its innovation.