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## [Three initiatives to foster teacher motivation](#)

### [Blog](#)

A shift is happening in the global discourse around teachers. While much of the emphasis used to be placed on teacher accountability, in recent years there has been an increasing focus on how to better support, motivate and professionalize the teaching profession.

For sustained motivation, teachers and school leaders need spaces where they can get training, interact and collaborate as professionals, and where they can talk freely without feeling that they are being judged or controlled. Teachers and school leaders need to get recognition from, and feel valued by, the children they teach but also from the societies they serve: there needs to be a continuum to foster motivation not only at the school level but also in a wider system perspective.

A panel held at the [CIES 2018](#) presented the work of three institutions – [STiR education](#), [VVOB – Education for Development](#) and [IIEP-UNESCO](#) – engaged in initiatives aimed at promoting teachers' and school leaders' competence and motivation at different levels, through networks or professional learning communities and career management.

### **Teacher networks in partnership with governments**

In India and Uganda, the NGO STiR Education has been working on the development of teacher networks as an enabler of and a force for motivation and professional development. Teachers with ties to their colleagues and a sense of shared purpose and momentum will be less likely to leave the profession. In addition, autonomy, or the authority to make decisions based on professional experience and trust, is critical for teacher motivation. Findings from two impact evaluations in India indicate that teachers in these networks are spending a significantly greater amount of time in class actually teaching. The monetary value of this additional teaching time—measured in terms of teacher salary—is over eight times the cost of running the teacher networks. Teacher networks can thus be a potential source of teacher motivation, and teacher effectiveness in improving classroom practices and student learning. However, adequate systemic conditions, especially support structures and school leadership, also need to be met, for this to be effective. In response to this learning, STiR is deeply embedding its approach in government structures to ensure improvements in intrinsic motivation not just among students and teachers but also among officials at all levels of the system. Intrinsic motivation can thereby play a critical role in ensuring a fertile soil for more technical interventions to flourish through a culture of continuous improvement in the education system.

### **Building the capacity of school leaders**

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Effective school leadership is associated with greater student well-being and better learning outcomes. The relationship is strong and research indicates that it works primarily through improved teacher motivation and working conditions. The [Rwanda Education Board](#) (REB) has developed professional standards for effective school leadership, which identify the main competences and work roles needed for effective head teachers: setting strategic direction; leading the school as an organization; leading teaching and learning; and engaging with parents and the wider community. Motivating teachers is an integral part of three of these. To make sure these standards are met, the Education Sector Strategic Plan prioritises the professional development of head teachers. Two modalities are in place: professional learning communities (PLCs), where head teachers are coached by trained Sector Education Officers; and a competence-based diploma course for head teachers, offered by the University of Rwanda – College of Education (URCE).

VVOB has carried out two studies in Rwanda to explore the hypothesis that well-designed professional development opportunities will positively influence self-determined motivation and a transformational leadership style of school leaders. Focus group discussions revealed that head teachers' participation in the PLCs met their basic need for relatedness, autonomy and competence, increasing their intrinsic motivation. This was primarily achieved through the building of positive relationships with others both within and outside the school. Findings from the same study indicated that in turn, motivated head teachers motivate their teachers by improving working conditions that meet teachers' basic needs.

## **Widening career opportunities available to teachers**

Governments are also looking for systemic solutions to overcome the global teacher motivation crisis and reprofessionalize the profession. In this attempt, an increasing number of countries is moving away from traditional career structures, where all teachers progress along the salary scale at the same pace, towards more sophisticated career schemes introducing greater recognition and opportunities for promotion to teachers. Teacher career reforms come also as a result of broader public sector reforms that have been importing private sector managerial techniques for many years. [IIEP-UNESCO's research](#) identified three emerging models of career organization – bonuses, salary progression based on evaluation, and career ladders – that all include a component of performance management. While research into the psychology of motivation shows that bonus pay based on students' performance may ultimately undermine teacher motivation, the career ladder model appears to be more promising in theory. By widening horizontal and vertical advancement opportunities, career ladders offer teachers a pathway for professional growth by encouraging them to improve, and to gain responsibility and autonomy over the direction of their careers.

IIEP-UNESCO investigated three cases – Ecuador, New York City, and the Western Cape in South Africa – that have tried to widen career opportunities for teachers. [Research findings](#) show that although teachers value having the opportunity to choose between different pathways, the career ladder model and attached evaluation modes are difficult to implement in practice. Such a scheme requires a well-established set of conditions to be able to act positively on teacher motivation. These implementation challenges, combined with a perceived threat to job stability and increased competition, explain why some countries remain opposed to the introduction of greater differentiation between teachers. Yet, in an age of performance management, teacher career reforms often appear as inevitable. Countries entering in this process can learn from IIEP-UNESCO's research that highlights the need for adopting an incremental approach to implementation in consultation with teachers.

Initiatives and research undertaken at the school and system level help provide a basis for advancing

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the understanding around teacher motivation and its conditions in different geographical settings. The various approaches presented above show how initiatives to foster teacher motivation can be multi-level and complimentary. It follows that concerted efforts and comprehensive strategies should be encouraged to increase the likelihood of having a lasting impact on teacher motivation.

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