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Remote professional development during Covid 19: The Case of SAGE Zimbabwe Stephen Harrison – Open University



Context:

The SAGE Zimbabwe project is funded by UK Aid from the UK government. It is formed by a consortium, led by Plan International UK and including faith-based, academic (Open University) and private sector actors. Its focus is on providing high-quality, accelerated (ATL), non-formal education in, accessible, girlfriendly community-based Learning Hubs.

Challenges:

Covid 19 Restrictions not only threatened to disrupt the provision of learning opportunities to learners but also the essential ongoing professional development programme aimed at supporting hub volunteers.

The challenge for the ATL programme partners lay in mobilising training for Community educators to support the re-focussing and of practice.

The challenge for Hub Based Community Educators lay in engaging learners through new methods such as telephone based, and socially distanced, small groups within the community

A rapid, pragmatic response to Covid restrictions:

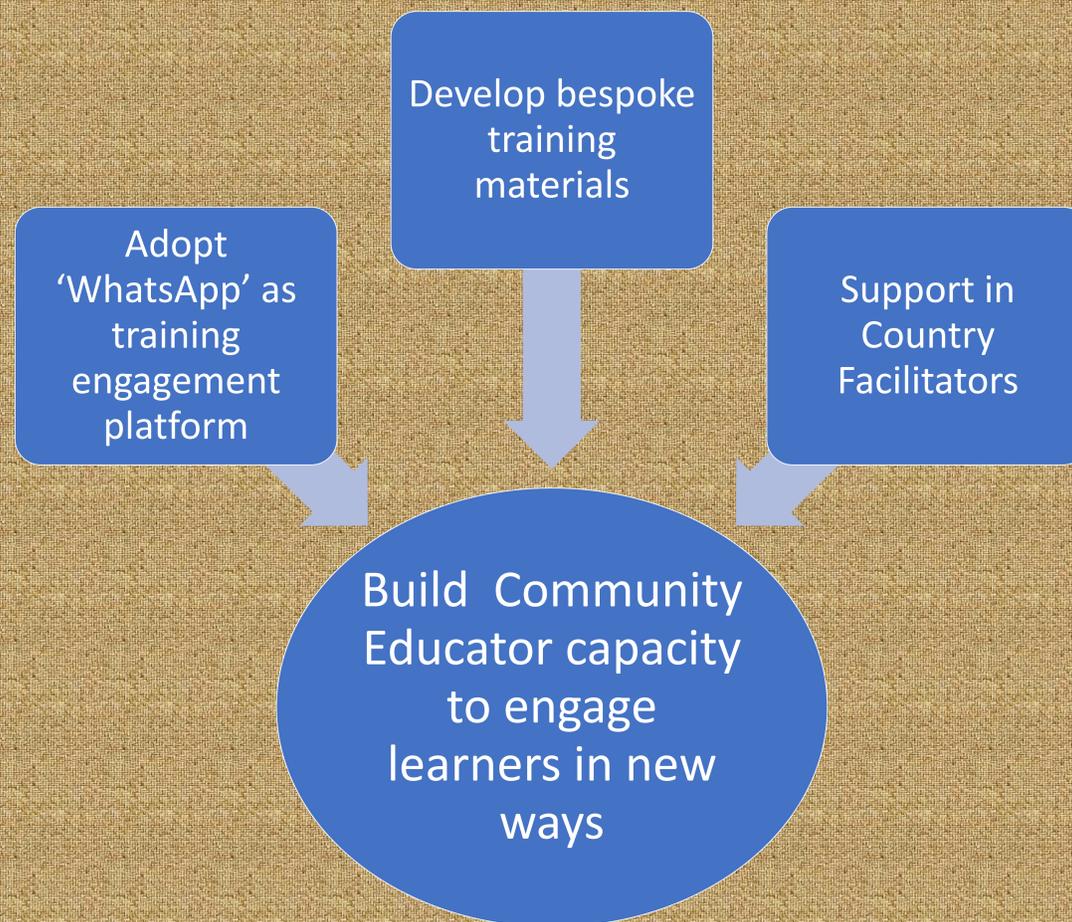
In order to support the refocussing of Hub Volunteer practice in order to support learners at a distance. The mode of training and support for Hub Volunteers also needed to change.

Within the context of Covid Restrictions and poor IT infrastructure, WhatsApp emerged as the digital platform of choice due to its widespread popularity and use within Zimbabwe.

WhatsApp was to become the primary mean for delivering training to Hub volunteers in order to overcome Covid Restrictions.

Bespoke training materials:

Due to the cost of data and inherent restrictions in using small screen devices to share information, bespoke training materials, referred to as 'One Siders' were designed to support the training. Comprehensive briefing notes and session guides supported facilitations of sessions. Cofacilitation and the use of 'side chats allowed for in session support.



Strengthening Learning Conversations: Principles into Practice

Principles: 'Starting where learners are':
During your recent contact with learners you have achieved a greater understanding of learner progress. By now you have first-hand experience of some of the challenges you face and some of the ways in which these can be overcome. This support tool is designed to help you focus on one aspect of engaging learners and 'strengthening learning conversations', 'starting where learners are':

Starting where learners are involves:

- Understanding learner achievements to date and starting with returning to the the 'last successful point of learning' (LSPL) i.e. the last concept or activity within a module the learner was able to engage with.
- Being willing to engage learners to develop skills which appeared in earlier units within the module such as phonics or number recognition.
- Each new conversation seeking to understand what the learner has done with her learning since the last conversation.

Practices:

- Listen carefully to what learners are saying about what they can do confidently. Find activities which support learner development (these may feature within earlier units). It is important to build on learner confidence to support progress.
- Be aware of the different stages a learner may be at in relation to literacy and numeracy. A student may be at an advanced stage in a module regarding literacy whilst struggling in earlier stages with numeracy. Identify activities and set tasks that are appropriate to development in both areas.
- Keep a record of contact and learner progress to strengthen future learning conversations.
- Review learner progress with other Hub Volunteer and your NFE Buddies in order to reflect on how best to support individual students.

Miss Ncube's initial contact record:

Case Study:
Miss Ncube has had a busy couple of weeks contacting learners. One learner Miss Ncube successfully contacted was Tafadzwa (a 15-year old young mother from her Learning Hub). Whilst preparing for her follow-up conversation with Tafadzwa, Miss Ncube consulted her contact record to remind herself of what she had learned about Tafadzwa's last successful point of learning and what she had agreed with Tafadzwa in terms of what she would focus on between telephone calls.

Learner: Tafadzwa age/phone	Hub volunteer: date	LSPL Literacy	LSPL Numeracy	Agreed action
Initial call	MS Ncube 20/05/2020	TM has a good grasp of single letter sounds. And some combined letters. TM is comfortable up to module 1a unit 6.	TM has good number knowledge form 1 - 10 but struggles with numbers beyond ten. TM is comfortable up to Module 1a unit 5	TM to develop study plan. Practice. To practice letter combinations in unit 7. To practice naming numbers beyond 10 using the 1-100 number square marking the numbers she does not know. Call TM on 6 th June at 4 pm.
Follow up call 1	Ms Ncube 06/05/2020			

Reflections:

The use of contextual examples of practice, in the form of a running case study, were well received and provided concrete founding of principles in practice.

Cofacilitation of WhatsApp based training sessions allowed for the development of new facilitation skills

WhatsApp allowed for live engagement across distances and post session engagement.

Acknowledgements:

This poster draws upon work reported by Charlotte Chishava (Plan Zimbabwe) and Stephen Harrison (Open University) at the 2021 UKFIET, 'Building Back Better?' conference.

It also draws upon analysis being undertaken by Stephen Harrison, Clare Tope and Clare Woodward (Open University)

