

The Missing Piece

Developing Collective Leadership
to Transform Education

Teach For All, March 2024



Teach For All
A Global Network

Introduction

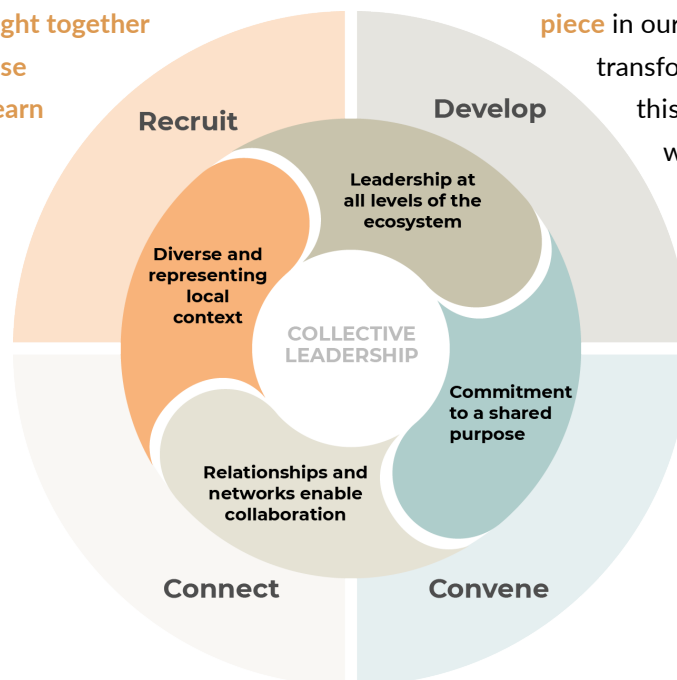
*Transforming education is an urgent global priority. Hundreds of millions of students worldwide aren't learning the basics they need to participate in today's world, let alone developing as the leaders we need to shape a better future for themselves and all of us. Evidence shows that **6 in 10 children** in low- and middle-income countries can't comprehend a basic written text by age 10. Our global efforts to tackle this crisis are not succeeding: levels of learning are stagnating and even declining globally.*

We must do better. But how? How do we transform education systems so that all children learn? What should we do differently as a global community? For 15 years, these same questions have motivated the efforts of the independent partner organizations that make up the Teach For All network, inspiring them to build a movement of 100,000 education leaders across more than 60 countries to tackle the learning crisis and ensure all children fulfill their potential.

communities and systems worldwide where the fastest progress is being made to put all children on a path to success. Through case studies, roundtables, workshops, and communities of practice, this diverse community of more than 600 system leaders, policymakers, researchers, civil society leaders, school leaders, teachers, students, and parents have shared their perspectives on the drivers of systemic change.

For the past five years, **Teach For All** has brought together many of these leaders to learn from the

This research identified **collective leadership as the critical missing piece** in our global efforts to transform education. In this report we describe why it matters, what it is, and how it can be developed.

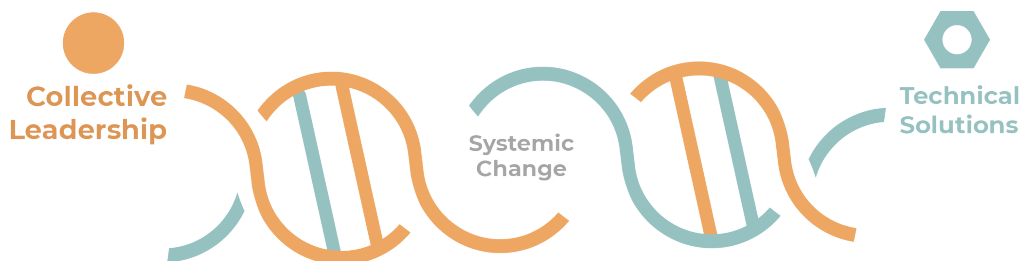


Why Collective Leadership?

Around the world, efforts to improve **educational outcomes usually focus on scaling evidence-based practices and policies**. Yet while the implementation of these technical solutions may lead to some improvements in learning, the experience of our network suggests that, taken alone, **this approach is insufficient** to achieve systemic change.

This is because education systems are human systems, the daily product of the motivations, ideas, abilities, and connections of millions of students, teachers, parents, and school leaders. Learning isn't determined by isolated interventions, but by **a complex web of interconnected actions**. To change these systems requires a critical mass of diverse people working together across all levels of a system towards a shared purpose.

In order to transform education, we must therefore **balance investments in new solutions and policies with parallel investments in the development of collective leadership** in individuals, groups, organizations, and networks. These efforts should be interconnected and mutually reinforcing, forming a dynamic interplay that propels meaningful change.



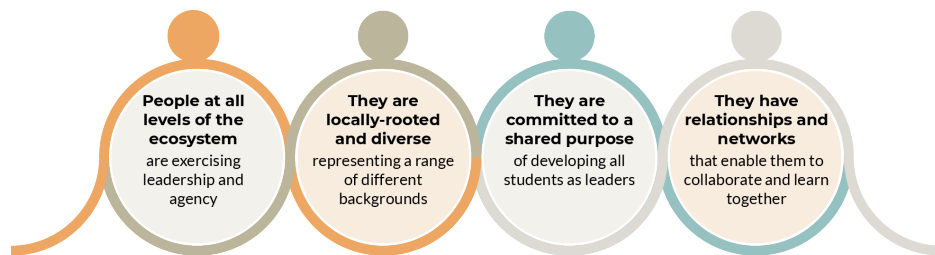
- To transform education we need system change, not just reform
- We need to change the wider ecosystem around children, not just the school system
- Unlocking progress in transforming education requires systems thinking
- There are multiple leverage points for transforming the systems around children
- These leverage points are interconnected, meaning a holistic approach is required
- **In order to change systems holistically, we need to develop collective leadership**

What is Collective Leadership?

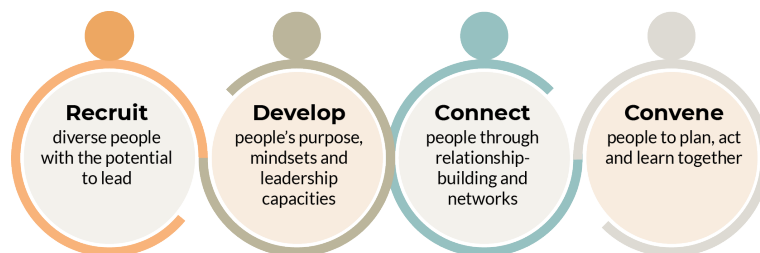
Source:
Authors'
definition
drawing on
Arkedis et al.
(2023)

Collective leadership is what happens when groups of people, who **share a common purpose, make meaning together** so they can find direction and **coordinate their interdependent actions** to achieve a socially useful outcome that each would not have produced on their own.

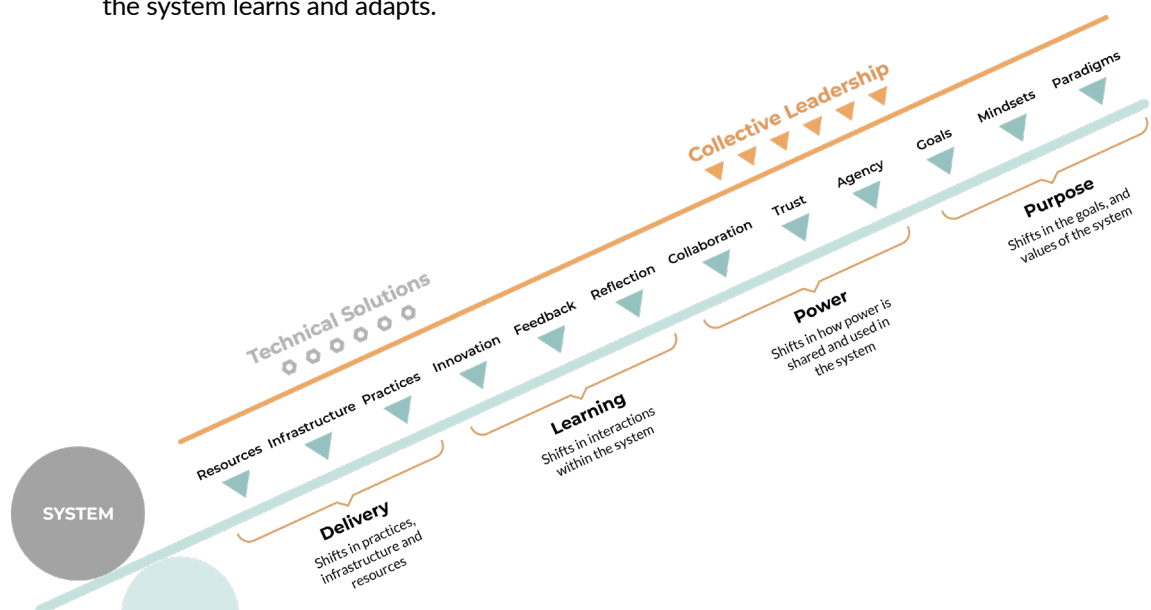
This report identifies **four characteristics of the collective leadership** that is contributing to transforming education in communities and systems across our network.



The report also proposes **four interrelated strategies** that organizations in the Teach For All network are employing to **develop collective leadership** in those communities and systems.



Finally, the report shows **how collective leadership development can contribute to system change** in education globally, by acting holistically on the points of highest impact in the system: the purpose the system is working towards, who holds power in the system, and how the system learns and adapts.



The Education Commission cited collective leadership as one of three critical enablers of transforming education. [Source: Education Commission (2022), *Rewiring Education for People and Planet*.] But what is it? In our own research and learning across the Teach For All network, we identify four common features of ecosystems where collective leadership is driving change:

Stakeholders throughout the whole ecosystem are exercising leadership and agency

While significant focus in the global effort to transform education is rightly placed on understanding the leadership required of policymakers, school leaders, and teachers, examples from our network demonstrate that the collective leadership both of these actors and of a wider ecosystem of students, parents, civil society leaders, nonprofit organizations, and other stakeholders is critical.

These leaders share a commitment to the purpose of all students thriving

Experience from our network suggests that it is equally critical that the stakeholders who are exercising leadership and agency throughout the ecosystem are purpose driven and working in pursuit of social justice. Collective efforts are most effective when groups of stakeholders are working towards a clear shared purpose that is locally rooted and has been collectively developed in order to tackle a common challenge.

These leaders are locally rooted and represent diverse backgrounds

The third characteristic of collective leadership is that it includes a broad group of people from diverse backgrounds, including both those who have experienced the inequities being addressed and those who have more privilege or access to power. While some approaches seek to achieve system change from the top down and others hold that system change can only come from a grassroots effort, the experience of our network suggests that a simultaneous top-down and bottom-up approach is best.

These leaders have the capacities, relationships, networks, and spaces to collaborate and learn together

Finally, collective leadership entails that relationships, networks, and trust exist between these diverse, purpose-driven leaders working throughout the system. These connections enable them to work together effectively and coherently, and to engage in shared learning about the progress being made, which informs adaptations to their approach.

Moreover, it is the simultaneous interplay of all four of these characteristics of collective leadership that best generates the shared purpose and shared momentum across the ecosystem. This creates the enabling conditions for the successful development and implementation of more technical solutions.

How Is Collective Leadership Developed: Recruit and Develop

Our research identified *four common strategies used by Teach For All network partner organizations to develop collective leadership at the community or system level.*

Recruiting a pipeline of diverse people with the potential to lead throughout the ecosystem

Core to the work of all Teach For All network partner organizations is the recruitment of diverse, talented people, typically early in their careers, to a two-year fellowship in which they work as teachers in classrooms serving their country's more marginalized students. This intervention brings into the sector people who would not otherwise have considered a career in education, who then, following the fellowship, overwhelmingly pursue careers as leaders working in different roles across the ecosystem around children to bring about systemic change.

Network partners most commonly:

- Recruit diverse cohorts to strengthen the representativeness and sustainability of collective leadership in the ecosystem
- Leverage sophisticated competency-based assessments to select purpose-driven participants with the requisite leadership potential
- Utilize the matriculation process to immerse candidates in the realities of the local ecosystem
- Sustain recruitment over time in a given ecosystem to build a critical mass of leaders as a foundation for system change efforts

Developing the purpose, values, vision, and leadership capacity of people in the system

For Teach For All network partner organizations, the primary focus is on the purposeful development of collective leadership mindsets and capacities in people throughout the ecosystem. They do this during the two-year teaching fellowship but also beyond it, through intensive pre-service and ongoing professional development programs, including extensive teacher coaching. Some partners are also experimenting with leadership development programs for other leaders and stakeholders.

Network partners most commonly:

- Develop a deep sense of purpose in all participants to work to ensure all students grow as leaders
- Incorporate system leadership development opportunities within the delivery of teacher training and professional development
- Deliberately cultivate specific leadership mindsets and capacities rooted in local needs and opportunities
- Strengthen alumni leadership through specialist platforms and programs that are also rooted in their context
- Leverage the leadership of alumni to develop the capacity of other stakeholders in the system

How Is Collective Leadership Developed: Connect and Convene

Connecting people through relationship-building and networks

Teach For All network partners invest in developing networks among their fellows and alumni, as well as among actors across the wider local or national ecosystem. During the two-year leadership development program, regular spaces are created for the purpose of fostering personal connections through storytelling, shared experiences, or celebrations. Connections continue to be cultivated beyond the completion of the two-year program, with annual gatherings of alumni in festivals of learning, weekend retreats, or evening social events.

Network partners most commonly:

- Facilitate ongoing connections among alumni to strengthen personal relationships, exchange ideas, and collaborate on projects
- Connect alumni beyond their network and the organization with key actors in the system
- Develop the capacity of all participants and alumni to engage deeply and authentically with community members

Convening people to develop shared approaches to taking action, learning, and adapting

Building on the foundations of a critical mass of connected leaders across the ecosystem, organizations in our network and outside it are bringing together

groups of actors across an ecosystem to build shared purpose, identify common challenges, envision possibilities and solutions, and take action together. Once established, these collectives then engage in ongoing processes of participatory inquiry, in which they evaluate the success of their shared strategy, and make adaptations to the approach informed by a combination of deep contextual understanding, shared experience, and global insight. In order to enable inclusive and effective participation, efforts may be made to build the capacity of diverse actors in the group—such as students, parents, and teachers.

Network partners most commonly:

- Engage in contextual vision setting and the construction of new narratives
- Align actors across the ecosystem around a common purpose
- Grow the agency and capacity of stakeholders throughout the ecosystem
- Establish system-wide approaches to collective action
- Develop collaborative partnerships with system leaders



How Systems Change

The importance of **collective leadership development** is underscored by the latest insight into how systems change. Many of those working globally to transform education now draw on the theory that **deeper shifts to systems are best achieved through system leverage points**—key places in a system where a small change in one thing can produce big changes in another.

This theory was initially developed by environmental scientist Donella Meadows, who saw that complex human systems, like natural ecosystems, have an **innate capacity for adaptation to superficial changes**—but could be transformed through shifts in things like the purpose, rules or practices of the system. Following learning and research across the Teach For All network, and engagement with the latest perspectives from our colleagues in the global education community, our report proposes a set of **twelve key leverage points** for transforming education.

SYSTEM ATTRIBUTE	LEVERAGE POINT
Purpose Shifts in the goals, beliefs, and values orienting the system	Paradigms organize actors in the system into patterns of thinking, doing, and being. Transcending a particular education paradigm and being able to consider multiple alternative paradigms is a key driver of system transformation.
	Mindsets are the shared set of beliefs, underlying assumptions, and thought patterns of actors within the system that determine how they approach achieving the purpose of the system, or their individual purpose.
	Goals or desired outcomes of the system refer to the shared objectives towards which actors in the system are working. This shared direction fosters commitment, coordination, and system resilience that endures over time.
Power Shifts in how power is shared and exercised across the system	Agency is the ability to influence the distribution of resources, opportunities, and decision-making in the system. It means acting rather than being acted upon and shaping rather than being shaped.
	Trust is the critical intangible thread between stakeholders that enables effective collaboration, communication, and cooperation within a system. It is built on a foundation of strong interpersonal relationships between people.
	Collaboration is more than a technical process of connecting projects, but the creation of structures that strengthen purpose, trust, and power, the ability to take coordinated shared action, and to continuously learn and adapt together.

SYSTEM ATTRIBUTE	LEVERAGE POINT
Learning Shifts in interactions within the system	Reflection is the mechanism through which adaptations to the system are triggered and sustained. It is most effective when it is iterative, inclusive, and rooted in relevant data, with multiple actors involved.
	Feedback is the mechanism through which the system generates relevant information on the performance of the system, based on relevant measures, regular and reliable generation of data, and the analysis of that data.
	Innovation includes the development and implementation of novel ideas, approaches, and solutions to address complex challenges within a system. It involves introducing new concepts, technologies, processes, or strategies.
Delivery Shifts in practices, infrastructure, and resources	Practices are the approaches of actors across the system to curriculum design, teaching practice, teacher training and recruitment, learning assessment, school accountability, family engagement, governance, and other similar topics.
	Infrastructure refers to the physical infrastructure of an education system through which teaching and learning take place. This includes things like teaching and support staff, classrooms and schools, computers and books.
	Resources are the financial inputs into an education system that are determined by local or national governments. While a sufficient allocation of resources is critical to the education system, spending does not correlate with learning.

The experience of the Teach For All network suggests that by fostering a critical mass of diverse leaders who share purpose and values, collaborate across various levels, and embrace diverse avenues for change, collective leadership development increases the likelihood of system transformation. First, collective leadership has the potential to impact the points of highest leverage within a system, such as purpose, power, and learning, while technical interventions target points of lower leverage, such as policies and practices. Second, the coordinated actions

of diverse leaders working at all levels of an ecosystem towards a shared purpose can target multiple system leverage points simultaneously and holistically. Third, the inclusion of many diverse actors representing multiple voices, experiences, and perspectives, can mean both that collective efforts are more likely to hit their target by challenging systemic inequities, biases, and assumptions that may hinder progress toward equity, and that a larger mass of leaders will be involved in the effort to bring about change, increasing the likelihood of sustaining that change.

Case Studies

'The Missing Piece: Developing Collective Leadership to Transform Education' features case studies from Teach For All network partner organizations in **Perú, Chile, México, the United States, Nigeria, Austria, Bulgaria, Armenia, and India**. The case studies show how these organizations have developed collective leadership over time and assess the systemic impact of that collective leadership development at the local or national level. They include:



- 1 From individual bright spots to system-wide collaboration in Appalachia, USA
- 2 Building coalitions and mobilizing leaders to shift national public policy in Austria
- 3 Growing trust and influence to shift public narrative around equitable education in Armenia
- 4 Leadership development and deep local partnerships over ten years in Puebla, México
- 5 Government partnerships and a talent pipeline to grow mindsets and capability in Bulgaria
- 6 Developing a critical mass of student and system leaders to shift mindsets in India
- 7 A whole-ecosystem approach to improving learning in the Peruvian Andes
- 8 Developing leaders to leverage opportunities for impact in Chile
- 9 Mobilizing leaders to bring entrepreneurial energy to education in Ogun State, Nigeria

■ The How Behind This Paper

This report is the result of a three-part learning and research methodology comprising a global evidence review, the development of nine original case studies, and a synthesis of the learning co-created by practitioners across our global network using [Teach For All's global network learning approach](#). The approach comprises the purposeful cultivation of a supportive environment for global learning, and an explicit learning methodology through which diverse practitioners generate, test and evolve hypotheses. Additionally for the aims of this specific paper, local writers worked with a lead researcher to generate the nine original case studies by employing contextualized participatory inquiry methods.

In this section we include short summaries of the story that is told in each of the nine case studies.

A whole ecosystem approach to growing leadership to improve learning in the Peruvian Andes

Since 2017, Enseña Perú has run the Efecto Áncash, a multi-program collective impact initiative that has measurably improved learning outcomes for 6,800 students in Huari, a community in Northern Perú. By cultivating coordinated leadership among teachers, principals, students, parents, and local and regional education administrative managers, in just six years Efecto Áncash has created a clear shared purpose, built the capability of key actors across the region, and established new systems, processes and a culture of learning within the local ecosystem. This has resulted in improved student learning and socio-emotional outcomes, reduced learning gaps, and shifted local and national mindsets about the ingredients of quality education for children in marginalized rural communities.

Developing leaders to leverage opportunities for systemic impact in Chile

Over fifteen years Enseña Chile has cultivated a critical mass of 900 well-connected leaders who are driving systemic improvements in multiple sectors across all of Chile's territories, with a focus on local contextualization. In 2018, groups of Enseña Chile alumni worked together to take advantage of recent changes to the structure of the Chilean education system to establish and grow two initiatives: Colegios Que Aprenden, which is designed to embed a culture and practices of learning in schools across the country, and Impulso Docente, which works to improve teacher development practices at a national level. In a dynamic national context, Enseña Chile's alumni have emerged as influential leaders in education, occupying positions of leadership and actively shaping policies and practices to tackle educational inequity.

Pursuing depth of scale to build capacity and shift mindsets over time in Puebla, México

For ten years, Enseña por México has been working in Cuetzalan del Progreso, Puebla, to reduce educational inequity and strengthen the local learning ecosystem. Enseña por México made strategic choices to collaborate with local organizations, build trust with communities, improve the recruitment and selection of their fellows, and develop the leadership of local teachers alongside their program participants. In this way, Enseña por México became a trusted partner to local educational institutions and communities, enabling those who participate in schools as Professionals of Enseña por México (PEMs) to achieve a greater long-term impact. The efforts of PEMs have positively influenced students, parents, and teachers in the region, changing narratives, increasing community engagement, and contributing to development.

From individual bright spots to systemic collaboration in Appalachia, USA

Teach For America (TFA) Appalachia is developing collective leadership to enhance educational progress in Appalachia, a region that includes parts of the US states of Kentucky, West Virginia, Tennessee, and Virginia. In order to ensure every child in the region has access to an excellent and equitable education, TFA Appalachia has shifted its focus over the past decade from developing individual leadership to a more collective approach. Through its recruitment and retention strategies, it has convened and cultivated a diverse pipeline of 400 alumni, with several now serving as leaders across sectors within the region. By building networks among these leaders, promoting collaboration, and driving learning, TFA Appalachia is mobilizing these leaders to create lasting systemic change for the region's most marginalized children.

Mobilizing leaders to bring entrepreneurial energy to education in Ogun State, Nigeria

In 2017, Teach For Nigeria established a partnership with the Ogun State government and has since recruited and developed leaders who have impacted over 200,000 learners in underserved communities in the state. Teach For Nigeria's investment in leadership development and alumni support has contributed to the emergence of entrepreneurial projects across Ogun State that leverage technology and community partnerships to accelerate student learning, demonstrating how leadership development can complement other investments. These collective efforts, along with evidence generated through research, have started to lead to an increase in trust and shifts in mindsets throughout the state system. Teach For Nigeria's success in Ogun State has inspired the launch of a similar approach in Lagos State and Teach For Nigeria is now seeking to scale its impact nationwide through its TFNx Network initiative.

Building coalitions and mobilizing leaders to shift national public policy in Austria

Teach For Austria staff, alumni, public servants, and policymakers worked together to achieve a policy change to establish new pathways into the teaching profession. When Teach For Austria began in 2011, no alternative pathways to teaching existed in Austria. This meant that Teach For Austria alumni and other cross-sectoral professionals had limited prospects for securing long-term roles in the teaching profession. Teach For Austria made strategic choices around the selection, recruitment, and training of fellows, as well as connecting and supporting the initiatives of their alumni. This helped Teach For Austria build strong public and private sector partnerships, which grew the influence and credibility of the organization and their alumni at the political level. This has now led to new pathways into teaching, and an increase in trust in these pathways as part of a wider mindset shift across the public sector.

Government partnerships and a talent pipeline to grow mindsets and capability in Bulgaria

Over the past 13 years, Teach For Bulgaria, in collaboration with alumni, policymakers, other civic organizations, and educators, has spearheaded policy changes aimed at improving outcomes for young people through enhancing the skills and capacity of educators in Bulgaria. Through its long-term commitment, strategic programs, public engagement, and formation of strategic coalitions, Teach For Bulgaria has fostered a culture of constant learning across a broad ecosystem of schools, individual teachers, and civic leaders. The organization's highly regarded recruitment, training, and support programs, along with their pioneering projects in teaching and leadership training, have led to recognition across the system and helped to shift the culture among practitioners in parts of the system.

Growing trust and influence to shift public narrative around equitable education in Armenia

Teach For Armenia and its alumni have played a pivotal role in strengthening mindsets and narratives at all levels of Armenia's education system, resulting in a stronger national focus on addressing educational injustices. Over the past decade, the organization has raised awareness about the alarming levels of academic underachievement in Armenia, particularly in rural areas, and contributed to a new government-led education strategy to work towards a more equitable future. In this period, Teach For Armenia recruited and developed 400 fellows and fostered a culture of collaboration and shared responsibility across its network in line with its own "Kochari" framework. Teach For Armenia also supported alumni to assume leadership positions and drive grassroots changes across the national education ecosystem and contributed to tangible policy changes at the national level.

Developing leaders and proof points of an excellent education to drive systemic change in India

Since 2009 Teach For India has recruited, developed, and connected a national network of 900 fellows and 4,500 alumni who are deeply embedded in every level of India's education ecosystem and working to tackle India's severe educational crisis. This mission-driven network of leaders is innovating solutions, changing mindsets, and creating new structures and processes to catalyze systemic change. Teach For India's success is rooted in the attraction of top graduates and professionals to its mission, its rigorous selection process, and its comprehensive training program. 60% of Teach For India alumni work in direct impact roles, 30% work as transformational enablers, and 10% have formal roles in policy and governance. In parallel, Teach For India initiatives like the Kids Education Revolution, TFlx, and the Conference of the Birds have contributed to scaling this movement of leaders, empowering students as partners and changemakers to address local community challenges and influence government policy.

What is the Role of Collective Leadership Development in System Change?

The case studies show a range of ways that collective leadership development can contribute to systemic change through shifts to purpose, power, learning and delivery across the system.

- **More comprehensive approaches to system change appear to be more effective.** Integrating strategies to recruit, develop, connect, and convene diverse people to work together towards a shared purpose shows great potential in driving systems change.
- **A group of purpose-driven leaders working together can shift mindsets and narratives within a system.** The collective leadership of network partner staff, alumni, and other allies has challenged traditional narratives at the local, regional, or national level, paving the way for systemic change.
- **Trust building stands out as a critical first step in enabling a collective effort to achieve systemic change.** Building trust with stakeholders at all levels of the system is critical. Trust can be cultivated through personal relationship building, a long-term commitment to a community, professional credibility, or demonstrating evidence of impact.
- **Changing who exercises power in a system can increase the agency of actors at all levels of that system.** This could involve centering community members in decision-making, retraining and re-inspiring teachers locally, organizing workshops for parents, or supporting students themselves to lead initiatives to transform education.
- **Changing how systems learn requires shifts in culture, processes, and the availability of data.** Innovations in the culture and practices of the existing education system can be brought about by embedding data-driven decision-making as a core practice at schools in remote areas and can affect a system-wide shift from intuition to informed choices.
- **Innovations can shift practices and mindsets.** The teacher recruitment and retention strategies used by network partners have influenced the system to steer towards innovations that include introducing a selection process in the teaching profession, a greater focus on learning, the development and leadership of teachers and school principals, and developing a mentoring process for young teachers.
- **Collaborative networks can bring momentum and coherence to the system.** A highly collaborative alumni network can cultivate a critical mass of well-connected leaders who are driving systemic improvements, prioritizing equity, innovation, and quality education for all.
- **Civil society organizations play a critical role in influencing policy change.** Organizations might intervene directly by influencing or proposing policies, or coordinate advocacy wider efforts to lift barriers inside the systems to enable the growth of collective leadership.

Recommendations

Local Investments

At the local level, we recommend investments that accelerate the development of collective leadership to complement existing efforts to improve education through the design, delivery, and scaling of evidence-based

technical solutions. We believe that collective leadership development is a critical missing piece in fostering the enabling environment in which technical solutions are more likely to flourish.

We recommend investments in:

1. Fostering commitment to the shared purpose of transforming education
2. Recruiting diverse leaders to grow a critical mass of collective leadership
3. Developing diverse people across the ecosystem as agents of change
4. Connecting people to build trust, networks, and structures for collaboration
5. Convening people to establish the culture and processes for shared learning and adaptation

Global Commitments

For decades our global ecosystem of governments, multilaterals, researchers, donors, and non-profit organizations has prioritized generating evidence about what works in education and disseminating that evidence to guide policy-making and

program design. We believe that we must complement this approach with a parallel effort to mobilize a global movement of leaders that is on a mission to transform education, which is more inclusive of local actors at all levels of education systems.

To this end, we recommend five global commitments:

1. To a people first approach to transforming education
2. To the active inclusion of civil society organizations and practitioners
3. To cultivating a diverse and inclusive movement to transform education
4. To reimagining global learning—from evidence into practice, to practice into evidence
5. To the global mission of whole child development for all children

Acknowledgements

This report has thousands of authors. It is the product of the efforts and insights of the diverse global community of tens of thousands of system leaders, policymakers, researchers, civic leaders, school leaders, teachers, and students who are working in partnership with communities across the Teach For All network to transform education in more than 60 countries worldwide. We thank them all.

More practically, the report shares findings from a program of workshops, roundtables, and discussions hosted by Teach For All's Global Learning Lab for Community Impact over the past three years, which actively included more than 600 members of that global community in surfacing, testing, and evolving hypotheses about the drivers of change in schools and systems around the world.

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The report also features nine new case studies of the work of Teach For All network partners. The authors and contributors were Shivani Agrawal, Michael Aregbesola, Biayna Amirjanyan, Jose Antonio Alva Bacigalupo, Angela Bravo Chacon, Ruiz Clark, Javiera Delgado, Stephanie Devine, Zlatka Dimitrova, Hanna Gegenhuber, Juan Manuel Gonzalez Barajas, Iris Jeffries, Neli Koleva, Nara Magtaghyan, Deni Navarro, Bosede Ogidan, Antonia Raby Amadori, Anuradha Rao, and Becky Smerdon.

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The full report **The Missing Piece: Developing Collective Leadership to Transform Education is available in English** and can be accessed at teachforall.org/missingpiece, along with the nine network case studies.