THE REACH TRUST

IMPROVING LIVES THROUGH THE DEVELOPMENT OF INNOVATIVE AND COST-EFFECTIVE MOBILE SOLUTIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

A Reach Trust beneficiary. Photo credit: The Reach Trust

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Reach Trust was established in 2012 to inspire and improve lives of low-income communities in South Africa through the development of innovative and cost-effective mobile solutions. Their mobile-first solutions are designed to cost-effectively enable the transition from a resource-based to a knowledge-based economy, while focusing on three priority areas to improve lives through education: parenting, student education, and youth employment. They have developed targeted programs to address each of these areas: CareUp, LevelUp, and MoveUp. To date, they have helped more than 10 million people transform their lives through access to free education, health, and counseling services on their mobile phones. They work in partnership with governments, the private sector, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), communities, and leaders around the world who support programs for cost-effective social change.

Keywords: Mobile applications, education, health, youth employment, South Africa

CONTEXT

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) estimated that 98.96 percent of people between the ages of 15 to 24 were literate in 2015, but the 2016 Research on Socioeconomic Policy brief showed that 58 percent of Grade 4 learners in South Africa could not read for meaning, while 29 percent are completely illiterate. The quality of education in South Africa has been lamented by many researchers, policy-makers, and concerned citizens.

The high cost of labor, low skills, difficulty job searching, and persistently low employment outcomes are some of the barriers for South African youth to securing employment. The challenging job search is related to the fact that poor youth cannot afford or are incapable of using the Internet to search for jobs or postsecondary education opportunities, and it is difficult for them to leverage their social network.

The South African government and other organizations have been striving to address youth unemployment issues through various programs. The National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) is an agency established in 2008 that is operating the National Youth Service (NYS) program, which tackles youth unemployment. The Fit for Life, Fit for Work program provides young people with a comprehensive program that offers life skills and work-related skills training, and job search assistance, with a 80 percent success rate. Additionally, the Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator project takes a different approach by advocating employers practice inclusive recruitment that focuses on young people.

South Africa			
Population (UN, 2015)	53,491,333	**Fixed broadband subscriptions (%) (ITU, 2016)**	2.84
Population density (people per sq.km) (UN, 2015)	43.81	**Mobile cellular subscriptions (%) (ITU, 2016)**	142.38
Median household income (Gallup, 2006-2012)	US$ 5,217	**Individuals using the Internet (%) (ITU, 2016)**	54
Education (Mean years of schooling) (UNDP, 2013)	Male: 10.1 Female: 9.8	**Individuals using the Internet by Gender (%) (ITU, 2016)**	N/A

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Reach Trust currently has 12 full-time employees and three main initiatives: CareUp, LevelUp, and MoveUp.

CareUp– Developed in association with the Western Cape Department of Social Development and The Innovation Edge in 2016, CareUp breaks down the complexity of parenting into small steps that are easy to achieve. CareUp is available as an Android app and mobile site. It helps to improve early childhood development (ECD) through regular messaging and push

notifications with bite-size ECD content linked to activities, instructions, and exercises that supports children's mother tongue language development. The content is sourced from Wordworks's *Every Word Counts* books and provide parents and practitioners with the tools they need to teach young children to read and converse. Parents and practitioners receive three weekly messages with activities and instructions around a theme that is aligned to the National Curriculum Framework. In addition, they also receive weekly inspirational content, and can access a resource section that includes a selection of stories from Nal'iBali, a national reading-for-enjoyment campaign to spark children's potential through storytelling, to read to children at any time. They conduct two-hour-long training sessions at schools for parents for CareUp in which they show them how to use the app and provide some basic digital literacy for parents and teachers.

LevelUp – Level Up aims to encourage learners to increase their learning time outside of the classroom through regular engagement with educational content in the form of bite-sized daily interactions. The system measures the performance of learners in these interactions and they are awarded points. These points can then be used to unlock a variety of real world rewards. The program targets high school students for incentivized learning. Learners take quizzes for points, and earned points can be redeemed in a rewards store for things like groceries and other essentials. Unlike most e-learning and mLearning products and services on the market, LevelUp provides learners with access to psycho-social support, and inspirational career advice free of charge. Educational learning material is presented in a mobile friendly format with contextual references to make it meaningful and relevant to learners. Although LevelUp is available on virtually any mobile phone, it was built for the future, with the main focus being on the Android operating system.

MoveUp – MoveUp is a free mobile application that affordably helps young people learn new skills and build a performance-based résumé. The Reach Trust believes that there is a significant opportunity to disrupt the status quo and unlock substantial value and savings for young work-seekers through a cost-effective and scalable mobile technology solution. MoveUp targets unemployed youth, especially school dropouts, between the ages of 18 and 25. It offers tutorials on particular work opportunities and career paths, as well as on practical employment seeking skills like building a résumé. Micro courses allow users to learn entry-level jobs skills, and build successful behaviors through small, focused steps. MoveUp's built-in résumé generator automatically captures everything that a user learns and achieves on the platform on their SmartCV. They can easily share their SmartCV online, or download and print it.

A range of sources including the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Innovation Edge, the Government of the Western Cape, corporate social responsibility funding, and private donations funds Reach Trust. They are considering introducing a short curriculum for early childhood that would include a small fee to generate some revenue, but the project generally is a donation and grant-funded nonprofit.

Project details			
Technology	Mobile based training	**Training**	Application based training on a wide range of topics
Year program started	2012	**Cost to users**	Free

Geography	South Africa	**Total cost of program**	Fixed cost: US$ 40,000 per application Operational cost: US$ 60,000 per application per year
User profile	Parents aged 25-30, unemployed youth, low income students	**Associated organizations**	The Innovation Edge, Western Cape Department of Social Development

PROGRESS AND RESULTS

CareUp is available in Xhosa, English, and Afrikaans, and was piloted in the Western Cape at 10 locations with 15 practitioners and 120 parents between August and December 2016. The results of the pilot have been very encouraging, especially in terms of parents reading to their children. As such, CareUp will be piloted at 50 additional sites in 2018, and will soon be available in Zulu as well.

Since its launch in February 2016, more than 150,000 unique users have engaged with LevelUp, completing more than 750,000 learning exercises. Key performance metrics, such as a significant increase in weekly engagement, confirm the potential of LevelUp to reach and retain users through mLearning.

Reach launched the minimum viable product to validate use-case assumptions in February 2017. To this end, they will trial rapid product iterations with randomized user groups in the Western Cape over a 10-month period. Concurrently, they plan to develop and implement further product enhancements, including localization (specifically language options), talent analytics, and job matching. It has been implemented in four schools as of early 2018.

Plans for expanding the project include a new math application for teachers called MathsUp that is currently being piloted in the rural area of the Eastern Cape. That was launched on 1 October 2017, and they are waiting to gather more data before further expanding the program. Another application in development is focused on reusing recycled materials. Content is designed for a certain grade level, but students in that grade are not up to speed; thus, pushing content appropriate for the proficiency level students are currently at is a struggle that requires extensive data and analysis.

CHALLENGES

Lack of affordable access – Low-income and under-resourced target users are reluctant to interact with content that will cost them money, either directly or indirectly because of the cost of the Internet use in general.

Community resistance – Parents assume schools educate their children, so they do not see why they should be involved in educating their child further. In order to get them to interact with content that can help them, they have to first be convinced that it is relevant to them at all.

Technological obsolescence – Many people have Android smartphones that are using outdated versions of the operating systems, which cannot support the mobile applications that the projects rely upon.

REACH TRUST'S SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE PROJECTS

Understand your audience is essential to creating useful experiences – Initiatives would benefit from being tailored not just to the local communities and their needs, but also to their favored technologies and ways of access. Users may have variable literacies in different streams of access, so they need to be catered to developing their strengths as well as eliminating their weaknesses. Not all iconography signifies in the same way across communities either; adopting colors and symbols in an informed way that is responsive to local signifying regimes is helpful at helping the content and program make sense to the users.

SOURCES

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