Abstract: Recent nationwide assessments have documented the low levels of learning in Tanzanian schools. These low levels of learning are driven in part by limited accountability in the education system, which is reflected in the frequent absence of teachers from schools. This is further compounded by the resource constraints that schools face. In this study we conduct a randomized experiment to examine the efficacy of increasing resources to schools relative to increasing teacher incentives. Specifically, we compare the student learning outcomes between four different interventions: one in which we provide schools with extra resources through capitation (or per pupil) grants, one in which we provide teachers with a bonus based on the performance of their students in an externally administered exam, one in which schools received both programs, and the control group which received no support. Overall, we find limited evidence that solely providing resources improves learning outcomes, while we do find some evidence that incentives improve learning outcomes especially when coupled with extra resources.

Bio: Isaac M. Mbiti is an Assistant Professor of Public Policy and Economics at the Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy. Prior to his appointment at the Batten School, Mbiti was an Assistant Professor of Economics at Southern Methodist University and also served as a Martin Luther King Visiting Assistant Professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. His research has focused broadly on African economic development with particular interests in examining the role of education policies such as free primary education and teacher performance pay programs, as well as the potential for new technologies (especially mobile phones) to spur the development process. His ongoing research projects in East and West Africa evaluate various policies that aim to improve the livelihoods of African youth through training programs. His research has been supported by numerous agencies including the National Science Foundation, The National Institutes of Health, the International Impact Evaluation Initiative, USAID and the World Bank. He is a research affiliate at the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) at MIT and was previously selected as a National Academy of Education/Spencer Foundation Post-Doctoral Fellow. His publications have appeared in the American Economic Review, Journal of Economic Perspectives, American Economic Journal: Applied Economics, and Journal of African Economies. He has also authored several policy reports for the Kenyan Government, the World Bank and NGOs, such as the International Rescue Committee. He received his Ph.D. in economics from Brown University.