

Issue 3: 2026

The Learning Leader

Advancing Professional Development
for the Future of Education



From the Editorial Desk

Thank you for picking up this latest edition of *The Learning Leader*.

Over the past few months, we have had the privilege of speaking with teachers, school leaders, policymakers and partners who are addressing education challenges from different angles. As we brought their contributions together, it is clear that while the contexts may differ, many are grappling with the same questions about how to better support teachers, strengthen leadership, enhance inclusive classrooms and ensure professional development keeps pace with a changing world.

Within these pages, you will find conversations on school leadership, teacher professional development, gender-responsive pedagogy, blended learning and regional collaboration. You will also read stories of programmes that are moving beyond successful pilots into sustainable systems and also hear directly from the people making that transition possible.

As editors, one of the most rewarding parts of producing this newsletter is seeing the diversity of voices represented in every issue. We are grateful to our contributors from government institutions, partner organisations, schools and the wider education community for generously sharing their experiences and insights.

Enjoy the read, and as always, we welcome your feedback and suggestions as we continue to grow *The Learning Leader* together.

Sincerely,

Mary Oyuke and Dorian Mwangi

Message from the Editor in Chief



Claire Mazin

Country Programmes Manager, VVOB in Kenya

Dear readers,

I am delighted to share this latest edition of *The Learning Leader* with you.

As I reflect on the milestones that have shaped the past few months, I am reminded that meaningful education reform is built over time through committed teachers, visionary school leaders, responsive institutions and partners willing to learn and adapt together.

This edition explores that journey from multiple perspectives. Across its pages, you will find stories of programmes progressing from pilot to scale, teachers embracing new ways of engaging learners, institutions strengthening the systems that support continuous professional development and the place of policies and frameworks in supporting all this. You will also hear from partners across Kenya and the region who

are helping to create a future where quality education is more accessible and inclusive.

One of the strongest messages emerging from this edition is the importance of investing in people. Policies, digital tools and innovative approaches all matter, but their impact ultimately depends on the educators and leaders who work every day to make them meaningful for learners. By supporting teachers to grow professionally and equipping school leaders to lead change, the benefits extend far beyond individual classrooms.

I am particularly encouraged by the growing collaboration reflected throughout this issue. The contributions from our government counterparts and development partners demonstrate what is possible when institutions work towards the shared goal of transforming education systems for every learner. As VVOB, we are proud to contribute to these efforts by strengthening school leadership and teacher professional development, while ensuring that effective approaches can be sustained and scaled.

I hope the experiences and reflections shared here will inspire new ideas and encourage continued collaboration as well as reaffirm our collective commitment to improving teaching, learning, school leadership and education equity.

Thank you for reading and for being part of this community committed to strengthening education.

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Foreword



Dr. Martha Muhwezi,
Executive Director, FAWE Africa

Africa's future will be shaped by the quality of the education we provide today and by the teachers who make learning possible every day. As the continent advances the African Union Decade of Accelerated Action for the Transformation of Education and Skills Development (2025–2034), strengthening the teaching profession must remain central to our efforts to build inclusive, equitable and resilient education systems.

With the world's youngest population, Africa has a unique opportunity to harness its demographic dividend and drive sustainable social and economic transformation. Achieving this vision requires education systems that equip learners with the skills, knowledge and values needed to thrive in a rapidly changing world. Yet many countries continue to face teacher shortages, growing learner populations and increasing demands on education systems. These challenges reinforce the urgent need to invest not only in recruiting teachers, but also in supporting their continuous professional development.

Gender-responsive Teacher Professional Development (TPD) is a critical part of this investment. It equips teachers to recognise and address barriers that affect participation, learning and achievement, while creating safe, inclusive and supportive learning environments for all learners. When teachers are equipped with the right skills and tools, they become powerful agents of change who can improve learning outcomes and promote equity within and beyond the classroom.

Equally important are the partnerships and policy frameworks that enable sustainable change. No single institution can transform education systems alone. Progress depends on strong collaboration among governments, teacher training institutions, development partners, civil society organisations and communities. At the same time, frameworks such as the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 2026–2035) provide a roadmap for strengthening teacher development, advancing school leadership and embedding inclusion and gender equality within education systems.

At FAWE Africa, we remain committed to working with partners across the continent to advance these priorities. By investing in teachers, strengthening partnerships and supporting evidence-based policies, we can build education systems that support every learner to thrive and contribute meaningfully to Africa's future. After all, when we invest in teachers, we invest in the future of our continent.

Scaling Learning Across Systems



Institutionalising the Effective School Leadership for Junior Schools (ESL4JS)

By **Martin Kisilu**,
Deputy Director - Curriculum Development & Training, KEMI



Teachers share a light moment during an training session | Photo by VVOB

The transformation of education systems depends on sound policies and curriculum reforms, as well as strong leadership within schools. As Kenya continues implementing Competency-Based Education (CBE), school leaders play an increasingly important role in driving change, supporting teachers and improving learning outcomes.

Against this backdrop, the Effective School Leadership for Junior Schools (ESL4JS) course has emerged as an important initiative for strengthening leadership capacity among school leaders across Kenya.

For the Kenya Education Management Institute (KEMI), the rollout of the first scaling cohort of ESL4JS represents the transition of a successful pilot initiative into an institutionalised programme

embedded within KEMI's systems and operations. More importantly, it demonstrates how strategic partnerships, evidence-informed design and institutional commitment can support sustainable leadership development at scale.

A Significant Milestone for KEMI

As the national institution mandated to strengthen educational leadership and management through training, research and consultancy, KEMI views the institutionalisation of ESL4JS as a natural extension of its mission. The programme provides a structured and evidence-based approach to developing leadership competencies among school leaders managing junior schools.

The decision to scale the programme was informed

by evidence from the pilot phases, which showed improvements in instructional leadership, school management practices, teacher collaboration and responsiveness to education reforms. These results provided a strong foundation for integrating ESL4JS into KEMI's mainstream professional development portfolio.

Embedding ESL4JS Within KEMI Systems

Over the past several years, KEMI has worked closely with key stakeholders to transition ESL4JS from a project-supported initiative to an institutionally owned programme. This has included strengthening programme management, facilitation, quality assurance, monitoring and learner support mechanisms within existing institutional frameworks.

The programme is now aligned with KEMI's broader professional development architecture. Lessons from the pilot have informed improvements in content delivery, participant engagement, digital learning support and monitoring systems.

The programme has also strengthened KEMI's capacity to deliver blended and online learning, capabilities that are increasingly important as education systems seek flexible, scalable and cost-effective approaches to professional development.

Lessons from the Journey

The transition from pilot implementation to institutionalisation has generated several important lessons.

First, partnerships matter. The success of ESL4JS has been built on collaboration among KEMI, the Ministry of Education, county education structures, development partners and participating school leaders. These partnerships helped ensure that the programme remained aligned with both policy priorities and the realities of school leadership.

Second, evidence should guide decision-making. Continuous monitoring, participant feedback and programme evaluations provided critical insights that informed programme improvements and scaling decisions.

Third, institutional ownership must be intentional. Sustainable programmes require investment in

internal capacity, technical expertise, facilitator development and quality assurance systems from the outset.

The experience also highlighted the opportunities and challenges of technology-enabled professional development. While blended learning expands access and scalability, it must be supported by strong learner support systems and investments in digital capacity.

Finally, leadership development is not a one-time intervention. School leaders require ongoing opportunities for learning, reflection, collaboration and professional growth as educational demands continue to evolve.

In the Future

As Kenya's education system continues to transform, the demand for effective school leadership will only grow. School leaders are expected to navigate curriculum reforms, foster inclusive learning environments, leverage technology, strengthen community engagement and improve learning outcomes.

The future of professional development therefore lies in continuous, accessible and practice-oriented learning opportunities that support leaders throughout their careers. Programmes such as ESL4JS demonstrate how this can be achieved through structured learning pathways, peer collaboration, reflective practice, coaching and technology-enabled delivery.

KEMI envisions a professional development ecosystem where leadership learning becomes an integral part of school improvement and educational transformation. This ecosystem will be driven by strong partnerships, evidence-based programme design, flexible learning modalities and sustained institutional support.

The successful institutionalisation of ESL4JS shows that meaningful and sustainable leadership development is possible when innovation is matched with institutional commitment. The first scaling cohort is therefore the beginning of a new chapter in Kenya's school leadership development agenda, one grounded in continuous learning, sustainability and educational transformation.

Learning to Lead in a Changing Education System

By Dorian Mwangi,
Communication Advisor - VVOB in Kenya

Kenya is currently implementing the Competency-Based Education (CBE), aimed at equipping learners with the knowledge, skills, values and competencies needed to thrive in school, work and life. The approach places greater emphasis on learner-centred teaching and practical application of knowledge, preparing learners for an increasingly dynamic world.

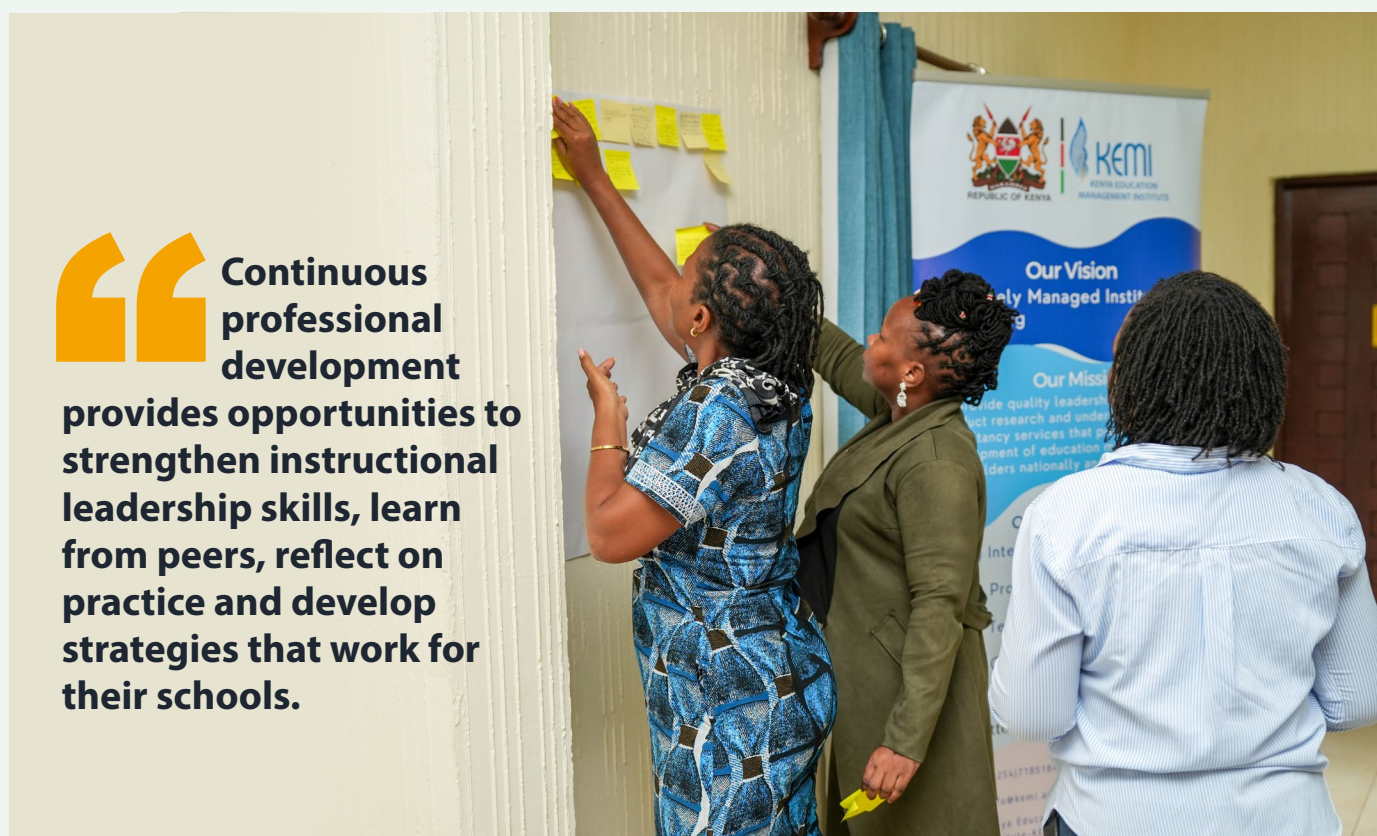
As part of this reform, the country is transitioning to Senior School, the upper secondary level of education that begins at Grade 10. At this stage, learners begin specialising in learning pathways based on their interests and aspirations, such as Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), Social Sciences, and Arts and Sports Science. While much of the focus is often placed on curriculum and classroom practice, the success of

the transition also depends on the people leading schools through change.

School leaders are being called upon to take on roles that extend beyond administration. They are expected to guide curriculum implementation, support teachers through change, strengthen learner support systems and create school environments where both teachers and learners can thrive.

For many school leaders, the challenge is translating the curriculum reforms into meaningful action within their schools. Continuous professional development provides opportunities to strengthen instructional leadership skills, learn from peers, reflect on practice and develop strategies that work for their schools.

“Continuous professional development provides opportunities to strengthen instructional leadership skills, learn from peers, reflect on practice and develop strategies that work for their schools.”



School leaders present group discussion outputs during a collaborative learning activity. | Photo by VVOB

It is within this context that school leaders from Narok, Kwale, Migori and Kitui counties gathered between 22 and 24 April 2026 for the onboarding of the Effective School Leadership for Senior Schools (ESL4SS) course under the [Implementing National Curriculum Reforms through App-based Learning for School Leaders in Secondary Education \(INCREASE\)](#) programme.

The onboarding marked the start of a programme designed to prepare principals, deputy principals and senior teachers for Senior Schools under the new system.

Building on the Junior School course

The ESL4SS course has been developed by the Kenya Education Management Institute (KEMI), with support from VVOB - *education for development*. It builds on lessons from the Effective School Leadership for Junior Schools (ESL4JS) course, which has been implemented with junior school leaders across Kenya since 2022.

Like ESL4JS, the senior school course uses a blended learning model that combines self-paced digital learning through the KEMI app, online engagement sessions and practical school-based application.

Inside the Onboarding Sessions

The onboarding sessions brought together 280 participants who were introduced to the course structure, onboarded onto the KEMI Learning Management System and guided through the digital tools they will use throughout the programme.

Early sessions focused on ICT integration in learning, curriculum implementation support and learner support programmes. Participants were also introduced to the e-portfolio component of the course, where they will document and reflect on how they apply their learning within their schools over the coming months.

Peer learning emerged as a strong aspect of the onboarding sessions. Through group discussions and collaborative activities, school leaders shared experiences, discussed challenges and reflected on how leadership is changing under CBE. For many participants, the blended learning approach stood out as particularly practical, combining flexibility with opportunities for interaction and support.



Participants use the KEMI E-learning app to access course content. | Photo by VVOB

Preparing School Leaders for Senior School

As school leaders take on new responsibilities under Competency-Based Education, access to relevant and practical professional development becomes increasingly important. During the onboarding session in Narok, VVOB in Kenya's Country Programmes Manager, Claire Mazin, highlighted the value of the course in supporting school leaders through this transition.

"We believe that this blended training will be a different learning experience for you and will help make a difference in your respective schools, while being flexible to your busy schedules," she said.

She noted that school leaders play a vital role in creating conditions for effective teaching and learning, making their professional growth an important part of successful education reform. Education officials who attended the onboarding also echoed the importance of strengthening school leadership as part of the wider reform process.

The onboarding reflects a commitment by KEMI and VVOB to strengthening school leadership in Kenya. Through the INCREASE programme, the two organisations have worked alongside the Ministry of Education and other stakeholders to support school leaders as key drivers of quality teaching and improved learning outcomes.

The Next Phase of the Pilot

The onboarding marked only the first phase of the ESL4SS pilot. Participants thereafter moved into self-paced online learning, online check-in sessions and extended learning activities that encourage them to apply what they are learning in their schools.

The goal is not only to strengthen individual school leaders, but also to improve how schools respond to change. By strengthening instructional leadership, the programme aims to better support teachers, improve learning environments and contribute to better outcomes for learners as Kenya continues implementing CBE.

Through the partnership between KEMI and VVOB under the INCREASE programme, ESL4SS forms part of a wider effort to support school leaders through a period of significant transition in education. As the pilot progresses, the experiences and lessons emerging from the course will contribute to ongoing efforts to strengthen school leadership and support the implementation of CBE in Kenya, building on the work of the INCREASE programme to strengthen curriculum reform through app-based learning for school leaders. Sustaining this momentum will require continued collaboration across the education sector to ensure every school leader has access to high-quality professional development.

Managing the Shift From 8-4-4 to CBE at the Senior School Level

By Risper Mumbe,
Education Advisor - VVOB in Kenya

Leading a senior school has become more complex than ever. With the transition from the 8-4-4 system to Competency-Based Education (CBE), school leaders are navigating a shift in how teaching and learning are organised. Unlike the 8-4-4 system, which largely emphasised the acquisition of knowledge and performance in high-stakes examinations, CBE places greater focus on developing learners' competencies through learner-centred teaching and multiple learning pathways. Managing this transition requires school leaders to guide changes in classroom practice while ensuring their schools can effectively implement the new curriculum.

School leaders are therefore expected to support competency-based pedagogy, guide teacher

professional development, oversee assessment, manage learner pathways and lead change, all while many schools continue operating under both the 8-4-4 and CBE systems.

To support school leaders with this transition, the Implementing National Curriculum Reforms through App-based Learning for School Leaders in Secondary Education (INCREASE) programme, implemented through a partnership between the Kenya Education Management Institute (KEMI) and VVOB, launched the Effective School Leadership for Senior Schools (ESL4SS) course in April 2026. Building on the success of its junior school predecessor (Effective School Leadership for Junior Schools (ESL4JS), which demonstrated the value of flexible, blended learning that leaders



Risper Mumbe supporting participants to access the KEMI App during the ESL4SS onboarding | Photo by VVOB

can apply directly within their school routines, ESL4SS strengthens the instructional leadership capacities of senior school heads. Ultimately, the course equips leaders with practical strategies to better support teachers and drive improved learner outcomes.

How School Leaders Helped Design Their Own Training

One of the core strengths of ESL4SS is that it was built using [backward design](#), where, rather than starting with a list of content to teach, the design team began with the desired outcomes, asking: What instructional leadership competencies must school leaders demonstrate to effectively support Competency-Based Education in senior schools?

To answer this, the [Ministry of Education \(MOE\)](#), [Kenya Education Management Institute \(KEMI\)](#) and [VVOB in Kenya](#) conducted a training needs assessment workshop with school leaders from selected counties. By engaging those directly implementing CBE, the programme was designed around the practical challenges facing senior schools rather than theoretical assumptions.

Insights from the successful implementation of ESL4JS also informed the new course. School leaders who participated in the earlier programme valued the blended learning model that offered them the opportunity to strengthen their digital skills while immediately applying new knowledge in their schools.

Flexibility via a Mobile-First, Offline App

One of the strengths carried over from ESL4JS is its flexible blended learning approach, which school leaders consistently identified as one of the programme's greatest advantages. The model allows participants to balance professional learning with the day-to-day demands of leading their schools while immediately applying new knowledge in practice.

As with ESL4JS, physical onboarding is complemented by self-paced study and staggered live online sessions. The programme is delivered through KEMI's mobile-first, offline-capable e-learning application, enabling school leaders to

download course content when connected to the internet and continue learning offline. They only need to reconnect to receive updates, participate in discussion forums or submit assignments, making the course accessible even in areas with limited connectivity.

Continuous Quality Assurance and Impact Tracking

To maintain high-quality delivery across all participating counties, robust quality assurance measures are embedded throughout the programme. KEMI facilitators receive ongoing professional development in blended learning facilitation and use standardised guides to ensure consistent delivery across participating counties.

At the same time, a Learning Management System (LMS)-based digital data ecosystem provides real-time insights into learner progress and participant engagement. Together with learner feedback collected throughout the course, this data enables continuous refinement of both course content and facilitation.

Learning is assessed through LMS analytics, completion rates, reflective assignments completed during self-paced learning and practical school improvement activities observed during planned school visits.

A Programme Backed by Global Evidence

The design of ESL4SS is grounded in global evidence on what makes teacher and school leader professional development effective. Research consistently shows that instructional leadership, collaborative professional learning and ongoing school-based support are among the strongest drivers of improved teaching practice and learner outcomes.

The [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development \(OECD\) Teaching and Learning International Survey \(TALIS 2024\)](#) found that most teachers work in collaborative school environments where professional learning and shared leadership contribute to improved teaching practice. Earlier findings from TALIS 2018 also showed that teachers who regularly engage in collaborative professional

learning report higher confidence, greater job satisfaction and stronger classroom practice.

These findings reinforce the design of the ESL4SS programme, which encourages school leaders to build professional learning communities and support school-based continuous professional development to strengthen teaching practice. The programme also aligns with recommendations from the [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization \(UNESCO\)](#), which emphasise that effective professional development should be continuous, collaborative and closely connected to classroom practice.

Investing in better learning outcomes

ESL4SS is an investment in strengthening instructional leadership across Kenya's senior schools. By equipping school leaders with practical tools to support teachers and lead the implementation of CBE, the programme aims to improve teaching practice and create better learning experiences for every learner.

As Kenya continues its education reforms, strong instructional leadership will remain essential in ensuring that schools are well positioned to deliver high-quality, inclusive education.



Risper addresses school leaders during an ESL4SS training session | Photo by VVOB

Transforming STEM Through Gender-Responsive Teaching

By Mary Oyuke,
Strategic Advisor, Communication and Advocacy - VVOB in Kenya



Participants learning to navigate the CEMASTE eLearning app during onboarding, demonstrating how digital learning supports continuous teacher professional development. | Photo by VVOB

In Kenya's classrooms, teachers make countless small decisions every day. Who they call on to answer a question, which learners they encourage to take on a problem, what career ambitions they treat as realistic. Often without realising it, those decisions reflect gendered assumptions. As Kenya's education system undergoes significant curriculum reform, VVOB and Centre for Mathematics, Science and Technology Education in Africa (CEMASTE) are working to ensure teachers are supported not just on what they teach, but on how they teach it. Our newly developed app-based Teacher Professional Development course is just the start.

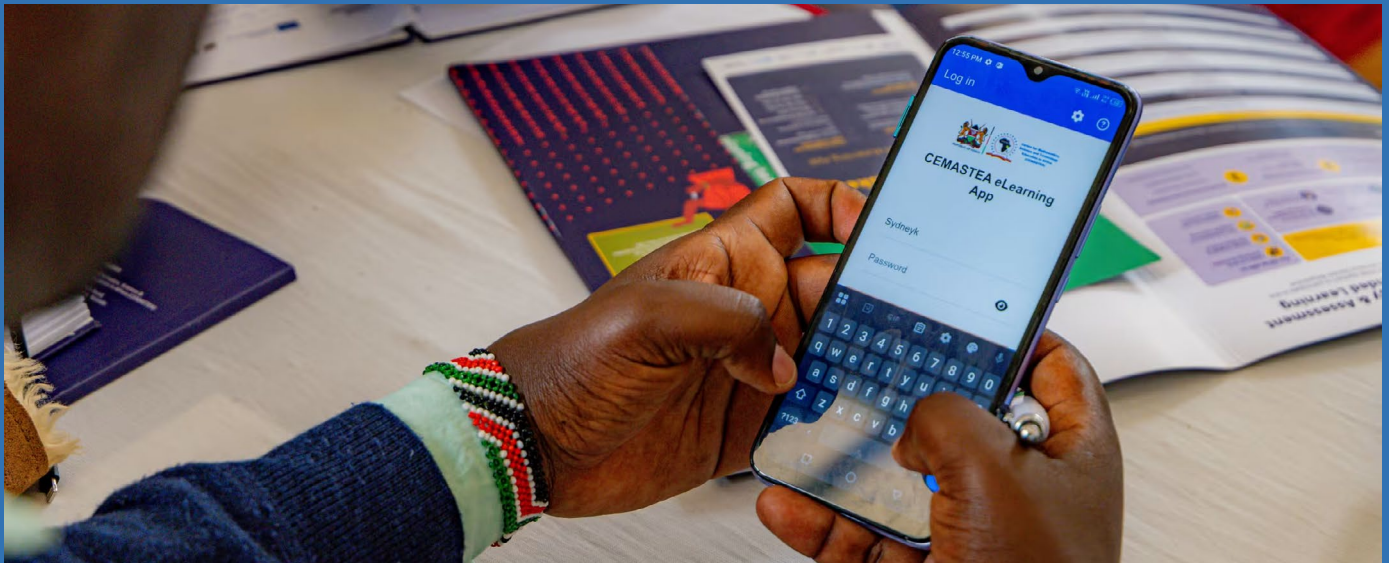
Across Africa, countries are reforming their education systems to align with global ambitions for quality, equitable learning. In Kenya, teachers and school leaders have played a central role in the transition from the 8-4-4 system to Competency-Based Education, introduced in 2017. This shift places greater emphasis on nurturing learners' talents, skills, character, and psychosocial

development, moving beyond rote learning, which characterised the previous system.

It also introduced three academic pathways for learners moving from Junior to Senior School: Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), Social Sciences, and Arts and Sports Science, all designed to align learners' strengths with their future aspirations while advancing progress towards United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Gender Equity Across Career Pathways

Competency-based education career pathways are designed to foster specialised skills and direct preparation of learners for higher education and the workforce, based on their academic interest, natural talents and unique abilities, regardless of gender. However, due to **gendered societal norms, misconceptions and biases**, boys and girls don't



The CEMASTE eLearning app gives teachers flexible access to course content, enabling continuous professional learning beyond the training sessions. | Photo by VVOB

always get the support they need to pursue their dream careers. STEM, for example, which has an enrolment of 60% of Kenyan learners, continues to be misconceived as a boys' domain, while the Arts, considered softer, are more often associated with girls. Subsequently, **different studies** have revealed a general underrepresentation of females in STEM disciplines, which can be attributed to various individual and institutional factors experienced by girls from a young age. These include **teachers' gendered perspectives and practices, use of teaching materials, and instructional methods, which play a significant role in female students' interest, entry and participation in STEM.**

These disparities often extend into adulthood, where the underrepresentation of women in STEM contributes to occupational segregation and persistent gender pay gaps. **Closing the gender gap in STEM is therefore critical for leveraging the economic and social prosperity of countries** since women constitute more than half of the global population, and further, to enhance inclusive economic growth.

The Role of Teachers in Building Inclusive STEM Classrooms

Teachers play a significant role in promoting gender equality and fostering inclusive learning environments. Through their daily interactions with learners, they shape participation, classroom dynamics and experiential activities. However, they

may also bring unconscious biases, stereotypes, and gender norms that can influence how they engage with and support different learners.

They therefore need **to be supported to address biases, employ inclusive practices, and create equitable classrooms, especially in early years.** This is particularly important given that the gender gap in STEM participation widens in lower secondary education (Junior School, catering for 12 to 14-year olds), posing challenges in engaging students in STEM beyond age 13 when career aspirations are typically shaped. It is also necessary for them to assess their gender-related attitudes and interactions especially in STEM fields, underscoring the need for training in **gender-responsive/ gender-transformative pedagogy** (used interchangeably at VVOB).

Innovative Solutions for Inclusive Education: Teacher Professional Development

While STEM teacher professional development is key in Kenya, **existing policies often emphasise content knowledge over pedagogical approaches that address gender bias,** leaving a critical gap in gender-responsive STEM teaching, particularly at the Junior School level. To respond, VVOB in Kenya and **Centre for Mathematics, Science and Technology Education in Africa (CEMASTE)** have partnered in a pilot project to equip teachers with the knowledge, skills and tools to create inclusive STEM classrooms. Through the app-based Teacher

Professional Development course, “Enhancing Gender-Responsive Pedagogy and Assessment in STEM For Junior School Through Blended Learning” nearly 500 teachers across Nyandarua, Vihiga, Uasin Gishu and Tharaka Nithi counties will strengthen their practice and enhance STEM learning outcomes through improved lesson planning, engaging teaching strategies, peer learning and self-reflection.

Delivered through the CEMASTEAs eLearning App, the 120-hour course combines face-to-face sessions, self-paced online learning, and extended practice. Teachers will receive ongoing support through virtual check-ins after each unit, monitoring visits, and peer exchange. This blended approach offers flexibility, encourages collaboration, and helps teachers integrate digital tools effectively into their classrooms.

Getting Things Right: Education Leadership in Practice

Speaking during the teacher onboarding on 16 April, Uasin Gishu County Quality Assurance and Standards Officer, Mr. Moses Miogo, urged participating teachers to seize every opportunity to strengthen their skills, create inclusive classrooms, and inspire learners toward future STEM careers in line with the aspirations of Competency-Based Education.

“Teacher professional development in STEM is a key priority under the Ministry of Education’s National Education Sector Strategic Plan 2023-2027. You must be well prepared to nurture every learner’s potential in STEM,” he said.

He also encouraged teachers to embrace peer learning and Communities of Practice, noting that sustained collaboration is essential for effective implementation of competency-based education. Mr. Miogo commended the partnership between VVOB and CEMASTEAs and expressed confidence in the county’s role in successfully delivering the pilot. On her part, Jane Maweu, VVOB in Kenya Project Coordinator recognised the fundamental role of the **Regional Teachers Initiative for Africa (RTIA)** in delivering quality education and under which the pilot project is being implemented. RTIA supports national systems to strengthen teacher training on gender-responsive pedagogy and career guidance across **Kenya**, **Ghana** and **South Africa**.

The onboarding was preceded by an induction for Heads of Institutions and a County Leadership briefing, both critical in preparing schools for successful implementation of the project and reinforcing the role of education leaders in sustaining impact and improving access to quality education for all learners.

Looking Ahead

The Enhancing Gender-Responsive Pedagogy and Assessment in STEM for Junior School through Blended Learning course is expected to generate evidence and practical insights on effective gender-responsive teaching. Therefore, the rallying call by CEMASTEAs and VVOB officials throughout the onboarding sessions was for the teachers in the pilot project to be champions for meaningful and lasting change as the project grows.



“The teacher accounts for 75% of learner outcomes. If we get it right with the teacher, then learners in these counties, and eventually across the country, will be better positioned to realise their full potential for the future.”

Gladys Masai,
CEMASTEAs CEO

Making Climate Action and Gender Equity Part of Everyday Learning

By Alexander Amos Banda,
Regional Strategic Education Advisor - VVOB in Kenya



A group photo taken during a Teach2Empower learning activity in Mombasa in April 2026. | Photo by VVOB

Significant progress has been made across Africa in embedding gender-responsive pedagogy into teacher development. Yet sustained, system-wide implementation remains a work in progress, particularly where gender equity intersects with environmental sustainability.

Teachers who understand these connections can create classrooms where every child feels included, valued and able to thrive. Building these competencies must become a baseline expectation across Teacher Professional Development (TPD) systems.

The teachers who stand before millions of learners every day are expected to navigate a world shaped by climate disruption, persistent gender inequality, rapid digital transformation, and shifting economic realities, often without the tools they need to do so. The question is no longer whether teacher professional development needs to change, but

whether we are willing to change it fast enough and in the right direction.

While leading the [Teach2Empower \(T2E\) programme](#) in Kenya, implemented in partnership with the [Aga Khan Foundation \(AKF\)](#) in Mombasa, I have had the privilege of witnessing teachers rise to meet these challenges. What I have seen reinforces a conviction I hold deeply: TPD is not a peripheral investment and most certainly not one-off. It is the most direct lever we have for ensuring that learning is relevant, equitable and future-ready.

The scale of the challenge facing Africa's education systems is sobering. A [2026 UNICEF and Dalberg analysis](#) found that climate-related disasters have already caused an estimated US\$1.3 billion in damage to education infrastructure across Eastern and Southern Africa, disrupting learning for 130 million children. By 2050, the resulting loss in future

earnings could reach US\$380 billion. These are the lived realities of the communities our teachers serve.

Yet, much of our TPD infrastructure still reflects a different era, with limited connection to the environmental and social realities learners face today. If teachers are to become effective agents of change, they need more than subject knowledge. They need the confidence, skills, and practical tools to address the environmental and equity challenges increasingly shaping education.

This is precisely the vision articulated in the [African Union's Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2026–2035 \(CESA 26–35\)](#). The strategy places teachers at the centre of education transformation, while identifying green education and gender-transformative approaches as cross-cutting priorities. CESA 26–35 is not simply an aspiration—it is a continental commitment that challenges all of us to build professional development systems capable of delivering meaningful change.

Aligning Teacher Development with Africa's Future

Teach2Empower sits within the [Regional Teachers Initiative for Africa \(RTIA\)](#), which seeks to strengthen the teaching profession across Sub-Saharan Africa by supporting teacher governance, professional development and education reforms.

RTIA is helping countries build a workforce of skilled, motivated and inclusive teachers. As VVOB's contribution to this regional effort, Teach2Empower is already generating valuable lessons from implementation.

At the heart of our approach is VVOB's [Green and Gender Pedagogies Global Model](#) - a comprehensive framework that brings together environmental sustainability and gender-responsive teaching and learning. The model helps teachers, school leaders and education systems understand how the two reinforce one another and how they can be embedded in everyday teaching and professional learning. It expresses what it means for a teacher to become, in the language of the model, an ally for solidarity and alliance for green and gender action. The model helps teachers see new opportunities within what they already teach, making lessons more relevant to learners and the realities they experience every day.

This is exactly what we are seeing in practice. Junior secondary school teachers participating in the programme report greater confidence in integrating green and gender-responsive perspectives across different subjects, not as additional topics, but as lenses that enrich existing lessons. Many have shared that the course has strengthened their delivery of Kenya's Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC).



Group discussions during a Teach2Empower training session in Mombasa County | Photo by VVOB

The Value of Co-design

One of the programme's defining features has been its co-design approach: building the professional development journey with teachers rather than for them. By grounding the course in teachers' own experiences, contexts and challenges, we have created learning that resonates rather than prescribes.

This reflects one of the central principles of VVOB's Green and Gender Pedagogies Global Model that effective TPD should be collaborative, continuous and action-oriented rather than a one-off transfer of knowledge.

The Role of School Leadership

Another important lesson emerging from Teach2Empower is the critical role of school leadership. Schools with engaged and supportive leaders consistently demonstrate stronger uptake of new practices. This is no coincidence. The Global Model recognises school leaders as essential drivers of professional learning, responsible for creating environments where green and gender commitments can thrive.

Effective TPD cannot stop at the classroom door. When school leaders actively champion new approaches through their decisions, their support for collaboration, and the values they model, teachers are far more likely to sustain meaningful change. Investing in teacher development without investing in school leadership is a strategy with a leak in it.

Connecting Gender, Green Learning and Inclusion

What we have learnt in Mombasa reinforces a set of principles that extend far beyond one programme. Effective TPD must be sustained rather than episodic. It must be co-created with teachers, grounded in classroom realities and supported by school leaders. Above all, it must prepare teachers for the world their learners are inheriting. A world that demands environmentally conscious, gender-equitable and critically engaged citizens.

Africa's teachers are ready for this challenge. The educators I have worked alongside are already asking difficult questions, experimenting with new approaches, reflecting on their practice and adapting to changing realities. Our responsibility as programme designers, policymakers, funders and partners is to build systems that match their ambition.

That is the promise of RTIA. That is the work of Teach2Empower. And that, I believe, is the future of teacher professional development in Africa.



“The course has helped me find simpler ways to bring green and gender concepts into my classroom - issues my students are already living with.”
- Teacher, Mombasa

Alexander Banda engaging participants during a session in Mombasa | Photo by VVOB

Regional Perspectives on Teacher Professional Development



Beyond Access: Why Investing in Girls' Education Still Matters

By Karen Ondwasi,
FAWE Kenya



Learners participating in a school assembly. | Photo by FAWE Rwanda

Across Africa, the story of girls' education is one of remarkable progress. Millions more girls are enrolling in school, completing primary education and transitioning to secondary and tertiary levels than ever before. These gains reflect decades of investment, policy reform, advocacy and commitment from governments, communities, families and development partners.

Yet the conversation on girls' education must now evolve. The question is no longer simply whether girls can access school. The more important question is whether education systems are enabling girls to learn, thrive, complete their education and successfully transition into employment, entrepreneurship and leadership.

This shift matters because girls' education is one of Africa's most strategic investments. Educated girls are more likely to participate in the labour market, contribute to economic growth, delay

early marriage, improve health outcomes for their families and invest in the education of future generations. As Africa seeks to harness its demographic dividend and accelerate socio-economic transformation, ensuring that girls remain in school and acquire relevant skills is more important than ever.

At the same time, new challenges are emerging. Conflict, displacement, climate-related shocks, economic pressures and growing inequalities continue to disrupt learning across many parts of the continent. These disruptions affect all learners, but girls often experience the consequences more severely. Temporary interruptions to schooling can quickly lead to increased domestic responsibilities, heightened protection risks, early marriage or permanent withdrawal from education.

These realities highlight the importance of building education systems that apart from being accessible,

are resilient and inclusive. Strong systems are those that can sustain learning during periods of disruption and continue supporting learners when circumstances become difficult. At the centre of these systems are teachers.

Teachers play a critical role in determining whether girls remain engaged, supported and successful in school. Beyond delivering content, they help create safe learning environments, identify learners at risk of dropping out, challenge harmful gender stereotypes and encourage girls to pursue opportunities in areas such as Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).

This is why continued investment in teacher professional development remains essential. Teachers must be equipped with the skills, knowledge and support needed to respond to diverse learner needs and to change education contexts. Gender-responsive pedagogy is particularly important because it helps educators recognise and address barriers that affect participation and achievement, ensuring that girls and boys can learn and succeed on equal footing.

Encouragingly, many African countries have already established strong policy frameworks that promote gender equality and inclusive education. The challenge today is less about policy design and more about implementation. Too often, promising policies are constrained by limited financing, insufficient teacher support and gaps in accountability and monitoring.

The future of girls' education will therefore depend on sustained investment across the entire education ecosystem. This includes investing in teachers, school leadership, learner support systems, safe learning environments and pathways that enable girls to transition successfully through education and into meaningful opportunities.

For **Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE)**, this remains a central priority. Advancing girls' education is not just about opening the school gate; but is about ensuring that every girl who enters has the support, skills and opportunities needed to succeed. As Africa looks to the future, continued investment in girls' education is one of the smartest investments the continent can make for its prosperity, resilience and sustainable development.



FAWE at the 42nd Gender Is My Agenda Campaign (GIMAC) Conference. | Photo by FAWE Africa

Connecting Africa Through Teacher Professional Development

By Everlyne Nyongesa,

Regional Gender Technical Lead - VVOB in Kenya



Delegates follow proceedings during a regional convening focused on improving education across the continent. | Photo by VVOB

Africa stands at a pivotal moment in its demographic and educational trajectory. With the youngest population globally, it is projected that [one in four people worldwide will be African by 2050](#). The continent holds immense potential to benefit from a demographic dividend. However, this depends heavily on the quality, equity and relevance of its education.

Across the continent, education systems face interconnected challenges such as economic pressures, climate change, technological disruption and entrenched inequality. Approximately [118 million children and youth are out of school](#). Additionally, [90 percent of ten-year-olds in sub-Saharan Africa are unable to read and understand a simple text](#). While the contexts may differ from one

country to another, these challenges are widely shared. They present an opportunity for African countries to learn from one another's experiences and develop solutions that can be adapted across borders.

Why Regional Collaboration Matters

Regional collaboration creates space for governments, institutions and education practitioners to work towards shared goals, rather than developing solutions in isolation. This collaborative approach is reflected in continental frameworks such as [Agenda 2063](#), the [Continental Education Strategy for Africa \(CESA\)](#) and the [Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa \(STISA\)](#), which provide a shared vision for

strengthening education systems across Africa. By working together, countries can develop common competency frameworks, strengthen teacher and school leadership development, and scale proven innovations beyond individual projects or national borders.

The African Union has also created platforms that encourage this exchange. Initiatives such as the African Union Continental Teachers Awards recognise excellence and innovation in teaching, while the [African Union Teachers Forum](#) brings educators together to share knowledge, strengthen professional networks and promote continuous learning. Together, these initiatives support the African Union Decade of Accelerated Action for the Transformation of Education and Skills Development in Africa (2025–2034) and reinforce the importance of cross-country learning.

The Importance of Investing in Quality Teacher Professional Development

Teachers are the single most important factor in translating education policy into meaningful learning. According to the [UNESCO and the International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030](#), the world will need an additional 44 million teachers by 2030, including around 15 million in sub-Saharan Africa, to achieve universal primary and secondary education. Meeting this demand requires sustained investment in their professional growth throughout their careers.

[The role of teachers has also evolved significantly.](#)

Today's teachers are expected to support learners in developing not only foundational literacy and numeracy, but also critical thinking, creativity, digital competencies, social-emotional skills, environmental awareness, gender equality and responsible citizenship. These competencies are highlighted in UNESCO's *Reimagining Our Futures Together* report and are echoed in the African Union's Agenda 2063, which both emphasise the need for education systems that prepare learners for an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

As many countries adopt competency-based curricula, teachers are expected to shift from content delivery to facilitating inquiry, collaboration and real-world problem-solving. This transformation also demands that teachers effectively use digital tools and learner data, engage in peer learning and follow professional standards that guide career growth.

Despite these demands, [traditional TPD approaches remain prevalent](#). They rely heavily on standardised, workshop-based training that is often disconnected from teachers' classroom realities. More effective approaches build on teachers' existing knowledge and provide ongoing opportunities to learn, collaborate, practise, and reflect within their own contexts. [Evidence](#) shows that combining approaches such as professional learning communities, coaching, mentoring, and school-based support is more likely to improve teaching practice and learner outcomes than one-off training events.



“Teachers are the single most important factor in translating education policy into meaningful learning.”

RTIA's Contribution to Strengthening Teacher Development

The [Regional Teachers Initiative for Africa \(RTIA\)](#) brings together the African Union Commission, the European Union and UNESCO, alongside national governments and technical partners, to strengthen teacher development systems across the continent. VVOB as part of the RTIA, is working with governments and education institutions to strengthen teacher professional development in Gender-Responsive Pedagogy (GRP). This means supporting teachers to create more inclusive classrooms where every learner, regardless of gender, can participate, thrive and pursue their aspirations.

In Kenya, VVOB is partnering with the [Centre for Mathematics, Science and Technology Education in Africa \(CEMASTEA\)](#) to pilot a blended professional development programme that helps STEM teachers integrate gender-responsive teaching strategies into their classroom practice. The programme combines face-to-face training with online learning, coaching and peer support, equipping teachers with practical approaches they can apply in their schools while generating evidence to inform future scale-up.

Beyond Kenya, similar work is underway across the continent. In Ghana, VVOB is supporting efforts to strengthen gender-responsive teaching and career guidance so that more girls are encouraged to pursue STEM pathways. In South Africa, the focus is on embedding gender-transformative approaches within teacher professional development, helping educators challenge stereotypes and create learning environments where all learners can succeed.

While these initiatives respond to different national priorities, they are connected by a common goal: strengthening teacher professional development through approaches that are practical, evidence-informed and rooted in local education systems. By facilitating collaboration across countries, RTIA creates opportunities for governments and partners to learn from one another, adapt successful approaches and accelerate progress towards more equitable, inclusive and high-quality education across Africa.

Creating Systems that Last

Strengthening and sustaining TPD systems must shift toward lifelong, flexible and collaborative learning models. Regional collaboration will remain essential in supporting shared standards, cross-country learning, and scaling effective practices. [Regional Economic Communities \(RECs\)](#) will play a central role in facilitating national and sub-regional adaptation and strengthening accountability.

Improved measurement and data use will also be key. Systems need robust mechanisms to track progress, evaluate effectiveness and guide continuous improvement. In addition, there is a growing need for longitudinal research to understand what works overtime and at scale. Global North–South partnerships will be instrumental in strengthening technical and research capacity based on the regional realities and context.

Finally, sustainable progress will depend on embedding professional development within institutional structures, financing systems and career pathways, while designing programmes that support teachers without overwhelming them.

Trusting Teachers to Guide the Future of Learning

By Aisha Abeid,

Senior Programme Coordinator - Aga Khan Foundation Kenya



Aisha Abeid with participants during a session on Teach2Empower. | Photo by VVOB

After nearly twelve years of training and supporting teachers across Kenya, you learn a lot about what works in professional development. I have walked alongside educators across foundational learning, ICT integration, learning through play, gender-responsive pedagogy and most recently, embedding green and gender pedagogy across the curriculum. This latest effort is part of the Teach2Empower initiative which aims at equipping teachers with the green, digital and gender-transformative skills needed to guide learners toward a sustainable future.

If this journey has taught me anything, it is that before a teacher is an educator, they are a human being first. They require care, empathy and compassion. If we want to support them holistically, we must connect to the heart before we can expect to move the hand or the head. My philosophy is rooted in getting in touch with a teacher's lived experiences and listening to their challenges with an open mind. Only then can we collaborate effectively to improve learning outcomes.

Lessons from the Ground

Working directly with teachers, and school communities has shaped how I approach my role every day, leaving me with a few core lessons that guide my work.

First and foremost, authentic relationships matter; the interpersonal skills we bring to the table must be genuine. Caring about educators as individuals creates a foundation for collaboration.

Secondly, Because the stakeholders we work with are experts in their fields, we must focus on co-designing working models with them rather than dictating solutions to them. This collaborative spirit relies heavily on the power of listening, honouring the universal desire to be heard and understood, which, alongside genuine appreciation, forms the ultimate ingredient for a lasting partnership.

Finally, adopting a strength-based lens allows us to accept people exactly as they are, focusing on and lifting their unique strengths rather than looking at them through a lens of deficit.

Evolving Realities and Contextualised Support

The world is changing rapidly and so are our classrooms. Today's learners are digitally literate, requiring teachers to constantly adapt and master 21st-century skills. Furthermore, the environments teachers operate in are increasingly complex. Apart from technical training, teachers also need psychosocial support. We must nurture teacher agency, recognising that they are the primary agents of change.

This requires a massive mindset shift away from a one-size-fits-all training. Instead, we must help individual teachers define their unique classroom challenges and develop localised solutions so that they take ownership of their pedagogical approaches.

Why Initiatives Like Teach2Empower Matter

Instead of handing down a pre-packaged curriculum, the Teach2Empower model treats educators as equal partners in creating their own professional development. It also meets teachers exactly where they are, rather than assuming everyone already has a deep grasp of emerging topics; the programme builds in intentional introductory sessions. For instance, in our green and gender course, we ensure teachers establish a shared, comfortable understanding of environmental science and gender essentials before asking them to weave these complex concepts into their daily lesson plans.

On the ground, this approach transforms how we offer support. It moves away from rigid workshops and into regular classroom observations coupled with supportive, intra-school reflections. It means creating safe, accessible spaces, often as simple as a WhatsApp group, where teachers can celebrate their wins and voice their struggles without fear of judgement. As a teacher myself, I know that when you feel confident in a model, implementing it becomes second nature. By actively coaching teachers through practical, everyday tasks like lesson planning, we build that confidence.



Aisha Abeid at a previous event | Photo by AKF

Voices from the Field



Dismantling Classroom Bias Through Targeted Teacher Training

The push for Gender-Responsive pedagogy (GRP) in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) is a current priority under the Competency-Based Education (CBE) system.

Through the [Regional Teachers Initiative for Africa \(RTIA\)](#), VVOB in Kenya has partnered with the [Centre for Mathematics, Science and Technology Education in Africa \(CEMASTEa\)](#) to pilot an innovative, blended GRP for STEM training programme.

We caught up with two training coordinators during the onboarding of teachers to the course to discuss how they are bringing GRP directly to the teachers.



1. You Can Only Give What You Have

A Conversation with Joseph Kuria, Mathematics Trainer - CEMASTEAM



Joseph Kuria | Photo by VVOB

Demystifying Gender-Responsive Pedagogy

“Pedagogy refers to ways or approaches to teaching,” Joseph explains. “And while there are so many approaches to teaching, in this specific case of gender-responsive pedagogy, we want to infuse issues to do with gender into the teaching process.

In our country, we want girls as well as boys to actively participate in learning. But in many instances, the girl child has been left behind, especially in STEM subjects. We have very good careers in STEM and these careers should be open to both boys and girls, meaning that learning opportunities in our schools should be equal for both.”

The Preparedness Gap

When asked about the current gaps in classroom integration, Joseph points directly to teacher readiness:

“The major issue is the preparedness of the teachers. For effective gender-responsive pedagogy, teachers need to be trained. You can only give what you have. So, we feel that for gender-responsive pedagogy to take root within our schools, teachers must be prepared.”

In practice, Joseph notes that being gender-responsive changes daily classroom routines: “The language teachers use in the classroom should encourage both boys and girls to participate in the lessons. The classroom arrangement and the materials being used should all be geared toward supporting all learners to learn better in an inclusive environment.”

The Power of a Blended Pilot

The pilot across Nyandarua, Vihiga, Uasin Gishu and Tharaka Nithi counties aimed to solve the challenge of scale, given its blended approach. “We feel that we may not be able to reach all teachers comprehensively, but we can make use of online facilities to reach as many as possible. Instead of having a one-off face-to-face session, it adds more value if we continue the training for longer through online platforms.”

For the future, Joseph is optimistic about scaling nationally. “Once we establish the impact of this pilot phase within our schools, we can see what needs to be improved and enhanced before we expand to other counties across the country. I know it may not be a very cheap venture, but we can also consider ways of bringing other partners on board to work with us.”

2. Challenging Unconscious Biases

A Conversation with Makoba Kizito, Dean, Biology department and STEM Programme Coordinator, CEMASTE A



Makoba Kizito | Photo by VVOB

Practicing Gender-Responsive Pedagogy

For Makoba Kizito, gender-responsive pedagogy is about deep, intentional awareness. “It is about being mindful of circumstances that happen, often completely unconsciously, that affect how different genders learn,” he says. “Sometimes, the way we give instructions can subtly favour boys, leaving girls to feel an activity isn’t for them. GRP is about actively designing a neutral, inclusive environment where all learners feel like they belong.”

That same intentionality is important in teacher professional development. Creating gender-responsive training means ensuring that both women and men have equal opportunities to participate and contribute, particularly where one gender may be underrepresented. It also involves reviewing training materials, examples and facilitation approaches through a gender lens to eliminate bias and create learning experiences that

are inclusive from the outset. By modelling these practices during teacher professional development, facilitators reinforce the same principles teachers are expected to apply in their own classrooms.

“Sometimes, the way you give instructions might sound as though it favours a certain gender, leaving boys or girls feeling like a particular activity is not meant for them. It is simply about being aware and providing a neutral environment that favours all learners, regardless of gender.”

Overcoming the Gender Balance Gap in STEM

County enrolment data from CEMASTE A’s reports reveal that math and science teachers are still predominantly male. This makes gender-responsive training necessary, ensuring that every educator, regardless of their own gender, is gently guided on how to equally encourage and support both boys and girls in the classroom.

“When we call out for training, you will always find that the male teachers are the majority, especially in the STEM field,” Makoba notes. “We keep on asking, why can’t we have more females? But the response is often that the STEM field simply doesn’t have as many female teachers as male.”

While CEMASTEIA cannot immediately correct national teacher distribution numbers, the RTIA programme allows them to rigorously evaluate and audit their own training materials. By intentionally integrating GRP into teacher professional development, the project introduces educators to critical, inclusive frameworks. This foundation enables junior school teachers to run active, balanced group work where both girls and boys are pushed into leadership roles.

Reaching teachers with offline-ready apps

To ensure these gender-responsive strategies reach teachers in every corner of the country, the programme introduced a major delivery innovation that is a dedicated mobile app.

“To a large extent, our history was focused on using hard manuals and training was face-to-face,” Makoba says. “But now, VVOB has come in with the

idea of a mobile app, which is novel because all teachers have access to it. Another beauty of the app is that it can run offline.”

Because Kenya is vast and internet connectivity can be a major hurdle in remote sub-counties, the offline capability allows teachers to download the GRP modules when they have access, study flexibly on their own schedule and log back online only to upload assignments. This minimises the friction of continuous professional development, ensuring that long-term, self-paced interactions with inclusive content replace one-off, easily forgotten workshops.

Extending active learning to the Community

Ultimately, Makoba sees a direct link between inclusive classrooms and community transformation. When teachers use active, gender-responsive strategies, it changes how students interact with real-world problems through the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC).

“I think the key is making communities understand the role of education,” Makoba concludes. “If communities can see that education pays back into the community, we will see a lot of support.”

Leading Together: How Dennis Owino Is Building a Collaborative School Culture



Dennis Owino presenting during an in-person session of the ESL4JS course. | Photo by VVOB

When 35-year-old Dennis Owino walks into his Grade 9 classroom, he sees young people whose futures, much like his own years ago, can be transformed through education.

“Education changed my life,” he says. “Coming from a humble background, it gave me exposure, knowledge and confidence. This opened doors that would have otherwise remained closed, creating opportunities to pursue leadership roles and serve my community. It also shaped my entire worldview.”

That belief has guided Dennis throughout his career since he began teaching in Meru County in 2014. Today, as Principal of The Makueni School, he is driven by the purpose to create opportunities for both learners and teachers to succeed.

“Every day, I step into school not just to teach, but to ignite dreams,” Dennis says. “Teaching is my calling.”

Embracing Shared Leadership

In April 2024, Dennis joined the Effective School Leadership for Junior Schools (ESL4JS) course under the Implementing National Curriculum Reforms through App-based Learning for School Leaders in Secondary Education (INCREASE) programme, seeking practical ways to strengthen his leadership. What he did not expect was how much it would change the way he approached leadership itself.

“The course challenged me to reflect deeply on my leadership style,” he admits.

One of the biggest changes was moving away from a top-down approach to one built on collaboration. “I now involve staff more intentionally in decision-making and encourage shared responsibilities, ensuring every team member feels valued and contributes meaningfully to the school’s progress.”

Today, regular consultative meetings are a staple of school life in Makueni School, giving teachers a voice in shaping school policy. The result has been a noticeable boost in staff morale alongside stronger academic engagement from the students.

Learning as a Team

Rather than keeping what he learnt to himself, Dennis looked for ways to extend it across the school.

He introduced weekly reflective leadership forums, where teachers gather to tackle classroom management issues and share practical solutions. The sessions have become a space for honest conversations and shared learning.

“Through my participation in the ESL4JS course, I have taken initiative in leading professional development sessions for my colleagues,” he explains. “For example, I introduced a weekly reflective leadership forum for teachers where we share challenges and solutions related to learner performance and classroom management. This has fostered a stronger culture of collaboration and innovation at our school”.

Finding Solutions Together

Like many schools implementing Competency-Based Education, The Makueni School has faced its share of challenges, including shortage of instructional materials as the new curriculum was introduced.

Instead of waiting for external solutions, Dennis and his colleagues adapted. Teachers worked together to pool curriculum designs, draft custom lesson notes, create improvised physical teaching aids and organise interactive group activities. To ensure no learner was left behind, they also restructured physical spaces to reduce class sizes and deliver more individualised attention.

“The ESL4JS course equipped me with practical approaches to problem-solving and resource management,” he explains. “It reinforced the importance of working together and making the best use of the resources available.”

A Vision for the Future

Dennis dreams of seeing a teaching staff that is fully equipped to drive school improvement independently. Beyond Makueni, he aspires to contribute to nationwide education policy, advocating for continuous professional development and learner-centred leadership across Kenya.

His advice to fellow school leaders is simple:

“Build a culture where people learn together. Open communication, collaboration and reflective practice strengthen the entire school.”

With every reflective forum and shared decision, Principal Dennis Owino is proving that when leaders choose to listen, real transformation follows.



**The ESL4JS course
equipped me
with practical
approaches to problem-
solving and resource
management**
- Dennis Owino

Interview Features



Dr. Martha Muhwezi, Executive Director, FAWE Africa



Q1: Please introduce yourself, your role and the work you lead/support at FAWE.

A: I am Dr. Martha Muhwezi, the Institutional Head of FAWE Africa. I provide leadership oversight across 34 chapters in 33 countries to strengthen the implementation of programmes and interventions that advance education systems across the continent. I also lead advocacy

initiatives at regional and continental levels to promote gender equality in education.

Q2: For readers who may not be familiar with FAWE, could you briefly tell us about the organisation and its mission?

A: Forum for African Women Educationalists is a pan-African organisation committed to advancing gender equality in education across Africa. Our mandate is to ensure that girls and women have equitable access to quality education and are able to complete their learning journey in safe, inclusive, and supportive environments. We work to influence education policy, strengthen gender-responsive pedagogy, support girls' retention and transition through the education system, and address key barriers such as poverty, harmful social norms, and gender-based violence. We operate through 33 national chapters across 34 countries, enabling us to drive impact at both community and policy level across the continent.

Q3: FAWE has been involved in regional conversations around girls' education and gender-responsive pedagogy for many years. How has this work evolved over time?

A: FAWE's work has evolved alongside Africa's education journey. In the early years, much of the focus was on ensuring that girls could access education by addressing barriers such as poverty, harmful social norms, and early marriage. While expanding access remains important, the conversation has increasingly shifted from getting girls into school to ensuring they learn, thrive, and successfully transition into further education, employment, and leadership.

This evolution brought greater attention to what happens inside the classroom, leading FAWE to champion Gender-Responsive Pedagogy (GRP) as a way of creating more inclusive and effective learning environments. Over time, the focus has moved beyond classroom practice to institutionalising GRP within teacher

education systems, policies, and professional development frameworks.

Today, we are advancing the conversation further toward education systems that are inclusive by design. As Africa seeks to harness its demographic dividend, education must equip girls not only to succeed academically, but also to lead, innovate, and contribute to the continent's social and economic transformation.

Q4: From FAWE's perspective, what are some of the most pressing challenges currently facing girls' education across the region?

A: One of the greatest challenges facing girls' education today is ensuring that education systems remain relevant to the realities of the 21st century. Access has improved significantly across much of Africa, but too many girls still struggle to transition successfully through education and into meaningful employment or entrepreneurship. We continue to face challenges related to teacher shortages, gender norms, school safety, and financing, but we must also confront a larger question: are our education systems preparing girls for the future Africa is trying to build? Education must equip young women not only to succeed academically, but to lead, innovate, participate in STEM fields, and contribute to economic transformation. The question is no longer only whether girls can access school. The question is whether our education systems are preparing girls for the future of work, leadership, entrepreneurship, and participation in a rapidly changing world shaped by technology, climate change, and shifting labour markets.

Q5: Why is teacher professional development particularly important in advancing inclusion and equity in education?

A: Teachers are the primary agents through whom education policies and reforms are translated into classroom practice. Even the most progressive policies cannot achieve their intended impact if teachers are not equipped to respond to the diverse needs of learners.

From a gender perspective, professional development helps teachers recognise and address biases that may reinforce inequalities in the classroom. Through gender-responsive and increasingly gender-transformative approaches, teachers can create learning environments that challenge stereotypes, promote positive social norms, and support all learners to reach their full potential.

Ultimately, inclusion and equity are achieved in classrooms. Well-equipped teachers are better able to identify barriers to learning, adapt their teaching, and create safe and supportive environments where every learner feels valued. Investing in teacher professional development is therefore one of the most effective ways to build education systems that leave no learner behind.

Q6: How does FAWE approach gender-responsive pedagogy within its work and partnerships?

A: FAWE works directly with teachers through in-service training programmes that equip them to identify and address gender barriers in teaching and learning. We also collaborate education ministries and teacher training institutions to integrate GRP into teacher education curricula, ensuring that new teachers enter the profession with the competencies needed to support all learners effectively.

Beyond teacher training, FAWE works closely with Ministries of Education, teacher training colleges, and other education stakeholders to institutionalise GRP within national education systems. Through our partnerships, we advocate for the adoption and integration of GRP within teacher education frameworks, professional development programmes, and education policies, helping to move GRP from a project-based intervention to a sustainable system-wide approach.

FAWE also supports governments and partners to monitor and evaluate the impact of GRP implementation. This helps generate evidence on what works, informs policy and practice, and strengthens the case for scaling up gender-

responsive approaches across education systems.

Q7: What opportunities do regional platforms such as RTIA create for organisations working in teacher professional development?

A: Regional platforms such as RTIA are important because they help Africa move from isolated success stories to systems transformation. Too often, countries solve similar challenges independently. Regional collaboration allows us to accelerate learning, scale proven approaches, and strengthen policy coherence across borders. For FAWE, some of our most impactful interventions, including gender-responsive pedagogy, have grown because countries learned from one another and adapted successful models to their own contexts.

Q8: Why is collaboration important in strengthening education systems?

A: No single institution can transform education systems alone. Governments, teachers, universities, development partners, civil society, and communities each hold part of the solution. Collaboration allows us to align efforts around a shared vision, mobilise resources more effectively, and scale innovations that would otherwise remain localised. In today's interconnected world, collaboration is no longer optional; it is essential for achieving sustainable and equitable education outcomes.

Q9: What lessons or promising practices are beginning to emerge from these regional collaborations?

A: First, having a shared understanding and common language around teacher professional development, gender-responsive pedagogy, and increasingly gender-transformative pedagogy makes a big difference. It helps countries and partners speak to the same issues and learn from each other more effectively.

Peer learning is also very powerful. When teachers, trainers, and policymakers engage directly across countries, the learning becomes

practical and grounded in real classroom experiences. It helps move ideas from theory into practice much faster.

I see a clear shift toward institutionalising teacher development, rather than relying on short-term projects. Regional collaboration is helping countries embed gender-responsive and gender-transformative approaches into teacher training systems and continuous professional development.

There is also a stronger focus on using evidence better. Countries are not just implementing approaches, but also documenting what works, especially in changing classroom practices and challenging harmful gender norms. This is strengthening decision-making and investment.

Finally, collaboration is helping us understand that scaling does not mean copying. It means adapting good practices from one context to another while staying true to the core principles of inclusion, equity, and transformation.

One lesson emerging strongly is that sustainable change happens when reforms are embedded within systems rather than implemented as stand-alone projects. Africa's education future will be shaped not by isolated interventions, but by the ability of institutions to sustain and scale what works.

Q10: What role does policy frameworks play in ensuring that professional development initiatives remain inclusive and sustainable?

A: Policy frameworks are essential because they anchor teacher professional development (TPD) within national and continental education systems, making it structured, inclusive, and sustainable rather than project based.

At continental level, the CESA 2026–2035 Strategic Objective 2 provides a clear direction by prioritising stronger teacher policies, continuous professional development, a more attractive teaching profession, and improved school leadership, including increased female representation. This ensures inclusion and

equity are built into system reform, not treated as add-ons.

Strong policy frameworks are particularly important as countries seek to navigate rapid social, economic, and technological change. They provide continuity, direction, and accountability, ensuring that reforms outlive individual projects, leaders, and funding cycles.

Q11: Looking ahead, what areas should education stakeholders prioritise most in supporting teachers and learners?

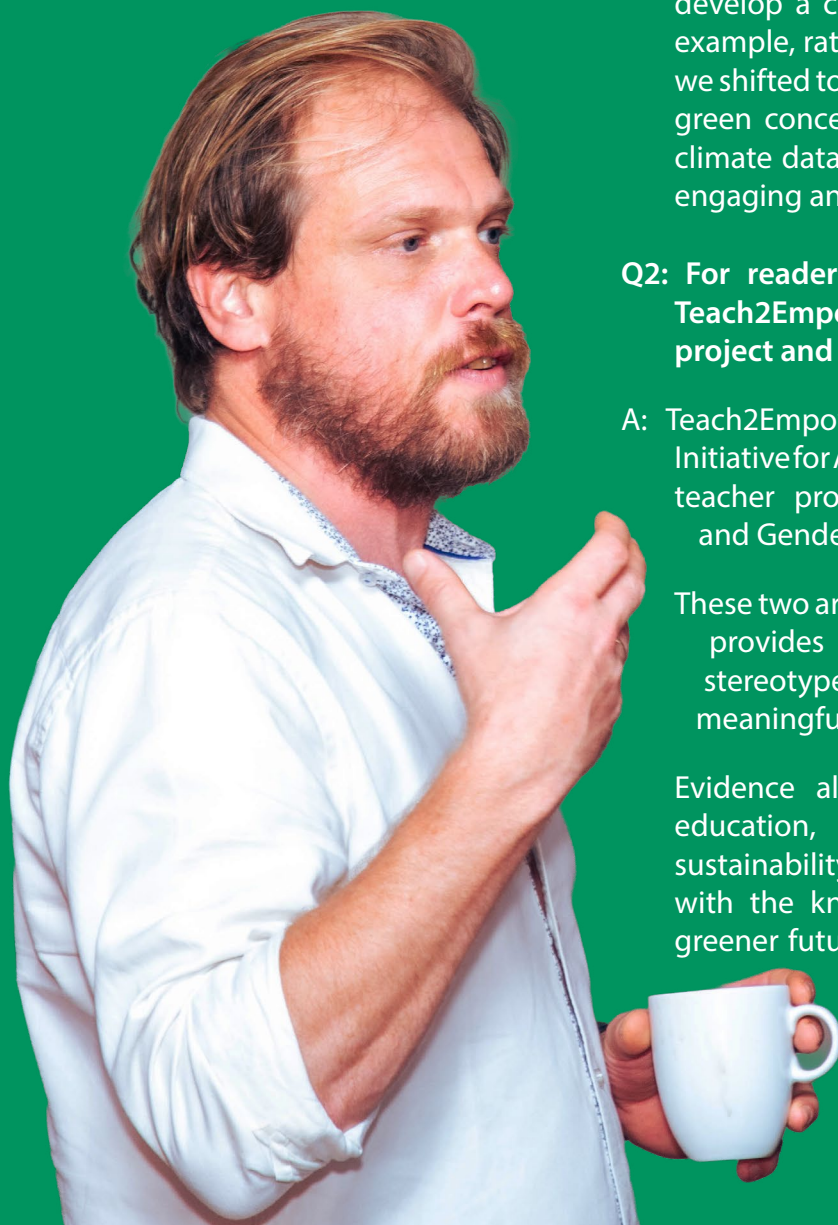
A: Looking ahead, education stakeholders must focus on three areas. First, investing in teachers and school leaders, who remain the most important drivers of learning outcomes. Second, ensuring that education systems equip learners with the skills needed for a rapidly changing world, including digital literacy, critical thinking, innovation, and entrepreneurship. Third, strengthening the connection between education and economic

opportunity so that young people can transition successfully into employment and livelihoods. If Africa is to harness its demographic dividend, these investments cannot wait.

Q12: What gives you hope when you think about the future of education in Africa?

A: What gives me hope is Africa's young people. Every day, I meet girls and young women who continue to dream, innovate, and persevere despite significant challenges. I also see governments, educators, and partners increasingly recognising that education is apart from a social sector issue, is a strategic investment in Africa's future. We have the talent, the energy, and the solutions. The question is not whether Africa can transform its education systems. The question is whether we will act with the urgency and scale that this generation deserves.

Rupert Corbishley, Education Advisor-Africa, Aga Khan Foundation



Q1: Please introduce yourself, your role at Aga Khan Foundation, and the work you support under Teach2Empower (T2E).

A: I am the Education Advisor for Africa at the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF), based in Nairobi, Kenya. I provide strategic and technical leadership to education teams in Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique, Tanzania and Uganda, supporting innovation, evidence-based approaches, programme quality, and learning. I also lead AKF's global work on Climate and Environmental Education.

Under Teach2Empower, I have been leading the technical design of the Green and Gender course alongside colleagues from AKF, Creative Action Institute, Curriculum Support Officers and participating teachers. A key lesson has been the value of co-design. Working closely with teachers challenged many of our assumptions and helped us develop a course that is practical and relevant. For example, rather than teaching about climate change, we shifted towards showing teachers how to integrate green concepts into existing lessons, such as using climate data in mathematics, which proved far more engaging and immediately applicable.

Q2: For readers who may not yet be familiar with Teach2Empower, could you briefly tell us about the project and what it seeks to achieve?

A: Teach2Empower is part of the Regional Teachers Initiative for Africa (RTIA), with a focus on strengthening teacher professional development through Green and Gender approaches.

These two areas are closely connected. Green learning provides opportunities to challenge gender stereotypes, promote inclusion and create more meaningful learning experiences.

Evidence also shows strong links between girls' education, climate resilience, environmental sustainability and poverty reduction. Equipping girls with the knowledge and skills to participate in a greener future benefits not only individuals but also communities and societies.

Q3: In your view, what does meaningful and inclusive teacher support look like today?

A: Meaningful teacher support goes beyond supervision. It focuses on helping teachers grow professionally in an environment built on trust and continuous learning.

Three principles stand out. First, teachers need supportive relationships where they feel safe to try new approaches and learn from mistakes to continuously improve. Second, professional development should promote teacher ownership, enabling educators to identify their own learning priorities rather than simply being told what to do. Finally, support should recognise that teachers learn differently. At AKF, we refer to this as a Fabric of Support, a combination of mentoring, peer learning, digital communities, podcasts and practical classroom resources that provides teachers with multiple ways to access support throughout their professional journey.

Q4: Why is it important for teacher professional development initiatives to go beyond content delivery to also focus on inclusion, participation, and learner wellbeing?

A: Teachers are responsible for creating meaningful learning experiences for every child, regardless of gender, ability, background or identity. Achieving this demands continuous professional development that strengthens knowledge, skills, and attitude and values, needed to create inclusive classrooms.

At AKF, we describe this as developing the Head, Hand and Heart: what teachers need to know, what they need to do and what they need to believe. Without believing that inclusion, gender equality, or climate education matter, teachers are unlikely to translate learning into practice.

This thinking informed our Activating Values approach, which helps teachers reflect on their own identities and biases while strengthening positive values and relationships. We also design every course around three simple questions: Why does this matter? How do I do it? What will I do differently tomorrow? This helps teachers move from theory to action while recognising professional development as a lifelong journey.

Q5: How do innovative approaches create opportunities for more accessible and effective professional development?

A: Every education system, school and teacher evolves and changes over time. While I think the word 'innovation' is overused now, I believe true innovation is critical to influence these evolution processes. Innovation can be something genuinely new, something adapted from three or four existing approaches, or a single approach borrowed and adapted to meet the needs of the context. In this way, innovation can help to solve problems in new ways to improve inclusive, holistic learning and student wellbeing.

Q6: Are there any early reflections or lessons already emerging from Teach2Empower's implementation or conceptualisation phase?

A: One important lesson has been the need to balance ambition with practicality. Trying to cover too much at once can overwhelm teachers, so we have continuously adapted the course based on their feedback.

We have also recognised that teachers are not a homogeneous group. That's why participants apply in teams from the same school, allowing them to support one another throughout the course. We have also built communities of practice where teachers share ideas, challenges, and resources.

Finally, we have learnt that an enabling environment matters. By engaging school leaders and county education officials from the outset, we have built stronger ownership and support for teachers as they begin applying new approaches in their classrooms.

Q7: How can projects like Teach2Empower contribute to broader education systems strengthening efforts beyond individual trainings or pilot activities?

A: Teach2Empower can contribute to systems strengthening in two important ways.

First, by generating the evidence needed to move from a pilot to a nationally recognised

professional development programme that strengthens teacher practice and learner outcomes.

Second, through the principles underpinning its design. Approaches such as co-designing with teachers, recognising diverse teacher needs and moving away from one-size-fits-all professional development have the potential to influence how teacher development programmes are designed far beyond this project.

Q8: What role does policy and institutional support play in ensuring that innovative approaches to teacher professional development become sustainable?

A: Policy and institutional support are essential for turning promising innovations into sustainable practice. As education systems continue to evolve, policies and institutions must be flexible enough to recognise evidence, adopt effective innovations and respond to changing needs.

At the same time, we must recognise what I describe as education entropy, the tendency for systems to become increasingly complex over time. Sustainability is therefore not only about introducing new approaches but also about simplifying systems by letting go of outdated ones. This requires curious, adaptive leadership that is willing to learn and continuously improve.

Q9: Looking ahead, what opportunities excite you most about the future of teacher professional development in Africa?

A: What excites me most is the growing recognition of teachers as professionals and the increased investment in teacher professional development across Africa.

This presents an opportunity to think beyond individual projects and instead work together to strengthen the profession itself. At AKF, we see teachers as our research and development partners of choice. If we can unlock the

potential of Africa's more than 15 million teachers, the educational, social and economic benefits for the continent will be extraordinary.

Q10: What would success for Teach2Empower look like over the next few years?

A: Success for Teach2Empower would mean three things. First, the Green and Gender course becomes embedded within national teacher professional development systems and is eventually adapted beyond Kenya.

Second, the project's design principles such as co-design, teacher agency and differentiated support influence the wider teacher professional development ecosystem.

Finally, I hope the project demonstrates how closely connected green and gender education are, encouraging future professional development programmes to take more integrated approaches while remaining practical and manageable for teachers.

Q11: What gives you hope when you think about the future of education and learning across the continent?

A: People. It is always people. I believe that in a very large proportion we have a deeply committed, motivated and talented teacher fraternity across Africa. The heterogeneous nature of this fraternity means there are diverse talents and motivations that, when brought together, can transform learning environments, learning outcomes and education systems.

As above, if the unrealised potential of this 15-million-person strong continental talent pool can be fully activated and realised, the future of education and learning across Africa will reap the rewards. This is the challenge and ethical responsibility for those of us privileged enough to work in the service of teachers must meet. I am excited to meet this challenge together with teachers, partners, and governments alike.

Clinton Onaya, Strategic Education Advisor, VVOB in Kenya



Q1: Please introduce yourself and your role at VVOB and within the INCREASE programme.

A: I am the Strategic Education Advisor for Policy and Partnerships at VVOB in Kenya. I work with government institutions and partners to strengthen education systems and support the implementation of national education priorities.

Within the INCREASE programme, I work closely with the Ministry of Education, the Kenya Education Management Institute (KEMI) and other partners to support the institutionalisation and scale-up of the Effective

School Leadership for Junior Schools (ESL4JS) and Effective School Leadership for Senior Schools (ESL4SS) programmes. These blended professional development programmes equip school leaders with the knowledge and practical skills to strengthen instructional leadership and support the implementation of Competency-Based Education (CBE). My role focuses on ensuring these programmes become embedded within national systems, so their impact continues well beyond the life of the project.

Q2: Looking at the INCREASE programme, what would you consider to be some of its most significant contributions to strengthening school leadership in Kenya??

A: One of the programme's biggest contributions has been shifting the focus of school leadership from administration to instructional leadership. As Kenya implements Competency-Based Education, school leaders are taking on a greater role in supporting teachers and improving learning.

The programme has equipped school leaders with practical skills while demonstrating that high-quality professional development can be delivered effectively through blended learning. It has also strengthened the institutions responsible for leadership development, helping create a more sustainable system for continuous professional learning.

Q3: One of the programme's defining achievements has been the institutionalisation of ESL4JS within KEMI. What does this milestone mean for the future of professional development and what made it possible?

A: Institutionalisation means the programme has become part of KEMI's work rather than remaining a stand-alone project. That gives confidence that future school leaders will continue accessing quality professional development through national systems.

This was possible because the programme

was built as a partnership from the beginning. VVOB worked alongside KEMI and the Ministry of Education throughout the design and implementation process, building ownership together.

Q4: Your work has involved engaging a wide range of education stakeholders. What have been the biggest lessons about building partnerships and creating shared ownership of education reforms?

A: A lesson that stands out is that lasting education reform depends as much on relationships as it does on technical solutions. Strong partnerships are built by listening, respecting each institution's role and working towards shared goals.

Q5: Blended learning has been central to the INCREASE programme. What has this experience taught you about the role technology can play in making professional development more accessible, relevant and sustainable?

A: Blended learning has shown that school leaders can continue learning while remaining in their schools, applying knowledge directly to their daily work. Combined with coaching, peer learning and facilitated discussions, technology has become a powerful tool for continuous professional development.

Q6: As Kenya continues to implement education reforms, what opportunities do you see for strengthening continuous professional development for school leaders and teachers?

A: Kenya has an opportunity to move beyond one-off training towards a culture of continuous professional learning. Digital platforms can make learning more accessible, while professional learning communities give school leaders and teachers opportunities to learn from one another and tackle shared challenges. Together, these approaches can make professional development more practical and sustainable.

Q7: Many education initiatives end when projects come to a close. From your perspective, what

does true sustainability look like and how can programmes be designed with this in mind from the outset?

A: True sustainability exists when the system no longer depends on the project to continue delivering results. That happens when programmes strengthen institutions instead of creating parallel systems. By building local capacity and embedding successful approaches into existing structures, institutions can continue driving change long after external support has ended.

Q8: What advice would you give to institutions or development partners looking to strengthen professional development through partnerships and systems-based approaches?

A: The most impactful partnerships recognise that governments lead reform while development partners provide technical expertise, innovation and catalytic support. This requires patience and long-term commitment.

Secondly, invest equally in relationships where institutions can learn together, solve problems collaboratively and build mutual trust over time.

Finally, think beyond programme outputs and focus on strengthening institutional capacity, policy coherence, leadership systems and knowledge management. When these elements are strengthened, programme achievements naturally become embedded within the education system.

Q9: What gives you confidence about the future of school leadership and professional development in Kenya?

A: I am encouraged by the growing recognition that effective school leadership is one of the strongest drivers of quality education. As leadership development becomes more embedded within national systems, I am confident today's investments will continue strengthening schools and improving learning for years to come.

International Days



24 January

International Day
of Education

11 February

International Day
of Women and
Girls in Science

22 April

Earth Day

23 April

International
Girls in ICT Day

16 May

International Day
of the Boy Child

5 June

World
Environment Day

11 June

International
Day of Play

16 June

Day of the
African Child

15 July

World Youth
Skills Day

12 August

International
Youth Day

8 September

International
Literacy Day

5 October

World
Teachers' Day

11 October

International Day
of the Girl Child

25 November

International Day for the Elimination
of Violence against Women

10 December

Human Rights
Day

Resources

Blended Professional Development Impact in Junior School Instructional Leadership and Teacher Efficacy

This article, published in the KEMI Journal of Educational Management and Leadership, examines the implementation and impact of the Effective School Leadership for Junior Schools (ESL4JS) programme under the INCREASE programme. Drawing on evidence from school leaders across Kenya, it highlights how blended professional development strengthened instructional leadership and supported the implementation of Competency-Based Education (CBE). The findings offer insights for policymakers and practitioners seeking to strengthen school leadership as a driver of education reform.



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Compendium of Resources on Gender Responsive Teacher Development in Africa

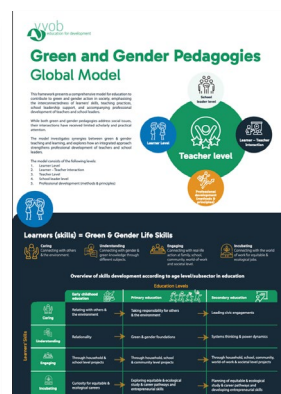
Developed by the UNESCO International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (UNESCO-IICBA) in partnership with VVOB, the African Union International Centre for the Education of Girls and Women in Africa (AU/CIEFFA) and the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), this online compendium brings together practical tools, policy guidance, research, case studies and professional development resources to support gender-responsive teacher development across Africa. It is a valuable reference for policymakers, teacher educators, school leaders and practitioners seeking evidence-based resources to strengthen more inclusive education systems.



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Teach2Empower Green GTP Conceptual Framework

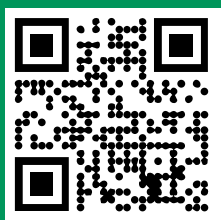
The Green and Gender Pedagogies Global Model, developed by VVOB, offers a framework for integrating environmental sustainability and gender-transformative pedagogy within teacher professional development. It outlines the competencies needed at learner, teacher, school leader and system levels, and provides a roadmap for embedding green and gender-responsive approaches into teaching and learning rather than treating them as separate initiatives.



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