

The Learning Leader

Strengthening School Leadership for Quality Education



From the Editorial Desk

Welcome to the first issue of The Learning Leader - a publication for all those dedicated to making quality education for all learners in Kenya a reality. It has been a great privilege to curate this collection of insights, lessons, stories and reflections that shine a light on the work that is going into strengthening school leadership across the country.

The Learning Leader, a bi-annual publication was birthed from the need to create a space where educators, policy makers, partners, trainers and programme implementers, connect, share their journeys and grow, all while learning from one another. This inaugural edition therefore brings together this diverse range of voices; each piece offering a different lens into how leadership is being reimagined and supported at multiple levels across the education system in Kenya.

We would like to extend a sincere thank you to all the contributors who shared their time, perspectives and writing; and to the VVOB in Kenya leadership, wider team and partners who continue to walk this journey with us.

As we continue this work, we hope that The Learning Leader grows into a space for reflection, inspiration, learning and dialogue. We invite you to not only read it but to also engage and share your feedback even as we all play our part in transforming education in Kenya.

Enjoy the read and let's keep the conversation going.

Sincerely,

Dorian Mwangi and Mary Oyuke

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Message from the Editor in Chief



Claire Mazin

Country Programmes Manager VVOB in Kenya

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the first issue of *The Learning Leader*. This newsletter marks a new chapter in how we tell the story of school leadership in Kenya. As stories about the individuals who shape the future of our schools and the learners within them.

At VVOB – education for development, our mission is to contribute to a more equitable world by improving the quality of education. We do this by strengthening the capacities of teachers and school leaders to deliver inclusive, effective learning experiences. This vision underpins all our work, across Africa, Asia and Latin America. Here in Kenya, it comes to life through collaboration with national education stakeholders.

Our programmes in Kenya focus on supporting school leadership, promoting gender-responsive pedagogy and enhancing teacher professional development. Through partnerships with the Ministry of Education, Teachers Service Commission (TSC), Kenya Education Management Institute (KEMI), Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), Centre for Mathematics, Science and Technology Education in Africa (CEMASTEA) and others in the education sector, we are contributing to the implementation of ongoing education reforms, especially those tied to the Competency-Based Education (CBE) rollout.

One such example is the Implementing National Curriculum Reforms through App-based Learning for School Leaders in Secondary Education (INCREASE) programme. As we near the final phase of this programme, we are seeing first-hand how targeted professional development, blended learning approaches and coaching support can strengthen school leadership and in turn, improve school-based teacher development and learning outcomes.

But INCREASE is just one part of our broader contribution. Through the Regional Teachers' Initiative for Africa (RTIA), we work to dismantle gender biases in education by embedding gender-transformative pedagogy into teacher training across Kenya, South Africa, Ghana and the wider region. Complementing this, Teach2Empower supports children and youth to become active, responsible citizens shaping green, digital and gender-equal societies. Together, these efforts reflect VVOB's commitment to education systems that are inclusive, equitable and future-ready.

This newsletter is a space to reflect on that work, to highlight voices from the field and to bring together insights from across the education system. In this issue, we showcase contributions from government agencies, VVOB teams, trainers and school leaders, all working towards a shared vision of quality education through empowered leadership.

My sincere thanks go to everyone who contributed to this inaugural edition. We hope *The Learning Leader* becomes a go-to platform for engaging with the big questions around school leadership in Kenya and for celebrating the efforts, progress and possibilities that lie ahead.

Foreword



Dr. Maurice Odondo, PhD

Chief Executive Officer
Kenya Education
Management Institute

At the Kenya Education Management Institute (KEMI), we constantly endeavour to enhance the quality of education in Kenya by strengthening leadership and management capacity within the education sector.

In an era defined by dynamic curriculum reforms and the rollout of Competency-Based Education (CBE), effective instructional leadership has never been more critical.

Since 2022, KEMI has been privileged to work in close partnership with VVOB – education for development – under the Implementing National Curriculum Reforms through App Based Learning for School Leaders in Secondary Education (INCREASE) programme. This transformative initiative is enabling school leaders to embrace their roles not just as administrators, but as instructional leaders who foster innovation, inclusivity, and learner centred approaches in their institutions.

The programme's blended learning model, combining self-paced digital learning with in person and online sessions, is a pioneering approach in professional development. Through this model, we have trained over 1,000 school leaders across 21 counties—empowering them to plan strategically, support teachers more effectively and drive whole school improvement. Evaluation data and qualitative studies have shown that INCREASE is contributing meaningfully to teacher efficacy, learner engagement and improved school planning practices.

KEMI's role has extended beyond course delivery. We are actively shaping the policy and systems that will sustain this model nationally. From developing digital content and facilitating training to working alongside stakeholders like the Teachers Service Commission, Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), and Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC), we are committed to institutionalising a culture of continuous professional development through blended learning.

As we move towards national scaling, we call on all education stakeholders; school leaders, policymakers, partners and communities, to continue supporting this vision. The INCREASE programme exemplifies how collaboration, innovation, and evidence-based planning can lead to lasting improvements in school leadership and learner outcomes.

Let this newsletter serve as a testament to the progress we've made, and an invitation to shape the future together.

VVOB in Kenya at a Glance



Who We Are



Exploring the course for the first time. School leaders scroll through ESL4JS with curiosity | Photo by VVOB

VVOB – education for development – is a non-profit organisation headquartered in Belgium with operations in multiple countries across Africa, Asia and Latin America. VVOB has been operating in Kenya with a mission to strengthen education systems through evidence-based, sustainable interventions that promote equity and quality in education.

In Kenya, VVOB collaborates closely with government institutions and educational stakeholders to support the professional development of school leaders and teachers, contributing to improved learning outcomes for all learners.

Our Vision

An equitable world in which governments are capacitated to respect, protect and fulfil the right to quality education for every learner, without any form of discrimination.

Our Mission

VVOB works towards Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) - "quality education for all" - and ensures the improvement of education:

through capacity development of education actors, governmental or otherwise. This is achieved through technical assistance provided by VVOB's global expert staff.

by connecting education stakeholders across borders. This way, VVOB contributes to the facilitation of knowledge exchange based on worldwide research, experiences and expertise between partners with a similar mission.

Key Focus Areas

School Leadership: Empowering headteachers and education officers with the skills to create inclusive, learning-focused school environments.

Continuous Professional Development (CPD): Supporting the design and implementation of blended learning trajectories for educators.

Equity & Inclusion: Promoting gender-responsive and context-relevant educational practices.

Evidence-Based Practice: Generating and using data and research to inform policy and practice.

Flagship Programme

INCREASE – Implementing National Curriculum Reforms through App-based learning for school leaders in Secondary Education

i. Enhancing School Leadership for Junior School (ESL4JS)

Implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, through the Kenya Education Management Institute (KEMI). The program's Technical Committee and Scaling Working Group comprise of technical officers from key Ministry departments, Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) and Teachers Service Commission (TSC) with aim of promoting a unified and multi-agency execution. ESL4JS enhances the capacity of junior school leaders through a blended Continuous Professional Development (CPD) course to be instructional leaders and support school-based CPD. The course equips school leaders to foster safe, inclusive and effective learning environments aligned with Kenya's Competency-Based Education (CBE) reforms.

II. CPD for STEM teachers in Junior School

VVOB partners with the Ministry of Education, CEMASTEIA and TSC to scale up and strengthen existing efforts to build capacity of STEM teachers in junior school. This partnership focuses on integrating gender-responsive pedagogy into CEMASTEIA's training programmes, ensuring that teachers are better equipped to create equitable, engaging, and learner-centred environments in mathematics and science classrooms.

Regional Teachers' Initiative for Africa (RTIA)

VVOB in Kenya is part of the Regional Teachers' Initiative for Africa (RTIA), a multi-country programme aimed at strengthening teacher support systems and promoting gender-responsive pedagogy across Africa. In Kenya, RTIA collaborates with the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) and the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE). This initiative aligns with Kenya's commitment to enhancing the quality of education and ensuring that teaching practices are inclusive for all learners.

Our Partners

We work in strong partnership with:



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION



Centre for Mathematics,
Science and Technology
Education in Africa
(CEMASTEIA)



KENYA INSTITUTE OF
CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT
"Nurturing Every Learner's Potential"

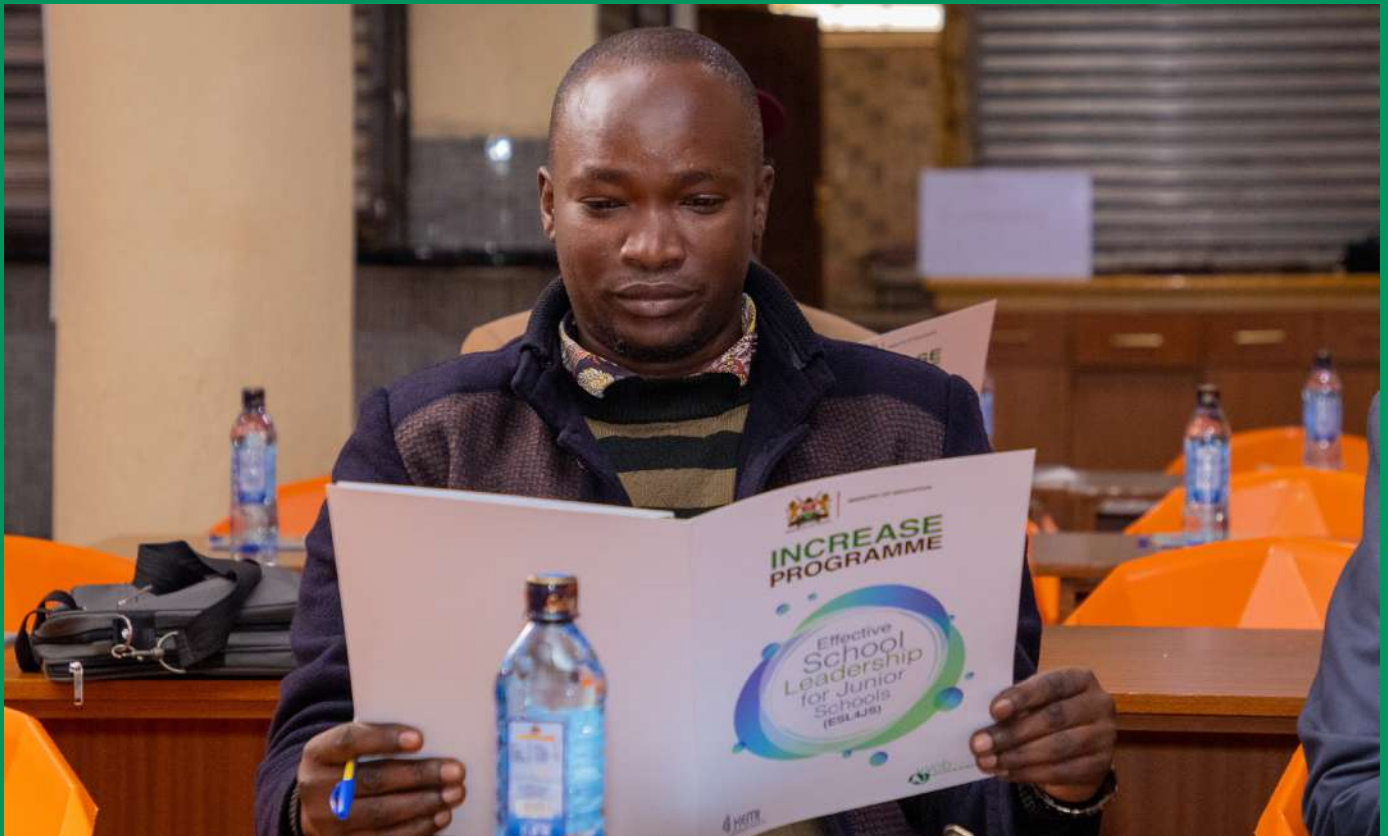


FAWE
FORUM FOR AFRICAN WOMEN EDUCATIONALISTS
FORUM DES EDUCATRICES AFRICAINES

Evidence in Action: How Research is Driving Smarter Leadership for Better Schools

Gatwiri Nkonge,

M&E Research Advisor - VVOB in Kenya



A school leader reads through the INCREASE programme overview to better understand the bigger picture | Photo by VVOB

Across the globe, school leadership is increasingly recognised as a key driver in achieving quality education. According to a publication by the [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development OECD](#), effective school leadership improves teaching and learning, accounting for up to 25% of a school's impact on student learning outcomes. Yet, in many African contexts, including Kenya, school leaders often take up their roles without adequate preparation in instructional leadership, a gap that demands urgent attention and evidence-based action.

VVOB - education for development supports school leaders through capacity development rooted in research. Research is central to how programmes are designed, refined, and scaled which is used not only to inform programmes, but also to influence national policy and catalyse sustainable reform. It also plays a key role in policy advocacy, ensuring that education reforms are anchored in data and grounded in local realities.



Since its launch in 2022, INCREASE has reached over 1,000 school leaders across 21 counties, structured into three implementation cohorts between 2023 and 2025.

INCREASE: Research at the Heart of Programme Design

Effective School Leadership is one of VVOB in Kenya's flagship initiatives. Under this initiative, the INCREASE programme (Implementing National Curriculum Reforms through App-based Learning for School Leaders in Secondary Education) supports junior school leaders in developing the instructional leadership skills needed to effectively implement the Competency-Based Education (CBE). The programme is implemented in partnership with the Kenya Education Management Institute (KEMI), the government agency mandated to provide professional development and management training for education leaders and managers. Central to this collaboration is the Effective School Leadership for Junior Schools (ESL4JS) course, a blended learning trajectory under INCREASE that combines app-based, online, and face-to-face learning. Since its launch in 2022, INCREASE has reached over 1,000 school leaders across 21 counties, structured into three implementation cohorts between 2023 and 2025.

What sets INCREASE apart is its deliberate integration of research into every phase of its design and delivery. Currently, two major studies are underway:

- A cost-effectiveness study, among the first of its kind targeting school leadership in Kenya, is comparing two models of blended continuous professional development (CPD), which combine in-person training with digital learning to determine which provides the greatest value for money.
- An impact study is examining how CPD for school leaders influences how confident and effective teachers feel in junior schools.

Together, these studies aim to answer a critical question: Which blended CPD delivery model yields the greatest impact on school leadership and teacher performance, in the most cost-effective way, under the CBE framework?

Pathways to Improved Teacher Practice

Preliminary findings from the impact study offer promising insights. The Effective School Leadership for Junior Schools (ESL4JS) training has significantly strengthened school leaders' knowledge, skills, attitudes and confidence in leading CBE implementation. Three key pathways have emerged:

1. **Strengthened school planning** – School leaders report enhanced collaboration with stakeholders, better budgeting, greater access to teaching and learning resources, and higher implementation fidelity of the CBE.
2. **Enhanced pedagogical support** – School leaders are mentoring

peer collaboration and feedback, resulting in improved teacher knowledge, reduced workload, and better classroom practices.

3. Potential impact on learners -

Initial Observations suggest improvements in student outcomes, including increased digital literacy, greater learner autonomy and reduced absenteeism. These trends require further validation but point to a broader ripple effect of leadership training.

Despite the presence of other CPD providers, ESL4JS has been consistently rated as the most impactful, particularly because it builds on existing practices and recognises the realities of school leadership in Kenya. The studies also highlight enabling factors such as high-quality content and the flexibility of blended delivery, while calling attention to barriers like time constraints, limited technology access, and insufficient school-level resources.

These findings have helped improve how the INCREASE programme is planned and have led to practical recommendations for strengthening the training, how progress is measured, and how we engage with policymakers.

Insights Informing Policy

The research emerging from INCREASE is set to inform multiple layers of policy:

- It contributes to Kenya's Teacher Professional Development Policy Framework (2018), which recognises school leadership as a cornerstone of effective CPD.
- Its cost-effectiveness findings may influence decisions by the Ministry of Education and KEMI in selecting sustainable, scalable CPD delivery models.
- It offers practical recommendations for operationalising instructional leadership at the school level, a critical component of the government's CBE implementation agenda.

However, gaps remain. While school leaders are evolving their instructional practices, system-level enablers, such as time allocation for CPD, digital

infrastructure and financial autonomy are still inconsistent. Moreover, the lack of standardised indicators for instructional leadership in national performance frameworks limits how well research insights can be embedded into ongoing policy efforts.

A Call for Collaboration and Sustained Evidence Generation

Closing these gaps will require deeper collaboration between government agencies, development partners and research institutions. There is an opportunity for the Ministry of Education, through KEMI, to lead in adopting evidence-based CPD guidelines that incorporate cost-effectiveness data. At the same time, donors and partners can invest in longitudinal research that draws a clearer link between leadership development and student learning outcomes, a connection that remains underexplored in Kenya.

As Kenya continues its CBE reform journey, school leaders are emerging as the bridge between policy and practice. Research-led programmes like INCREASE are building a solid evidence base that will inform how school leaders are trained, supported and evaluated. Through this work, VVOB reaffirms its commitment to quality education, not just by strengthening individuals, but by transforming the systems that support them.

In the words of one junior school leader from the programme:

“Now, I do not just manage my school. I lead it with purpose.”



A group photo from the regional stakeholders' workshop. | Photo by VVOB

The Regional Teachers' Initiative for Africa: Advancing Gender-Responsive Classrooms in Africa

Everlyne Nyongesa,
Regional Gender Technical Lead – VVOB in Kenya

On 26 January 2023, the European Union launched the [Regional Teachers' Initiative for Africa \(RTIA\)](#) under the [Global Gateway partnership](#). This ambitious six-year initiative is a partnership between the European Union, EU member states, also referred to as Team Europe (France, Belgium and Finland), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), and the African Union Commission to improve the quality and equity of teaching across Africa. Team Belgium, led by [Enabel](#) in collaboration with [APEFE](#) and [VVOB – education for development](#), plays a key role in this regional effort.

The RTIA project supports African countries to improve the education and training of teachers to make sure that their schools have qualified teachers. This will be achieved through policy support in areas of teacher governance and teacher professional development. Part of the work of the RTIA includes testing and scaling up of successful programmes on teacher education and training focusing on identified social transformative pedagogies such as foundational learning, digital

and green skills, gender-responsive pedagogy.

VVOB contributes to the RTIA through the implementation of a regional project for scaling Gender-Responsive Pedagogy (GRP) as a Teacher Professional Development (TPD) initiative for teachers in Early Childhood Education (ECE), Primary and Lower Secondary Education. The project is being implemented in Kenya, Ghana and South Africa, with the goal to improve learning outcomes and the socio-emotional development of children in Africa, by having a more competent, motivated and inclusive teacher workforce in basic education. Specifically, it seeks to enhance the quality, relevance, and effectiveness of initial and continuous teacher professional development, notably through digital education, peer-to-peer learning approaches and regional collaboration. **Why Gender-Responsive Pedagogy Matters**

A quarter-century after the Education for All Framework (a global commitment to providing quality basic education for all children, youth, and adults) warned that gender-based discrimination is one of the most entrenched obstacles to quality education, the challenge remains. Across the continent, gender norms continue to shape learning environments, limit learners' choices and undermine equitable learning outcomes.

Girls may be discouraged from staying in school or fully engaging in learning due to domestic responsibilities, early marriage, pregnancy, or

gender-based violence. Boys may feel pressured to leave school and contribute to household income or may disengage due to stereotypes about masculinity. Both are affected by persistent, unconscious biases among educators; biases that can narrow aspirations and reinforce inequality.

GRP offers a promising path forward. It moves beyond simply acknowledging gender differences in the classroom to actively challenging harmful norms and practices. It prompts teachers to reflect critically on their own beliefs about gender roles and equips them with the tools to create inclusive, empowering learning spaces, where all learners can participate, achieve, and thrive.

VVOB's Role: Scaling Gender-Responsive Pedagogy Across the Region

VVOB's contribution to the RTIA focuses on scaling Gender-Transformative Pedagogy as a teacher professional development strategy across Early Childhood, Primary and Lower Secondary Education. The overarching goal is to improve both academic and socio-emotional outcomes for learners, by building a more inclusive and motivated teacher workforce.

RTIA implementation under VVOB spans three interconnected focus areas:



VVOB and partners in conversation on strengthening Teacher Professional Development for Gender-Responsive Pedagogy in the region. | Photo by VVOB

1. Strengthening National Capacity to Scale Gender-Responsive Pedagogy

In South Africa, VVOB has partnered with the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to scale Siyalingana (Zulu for “We Are All Equal”), a blended-learning programme for Early Childhood Education. This initiative trains facilitators and ECE practitioners on how to implement GRP in their daily practice. To date, 9 DBE officials and 17 facilitators have been trained, with over 2,000 ECE practitioners already enrolled in the self-paced online course.

In Ghana, VVOB is working with the Ministry of Education, Ghana Education Service and the National Teaching Council to strengthen career guidance systems in Junior High Schools. The focus is on integrating gender-responsiveness into study and career guidance, so learners are not limited by gendered expectations when imagining their futures.

In Kenya, VVOB collaborates with the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) to co-develop Information, Education and Communication materials that help Junior School teachers integrate gender-responsive pedagogy across subjects. This aligns with Kenya’s curriculum policy, which identifies gender as a key cross-cutting issue.

These country-level efforts are not isolated but are part of a regional strategy to build sustainable, scalable systems for teacher professional development.

2. Fostering Regional Collaboration and Knowledge Exchange

To strengthen learning across borders, VVOB is facilitating dialogue and exchange among education stakeholders. In March 2025, VVOB convened a regional stakeholder workshop that brought together participants from six countries: Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Malawi, Zimbabwe and Rwanda.

Government officials, civil society actors, researchers and education experts reflected on lessons learnt, shared strategies and explored collaborative opportunities to scale GRP in their contexts. Such regional platforms are critical for peer learning and for strengthening collective

ownership of gender equality in education.

The workshop underscored the importance of adapting strategies to local contexts while building a shared regional vision for gender-transformative education.

3. Identifying and Supporting Promising GRP Solutions Across Africa

RTIA is not just about scaling VVOB-led interventions. A core ambition of the initiative is to identify and co-create scalable solutions with other education actors across Africa.

To this end, VVOB conducted a regional mapping exercise across 12 countries to identify promising GRP practices, alongside an evidence review on effective TPD approaches. These efforts have laid the groundwork for future partnerships and co-creation processes with local and regional actors.

A first step is underway in Malawi, where VVOB is partnering with the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) to support the design of a context-specific GRP programme for Early Childhood Education. This collaboration exemplifies RTIA’s commitment to building inclusive ecosystems for change, where new ideas are shaped and owned locally.

Teaching for a More Equal Future

The RTIA is a long-term investment in equity and quality. It acknowledges that teachers play a transformative role in shaping learners’ identities, aspirations and sense of belonging.

But to truly change education systems, efforts must reach beyond the classroom. It means engaging parents and communities, addressing harmful social norms and providing long-term support that begins in the earliest years of a child’s life.

By building a critical mass of teachers trained in gender-responsive approaches, RTIA is helping to shift mindsets, open opportunities and create classrooms where all children, girls and boys alike, can imagine and achieve a better future.

Teach2Empower: Equipping Teachers for a Sustainable, Inclusive Future

Alexander Amos Banda,

Regional Strategic Education Advisor for Teach2Empower – VVOB in Kenya



Peer conversations help school leaders exchange ideas and solutions. | Photo by VVOB

As the world strives toward Sustainable Development Goal 4 - ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all by 2030, one truth remains constant: teachers are at the heart of education. Yet across many African countries, educators often lack the tools, support, and professional development opportunities they need to prepare learners for a rapidly evolving world shaped by technological change, environmental challenges, and persistent gender inequality. These challenges highlight the urgent need to better equip teachers with practical strategies that would not only address classroom realities

but also actively engage learners. This is where Teach2Empower (T2E) becomes essential.

A Unified Approach to Gender and Green Education

T2E is a bold initiative responding to this urgent need. Spearheaded by Belgian development agencies VVOB- education for development, APEFE, and Enabel (collectively known as Team Belgium), T2E complements the EU Global Gateway's Regional Teachers Initiative for Africa, a six-year programme aimed at strengthening teacher professional

¹Gender-responsive pedagogy (GRP) is an approach to teaching and learning that acknowledges and addresses the specific needs of both male and female students.

²Green education is an approach to learning that focuses on integrating environmental awareness, ecological principles, and sustainable practices into educational programs.

development across the continent. This partnership encourages cross-country learning and supports teachers in responding more effectively to the changing needs of their learners, in line with the goal of inclusive, quality education for all.

What sets Teach2Empower apart is its dual focus: integrating gender-responsive pedagogy¹ and green education² at the core of teaching practice. It empowers teachers not only to foster inclusive and equitable classrooms, but also to embed environmental awareness in their teaching, helping learners develop critical thinking, empathy and a sense of responsibility for both society and the environment.

Although both gender-responsive and green education are essential to building sustainable and inclusive societies, they are often addressed in isolation within teacher training programmes. Teach2Empower seeks to address this gap by uniting these two critical perspectives into a single, coherent approach. The initiative focuses on practical tools; mindset shifts and collaborative learning strategies that enable educators to apply these principles meaningfully in their classrooms.

Piloting Change in Kenya

T2E is currently in its foundational phase. A dedicated project team has been assembled, and work is underway on a Green and Gender Responsive Pedagogy Conceptual Framework. This framework will guide the development of practical training models and materials to support teachers in applying the principles in their classrooms.

The first pilot of the initiative will take place in Kenya, where T2E will test how gender and environmental themes can be effectively embedded in teacher training and everyday teaching. A Call for Quotations was recently opened to engage a professional development provider to help bring the framework to life through training and capacity-building activities.

Insights from the Kenyan pilot will inform future scaling across the continent and feed into broader education transformation efforts. T2E will not only shape classroom practice but also influence education systems and policy dialogues at Belgian, European, and African regional levels.

At its core, Teach2Empower is about ensuring that teachers are not only well-equipped to teach but can lead change. By bringing together two critical but often siloed dimensions of education, the initiative offers a powerful opportunity to prepare learners for a more inclusive and sustainable future.

“The initiative focuses on practical tools; mindset shifts and collaborative learning strategies that enable educators to apply these principles meaningfully in their classrooms.”

Curriculum, Context and Practice



Strengthening Instructional Leadership for Competency-Based Education

Martin Kisilu,

Deputy Director Quality Assurance & INCREASE Focal Point - KEMI

The shift to Competency-Based Education (CBE) in Kenya has redefined the roles and expectations of school leadership. No longer confined to administrative duties, today's school leaders are expected to act as instructional coaches, facilitators of teacher professional development, and champions of learner-centred environments. At the Kenya Education Management Institute (KEMI), we have fully embraced this transformation.

To support school leaders in meeting these evolving demands, we are executing the INCREASE programme (Implementing National Curriculum Reforms through App-Based Learning for School Leaders in Secondary Education) in partnership with VVOB – education for development. This programme is delivered through the Effective School Leadership for Junior School (ESL4JS) course, which is specifically designed to build the capacity of junior school leaders to lead successful curriculum implementation under the Competency-Based Education (CBE) system.

By combining blended learning, mentorship, and the development of contextually relevant tools and training, INCREASE addresses critical gaps in leadership practice. It ensures school leaders are not only equipped with theoretical knowledge but also empowered to drive meaningful, school-based education reform.

A New Model for School Leadership Training

The INCREASE programme has provided a unique opportunity to design, test and refine a new model of professional development for school leaders. One of the key lessons we have learnt is that blended learning (which entails in-person face-to-face instruction and online learning) is not only feasible but also effective. Through a carefully crafted mix of app-based self-learning, virtual check-ins, and face-to-face sessions, the app-based Effective School Leadership for Junior

Schools (ESL4JS) course has reached hundreds of leaders across Kenya, including in hard-to-reach and marginalised counties.

Several best practices have emerged from this experience. First, flexibility and accessibility are key. The mobile learning platform has enabled school leaders to learn at their own pace, revisit content and participate in extended learning activities. Many have shared that this approach allowed them to balance their professional responsibilities while engaging deeply with the course content.

Secondly, trainer preparedness in peer learning and mentorship have been critical. Before each cohort, trainers received comprehensive orientation, participated in peer learning and reviewed content collaboratively. This ensured consistency, responsiveness, and high-quality facilitation. As a result, both live and self-paced sessions complemented each other to create an engaging and reflective learning experience.

A third success factor has been the use of digital portfolios and real-life application tasks. School leaders are not only gaining new knowledge but actively applying it in their schools. They document their progress and share the outcomes, turning learning into practical action. Whether through collaborative school planning, mentorship, or community engagement, these activities have helped translate training into tangible results, significantly enhancing the programme's impact.

The programme has also fostered a culture of evidence-informed leadership. With support from independent monitoring and evaluation partners, we have gathered robust data, documented change stories, and adapted our content accordingly. Notably, the Most Significant Change stories have offered powerful qualitative insights into how leadership development leads to better teaching, stronger school climates and improved learner outcomes.

Perhaps the most profound transformation has been in school culture. Leaders who completed the training report greater confidence in supporting their teachers, fostering collaboration, and embedding CBE practices in their schools. Many now lead internal professional development sessions, guide teachers through new assessment strategies, and actively engage parents and the wider community in school improvement efforts.

Future Prospects

Looking forward, scaling this model will require ongoing investment in digital infrastructure, alignment with national teacher development frameworks and formal certification pathways. It will also depend on strong inter-agency collaboration to institutionalise blended learning approaches in leadership training.

The INCREASE programme has shown what is possible when innovation, policy alignment and local ownership come together. As KEMI, we remain committed to nurturing school leaders who are visionary, digitally empowered, and dedicated to transforming learning for every child in Kenya.



Mr. Kisilu providing school leaders with hands-on support. | Photo by KEMI

KNEC's Collaborative Approach to Assessment Reform in Schools

Godfrey Ombogo

Assistant Director, Corporate Communications



KNEC Chief Executive Officer, Dr. David Njengere, speaks during the launch of the Educational Assessment Resource Centre (EARC) at New Mitihani House, Nairobi, on 4th July 2025

Kenya's education system is undergoing a pivotal transformation. Informed by the recommendations of the Prof. Douglas Odhiambo-led task force in 2012 and reinforced by the Presidential Working Party on Education Reform (PWPER), 2023, the country is steadily shifting from the 8-4-4 system to Competency-Based Education (CBE). At the heart of this shift is Competency-Based Assessment (CBA), a model designed to ensure learners acquire practical, relevant skills for life and work.

Laying the Foundation: The CBA Framework

To support the implementation of CBA, the [Kenya National Examinations Council \(KNEC\)](#) developed the Competency-Based Assessment Framework (CBAF) in 2021. The framework envisions producing engaged, empowered and ethical citizens by nurturing each learner's unique potential. It outlines three key pillars: the purpose of assessment, the tools used and how feedback is shared.

Unlike the traditional high-stakes exam model, CBA emphasises formative assessments - ongoing evaluations conducted in the classroom to provide learners with continuous, constructive feedback, complemented by summative assessments that gauge overall competency at the end of a learning cycle.

To accommodate diverse learning styles and needs, teachers use a wide array of assessment tools, including portfolios, journals, rubrics, oral questioning, observation checklists and rating scales. Importantly, this model puts the learner at the centre of the process.

Data for Learning: Supporting Teachers and School Leaders

CBA generates vast amounts of data, both at the classroom and national level and teachers are central to this process. They administer and report formative assessments using the KNEC CBA portal and serve as centre managers, invigilators, supervisors, and assessors for summative exams.

Recognising the role of educators and school heads, KNEC invests heavily in capacity building. This includes in-person workshops, conferences, virtual engagements and official circulars. The goal is to help teachers and school leaders make sense of assessment data and use it to improve teaching and learning outcomes.

Each assessment cycle begins with the registration of candidates, which is now done fully online through KNEC's digital platform. To ensure accuracy and inclusivity, KNEC dispatches officers to sensitise school leaders about the registration process, which typically runs from January to March each year.

Teachers as Examiners and Item Developers

KNEC not only relies on teachers to administer assessments, but it also engages them as examiners and assessment item developers¹. To ensure fairness and consistency in marking, KNEC trains thousands of teachers annually. For example, in April 2025, KNEC trained 7,200 examiners for the inaugural Kenya Junior School Education Assessment (KJSEA), targeting 15,000 trained examiners by August.

Developing quality, reliable assessment tools is equally crucial. KNEC contracts trained teachers as setters and moderators to create assessments that are valid, reliable, and aligned with learning outcomes. They not only contribute to national assessments but also pass on their knowledge within their schools, helping to reduce dependence on unstandardised commercial test papers. In April 2025, 1,400 teachers and teacher educators completed item development training.

Building Knowledge and Innovation Hubs

To deepen expertise in CBA and educational research, KNEC has established an Educational Assessment Resource Centre. This hub supports teachers, examiners, researchers and policymakers by offering training in psychometrics, data analysis

and CBE-aligned assessments.

The Centre also leads national and international research initiatives, including the National Assessment System for Monitoring Learner Achievement (NASMLA) and Kenya's upcoming participation in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in September 2025. Through PISA, Kenya will benchmark how 15-year-olds apply knowledge in science, reading and mathematics compared to peers in over 90 countries.

Bringing Assessment Closer to Schools

In 2024, KNEC conducted a pilot for the KJSEA, which culminated in the development of sample papers shared with all schools. More importantly, it led to the creation of Assessment Hubs in 235 pilot schools across all 47 counties. These hubs now serve as regional resource centres, supporting assessment innovation, peer learning, and professional development for schools in their zones.

Collaborating with School Leaders

KNEC's engagement with school leaders goes beyond data collection and training. It includes active participation in county dialogues, the Annual Symposium on CBA, and national platforms like the Kenya Primary School Heads Association (KEPSHA) and Kenya Secondary School Heads Association (KESSHA) conferences. These forums offer opportunities to share insights, gather feedback and collaboratively improve assessment practices.

As custodians of school environments and drivers of academic quality, school leaders are integral to the success of Competency-Based Education and Assessment in Kenya. Their involvement in shaping and implementing effective assessment strategies ensures that learners receive the support they need to thrive.

New Curriculum, New Demands: Empowering Leadership in Senior Schools

Thuo Karanja,

Deputy Dean Biology department - CEMASTE A



Brainstorming during a training session | Photo by CEMASTE A

As Kenya approaches 2026, the Competency-Based Education (CBE) is on the brink of a historic milestone: the transition of the first cohort of Grade 9 learners from junior to senior school.

As Kenya approaches 2026, Competency-Based Education (CBE) is on the brink of a historic milestone: the transition of the first cohort of Grade 9 learners from junior to senior school. This group of learners has been at the forefront of Kenya's education reform journey, having been the first to move through the CBE following the gradual phase-out of the 8-4-4 system. The transition to senior school is a litmus test for how well the system has prepared both learners and schools to embody the principles of CBE: learner-centred, skill-based and future-oriented.

To support this transition, the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Centre for Mathematics, Science and Technology Education in Africa (CEMASTEa), organised nationwide capacity-building workshops in April 2025. Held across all 47 counties, the aim of the sessions was to equip principals with the tools, knowledge and confidence needed to lead the CBE rollout in senior schools effectively.

Strengthening Leadership Capacity for CBE Implementation

To support school leaders in their evolving roles as instructional leaders, the training went into key frameworks and strategies that form the backbone of the Competency-Based Education. This segment of the workshop moved beyond theory, offering practical insights into how to steer schools toward learner-centred, skills-focused education. Participants engaged with a wide array of concepts, some familiar, others entirely new, but all essential to making CBE work in the senior school context.

From curriculum frameworks to pedagogical models and assessment strategies, each component is part of a broader effort to transform teaching and learning. This “Competency-Based Education Leadership Toolkit” equips principals with the knowledge and resources they need to guide their schools confidently through the transition.

A major focus of the training was unpacking the [Basic Education Curriculum Framework \(BECF\)](#), which underpins the CBE. Principals explored the broader principles of Competency-Based Education and Assessment (CBE and CBA) and discussed how to align their school practices with national education goals. Through these sessions, school leaders examined how core competencies like critical thinking, communication, collaboration and self-efficacy are fostered in classrooms.

Recognising their role as instructional leaders, principals were trained to interpret CBE designs and support effective classroom delivery. They engaged with innovative pedagogical approaches such

as Project-Based Learning (PBL)¹, Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL)², and the Predict-Observe-Explain (POE)³ model. The integration of ICT through the Technology, Pedagogy and Content Knowledge (TPACK)⁴ framework was also highlighted, encouraging principals to embrace digital tools in teaching and learning.

Assessment, a key aspect of CBE, was reimaged during the training. Principals were introduced to the [Competency-Based Assessment Framework \(CBAF\)](#), which emphasises formative, project-based, and summative assessment. They explored the use of portfolios, rubrics, ICT tools, and age- and stage-appropriate evaluation methods. This shift away from high-stakes testing marked a significant step toward a more holistic approach to measuring learner progress.

Preparing for Pathways, Mentorship and Change

Another central focus was the introduction of senior school pathways: STEM, Arts & Sports Science and Social Sciences. Principals learnt about the resource and staffing needs required to implement each track, as well as how subject combinations align with national development goals. The STEM pathway sparked discussions about the availability of qualified teachers and laboratory equipment.

Principals also reviewed new guidelines on the transition from Grade 9 to Grade 10 and how CBE learners should be integrated into schools that still host 8-4-4 cohorts. They were encouraged to collaborate with junior schools and key education stakeholders such as [The Kenya Universities and Colleges Central Placement Service \(KUCCPS\)](#), [Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development \(KICD\)](#) and [Kenya Education Management Institute \(KEMI\)](#) for smoother transitions.

Mentorship and career guidance were emphasised as essential support systems for learners. School leaders explored how to institutionalise mentorship by engaging alumni, involving professionals across industries and incorporating career talks into the curriculum. Discussions even touched

¹ Project-Based Learning (PBL) is an educational approach where students actively engage in real-world projects to learn and develop essential skills.

² Inquiry-based learning (IBL) is a student-centered teaching approach where learners actively explore questions, investigate, and discover knowledge through their own investigations and experiences, rather than passively receiving information.

³ Predict-Observe-Explain (POE) is a teaching strategy used in science education to encourage active learning and help students develop a deeper understanding of concepts.

⁴ TPACK, or Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge, is a framework that describes the types of knowledge teachers need to effectively integrate technology into their teaching.

on emerging careers like gerontology⁵ and seismology⁶, underscoring the need to broaden students' horizons.

The Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability and Reinforcement (ADKAR model) was used to guide principals through change management strategies. They discussed how to build buy-in among staff, mobilise resources and foster adaptive school cultures responsive to CBE reforms.

Looking Ahead

In preparation for this significant milestone, the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with CEMASTE, conducted workshops for senior school principals in April 2025. These sessions aimed to build the confidence and capacity of school leaders to manage the transition to senior school under the Competency-Based Education. According to post-training feedback collected through workshop evaluation tools, principals reported notable gains in both understanding and confidence. In Taita Taveta County, for instance, awareness of the CBAF increased by 39%, while understanding of senior school pathways improved by over 26%. Similar positive trends were observed in other counties, reflecting the effectiveness of the training approach.

Participants expressed a desire for deeper and more sustained training. They recommended extending the workshops beyond three days, incorporating microteaching and model lessons, and providing structured follow-up support in areas such as mentorship, infrastructure planning and curriculum implementation.

As Kenya enters the next phase of CBE, empowered and well-equipped school leaders will be instrumental in ensuring a smooth and meaningful transition, one that positions learners for success in a rapidly changing world.



A teacher engaging with a student. | Photo by Freepik

⁵ The study of aging, encompassing biological, psychological, social, and environmental factors across the lifespan.

⁶ The scientific study of earthquakes, encompassing their causes, characteristics, and the propagation of seismic waves through the Earth and other planetary bodies.

Putting Gender at the Centre of Junior School Curriculum Reform

Jane Maweu,

Project Coordinator – VVOB in Kenya



A teacher with a student during a class lesson. | Photo by Freepik

VVOB – education for development and the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) are working together to make gender equality a more visible and practical component of Kenya's Junior School curriculum. This collaboration is part of the Regional Teachers' Initiative for Africa (RTIA), a six-year programme under the European Union's Global Gateway partnership. RTIA brings together the European Union, Team Europe (France, Belgium, Finland), UNESCO and the African Union Commission to improve the quality and equity of teaching across Africa.

As part of this regional effort, VVOB supports the scale-up of Gender-Responsive Pedagogy (GRP) across Kenya, Ghana and South Africa. In Kenya, VVOB and KICD are integrating GRP into the official Teacher Professional Development (TPD) system to equip educators with the tools to promote inclusive learning environments and challenge harmful gender norms in schools.

The Place of Gender in Competency-Based Education

Kenya's shift to Competency-Based Education (CBE) is reshaping the way teaching and learning happen in schools. CBE emphasises not only academic achievement, but also the development of skills, values and attitudes. A key feature of CBE is the integration of Pertinent and Contemporary Issues (PCIs)—cross-cutting themes that reflect the real-world challenges learners face. The four PCIs currently prioritised in the curriculum are:



**Global
Citizenship**



**Health
Education**



**Life Skills
and Values**



**Social and
Economic
Issues**

Gender equality is addressed within these PCIs, however, despite its inclusion, it is not always effectively translated into classroom practice. Many teachers lack the training to recognise unconscious bias or challenge harmful stereotypes. As a result,

unequal participation, limited career aspirations and entrenched gender roles continue to affect learners, especially girls and other marginalised groups.

Addressing Bias in the Classroom

In 2024, KICD and VVOB launched a targeted intervention to assess how gender is represented across the nine Junior School learning areas: Languages, Mathematics, Integrated Science, Social Studies, Business Studies, Agriculture, Life Skills Education, Pre-Technical and Pre-Career Education and Religious Education.

This involved a comprehensive review of curriculum designs, teacher guides and approved textbooks to identify both overt and subtle forms of gender bias. For instance, stereotyped depictions of boys and girls in illustrations or language that reinforces traditional gender roles can shape learners' beliefs about their potential and career options.

Insights from the review are now guiding the development of practical educational materials to help teachers recognise and respond to gender bias in teaching content and interactions. These materials are designed to complement existing resources and support more inclusive, gender-aware classroom practices.

Embedding Change in Teacher Development

In parallel, the initiative is supporting KICD to review and revise curriculum resources through a gender lens and to explore how GRP can be integrated into national teacher training programmes at scale. This includes attention to areas such as study and career guidance, where learners' aspirations are often shaped by societal expectations about gender roles.

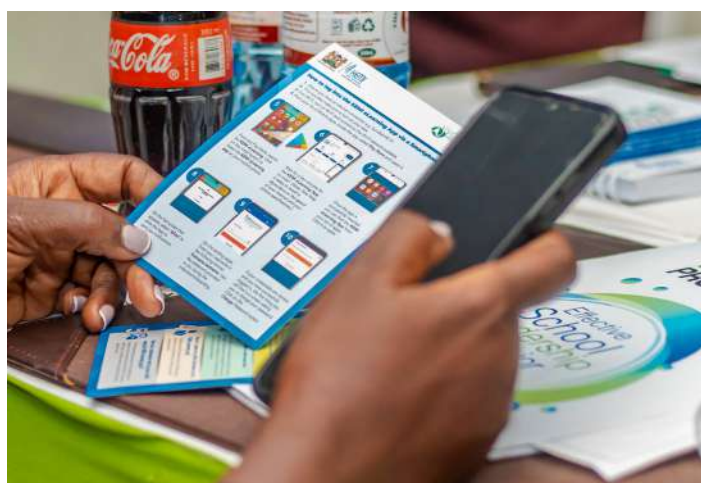
By helping teachers move beyond awareness to practical application, this work strengthens their capacity to create classroom environments where every learner, regardless of gender, is seen, supported and empowered to reach their full potential.

Toward a More Inclusive Education System

This partnership between KICD and VVOB demonstrates how curriculum reform and teacher development can work hand-in-hand to promote equity. By embedding gender responsiveness into both what is taught and how it is taught, the initiative supports Kenya's broader vision of an education system that prepares all learners to contribute meaningfully to society, free from limiting gender norms.



A teacher engaging with students. | Photo by Freepik





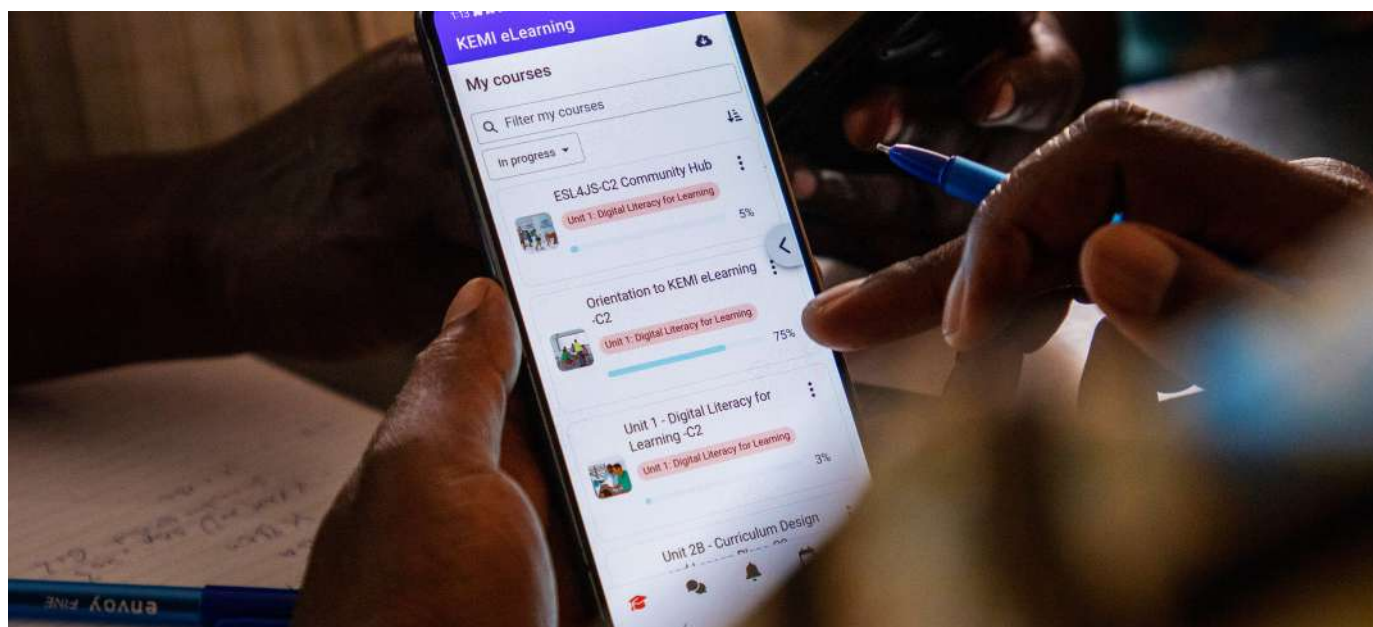
Learning from the INCREASE Programme



Advancing School Leadership Through Blended Learning

Risper Mumbie

Education Advisor – VVOB in Kenya



Learning in their hands. A school leader logs into the KEMI e-learning app to engage with the ESL4JS course. | Photo by VVOB

One of the most powerful ways that VVOB – education for development contributes to Sustainable Development Goal 4: ensuring inclusive and quality education for all, is by strengthening school leadership. In Kenya, this vision has come to life through a collaborative effort with the Ministry of Education and the Kenya Education Management Institute (KEMI), leading to the design and rollout of the Effective School Leadership for Junior School (ESL4JS) course.

The ESL4JS course, piloted in 21 out of 47 counties over three cohorts, is part of the broader Implementing National Curriculum Reforms through App-Based Learning for School Leaders in Secondary Education (INCREASE) programme. It offers a refreshing, practical approach to professional development for school leaders, one that blends in-person learning with virtual sessions and self-paced digital content. It is a rethinking of what school leadership training could look like in a changing education landscape.

School leadership is changing and so is the way leaders learn

For many years, the professional development of headteachers focused largely on administrative or operational matters. Yet in the era of Competency-Based Education (CBE), the demands on school leaders have evolved. They are now expected to play an active role in mentoring teachers, fostering professional learning communities and improving classroom instruction.

The ESL4JS course was developed in response to this shift. Its core aim is to support school leaders in strengthening their instructional leadership roles, guiding teachers, facilitating school-based continuous professional development (CPD) and building a school culture that prioritises innovation and learning.

To achieve this, ESL4JS uses a blended learning model; a flexible, learner-friendly approach that combines asynchronous (self-paced) digital learning with synchronous (real-time) virtual and in-person sessions. Through interactive digital

content on the KEMI app, reflective exercises, practical modules and collaborative discussions, school leaders engage with materials in their own time while also benefiting from peer learning and expert facilitation during live sessions.

Blended learning works because it meets school leaders where they are, both geographically and professionally. It allows for greater flexibility, continuous reflection and immediate application of learning in real-world contexts. Leaders can absorb theory at their own pace, reflect on its relevance to their school and then apply and discuss these ideas during structured virtual or face-to-face sessions.

School leaders across the country have praised this model for its relevance and realism. “This course has made leadership practical. I now have the tools and confidence to support my teachers better,” says Timothy Mwai, a school leader from Murang’a County.

The power of partnership and practical innovation

VVOB’s role has gone beyond content development. We have worked closely with KEMI to strengthen its capacity in instructional design, digital learning and blended facilitation. One of the most exciting aspects of this work has been the collaboration between KEMI’s experienced trainers and ICT staff, who co-developed content and adapted materials into engaging, interactive formats for the KEMI eLearning app and online platform.

Available on mobile devices, the KEMI app offers self-paced access to multimedia learning materials, quizzes, assignments, discussion forums and real-time feedback from facilitators, all designed to make learning more accessible, flexible and impactful. The app also includes features such as progress tracking and gamified learning to keep participants motivated and it complies with data protection standards to ensure user privacy.

VVOB has seen meaningful changes take root.

There is evident growth in the use of digital learning forums where school leaders reflect together, increased accessibility of mobile-based content for those in hard-to-reach areas, and stronger peer support systems through WhatsApp groups and community networks. These are enablers of better leadership and professional connection.

Of course, not everything has been smooth. Inconsistent connectivity in some regions and varying levels of digital fluency among users have posed real challenges. But each obstacle has spurred innovation, including the incorporation of downloadable resources, step-by-step user guides, remote trainer support and hybrid facilitation teams that blend the efficiency of digital learning with the value of in-person touchpoints.

Lessons learnt

The experience with ESL4JS has offered several important lessons: that flexibility matters; that blended learning, when well-designed, can support deep professional growth; and that leadership development is most effective when it is reflective, engaging, contextual and peer driven.

More importantly, it has proven that blended learning works, not just in theory, but in the real lives of busy school leaders balancing management, mentorship and ministry directives.

What Lies Ahead

VVOB and KEMI are exploring how the blended learning model can be adapted for senior school leaders and how it can be refined to include personalised learning pathways, real-time analytics and even stronger school-based CPD systems.

VVOB believes the future of educational leadership in Kenya is learner-centred and built on communities of practice and we are excited to continue walking this path alongside its partners. We are excited to continue walking this path alongside our partners.

A Trainer's Perspective: Transforming Schools from the Inside Out

Peris Kiprono,

Trainer - KEMI

As a trainer in the Effective School Leadership for Junior Schools (ESL4JS) course, I have had the unique privilege of walking alongside school leaders as they navigate one of the most significant education reforms in Kenya's history, the implementation of the Competency-Based Education (CBE). My role within the Implementing national curriculum reforms through app-based learning for school leaders in secondary education (INCREASE) programme has been both professionally rewarding and personally inspiring, offering a front-row seat to the evolution of school leadership across the country.

Learning That Fits into Real Life

From the outset, it was clear that this programme was different. Unlike traditional professional development initiatives, the ESL4JS training was intentionally designed to meet the unique needs of school leaders implementing CBE in Kenya's junior schools. Spanning 120 hours, ESL4JS equips participants with the leadership competencies necessary to effectively steer curriculum implementation and foster learner-centred environments. ESL4JS adopts a blended learning model that combines mobile app-based self-study, virtual engagement and in-person sessions. This flexible structure allows school leaders to access content through the KEMI mobile app, progress at their own pace and then consolidate their learning through interactive group discussions, practical activities and school-based application tasks. By enabling participants to reflect on their own practices and apply learning in real time, ESL4JS promotes sustainable, context-relevant school improvement.

One of the most remarkable outcomes has been the growth in digital literacy. Many participants in the training initially approached the online platform with hesitation. But through structured onboarding sessions, guided walkthroughs of the Learning Management System (LMS), and continuous technical support, participants gradually built their confidence. By the end of the training, most were not only navigating the platform with ease but also uploading digital portfolios.

But the transformation goes beyond technology. The human connection established during the in-person sessions and virtual check-ins has been equally impactful. These sessions allowed us to create spaces for open dialogue, collaborative reflection, and shared problem-solving. I witnessed school leaders candidly discuss challenges in managing teacher performance, planning under limited resources, and addressing learner diversity. Through peer learning and facilitated reflection, many of these challenges were reframed as opportunities for growth and innovation.

A particularly memorable moment in my facilitation experience was supporting a group of school leaders from Turkana County. Many of them work in resource-constrained environments with intermittent internet access. Despite these challenges, their determination to complete the course was unwavering. Their commitment reminded me of the power of professional development to reignite purpose and motivation among educators.

Equally inspiring has been the shift in how school leaders view their role. Many have embraced their new identity as instructional leaders,

actively supporting teachers through classroom observations, feedback sessions, and in-school capacity-building forums. Several participants shared how they now organise regular mentorship meetings, lead internal CBE trainings, and coordinate collaborative planning activities with staff, practices that were previously sporadic or absent.

This new perspective also extended into strategic school planning. Leaders have reported using the knowledge gained to align school improvement plans with CBE goals, engage parents more meaningfully, and advocate for resources that support 21st-century learning. The ripple effect is evident: when school leaders are well equipped, the entire school ecosystem becomes more dynamic, responsive, and learner-centred.

As a trainer, I too have grown. Facilitating blended learning has stretched me professionally by sharpening my digital facilitation skills and reinforcing the importance of staying learner focused. The ongoing feedback from participants and the support from my colleagues at Kenya Education Management Institute (KEMI) and VVOB-education for development (our INCREASE implementation partner) teams have helped me refine my approach and continuously improve.

Looking ahead, I am excited about the future of instructional leadership in Kenya. If the experiences of the first two cohorts are anything to go by, we are nurturing a generation of school leaders who are not only equipped to implement curriculum reforms but also to transform their schools into thriving learning communities. It is an honour to be part of this journey and I look forward to guiding even more leaders as the programme scales nationally.



Peris Kiprono. KEMI Trainer during Cohort 3 onboarding of ESL4JS course. | Photo by VVOB

“Unlike traditional professional development initiatives, the ESL4JS training was intentionally designed to meet the unique needs of school leaders implementing CBE in Kenya’s junior schools.”

Monitoring What Matters: How Monitoring and Evaluation Drives Impact in INCREASE

Peter Njoroge,

Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) Advisor – VVOB in Kenya



A room full of school leaders ready to learn. | Photo by VVOB

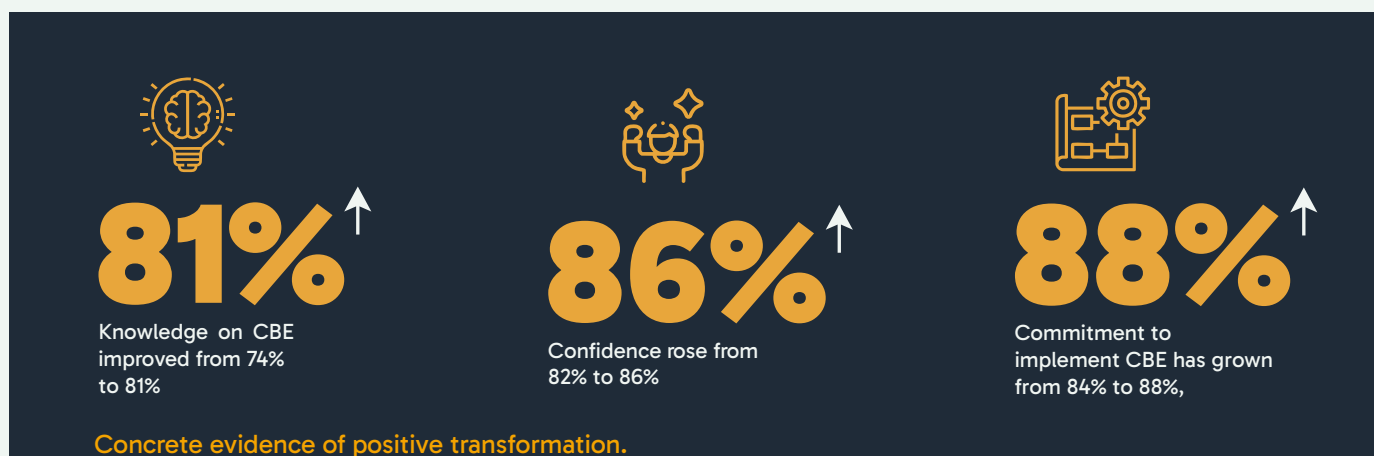
At the heart of every successful programme is a steady driver of progress: Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E); the systematic process of collecting and using data to understand whether a programme is working, how it can be improved and what impact it is making. In the Implementing National Curriculum Reforms through App-based Learning for School Leaders in Secondary Education (INCREASE) programme, M&E plays a key role in shaping the quality and effectiveness of school leadership training.

INCREASE is a five-year partnership between VVOB in Kenya and the Ministry of Education, implemented in partnership with the Kenya Education Management Institute (KEMI). It aims to strengthen instructional leadership among school leaders in junior school and empower them to lead high-quality, school-based teacher professional development that supports the rollout of the Competency-Based Education (CBE).

This programme is delivered through the Effective School Leadership for Junior School (ESL4JS) course.

To test and refine the delivery model, INCREASE has rolled out in three pilot cohorts for the ESL4JS course, each involving hundreds of school leaders and each testing a different blend of face-to-face, online self-paced and virtual learning sessions. These pilots have provided a rich environment for learning, for school leaders and the programme team as well. Through each cohort, M&E has been a critical learning tool, helping track progress, identifying what works and adapting the training design in real time.

By embedding M&E throughout the programme INCREASE has been able to adjust to school leaders' needs, scale what works and generate valuable evidence to inform national-level decisions on school leadership support.



What exactly does M&E do in INCREASE?

M&E acts as a real-time feedback and learning system, ensuring the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) of school leaders through the ESL4JS course is effective and impactful. It involves monitoring participation and completion rates, evaluating the quality and effectiveness of training and learning from what the data tells us to adapt and improve the programme continuously.

Making Leadership Development Count

In practice, the M&E team tracks key metrics like satisfaction levels, changes in knowledge and skills, and the confidence and commitment of school leaders to implement Competency-Based Education (CBE) reforms.

This includes:

- Satisfaction scores, reflecting how relevant and useful school leaders found the training
- Pre- and post-training assessments, measuring shifts in knowledge, attitudes, confidence, and commitment
- Feedback loops, allowing facilitators to address challenges in real-time.

From Data to Action

Monitoring tools like the Kirkpatrick Evaluation Model¹ (covering training uptake, quality, effectiveness and impact) and Edwiser dashboards² (drawing real-time data from Moodle) help visualise progress and identify where additional support may be needed.

In fact, M&E data has directly informed programme changes. For instance, after Cohort 1, participants expressed concern about weekend check-in sessions, the schedule was revised to better accommodate their needs. This simple adjustment, rooted in participant feedback, enhanced both engagement and satisfaction.

Turning Challenges into Insights

Naturally, collecting meaningful data from a wide pool of participants comes with challenges, especially when school leaders are juggling tight schedules. Embedding M&E tools into the learning management system (LMS)³, allocating reflection time during face-to-face sessions and anonymising surveys have helped increase both the quality and quantity of responses.

One standout learning has been that more data isn't always better; relevance, credibility, and clarity are what make data actionable. That means focusing on useful indicators and presenting findings in ways stakeholders can understand and apply.

What the Data Is Telling Us

What makes M&E powerful is its human impact. It helps facilitators adjust delivery methods, informs programme scaling decisions and highlights areas that directly affect school leaders' experience, such as the role of peer mentoring and the need for digital competence in blended learning. M&E ensures the programme continues to evolve based on what is actually happening on the ground.

¹ The Kirkpatrick Evaluation Model is a globally recognized framework for evaluating the effectiveness of training programs.

² Edwiser Dashboards are customisable interfaces, providing a visual overview of learning and engagement data.

³ A Learning Management System (LMS) is software used to plan, deliver, and track training and educational programs.

From M&E, it has also emerged that:

- Mixed research methods (quantitative and qualitative) provide a fuller picture therefore most appropriate to use
- Online spaces require intentional design to foster real collaboration
- External factors (e.g. digital access or school calendars) must be considered when evaluating learning outcomes.

The Road Forward

A new analysis is now underway, comparing the experiences and outcomes of three ESL4JS cohorts, each with a slightly different blended learning model. This will provide deeper insights into how

different formats impact satisfaction, knowledge, practice and guide the future of blended CPD for school leaders in Kenya.

In the words of the M&E team:

M&E is the GPS of education programmes, it tells us if we are on course, how far we have come, and where to go next.”

So, the next time you see an infographic or statistic about school leadership in Kenya, remember that behind it is a story of continuous learning, adaptation and a drive to make every data point count.



A moment of concentration as participants listen and take in new ideas. | Photo by VVOB

In the School Leaders' Own Words

From Knowledge to Action: Transforming School Leadership Through ESL4JS Training



Sr. Diana together with her peers in a group activity during the ESL4JS training. | Photo by VVOB

My name is Sr. Diana A. Odhuong'o, headteacher of St. Anne's Ahero Comprehensive, a public-comprehensive and Special Needs Education (SNE) inclusive school in Kisumu County. I have been the headteacher at the school for 7 years and a teacher for 16 years.

During my participation in the Effective School Leadership for Junior Schools (ESL4JS) training, I learnt the importance of bringing everyone on board and fostering collaboration and open communication with all stakeholders who influence the school: teachers, non-teaching staff, students, parents, and the wider community. The training enabled me to develop Action Plans to address specific challenges in my school, such as improving academic performance, supporting at-risk students, reducing dropout rates, and enhancing student engagement. By fostering collaboration, I garnered the support needed to implement these Action Plans effectively.

The training also introduced me to innovative teaching methods and educational practices, helping me make teaching more learner-centred and child-friendly. I trained teachers in these methods, emphasising student-centred approaches such as differentiated instruction. I also enhanced our teacher professional development (PD) programme by instituting performance appraisals and using the results to identify gaps and areas for improvement. Teachers now receive tailored support, including attending training sessions within and outside the school and learning from invited trainers. My capacity to support teachers has grown significantly since the ESL4JS training; I have moved from merely acquiring knowledge, skills and values, to ensuring their actual implementation. I feel fully empowered to transfer these insights to my teachers effectively.

ICT Integration in teaching and learning

The integration of ICT in learning is a major component of the Competency-Based Education (CBE). Following the training, I transferred the ICT knowledge and skills I gained to my teachers through workshops. Teachers quickly adapted and cascaded these skills to students, making ICT an integral part of the learning process. Our teachers now feel empowered to request the resources they need to teach efficiently, contributing significantly to their morale. Our school provides resources such as laboratory apparatus, audio-visual materials, spacious facilities for group work and interactive sessions, and comprehensive teaching materials and timetables. These resources have supported the effective implementation of CBE and improved the overall teaching and learning environment.

Teacher and student morale

These initiatives have greatly boosted teacher morale. Teachers report feeling well-mentored and appreciate being entrusted with leadership roles, which have elevated their confidence and effectiveness. They credit the positive school environment for enabling them to implement the CBE successfully. We now have a strong, united team working collaboratively toward academic excellence. Additionally, the ESL4JS training was critical in transforming my leadership effectiveness. By applying the strategies I learnt, I have driven a positive cultural shift in the school. Apart from increased morale among teaching and non-teaching staff and improved teacher efficacy, we also now have heightened student engagement

and academic performance, and overall school success.

To directly support students' learning, I initiated a mentorship programme linking junior school (JS) students with older students. This initiative fosters positive relationships between students and strengthens their sense of belonging within the school community. Combined with the enhanced skills and efficacy of teachers, this mentorship programme has improved student learning experiences and academic achievement. Additionally, the training equipped me to address the needs of at-risk students effectively. By understanding their challenges, I have helped reduce dropout rates and improve overall student well-being and success. Remarkably, my involvement in the course has also inspired other educators and school leaders in my community. Seeing the actions I have implemented, they have been motivated to push for positive changes in their schools, fostering a culture of excellence in education throughout the area.

Real impact, real change

I have participated in other training programmes for senior education leaders in the past, which provided valuable knowledge and skills. However, the most significant aspect of the ESL4JS training is that it directly translated into implementation. My participation in the ESL4JS training has been instrumental in driving meaningful change within my school. This course has truly been a turning point in my journey as a school leader.



Sr. Diana at St. Anne's Ahero Comprehensive in Kisumu County. | Photo by VVOB

Improving Leadership and Learning Through ESL4JS Training



Evans makes a presentation during one of the face-to-face training sessions | Photo by VVOB

My name is Evans Kalovwe, the Deputy Headteacher of Brighter Days Junior School, an Integrated Private School in Taita Taveta County. I have four years' experience as a teacher, two as a school leader.

The Effective School Leadership for Junior Schools (ESL4JS) training enhanced my relational skills, equipping me with ideas and the confidence to transform them into reality. As a deputy headteacher, I needed to ensure that the ideas I brought back from the training were clear and demonstrated tangible benefits for our school. The training also equipped me with better communication, decision-making and leadership skills, which I used to present my ideas to the administration team during meetings. The administration—comprising the director and the headteacher—listened, bought into, and implemented my ideas. Additionally, I now make better management decisions and confidently advise on strategic plans and resource management.

Empowering Teachers Through Capacity Building

Using the relational skills I gained from the training, I organised three retreats where I trained our teachers on the knowledge I acquired at ESL4JS and discussed their roles in successfully implementing the Competency-Based Education (CBE). Together, we developed booklets for professional documents such as well-structured schemes of work and lesson plans. I continue to facilitate capacity-building sessions every 10 weeks to address challenges teachers face and empower them with the necessary knowledge. Teachers report that the knowledge I shared has helped them deliver CBE content effectively and confidently assess learners using diverse methods. To further strengthen their capacity, I ensure they are financially supported to attend external trainings and encourage them to share what they learn with their colleagues. When needed, we invite external trainers to conduct workshops requested by teachers.

Inclusivity is Key in Learning

I consistently remind teachers about the CBE framework, which emphasises that not every learner excels academically. Our school accommodates learners with varying strengths by nurturing their abilities beyond academics. We have introduced numerous initiatives, including active clubs, a school sports court, and an intrinsic questions competition, to ensure inclusivity. This approach has helped all learners excel, fostering a more supportive and inclusive learning environment.

ICT Integration

The ESL4JS training's resource management section inspired me to advocate for projectors and additional computers, increasing our computer laboratory resources from 10 to 30. I also secured internet access for the school, enhancing digital literacy for both teachers and students. Teachers now plan lessons digitally and use IT tools for research, fostering creativity and reducing reliance on textbooks. Additionally, I introduced a digitised data submission platform for transmitting learners' results to parents, making communication more efficient. I regularly mentor teachers on integrating ICT into learning, which has significantly boosted their confidence and effectiveness in the classroom.

The Power of Stakeholder Engagement

Before the training, collaboration between the school, parents and teachers was limited. The ESL4JS training emphasised the importance of unity, prompting me to initiate regular meetings with parents and teachers to exchange ideas. Parents now attend meetings termly, where I sensitise them on CBE and explain stakeholder

roles. Teachers have reported that this increased parental involvement has made parents and the community more resourceful. I also began engaging learners in discussions with teachers, allowing us to better understand their expectations and make necessary adjustments. Learners are now more confident in expressing themselves, which has strengthened relationships with teachers and improved classroom interactions.

Welfare and Infrastructure Impact Learning Experience

The training inspired me to enhance our school welfare programme by creating new clubs and societies, such as Scouting, Journalism, the Bible Society, and various subject-based clubs. We also developed a basketball pitch and table tennis facilities. Additionally, we introduced school meals, which have improved the welfare of both learners and teachers. Further, in recognition of the gaps in our school's infrastructure, I successfully advocated for a Science Lab and Library, both of which are now operational. These facilities have enriched the learning experience, making it smoother and more effective for both teachers and students.

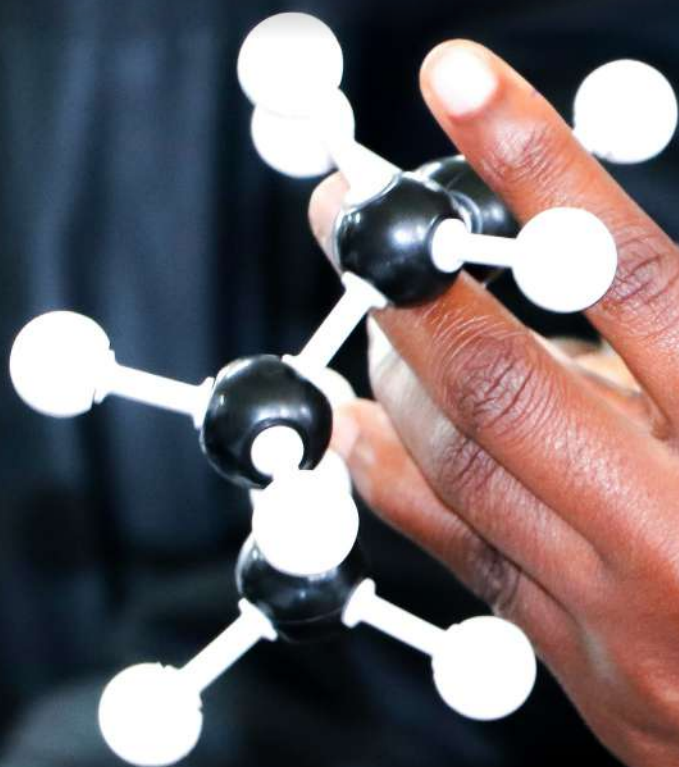
Lasting Solutions

The impact of the ESL4JS training was transformative, not only for me as a leader but also for my school. It opened my eyes to the need for meaningful changes and gave me the skills to implement them. My participation in this programme has had a lasting impact on our school's teaching, learning and overall environment.



Evans walks through the library, which he advocated for as one of his actions after the ESL4JS training. He is now pursuing funding to fill the library
| Photo by VVOB

The Stories That Shape Our Work



Unpacking STEM Careers: Her Voice in Science

Dorian Mwangi,

Communication Advisor – VVOB in Kenya

Teacher Victoria Wakoli's Journey in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

In Kenya's Makueni County, Victoria Wakoli stands as a beacon of inspiration for young girls venturing into science and mathematics. As the only female teacher of mathematics and integrated science at Makueni School, she is on a mission to challenge the status quo and open doors for more girls in Science, Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).

From an early age, Victoria's love for science was undeniable. "I always wanted to understand how things worked," she recalled. Teachers recognised her potential and often had her assist classmates with their schoolwork, which planted the seed for a future in education. Inspired by her mother, a community health volunteer who championed gender equality, Victoria was determined to show that girls have just as much potential as boys.

A Natural Path to Teaching Science

Victoria's journey into professional teaching began in 2021, but her role as an educator started long before that. She had been explaining scientific and mathematical concepts to her peers both in and out of school for years, building a strong foundation for her career. Excelling in these subjects, she knew she wanted to encourage more girls to explore STEM.

Throughout her practise, she experienced many highlights, but one of the most fulfilling was guiding a student who had struggled with mathematics. The student initially had low grades and doubted her abilities. Through encouragement and changing her mindset, Victoria helped her move from a failing D- grade to a B in mathematics. "It is all about attitude," she emphasised. "Girls are often

subjected to unconscious bias that makes them believe STEM is not for them."

Despite her passion, Victoria faced challenges in a male-dominated field. "I am the only female science teacher here, among seven male colleagues," she said. Navigating this environment required confidence and a lot of resilience. To support herself and others, she actively engaged in mentorship, volunteering with social justice movements and international



Victoria Wakoli | Photo by VVOB

organisations like the United Nations to advocate for gender equity in STEM.

Her impact extended beyond the classroom. She served as the patron of the Red Cross and St. John Ambulance societies at her school, mentoring students in first aid and community service. She also started clubs for journalism and mental health awareness, encouraging girls to explore different fields and develop leadership skills. Through these platforms, she guided many students, ensuring they gained both academic and life skills.

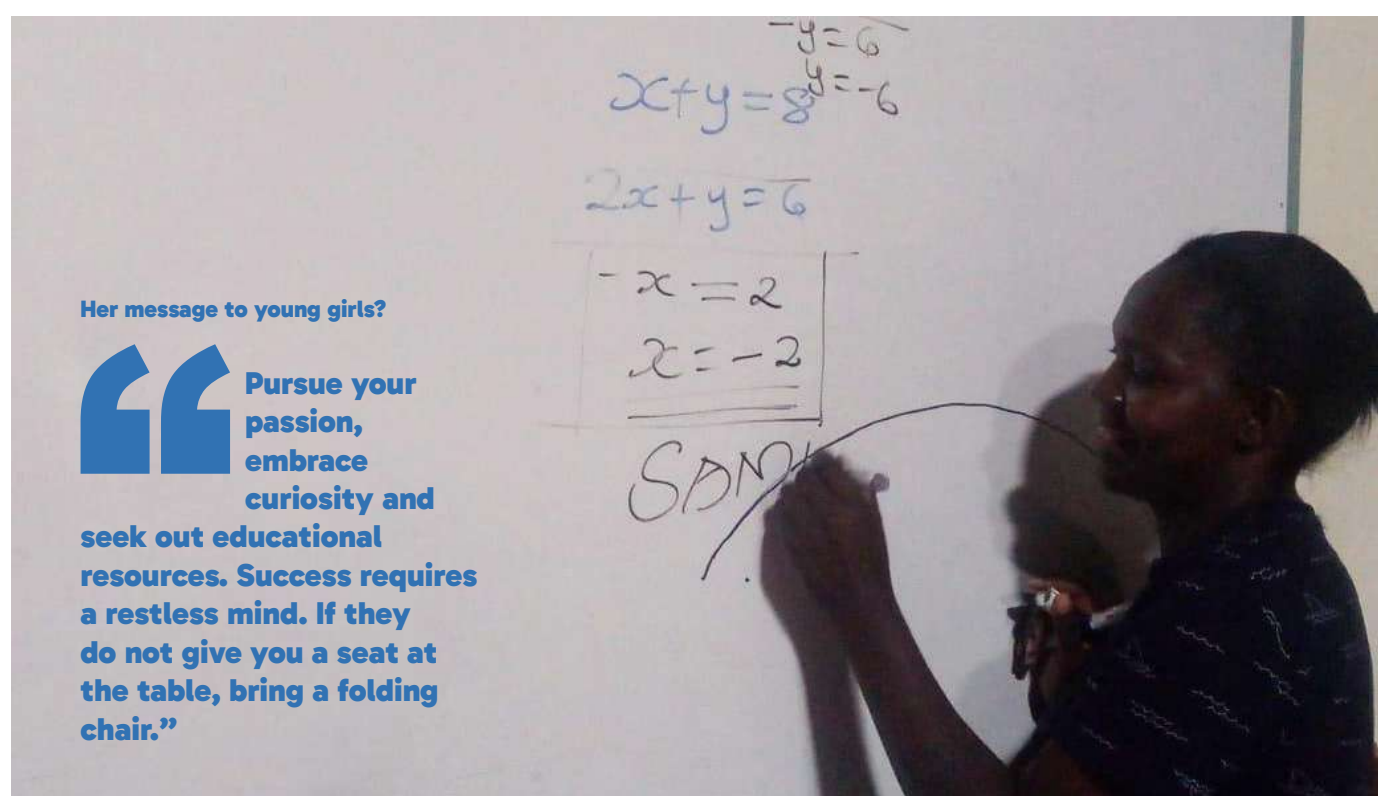
Celebrating the International Day of Women and Girls in Science

Victoria joined other educators in celebrating the 2025 International Day of Women and Girls in Science, a day dedicated to recognising the contributions of women in STEM and advocating for gender equality in these fields. The 2025 theme called for dismantling barriers and fostering inclusive learning environments that empower young girls to explore STEM careers. Through mentorship, policy advocacy, and awareness campaigns, educators and organisations have continued striving to ensure that science and

technology are accessible to all, regardless of gender.

Victoria saw the day as an opportunity to inspire the next generation, reinforcing that their potential is limitless. She believes that systemic change is needed to support women in STEM and calls for greater representation, equal recognition and leadership opportunities for female scientists and educators. "Let us eliminate the belief that science is not for women," she asserted. "Women's contributions in science should be recognised, cited and awarded just as much as men's."

Victoria's work aligns with VVOB's mission to promote gender equity and equality in education. Through the [Regional Teachers Initiative for Africa \(RTIA\)](#) and VVOB's ongoing Gender-Responsive Pedagogy for Teacher Professional Development project, VVOB supports teachers like Victoria in creating inclusive learning environments where boys and girls are treated fairly and equally at school. By supporting teachers to adopt gender-responsive teaching practices, VVOB empowers educators to address unconscious biases, challenge gender stereotypes and inspire future professionals.



Victoria Wakoli during a lesson | Photo by VVOB

Celebrating Women in Leadership: Sally Tanui's Impact in Education

Dorian Mwangi,

Communication Advisor – VVOB in Kenya

Overcoming barriers to create a more equitable education system

As the world marked the 2025 International Women's Day under the theme 'Accelerate Action', the call was clear: move beyond promises and advance gender equality through deliberate, sustained efforts. In Kericho County, Kenya, one school leader is doing exactly that.

Sally Tanui, Headteacher of Tahabi Primary School, is part of a growing wave of educators working to make inclusion t h e

norm and not the exception in schools. With more than two decades in the profession, her journey reflects the steady progress being made when committed leadership meets an enabling environment. Her work aligns closely with VVOB's mission and the goals of the Regional Teachers Initiative for Africa (RTIA), particularly around advancing gender-responsive pedagogy. Through RTIA and other programmes, VVOB works to embed equity and inclusion into teacher professional development. This includes creating learning environments that recognise and respond to the different needs of girls and boys, addressing unconscious biases and promoting equal participation. By equipping educators with practical strategies and reflective tools, VVOB empowers them to lead change within their schools and communities.

A Calling to Teach

Sally's path to teaching began with early experiences that sparked her love for education. Starting as a Sunday School teacher in her late teens, she found joy in simplifying complex ideas and helping children connect with lessons. "Seeing their eyes light up when they understood something was incredibly fulfilling," she recalled. These moments, along with the inspiration she drew from her own teachers, led her to formalise her calling into a career.

Over the year, Sally's work as an educator has been driven by a deep desire to make a meaningful impact on her students' lives. What keeps her motivated is the belief that teaching is about guiding others to reach their full potential.



Sally Tanui | Photo by VVOB

Stepping into Leadership

After years of shaping young minds in the classroom, Sally stepped into leadership with a desire to create an inclusive and dynamic learning environment. However, as a woman in a traditionally male-dominated space, she encountered deeply rooted gender biases. “Women are often limited by ingrained societal norms. We are told we are better suited for caregiving or supporting roles, not leadership,” she said. Determined to change this narrative, she took on a leadership role as soon as an opportunity arose. Despite these challenges, Sally views gender equity as something to be built, together.

Under her leadership, Tahabi Primary School has undergone significant change. Sally has led the integration of ICT into learning, ensuring that both students and teachers have access to digital tools. She has championed the establishment of a science lab, giving students the opportunity to engage in practical experiments to fuel their interest in science and technology. These are just some of her contributions to the success of the school.

Crucially, Sally has also prioritised gender inclusivity. By creating safe spaces for learners and reviewing practices that may disadvantage either gender, she has helped ensure that boys and girls participate equally in all aspects of school life. Her approach mirrors the principles of Gender-Responsive Pedagogy, which VVOB promotes through the RTIA and other programmes: inclusive teaching that addresses bias, encourages participation, and respects all learners’ needs.

Accelerating Action: Sally’s Call for Gender Equality

Sally is quick to point out that leadership is not about status but about creating space for others to lead. Her school’s culture now emphasises collaboration, mentorship and continuous improvement. “Education lays the groundwork for an inclusive society, and we must set the standard,” she says.

Reflecting on this year’s International Women’s Day theme, Sally acknowledged the progress made in gender equality but stressed that there is still much

work to be done. Over the years, she has seen more women step into leadership roles, particularly in politics, business and education. Policies such as quotas for women in leadership and improved parental leave have opened doors for many. There has also been a cultural shift, with leadership qualities like empathy and collaboration, traits often associated with women, gaining recognition.

However, Sally pointed out that challenges remain. Unconscious bias in hiring and promotions, the gender pay gap, and the lack of mentorship for women continue to hinder progress. “We need policies that promote gender equality in leadership, eliminate bias in hiring and support work-life balance. We need to create a culture where women can lead on their own terms.”

For Sally, her call is simple: “Accelerate access to leadership training, mentorship and networking for women so they are equally equipped to lead.”

A Final Word

To young women and girls aspiring to leadership roles, Sally offered this advice, grounded in confidence, not caution: “Believe in yourself, embrace your unique strengths and don’t be afraid to fail. Leadership is a journey and every setback is an opportunity to grow.” She also stressed the importance of mentorship and building a supportive network. “Surround yourself with people who uplift and challenge you,” she said.

As the world celebrated International Women’s Day, Sally’s story is one of many that illustrate what happens when schools are led with inclusion at the core. As we accelerate action on gender equality in education, her work stands as a powerful reminder: inclusive leadership is not only possible but is already happening.

Here’s to the strong women who lead, inspire and create change. May we know them, may we be them, and may we raise them.



We need policies that promote gender equality in leadership, eliminate bias in hiring and support work-life balance. We need to create a culture where women can lead on their own terms.”

Their Turn to Learn: Onboarding the People Behind Effective School Leadership

Dorian Mwangi,

Communication Advisor – VVOB in Kenya



School leaders deep in discussion during a group activity. | Photo by VVOB

In conference halls across the country, over 350 Junior School (JS) leaders from Mombasa, Wajir, Nandi, Isiolo, Murang'a, Meru, Nairobi and Trans Nzoia, took their seats not to teach, but to learn. From 7 to 15 April 2025, they became the third cohort to be onboarded into the Effective School Leadership for Junior Schools (ESL4JS) course, a short, intensive training designed to reshape how school leadership is understood and practised.

The onboarding sessions brought together KEMI trainers who led the workshops with support from VVOB teams, while representatives from the Ministry of Education and the Teachers Service Commission were present to offer guidance and underscore the importance of strong school leadership.

During the sessions, participants were introduced

to the structure of the ESL4JS course, including how to use the KEMI mobile app for self-paced learning. They also began engaging with the first three modules: integrating ICT in teaching and learning, supporting effective curriculum implementation, and leading inclusive learner support programmes. Through a mix of discussions, demonstrations and personal reflections, the school leaders started connecting theory to their day-to-day challenges, reimagining their role in shaping more effective and inclusive learning environments.

The ESL4JS course is part of the broader Implementing National Curriculum Reforms through App-based Learning for School Leaders in Secondary Education ([INCREASE](#)) programme, a partnership between VVOB in Kenya and the Kenya Education Management Institute (KEMI).



A trainer offering support to school leaders during an onboarding session of the ESL4JS course | Photo by VVOB

At its core, INCREASE believes that empowering school leaders with the right tools, knowledge and mindset is key to the success of Competency-Based Education (CBE). The programme transforms school heads into instructional leaders, equipped to inspire teachers, foster innovation and ensure every learner thrives.

Great Schools for Every Child

Speaking at the Mombasa launch event, Furaha Sebbe, County Project Coordinator for Mombasa, captured the vision behind the initiative:

“We no longer want just a few good schools; we want all schools to be great. Every child, no matter their background or location, deserves a strong learning environment led by capable leaders. The ESL4JS course is a step towards making excellence the standard.”

With this third cohort onboarded, Kenya moves closer to a future where effective leadership unlocks the potential of every school and every student.

A Mindset Shift

Cohort 3 marked an evolution in the ESL4JS course, building on lessons from the first two groups. While the blended learning model, combining self-paced modules on the KEMI mobile app, real-life applications, and interactive sessions remained consistent, key refinements took engagement to the next level. There was greater emphasis on peer-

to-peer learning, improved navigation and access to digital content and stronger support systems in place, especially for participants new to app-based learning which resulted in more confident participants and a clearer link between training and real-world leadership.

“This course has opened my eyes to the kind of leader I want to be,” said William Lusimbo, a school head from Nairobi County. “It is not just about checking lesson plans or filling reports anymore but also being present for teachers, being a coach and making the CBE real for our learners.”

Phyllis Wijense, a Deputy School Leader from Nyali in Mombasa County, echoed the value of the training during a separate session, “As school leaders, we’re often expected to have all the answers. But this training reminded me that leadership is also about being open to learning. The more we grow, the more we can support our teachers and learners to thrive”.

A Shared Commitment to Change

One of those present in Murang’a County was Ms. Florence Musalia, a member of the INCREASE Technical Working Group, a multi-agency committee formed under the programme to coordinate implementation. She reminded participants that school leadership is central to educational quality.

“Strong instructional leadership creates the foundation for everything else, be it teacher growth, student achievement, or a healthy school culture,” she said. “This course builds that foundation.”

In a video message shared with participants, Dr. Maurice Odondo, CEO of KEMI, encouraged school leaders to embrace the opportunity for growth offered through the programme. “This program will build you in all spheres of your leadership capacity and enable you to engage effectively with your teachers and learners in the effort to improve our education programs,” he said. “As key players in the education sector, walk this journey together, and be open to learning for better outcomes for our students.”

Adding to the message, Risper Mumbi, VVOB in Kenya’s Education Advisor, Blended Learning, highlighted the organisation’s long-term commitment to strengthening school leadership as a driver of systemic improvement.

“At VVOB, we are committed to strengthening school leadership as a pathway to improved school-based continuous professional development and making school leaders better instructional leaders,” she said. “Because of our shared vision for quality education, we work closely with the Ministry of Education, KEMI, and other stakeholders to co-

create and deliver impactful, evidence-based professional development programmes that are relevant, scalable, and sustainable.”

The Path Forward

This onboarding marks the final chapter in the piloting phase of the ESL4JS course, the last of three cohorts before the course is scaled up and fully adopted by KEMI for nationwide implementation. With Cohort 3 now onboarded, school leaders are expected to continue their learning journey through the KEMI mobile app and begin applying the course concepts in their own school contexts. These next steps are critical to translating knowledge into practice and fostering real change at the school level.

Even as the ESL4JS pilot winds down, the collaboration between KEMI and VVOB continues. The two organisations are already in the early stages of developing the Effective School Leadership for Senior Schools (ESL4SS) course, a next-phase initiative aimed at strengthening leadership across the full breadth of basic education.

For now, the message that resonates clearly is that transforming education doesn’t begin with a new policy or textbook, it begins with the people who lead. And across Kenya, those people are ready.



School leaders taking part in a group discussion. | Photo by VVOB

Bridging ALL Divides for an Inclusive Digital Transformation

Information Communication and Technology (ICT) has become a central part of our lives and should be accessible, available and safe for use to all; the digital world cannot grow without the input and participation of girls.

Collins Olang,

Strategic Education Advisor - VVOB in Kenya



Digital learning in the classroom. | Photo by Kibuuka Mukisa Oscar_ AFD

As you wake up in the morning, the first thing you will probably reach out for is your smartphone to switch off that annoying alarm. You will likely get into your WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram or other social media pages to catch up with what you may have missed out on the previous day or during that night. In Kenya, and many other African countries, you will probably pay for your bus fare to work using mobile money or better still, fuel your car using the same. At the workplace, technology will facilitate collaboration with your colleagues by enabling real-time communication, shared access to information and streamlined workflows, regardless of location, ultimately enhancing productivity and innovation.

However, according to the Analytical Report on ICT based on the 2022 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS), the digital divide, or technology gap between men and women/girls and boys is still wide. Girls and women often have less access to technology and the internet compared to boys and men. According to the report for example, girls and women struggle to afford technology and internet access. In addition, stereotypes around technology being 'for boys' discourages girls from using digital tools for fear of discrimination. Further, according to the [Mobile Gender Gap Report 2023](#) by [GSMA](#), a global organisation that brings together stakeholders in the mobile ecosystem to foster collaboration, drive innovation and promote

the growth of the mobile industry, women in Sub-Saharan Africa were 36% less likely than men to adopt mobile internet, a gender gap that has changed little since 2017.

ICT as a Prerequisite for Realisation of Developmental Outcomes at Global, Continental and National Levels

At the Global level, there is recognition and consensus that ICT plays a critical role in enabling advancements and progress in global economic growth and social inclusion. The role of ICT, especially broadband in accelerating the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has been anchored under the global 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The SDGs that have identified ICT as an enabler, include SDG 4 (Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all), SDG 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls), SDG 9 (Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation) and SDG 17 (Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development).

At the continental level, the African Union's Agenda 2063 on 'The Africa We Want' is the continent's shared strategic framework for inclusive and sustainable development. The framework anticipates Africa to be on equal footing with the rest of the world on matters of ICT. It also envisages an information society with an integrated e-economy where every government, business and citizen have access to reliable and affordable ICT services.

At the national level, Kenya's long-term development blueprint, Vision 2030, aims to transform the country into an industrialised middle-income economy, offering a high quality of life to all citizens and provides several strategic interventions to promote the development of the ICT sector, including expanding broadband access, promoting e-commerce and e-government.

The disparity in ICT Access and Use

Despite the frameworks in place, a study report, '[Bridging the Digital Gender Divide: Include, Upskill, Innovate 2019](#)' by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) indicated that women are under-represented in ICT jobs, top management and academic careers while men are four times more likely than women to be ICT professionals. This male domination exists in schools and business where at 15 years of age, only 0.5% of girls wished to become ICT professionals, compared to 5% of boys. Some root causes for the gender divide include poor access, lack of education, digital illiteracy, ingrained biases and cultural norms. The African Union also identified a similar trend in gender disparities in access to and use of ICT in sub-Saharan Africa with men more likely to own and use technology than women. Based on the data from the [Mobile Gender Gap Report 2023](#), it is estimated that over 150 million additional women in Sub-Saharan Africa would need to utilise online platforms to close the mobile internet gender gap in the region by 2030, highlighting the need to focus attention on this stubborn and significant divide.

Any Progress Over the Years?

It has now been 14 years since the first [International Girls in ICT Day](#) was celebrated. The day, which was created by the [International Telecommunication Union \(ITU\)](#), the [United Nations \(UN\)](#) specialised agency for telecommunication, aims to draw attention to the critical need for more girls and women in the ICT sector, thereby encouraging girls to explore careers in this field.

However, the gender divide in digital access, digital literacy and ICT education has continued to hinder young women and adolescent girls' access to the benefits and opportunities that digital technologies offer — educational, social, economic and health resources. Despite efforts to redress the balance over past years, such as providing affordable internet and devices, promoting digital literacy training, encouraging girls and women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields and addressing online safety concerns, girls still face barriers to digital

training, experience, careers and opportunities due to their gender.

Moving Towards Inclusivity- Practical and Concrete Action

As this year's International Girls in ICT Day was marked, there was a renewed call to ensure that digital literacy programmes are inclusive and accessible to all, regardless of gender and a call made for girls to be equipped with digital skills for their full, equal and meaningful participation in relation to the digital environment.

To realise this, there is a need to start with educating girls equally by pushing digital technology education and actively supporting and promoting girls' participation in related subjects. This will help ensure that they have equal access to opportunities in the workplaces of the future.

Secondly, we must challenge the stereotypes that dissuade girls from studying ICT and ICT-supported subjects through ensuring Gender-Responsive Pedagogy and promoting mentorship for girls so that they can grow up knowing and believing that their gender should not be a barrier to anything they want to become. Application of gender-responsive pedagogy calls for teachers and school leaders to create learning environments where teaching and leadership practices promote gender equity, equality and inclusivity, right from curriculum materials, school set-ups and further, by ensuring continuous professional training of teachers and school leaders in this regard. Partnerships in initiatives such as the [Regional Teachers Initiative for Africa \(RTIA\)](#) are key in this.

Lastly, we must close the technology access and usage gap by ensuring that ICT spaces are safe and girl friendly, free from all forms of violence, harassment and abuse through enacting and implementing strong legal frameworks, effective law enforcement, support for reporting and removing harmful content, raising awareness through digital campaigns and educating about online safety and digital security. In addition, collaboration between governments, technology-based companies and civil society organisations is vital for developing long-term solutions. To ensure

affordable internet access, governments should consider introducing more consumer protections, rescinding existing taxes on broadband or cellular internet access, subsidising the cost of internet, among others.

If the digital world grows without the input and participation of girls, we risk leaving them even further behind in other aspects. On this International Girls in ICT Day, the world was reminded that young girls need to be a part of the technology revolution, whether that be in the classroom, on social media, or in the workplace. Girls must be digital leaders!



We must challenge the stereotypes that dissuade girls from studying ICT and ICT-supported subjects through ensuring Gender-Responsive Pedagogy and promoting mentorship for girls

The Time is Now: Recommitting to Inclusive and Quality Education

Collins Olang,

Strategic Education Advisor - VVOB in Kenya

The critical role of teachers in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (*ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all*) has become increasingly evident in recent years. Research consistently shows that teachers are the most important school-related factor affecting student learning. The [2024 Global Report on Teachers](#) by [Teacher Task Force](#) recognises teachers as the core of all education systems and central to unlocking every learner's potential, which means that to achieve quality education for all, every child must have access to a qualified teacher.

According to [UNESCO's Metadata for the Global and Thematic Indicators on SDG 4 and Education 2030](#), teachers must receive adequate, appropriate and relevant pedagogical training to teach at the

chosen level of education and be academically qualified in the subjects they are expected to teach. This centres on the need for adequate and well-prioritised investment on teachers, a theme that resonates with [VVOB- education for development's](#) ongoing work in Teacher Professional Development (TPD) for Gender-Responsive Pedagogy (GRP) in collaboration with [Forum for African Women Educationalists](#) (FAWE).

Why the Investment in Teachers?

Effective TPD is essential for equipping teachers to help students develop 21st century skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, problem-solving and self-direction. These complex competencies require sophisticated teaching methods, which in



Learners actively engaging during a class session | Photo by VVOB

turn require ongoing professional development.

Preliminary findings from a VVOB Evidence Review on TPD for GRP in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) reveal that effective GRP implementation requires systematic teacher training that addresses gender biases, equips educators with practical classroom strategies and promotes inclusive learning environments. The report further reveals that despite progress in expanding access to education across SSA, persistent gender inequalities in classrooms continue to affect students' participation, learning outcomes and overall educational experience, for which Kenya is not an exception.

Evidence from multiple African countries however demonstrate that when properly implemented, GRP significantly improves educational outcomes for both girls and boys and contributes to broader social transformation toward gender equality. This can only be possible when planning and budgeting takes cognisance of all children's rights to education.

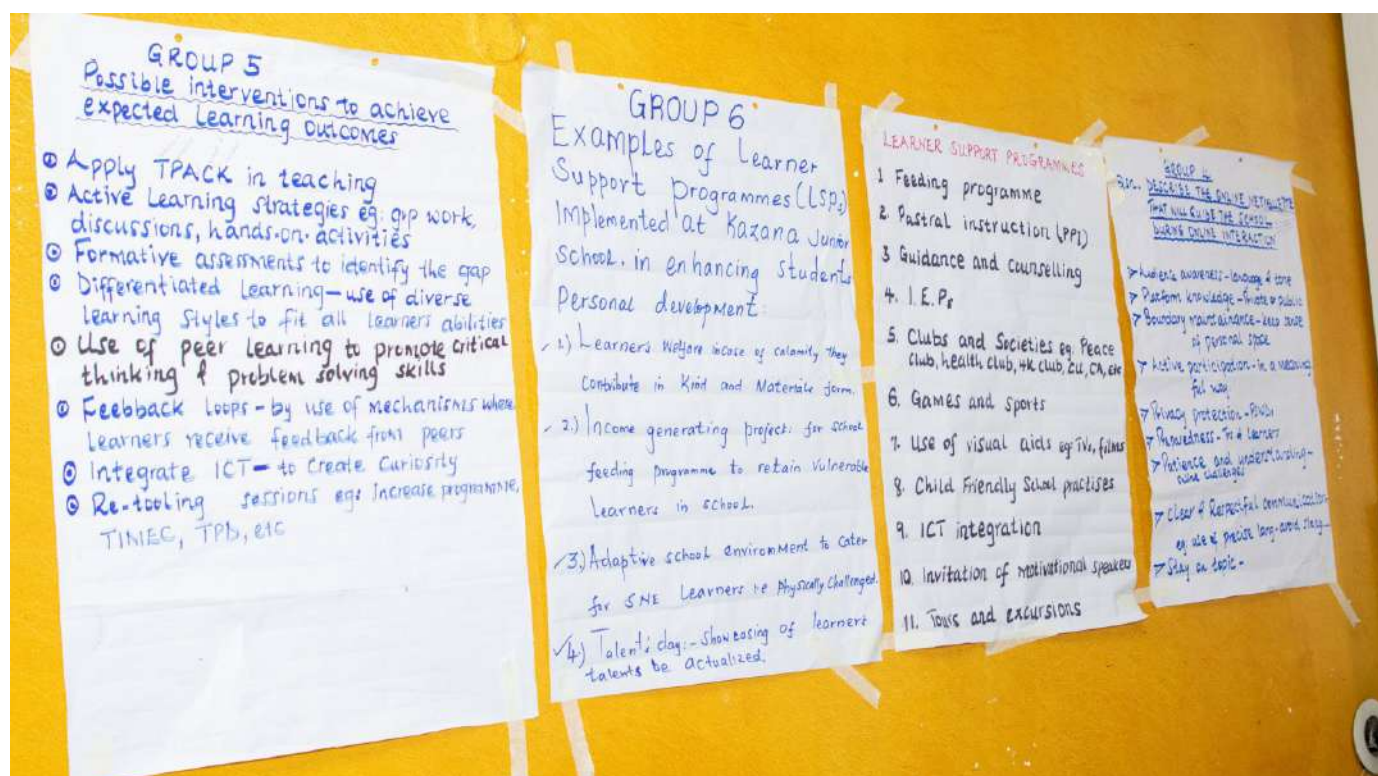
Financing Education as a Human Right

The right to education in Africa is enshrined in the [African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child](#),

the [African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights](#) and international agreements like the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#). The African Union's [Agenda 2063](#) also places universal access to quality education at the heart of sustainable development for the continent.

According to a UNICEF report, [Children in Africa: Key Statistics on Child Survival and Population](#) (2019), Africa's child population is projected to reach 1 billion by 2055, making it the largest globally; nearly half of Africa's current population is under 18, with a significant portion under 15. This demographic trend underscores the urgent need for greater investment in children's health, education, and protection, to harness the continent's potential.

Further, the [Education Finance Watch 2023; Special Edition for the African Union Year of Education 2024 Report](#) highlighted that the average government spending on education as a share of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was just 3.7%, unchanged since 2012, which is below the internationally recommended benchmark of 4%. This affirms that African nations still have a long way to go towards the realisation of educational ambitions in the continent.



A display of various interventions towards achieving expected learning outcomes for children. This was part of a group exercise during a previous training for school leaders | Photo by VVOB

A Call from The Day of the African Child

On June 16, Africa united in commemorating the [Day of the African Child \(DAC\)](#), a momentous occasion to honour the courage and sacrifice of students who participated in the Soweto Uprising in South Africa in 1976. On that day, thousands of black schoolchildren marched to protest the poor quality of education and demanded to be taught in their own language. Tragically, many lost their lives in the protests.

Since its first commemoration in 1991, the day has been an opportunity for all stakeholders and actors involved in the protection and promotion of children's rights in Africa to come together, to consolidate common goals and to tackle the obstacles that stand in the way of achieving an Africa fit for its children.

In 2010, the theme of the DAC was *"Planning and budgeting for children's rights: collective responsibility."* The commemoration of the DAC on this theme was informed by the various challenges the [African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child](#) (which leads the commemoration of DAC) observed on budgeting for children's rights. The Committee decided that in 2025 DAC would be commemorated under the theme *"Planning and budgeting for children's rights: progress since 2010."*

Viewing this year's theme through the lenses of Sustainable Development Goal 4 and more particularly, under the Education 2030 Framework for Action therefore calls for increased investment in education and educators, ensuring adequate funding for marginalised groups and domestic and international financing mechanisms to support education initiatives.

Looking Ahead

Education is not just about the classroom, it is about lifelong learning, empowerment and societal transformation. To meet 21st century learning needs like critical thinking, collaboration and problem-

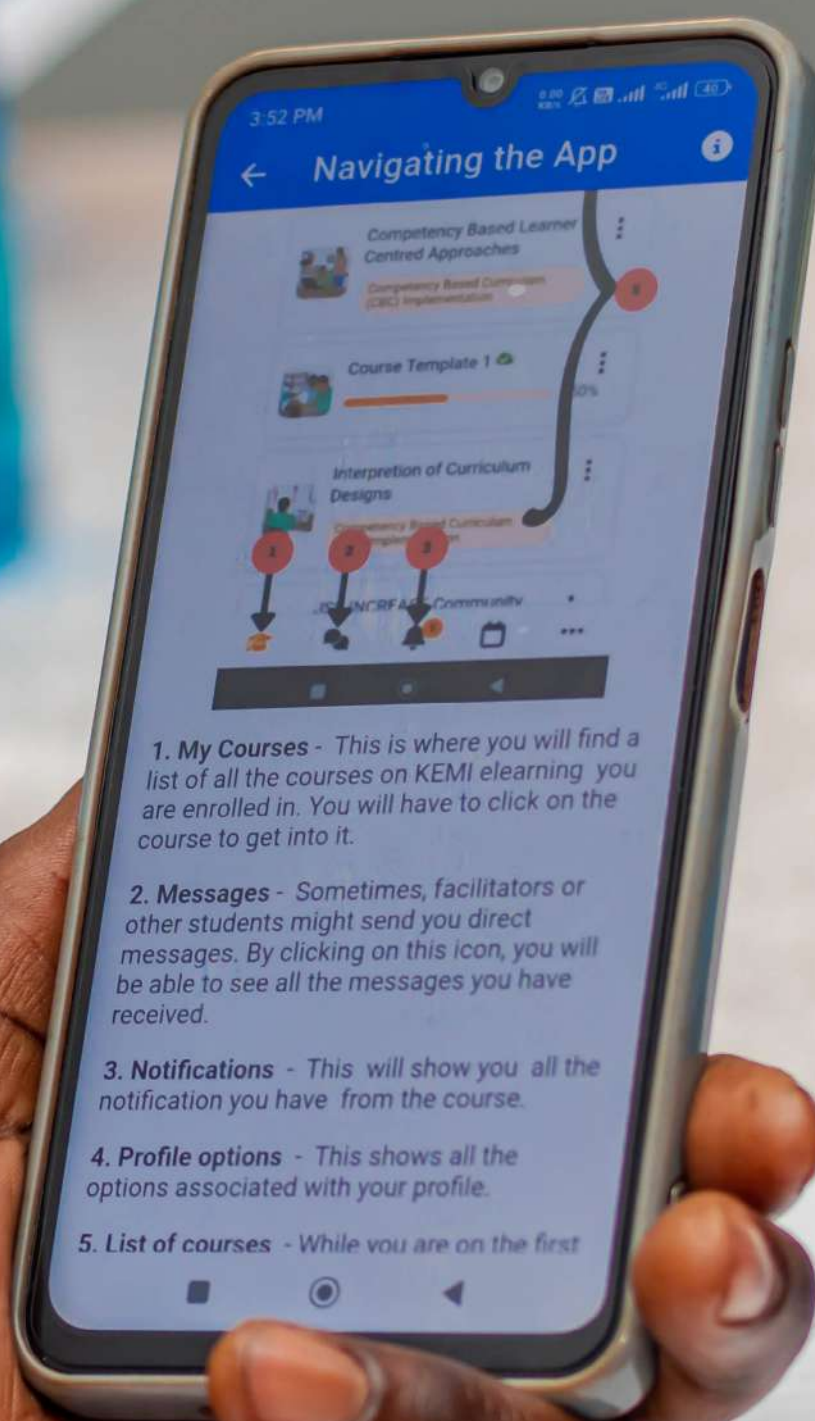
solving, as well as ensuring educational equity and access, teachers must be equipped with modern, inclusive pedagogies. Yet, too many teachers across Africa lack access to continuous, context-relevant professional development. One promising approach, however, is through Gender-Responsive Pedagogy (GRP), which equips teachers with the skills to create inclusive, participatory learning environments, recognise and address gender biases in the classroom, and encourage equitable student engagement and performance.

Through partnerships in initiatives such as the [Regional Teachers' Initiative for Africa \(RTIA\)](#), GRP is being integrated into Teacher Professional Development systems in SSA with a focus on identifying, co-creating and scaling promising TPD for GRP solutions, thereby improving learning outcomes and the socio-emotional development of children in Africa.

Building on the SDG4-Education 2030 commitments, the 2021 Global Partnership for Education's [Call to Action on Education Finance](#), the [Paris Declaration on Education Financing](#) and other existing frameworks on financing for development, it is imperative that governments and education partners assume their responsibility for adequate financing of education, working to identify and solve the main roadblocks to domestically agreed priorities and internationally agreed goals for education. Further, they need to commit to allocating educational investment more equitably and efficiently, starting with early childhood care and education so that advances towards quality education for all are efficiently achieved. This will enable every child regardless of gender, location or socio-economic status, to thrive.

In commemoration of the [Day of the African Child](#), let us all renew our dedication to ensuring every child enjoys equitable access to education through proper planning and budgeting. Let us all advocate for sustainable financing models that support innovative teaching approaches, inclusive learning environments and strengthening education systems.

Spotlight on Our Partners



Who We Work With

The success of our programmes is made possible through strategic collaboration with key institutions and agencies across Kenya. Each partner brings valuable expertise, commitment and reach, working together to transform education for all.

Ministry of Education (MoE)

The Ministry of Education leads the formulation and implementation of education and training policies in Kenya. It is responsible for setting standards, developing curricula, overseeing examinations, and managing institutions from basic to higher education. The Ministry plays a central role in ensuring the alignment of our work with national education goals.

Teachers Service Commission (TSC)

The TSC is an independent constitutional body charged with managing human resources in the education sector. From teacher recruitment to professional development, it plays a pivotal role in ensuring quality teaching across Kenya.

Vision: A motivated, ethical and globally competitive teacher.

Mission: To regulate, maintain and manage the teaching service through sound policies and operational excellence.

Kenya Education Management Institute (KEMI)

A Semi-Autonomous Government Agency under the Ministry of Education, KEMI is mandated to provide training, research and consultancy services to enhance education management.

Vision: Effectively managed institutions of learning.

Mission: To provide quality training, research and consultancy that promotes the capacity development of education managers and stakeholders nationally and globally.

Centre for Mathematics, Science and Technology Education in Africa (CEMASTEa)

CEMASTEa is a public institution dedicated to advancing STEM education for sustainable development. Through training, research and innovation, it builds capacity across the STEM education ecosystem in partnership with national and international stakeholders.

Vision: An empowered, creative and innovative STEM society in Africa.

Mission: To continuously develop capacity in STEM education for sustainable development through training, research, innovation and partnerships.

Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD)

KICD is mandated to develop, review and approve curricula and curriculum support materials for basic and tertiary education. The institute also provides curriculum-based consultancy and supports the implementation of the Competency-Based Education.

Vision: A skilled and ethical society.

Mission: To provide curricula and support materials through research and engagement, nurturing every learner's potential for sustainable development.

Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE)

FAWE is a pan-African NGO with a presence in 34 countries, promoting gender equity and equality in education. Through advocacy and capacity building, FAWE ensures girls and women across Africa access quality education.

Vision: An equitable and inclusive society where all African girls and women thrive.

Mission: To promote gender-responsive policies, practices and attitudes in education to enhance equal opportunities for African girls and women.

Strengthening Schools by Strengthening Leaders

KEMI's Broader Approach to Strengthening School Leadership

Dr. Joyce Kiruma,
Director, Research & Consultancy – KEMI



Dr. Joyce addresses school leaders on the role of effective leadership in curriculum implementation. | Photo by VVOB

As Kenya continues to implement the Competency-Based Education (CBE), the role of school leaders today demands a blend of instructional guidance, strategic planning, digital competence and the ability to foster inclusive, learner-centred environments. At the Kenya Education Management Institute (KEMI), we are aligning our training programmes to reflect this shift and to build leadership capacity that supports meaningful education reform.

KEMI's mandate is to promote the professional growth of education managers. Over the years, we have transitioned from conventional training models to embrace more flexible, responsive and context-specific approaches. One of the most significant steps in this evolution has been our partnership with VVOB- education for development through the Implementing national

curriculum reforms through app-based learning for school leaders in secondary education (INCREASE) programme. INCREASE aims at equipping junior school leaders with the competencies needed to implement CBE effectively. This collaboration has enabled us to design and implement a blended learning model that redefines professional development for school leaders.

Blended Learning That Builds Confidence and Competence

The Effective School Leadership for Junior Schools (ESL4JS) course, delivered through app-based self-learning, virtual facilitation and face-to-face mentorship, is a testament to the power of innovation in education. The ESL4JS course is a 120-hour training under the INCREASE

programme, which was designed with the aim to strengthen school leaders' instructional leadership competences, thus enabling them to gain a deeper understanding of the CBE framework and its implications for teaching and learning. More than 1,000 school leaders across 21 counties have now participated in the programme, developing stronger leadership practices that are directly improving school culture and teaching quality.

These leaders are embracing digital tools, building internal mentorship structures and championing a more collaborative approach to school governance. The shift from passive to active professional development is not only empowering school leaders but also sparking broader institutional change within KEMI.

Driving Systemic Change Through Partnerships and Evidence

Our vision for leadership development extends beyond ESL4JS. We are committed to institutionalising competency-based training and embedding digital technologies across our programmes. Whether through teacher performance appraisal, data management through the National Education Management Information System (NEMIS) or strengthening school improvement planning, KEMI is aligning its work with national priorities and education reform efforts.

Key to our approach is strong stakeholder collaboration with the Teachers Service Commission (TSC), Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC), and development partners. Together, we are creating aligned, scalable leadership pathways that strengthen both policy and practice.

As Director of Research and Consultancy, I believe that evidence must drive progress. We continuously gather feedback, conduct evaluations and collaborate on research, including under the INCREASE programme, to understand how leadership training influences teacher efficacy and learner outcomes. These insights guide our content development, delivery methods and scaling strategies.

In the future, we envision a national framework

for leadership development that is continuous, accessible and linked to school transformation. Whether through continuous professional development accreditation, certification reform, or digital expansion, KEMI is investing in leadership that is future-ready and responsive to learners' needs.

As we deepen our contribution to Kenya's education reforms, we remain anchored in one truth: empowered leaders drive successful schools. Through innovation, partnerships, and evidence-driven strategies, KEMI is proud to be shaping the next generation of school leaders for Kenya.



Dr. Joyce engaging participants during an ESL4JS session. | Photo by VVOB

Behind Every Great STEM Lesson is a Trained Teacher

How CEMASTEА is Equipping Schools for Quality Teaching and Learning

Kizito Makoba,

Dean, Biology department - CEMASTEА

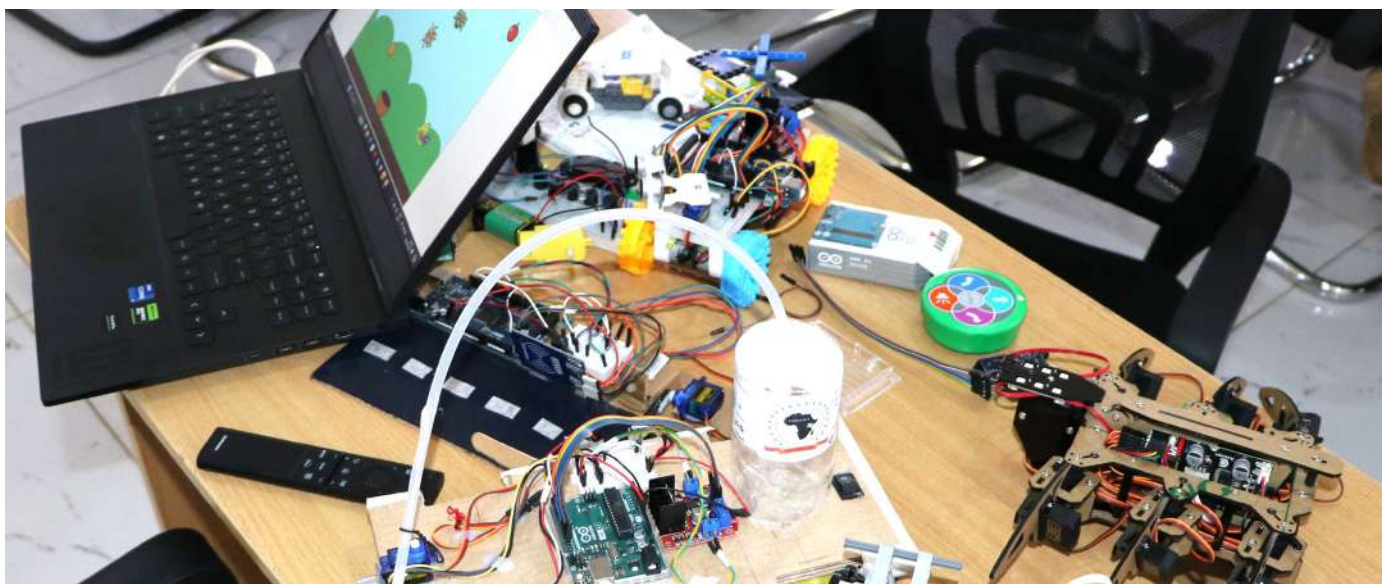
In today's rapidly evolving world, Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education is the foundation for innovation, economic development and global competitiveness. For Kenya, investing in a strong STEM workforce is critical to achieving the country's development blueprint, Vision 2030. Yet, persistent challenges such as insufficient teacher training, limited teaching resources and outdated methodologies continue to hinder meaningful instruction.

This is where the Centre for Mathematics, Science, and Technology Education in Africa (CEMASTEА) plays a vital role. As a leading institution for STEM education in the region, CEMASTEА is at the forefront of empowering schools to offer learner-centred, high-quality STEM instruction through targeted teacher capacity-building and strategic innovation.

Transforming Teaching Through Capacity Building

Quality STEM education requires hands-on, experiential learning that encourages problem-solving, creativity and critical thinking. Many teachers, however, struggle to create such engaging learning experiences due to a lack of support and training.

CEMASTEА addresses this gap through comprehensive professional development programmes that build teachers' capacity to design and deliver inquiry-based lessons. Through workshops, seminars and mentorship initiatives, educators are equipped with practical strategies and digital tools that make STEM subjects more engaging and relatable for learners. These programmes also integrate emerging trends, such as computational thinking, robotics and climate science, ensuring teachers are future-ready.



A robotics class ongoing | Photo by VVOB

Bridging the Resource Gap

To complement its training efforts, CEMASTEAs has developed a suite of teaching and learning resources tailored for diverse school contexts. These include virtual laboratories, interactive STEM kits and an offline STEM library, accessible via a dedicated digital portal. These innovations are particularly valuable for schools in remote or under-resourced areas, enabling them to offer high-quality STEM learning without the need for constant internet connectivity.

Inspiring the Next Generation of Innovators

CEMASTEAs work doesn't stop with teachers. The centre is also focused on directly nurturing students' interest in STEM through boot camps, math Olympiads and mentorship programmes, especially for girls, who are often underrepresented

in STEM fields. These initiatives are designed to spark curiosity and build confidence in young learners, setting them on a path toward STEM careers.

Evidence of Progress

CEMASTEAs success is amplified through its partnerships with government agencies, industry players and international organisations. These collaborations foster a sustainable ecosystem for STEM education by ensuring alignment with policy priorities, improving resource mobilisation and encouraging innovation across the sector.

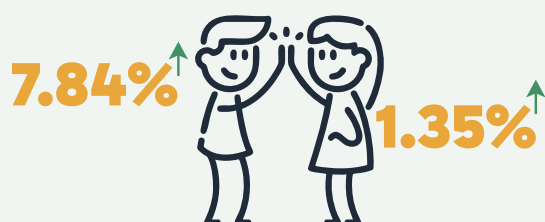
A 2022 survey evaluating the STEM Model Schools Programme between 2017 and 2021 reported promising outcomes:

Looking ahead, CEMASTEAs plans to integrate coding and artificial intelligence (AI) into teacher training and classroom practice. The expansion of virtual labs and STEM resource hubs, alongside a dedicated mentorship programme for junior schoolgirls, will further increase access to quality STEM education nationwide.

Shaping a STEM-Ready Kenya

The journey to a STEM-driven future requires collective commitment. Schools and educators are encouraged to fully leverage CEMASTEAs programmes and resources to enrich teaching practices and improve learner outcomes. By investing in teacher capacity today, Kenya can unlock a generation of problem-solvers, innovators and critical thinkers.

CEMASTEAs unwavering dedication to STEM education is positioning Kenya as a regional leader in innovation. As we celebrate these milestones, let us continue to support and scale these efforts for the benefit of our learners, our economy and our shared future.



STEM subject enrolments rose, with a 7.84% increase in physics uptake among boys, and 1.35% among girls.



Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) performance in Biology and Agriculture showed marked improvement.



Kenya's innovation ranking climbed to 3rd in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2021—an encouraging sign of the country's growing STEM capabilities.

Fostering Peer Learning and Mentorship in STEM Education

Ann Mumbi,

Principal Corporate Communication Officer - CEMASTEА



School leaders exploring the course on their phone. | Photo by VVOB

The Centre for Mathematics, Science and Technology Education in Africa (CEMASTEА) is championing innovative approaches to peer learning and mentorship through its targeted coaching and outreach initiatives in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education. Grounded in the belief that experiential learning can be transformative, the organisation engages both teachers and learners in collaborative, hands-on activities that spark creativity and deepen understanding.

Through its STEM outreach programmes such as school visits, CEMASTEА seamlessly integrates mentorship by connecting learners and educators with experienced subject specialists. These interactions are designed not only to nurture an appreciation for STEM but also to build vital 21st-century skills including communication, critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving.

Why Outreach Matters

CEMASTEА has long been a national hub for promoting STEM education through the development of innovative teaching resources, use of locally available materials and practical learning experiences. At the core of its efforts is the makerspace and innovation room, vibrant, resource-rich environments where teachers and learners can engage directly with STEM concepts.

However, CEMASTEА recognised a persistent gap: not all schools could access these facilities due to long travel distances, logistical challenges and limited space at the centre. In response, CEMASTEА piloted its STEM Outreach Programme in five counties: Machakos, Nairobi, Nyeri, Garissa and Kisumu. The results were clear that the outreach model was necessary, revealing a strong demand from both learners and teachers. The programme was created to take the CEMASTEА experience directly to schools, allowing more educators and students to benefit from practical, interactive STEM learning.

Learning Through Exploration

During outreach visits, participating schools provide designated spaces where learners rotate through subject-specific stations: Mathematics, Integrated Sciences (Biology, Chemistry, Physics) and Pre-Technical Studies. At each station, learners engage in inquiry-based, hands-on activities designed to demystify STEM concepts and reinforce classroom learning.

- In Mathematics, students explore concepts using tools such as abacuses, geometric shapes and solids, fostering peer interaction and active problem-solving.
- In the Integrated Sciences, learners use microscopes, basic lab tools and computers to conduct simple experiments, from preparing temporary slides to understanding magnetism and static electricity.
- At the Pre-Tech station, students dive into foundational computing, programming and creative tasks like building customised game controllers, combining logic, creativity and tech innovation.

Teachers actively observe these sessions and receive real-time coaching from subject experts. This dual engagement strengthens their instructional practices while also modelling how to adopt learner-centred pedagogies in their own classrooms.

Teamwork Behind the Scenes

Each outreach visit is a carefully coordinated effort led by CEMASTEAs Chief Executive Officer, Mrs. Jacinta Akatsa, HSC. The implementation team includes national subject trainers, laboratory technologists (in sciences, mathematics, and ICT), research officers, communication personnel and administrative staff. The CEO's office also liaises with the relevant County Directors of Education to align efforts with local needs and ensure smooth execution.

Looking Ahead

With the Competency-Based Education (CBE) approach emphasising practical, applied learning, STEM outreach is becoming an essential tool for bridging the gap between theory and practice. CEMASTEAs plans to expand the programme to reach more counties across Kenya. Future phases will continue to prioritise teacher mentorship, learner engagement, and context-relevant innovation.

The enthusiastic response from both learners and educators affirms the power of bringing STEM to life, right where learning happens. By embedding mentorship and experiential learning into outreach, CEMASTEAs is helping shape a more curious, confident, and capable generation of STEM thinkers and doers.



A student using a microscope in a biology class | Photo by VVOB

In Conversation



Flora Ntongai

INCREASE¹ Technical Working Group



Flora Ntongai. INCREASE TWG member

Q: Please introduce yourself and briefly describe your current role at the Ministry of Education

A: My name is Flora Ntongai. I serve as a Director at the Ministry of Education under the State Department for Basic Education, in the Directorate of Junior School Education. I am in charge of Junior School Academic Programmes, which involves coordinating the disbursement of capitation grants to learners in public junior schools, monitoring the distribution of instructional materials and overseeing the implementation of educational programmes in junior schools.

Q: How long have you been a member of the Technical Working Group (TWG) and what role do you play?

A: I joined the Technical Working Group in April 2025, representing the Directorate of Junior School Education. In this role, I contribute to shaping policies and strategies that support the effective implementation of junior school education. My participation ensures that the perspectives and needs of the directorate are reflected in the group's discussions and decisions.

Q: What has your experience been like serving as a TWG member in the INCREASE programme?

A: It has been a truly collaborative and rewarding experience. The Implementing National Curriculum Reforms through app-based learning for school leaders in Secondary Education (INCREASE) programme is inclusive, bringing together relevant technical directorates and education agencies to jointly plan and share lessons learnt from past initiatives.

I also appreciate the flexibility and accessibility of the programme. Its blended learning model is well-suited for school leaders with tight schedules, especially those in remote areas. The ability to access content through smartphones makes the learning experience more convenient.

Q: What aspects of the programme have stood out for you so far? Any notable successes or moments of impact?

A: The app-based training is particularly impressive. It is user-friendly, interactive and allows school leaders to learn anytime, anywhere, making professional development more feasible.

I have also seen significant value in the training on ICT integration. Helping school leaders understand how to use technology to support learner programmes will go a long way in improving the teaching and learning environment in junior schools.

¹ The INCREASE project centres on strengthening the professional development of school leaders to effectively implement the competency-based education (CBE) in junior school education.

Q: In your view, how is the INCREASE programme helping address key challenges in school leadership, especially within the context of ongoing education reforms?

A: The INCREASE programme is filling critical gaps in junior school leadership. It is:

- Equipping school leaders with the knowledge and skills to implement Competency-Based Education (CBE), aligned with the Presidential Working Party on Education Reform (PWPER).
- Addressing gaps in resource management, an area where many school leaders have limited experience.
- Providing training on institutional governance and enhanced learner support, both key for effective CBE implementation.

Q: What are your hopes for the future of school leadership in Kenya?

A: I believe that school leaders need ongoing capacity building to manage education reforms efficiently and effectively.

There should also be more focus on digital literacy, especially in the use of data systems like National Education Management Information System (NEMIS)² and Kenya Education Management Information System (KEMIS)³. Including a dedicated unit on these platforms in the INCREASE programme would help school leaders manage school data more confidently and accurately.

Q: Any final thoughts or messages you'd like to share with school leaders and education stakeholders reading this newsletter?

A: CBE is a learner-centred and inclusive approach that prepares our students for the demands of the 21st century. I encourage school leaders to keep sharpening their skills and knowledge to meet the evolving expectations of today's education landscape.

Lastly, I want to highlight the important role

of partners and stakeholders. Their continued collaboration is essential for the successful implementation of CBE and other education programmes. The Ministry of Education truly appreciates these valuable contributions.



Its blended learning model is well-suited for school leaders with tight schedules, especially those in remote areas.

Personalized support in the room as a KEMI trainer helps clarify something on the app. | Photo by VVOB

² A web-based data management solution which collects data and information from education institutions; processes and reports the status of designed indicators; and provides the sector a solid ground for effective management to ensure that every learner counts.

³ A web application that tracks performance mobility of learners and teaching staff from Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE) to Institutions of Higher Learning to ensure maximum efficiency and effective utilization of education resources.



Noam Janssens. SEA. VVOB | Photo by VVOB

Noam Janssens, Strategic Education Advisor – VVOB in Kenya

Q: Can you tell us a bit about your role and your involvement with the INCREASE programme?

I work as a Strategic Education Advisor for VVOB in Kenya. My main focus is the INCREASE programme which supports the roll-out of Kenya's Competency-Based Education (CBE) by strengthening instructional leadership in junior schools. As a focal point of the programme, I work closely with our key partner, the Kenya Education Management Institute (KEMI), to co-implement the programme. Together, we design and deliver professional development opportunities that are not only relevant and scalable but also fully aligned with the Ministry of Education's vision for effective school leadership.

Q: Why is INCREASE significant within the Kenyan education landscape?

INCREASE plays a crucial role in Kenya's education landscape because it tackles one of the most practical questions facing school leaders today: How do we lead schools in a way that actually improves learning? With the introduction of the CBE, school heads are no longer just expected to manage operations, they are now at the centre of instructional transformation. INCREASE helps bridge that gap by providing tools, training, and coaching that empower school leaders to support teachers in implementing learner-centred, competency-based practices.

Q: What are some key achievements so far, particularly in strengthening instructional leadership?

One of the proudest achievements has been the piloting of the Effective School Leadership for Junior Schools (ESL4JS) blended course, which KEMI and VVOB co-designed and now implement together. It has already reached hundreds of school leaders across multiple counties. Beyond the numbers, we are seeing real changes—heads who previously focused on compliance now talk about learning outcomes and classroom observation. The course helps shift mindsets and practices.

Q: The INCREASE programme takes a multi-agency approach. What stands out about this kind of collaboration?

What has been really powerful about the INCREASE programme is how it brings multiple actors to the same table: KEMI, multiple departments of the Ministry of Education, the Teachers Service Commission, KICD and county governments. Each brings a different strength. What makes it work is a shared commitment to system-level change and a strong foundation of trust. With KEMI, for example, we have been able to iterate quickly, improve course content based on feedback and explore digital solutions to scale training without compromising quality.

Q: Have you observed change at the school or county level as a result of the programme?

Absolutely. School leaders who have gone through the course are now running internal CPD sessions, using coaching tools we introduced and actively tracking learning outcomes. These are practical, visible changes. We have also seen county officials referencing INCREASE approaches when shaping local education plans, which signals broader institutional uptake.

Q: Are there any standout moments or success stories that have stayed with you in the course of your work with INCREASE?

A real standout success for me is seeing how KEMI has embraced and now delivers blended Continuous Professional Development (CPD) that includes app-based learning. This is a significant shift. It means we are no longer limited to face-to-face workshops or traditional delivery models. School leaders can now engage in flexible, self-paced learning, even in remote areas, without losing the richness of peer interaction.

What is especially powerful is how the blended model leverages the expertise that already exists among school leaders. Through virtual forums, peer review and school-based practicums, heads and deputies are not just receiving knowledge, they are co-constructing it together. It is a clear example of institutional growth and it sets a precedent for

how CPD can be made more relevant, scalable and sustainable within Kenya's education system.

Q: What challenges does INCREASE help address in the context of ongoing education reforms like CBE?

One major challenge has been helping school leaders shift from a syllabus-driven to a competency-based mindset. That is a fundamental change and requires both guidance and space to learn and adapt. INCREASE provides that space through training, coaching and peer collaboration. It is also aligned with the reforms' emphasis on school-based CPD and decentralised support.

Q: As we approach the final phase of the programme, what are the next priorities?

Sustainability is our top priority. We want to ensure that INCREASE approaches are embedded within KEMI's systems and routines and that county-level actors have the capacity to continue this work. We are also working on strengthening the programme's evidence base so that future policy decisions are grounded in what we've learnt from implementation.

Q: What have you personally learnt or valued most in your role as focal point for INCREASE?

The chance to work closely with dedicated educators and institutions like KEMI has been incredibly rewarding. I have learnt that lasting change comes from collaboration, not from bringing in ready-made solutions. It requires listening, learning together and building on local strengths.

Q: Finally, what message would you share with others working to improve school leadership and learning outcomes?

To all education stakeholders: keep investing in school leadership. The impact a well-supported headteacher can have on teaching and learning is enormous. When we invest in leaders, we multiply the impact of every other reform, because they are the ones making change happen, day in and day out.



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