



*Annual report 2017*

# Tackling barriers to education for all



# Preface

Dear reader,

Education, and the quality of education in particular, concerns us all. Parents are prepared to make sacrifices to get their children to school. We agree that the teaching profession, and the motivation and wellbeing of those individuals fulfilling it, needs to be prioritised. Governments have made commitments to inclusive education with the SDGs. And we know we owe school leaders the additional resources they require for creating conducive learning environments.

And yet we're struggling to close the learning gap. Worldwide, children are still denied equal opportunities at the start of their learning careers because of their race, sex or background.

This is exactly what VVOB focuses on. Together with the Belgian government, its main donor, VVOB agreed on a new five-year programme, which will run until 2021. 'Reaching the most vulnerable learners' is the main thread.

We applaud the fact that ever more young learners are enrolled in school in our partner countries. But the next question is: what are they learning, and how? In classrooms of 80 learners and more, it is hard to achieve involvement or to monitor their progress. Moreover, we see that children from the poorest families are the ones who drop out first. Their families require them to do their part for the household and family income.

Yet education is the first and most direct route to development, both for the individual and society. Quality education facilitates an easy transition to the world of work and, as a result, leads to higher income. It also leads to better health and family planning, less gender inequality, more entrepreneurship, more awareness about the environment, and more affinity with democracy and good governance.

Are we aiming too high? No. For me, education is the only way to go, with special attention for the most vulnerable learners.

VVOB contributes to this with valuable support from a wide network of education experts, both in Flanders and international: governments in our partner countries, NGOs, civil society, education networks, university colleges, teacher trainers and other education actors. This broad network fosters sustainable support from different corners in society. At the same time, we focus on building the capacity of school leaders and (newly qualified) teachers, so schools can be the best learning environments. This two-pronged approach is crucial for quality education for all.

To discover more, I warmly invite you to read on.

**Stefaan Van Mulders**

*Chairperson VVOB*

*Administrator-General of Youth Welfare Agency*



# Content

**3**     *Preface*

**4**     *Content*

**5**     *Introduction*

**6**     *Stories*

6        Cambodia | “Textbooks should show women as doctors and engineers”

8        DR Congo | Reducing youth unemployment through self-employment

10       Ecuador | “RCC Projects give its technical students that extra edge”

12       Rwanda | Empowered school leaders boost girls’ education

14       Suriname | “Local partners provide a shortcut to reaching vulnerable youngsters”

16       Vietnam | Diversity in preschools: an asset

18       Zambia | A quest for literacy: because falling behind is not an option

20       South Africa | Professional learning communities: where teachers support teachers

22       Belgium | Learning opportunities for vulnerable learners through international dialogue

24       Belgium | “Pupils learn to respect people who are ‘different’”

**26**     *Our expertise shared worldwide*

**27**     *VVOB Ambassador Van Rompuy*

**28**     *Overview of our donors in 2017*

**30**     *Financial report*

**34**     *Management of VVOB in 2017*

**35**     *Acknowledgements*

# Introduction

*"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights"  
(Art. 1 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948)*

In 1948, the world was in agreement: the fundamental human rights of every child and individual, without any form of discrimination, are to be respected and fulfilled. Since then, international research has often shown that access to quality education is an important, maybe the most important, catalyst to put these rights into practice.

And yet today, 70 years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, not all children and youngsters have equal access to quality education.

Indeed. Of those learners who attend school – and thankfully more children than ever before are enrolled – many do not learn enough, or even at all. According to recent studies, this is the case for over 300 million learners in primary and secondary education. The reasons for this shortfall of quality are plenty: insufficient funding, deficient initial teacher training and lack of quality professional development opportunities for teachers and school leaders, irrelevant and inadequate learning materials, and the list goes on.

What stands out, is the fact that, globally, similar population groups are confronted with additional barriers that prevent them from benefitting from effective, quality education: children with a poor socio-economic background or different mother language, children with an ethnic minority background, and girls. Personal background and sex are still determining factors in explaining learning outcomes. We cannot and will not accept this.

This structural disfranchisement in the education system deprives these children and youngsters from equal opportunities in life.

This deprivation then turns into genuine poverty, poverty that is passed on from generation to generation.

VVOB doesn't want to take this situation for granted. On the contrary, every day our staff joins forces with governments in our partner countries to improve the quality of the education system. The growing number of donors capacitates us to put this commitment into practice. We're very grateful to these institutions.

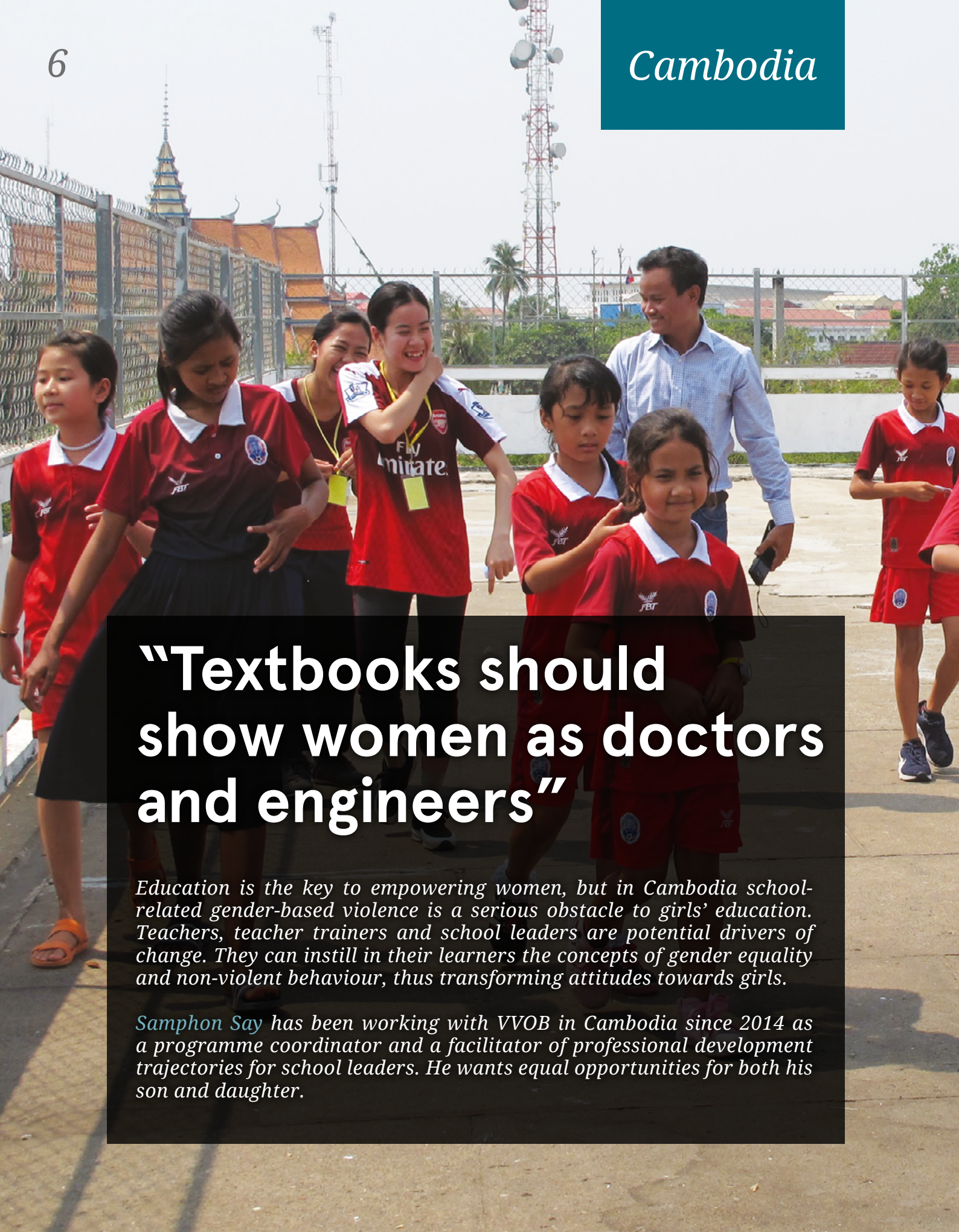
The battle for equal opportunities in education isn't far removed from our own personal lives. Many staff members of VVOB in our partner countries experienced the importance of education growing up. In this report, they tell their stories. Our colleagues share how their own past experiences have formed their view of the different barriers to learning in their countries. And how that stimulates them to make sure these barriers are torn down for future generations, together with VVOB.

Because every child, without exception, has the right to quality education.

Enjoy reading,

**Sven Rooms**  
*General Director*





## “Textbooks should show women as doctors and engineers”

*Education is the key to empowering women, but in Cambodia school-related gender-based violence is a serious obstacle to girls' education. Teachers, teacher trainers and school leaders are potential drivers of change. They can instill in their learners the concepts of gender equality and non-violent behaviour, thus transforming attitudes towards girls.*

*Samphon Say has been working with VVOB in Cambodia since 2014 as a programme coordinator and a facilitator of professional development trajectories for school leaders. He wants equal opportunities for both his son and daughter.*

## Female role models

### What would have to change in Cambodia for your daughter to have the same opportunities as your son?

**Samphon Say:** Girls are not encouraged to become managers or engineers. Society makes them feel they need to take care of the children. Consequently, women assume they're not equipped to take up leadership roles. This competence is not equally stimulated in boys and girls. These gender expectations influence the way teachers approach young girls, which is different from how they approach boys.

Authority figures like school leaders or directors at a Teacher Education College (TEC) are held in high regard and are therefore strong players for changing this tradition. That's why VVOB's starting point is to strengthen these school leaders. And in classrooms, teachers should stimulate learners equally in all subjects so that, when they grow up, they will feel equally confident.

### We know people's beliefs can stand in the way of real change. What is your approach to tackling teachers' gender biases?

It's not easy to change beliefs. But people *can* change when confronted with evidence. There's a Chinese saying: "Hearing a hundred times, is not as good as seeing once." We can provide as much training as we want, but if they're only listening, it won't be enough. People need to see that something is possible in their own context. Therefore, we need successful female role models, to show what women and girls can do and to be able to start a conversation about gender.

## Guides for action

### How will you capacitate drivers of change in the education system to ensure a gender-responsive pedagogy?

At the moment, VVOB is working with a team of ministry officials and TEC staff to provide training and coaching to teachers and school leaders on changing gender stereotypes. We're creating training materials that are gender-responsive in language and instructions.

We want to turn teachers into role models. School leaders are crucial in motivating teachers to address gender biases. In turn, teachers encourage their students to look out for gender stereotypes in textbooks – such as a depiction of more men than women in management positions, or more women than men doing household chores – and discuss these issues.

To this end, VVOB develops action guides for schools and TECs to promote gender equality. These include guidelines on using gender-responsive language, teaching and learning materials, classroom set-ups, and school policies and facilities. Teachers will also find tips to organise teaching and learning activities where boys and girls can participate equally and have equal responsibilities. Teachers are stimulated to observe each other and look out for gender-responsiveness.

By the end of VVOB's current projects in Cambodia in 2021, school leaders will be able to observe teachers and provide feedback on gender-responsiveness. The teachers and teacher trainers will have the knowledge and skills needed to promote gender equality in education, using the action guides. The established gender-responsive schools will be models of good practice that help inspire other schools and TECs with visits and video material, and that lobby the ministry.

## Gender from an early age

### What is the ultimate dream you have for your daughter and country?

I want to see girls and boys have the same opportunities in all fields of life. I wash the dishes at home. This way my daughter and son can see with their own eyes that it's not just the responsibility of the wife. I saw a picture my daughter drew in school which clearly showed she already has a kind of stereotype: the mother is cooking. These things start from a very young age. That's why we should be very sensitive of role models. She didn't know what my job is, so with gender in mind, I answered: "I take care of the baby." In the textbooks we should also show women as doctors and engineers, and at the same time men cooking at home.

## SMART

### Strengthening Maths Results and Teaching

**Location:** Provinces Phnom Penh, Battambang, Kandal and Kampong Cham

**Timing:** 2017 - 2021

**Budget:** € 3,868,000

**Donor:** Belgium

**Reach:** 225,000 pupils primary education (directly), 1,419,000 pupils (potentially)

## TIGER

### Teaching for Improved Gender Equality and Responsiveness

**Location:** Battambang province

**Timing:** 2017 - 2020

**Budget:** € 782,834

**Donor:** Belgium, European Union

**Reach:** 9,600 pupils of primary and lower secondary education

# Reducing youth unemployment through self-employment



Liliane Bibombe

*Last year, VVOB started the implementation of a programme in DR Congo that centres on strengthening secondary agricultural technical education. The goal is to provide students with the skills needed to become entrepreneurs. Among those students targeted are disadvantaged youngsters. An important challenge is to ensure that the programme's achievements reach them too.*

*Liliane Bibombe joined VVOB in DR Congo as an expert in effective school leadership in 2014. She explains how the programme reaches the most vulnerable learners to improve their economic and social situation.*

## Current projects

### ETAGE

**Programme for the improvement of the quality of technical education and agricultural entrepreneurship**

**Location:** Province of Kongo Central (educational provinces Kongo Central 1 and 2)

**Timing:** 2017 - 2021

**Budget:** € 4,484,000

**Donor:** Belgium

**Reach:** 3,500 students

### Biodiversity

**Study on the impact of awareness raising in agricultural schools about the importance of sustainable agriculture for biodiversity**

**Location:** Educational provinces Kongo Central I and Kongo Central II

**Timing:** January - June 2017

**Budget:** € 9,550

**Donor:** DR Congo and Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences





## Wandering minds

**Which groups of children are most vulnerable in your country? What kind of barriers do they encounter?**

**Liliane Bibombe:** Vulnerable youngsters are found in all layers of society in Congo. Generally speaking, they come from families living in rural areas, most of whom experience serious financial difficulties. They are, as we say, children from poor families. Orphans and so-called wizarding children should be added to the list. These children live in difficult conditions, and their family situation limits their development. The parents can't afford to send their children to school, or the students have to drop out. Most of them are confronted with difficulties paying school fees. Here in Kisantu for example, every day you see youngsters who are not in school. They have been sent home because of unpaid school fees.

**When you or your colleagues visit schools and classrooms, how can you tell that there are students who are at risk of not learning?**

We see a great number of students whose personal problems gravely affect their learning process. Often these youngsters are in the back of the class, they are distracted, afraid to associate with others and have difficulty learning at the same pace as other students. The learner is physically present in the classroom, but because of many concerns and problems in life, the mind wanders off. Therefore, he or she isn't learning. This is also a cause for drop-out. Inequalities keep children away from school and that's how they fall outside of the system.

## Linking students and farmers

**VVOB is primarily concerned with educational needs. But does the organisation touch on other aspects of society in Congo?**

Education is our main job. And education in Congo, as is the case everywhere else, demands an inclusive approach. That's why, apart from pedagogy, we also tackle other topics that contribute to the wellbeing of the students and wider society. For example, we guide

learners in the awareness that the environment needs to be taken care of and maintained. In agricultural technology education, we encourage students to use green manures. We also sensitise them on the notions of gender and many other important equity topics.

**You also stimulate linking schools and agricultural organisations. What is the biggest benefit of such a partnership for vulnerable students?**

Indeed, we also approach farmer organisations and specialised institutions. The links that schools make with other organisations are better for all learners, without exception. Especially students from underprivileged backgrounds benefit. They have the most trouble finding a job beyond their immediate social circle. Thanks to these partnerships, they are exposed to new people and job opportunities, and they can develop their skills. Agricultural organisations open their doors for young unemployed people and offer them on-the-job work experience. Afterwards, they can more easily enter the world of work and be of value to society as a whole. Every year, disadvantaged students with this type of experience are hired.

## Entrepreneurship: the answer

**VVOB's current programmes in Congo will run until 2021. How will vulnerable students be benefited these next four years?**

Entrepreneurship skills: that's our main goal for education. Entrepreneurship offers an answer to one of the crucial issues faced by our country today. We want to reduce youth unemployment through self-employment.

I am convinced that there is no better remedy to poverty than to guide those who suffer towards financial independence. Our answer as VVOB to the students in need, is to train them to become entrepreneurs. Thus, when they finish their studies, they will be able to take care of themselves.

## “RCC Projects give its technical students that extra edge”

*The percentage of secondary students that choose to enrol in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is decreasing in Ecuador. Students think that technical training provides less opportunities after graduation. This is a paradox in the Ecuadorean context: national policies focus on development through technical enterprises, and the country’s young population is in urgent need of labour placement.*

*Linking technical training with the business world is essential to respond to labour expectations, as well as an effective way to improve education. This is achieved through RCC Projects (‘Relación Colegio – Comunidad’ / School – Community Partnership), which improve TVET quality and appreciation. Involved students explain why: acquiring curriculum-set competences in the workplace assures alignment between school and the world of work.*





**Daniel Rojas** should know. He is VVOB's driving force in Santo Domingo in Ecuador, working as an educational advisor for the RCC Projects. As a technical school graduate before obtaining a college degree, he feels at home in TVET schools. He follows up former students who were part of RCC Projects and are now facing their young adult post-graduation challenges.

### **Believing in your own learning experience**

#### **How do RCC Projects strengthen the development of technical competencies in students?**

**Daniel Rojas:** The main goal of RCC Projects is to create learning situations in real-life work environments. After reviewing theory in the classroom, students can put their newly acquired knowledge into practice right away. This allows them to be creative, discovering new ways of learning and how to put theory into practice.

#### **Why is this process especially valuable for students in vulnerable situations?**

Participating students can demonstrate that their skills are better compared to others when entering their local labour world. This gives them an extra 'edge' in selection procedures.

Take Jeison Paladines for example, a graduate from Jaime Roldós High School in Santo Domingo, located in a suburban area where young people face various challenges, including drug consumption. He was selected among various applicants to join a company that works on home electrical networks design and installation, because he was the only one with previous experience thanks to the Electrical Equipment RCC Project in which his class was involved.

### **Believing in the learning experience of others**

#### **In your experience, how do families influence the choice for a technical career?**

In the context where VVOB works, it's normally the parents who steer their daughters and sons in the direction of technical secondary education. Unfortunately, many schools don't provide adequate conditions to meet their expectations, which is reflected in the decreasing number of students in TVET schools.

In these situations, RCC Projects are key to boost motivation levels in technical students. This results in lower dropout percentages and, consequently, in an increased satisfaction of families in general about the education the students are receiving.

### **Believing in the results**

#### **What are the expectations of younger students who have not yet participated in RCC Projects?**

Comments of students who were already involved in an RCC Project provoke considerable interest in students that haven't participated in them yet. We've noticed their interest many times during RCC workshops: students outside of the classroom are visibly curious about what's happening inside the classroom and afterwards ask many questions about what they saw. This interest motivates them to later enrol in technical career options offered in their schools.

#### **For you, what is the most unexpected result of RCC Projects?**

These projects support schools as an alternative to appropriately handle students with 'difficult' behaviour or academic difficulties. RCC Projects significantly reduce this type of negative behaviour in students by keeping their interest, motivation and activity levels high in technical workshops. Teachers have told me often that the especially 'difficult' students choose to enrol in extra-curricular activities related to RCC Projects as a way to disassociate themselves from gangs.

## **F-EFTP**

### **Strengthening Technical and Professional Education and Training**

**Location:** Provinces of Esmeraldas, Manabí, and Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas (educational Zones 1 and 4)

**Timing:** 2017 - 2021

**Budget:** € 4,267,000

**Donor:** Belgium

**Reach:** 61,000 students

# Empowered school leaders boost girls' education

*For a long time, discrimination against women and girls in the Rwandan education system was considered normal. However, this has been changing in the last twenty years. VVOB is one of the actors supporting the government of Rwanda to ensure that all female and male learners have equal access to quality education.*

*Jeanne d'Arc Usanase is the operations and finance manager for VVOB in Rwanda. Her story depicts how women and girls were undermined when she was younger, shows the current situation regarding education for girls, and highlights VVOB's contribution to inclusive quality education in Rwanda.*



Jeanne d'Arc Usanase

## Valuing girls

**You were born and raised in Rwanda. How has education for girls evolved?**

**Jeanne d'Arc Usanase:** There used to be a lot of negative social norms undermining women and girls in all aspects. Some activities were traditionally defined for men, others for women. Girls were generally expected to be mothers, boys to financially support their parents and relatives. In other words, sending a girl to school was considered a waste of money and time.

This has changed over the years. Parents are now sending both girls and boys to school, partly thanks to the government's efforts in raising the status of women and girls. VVOB works closely with our government, who have good education policies that address this issue. We support the government in implementing them. This local rootedness guarantees sustainability long after VVOB's programmes end.

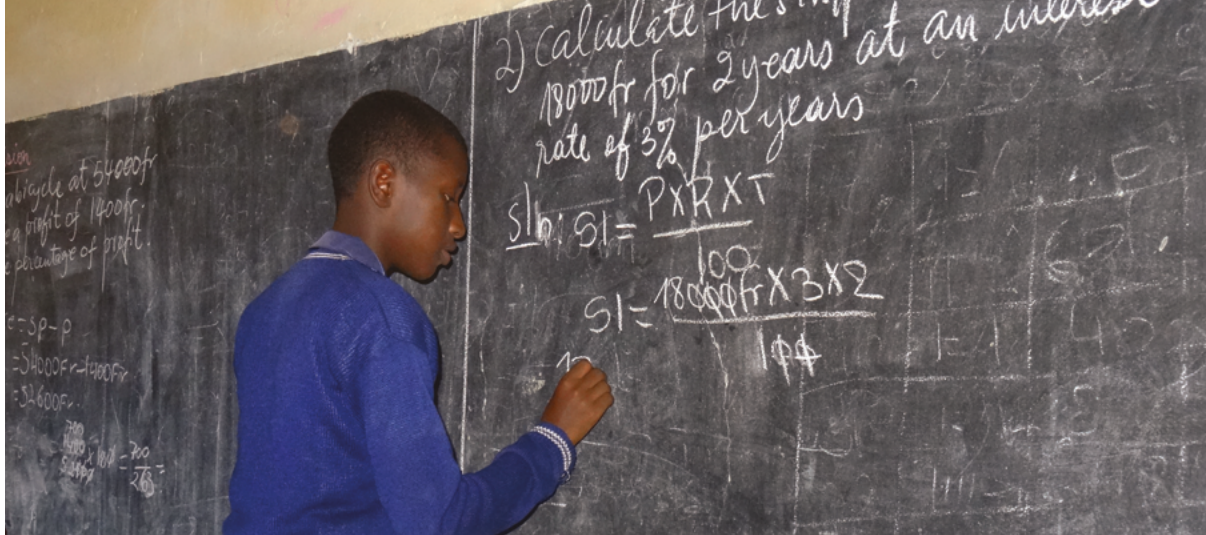
**What type of barriers to learning do girls in today's Rwanda still encounter?**

Stereotypes persist, and some groups in society are resisting change. Girls still miss out on school for various reasons. Some are absent during their period when the school doesn't have a 'girls' room', others because they are helping their parents in household chores or taking care of their siblings. More needs to be done so girls can overcome barriers to education and have equal opportunities to their brothers.

## Leaving no one behind

**So what can we do?**

VVOB is implementing a programme in Rwanda that aims at providing inclusive and equitable quality education for all female and male learners. The programme focuses on building the ca-



capacity of school leaders, teachers, school mentors and local leaders in charge of education. I believe this approach will address major challenges I faced of being treated as inferior to boys.

For example, with support of VVOB, the University of Rwanda - College of Education (URCE) trains subject leaders of math on how to deal with gender-related issues as far as learning and teaching math is concerned. Schools improve learning environments for both boys and girls, and effectively handle gender-based violence in schools. Girls will no longer fear or fail mathematics, rather they will love and improve their learning outcomes.

#### Have you experienced a positive outcome of VVOB's activities in Rwanda first-hand?

I once met a head teacher who completed a diploma course on school leadership offered by VVOB through URCE in 2016. Before the training, he was facing a number of issues at his school such as lack of clear vision, school dropout, handling teachers... He told me that the course opened his eyes. He started putting things in order: defining a clear vision for the school, developing action plans, involving teachers, parents and local leaders in all stages of the management. I was impressed.

### The future is female

#### Let's look ahead. How will VVOB's work in Rwanda contribute to achieving the SDGs?

It's obvious that the education system in Rwanda needs qualified leaders to take it forward. I believe that empowering school leaders in school leadership, coaching and mentoring teachers and local education officials, as VVOB has set out to do these next few years, will boost the education sector in Rwanda. This empowerment will certainly advance the implementation of the competency-based curriculum and improve learning outcomes in general, and especially for girls.

Once the SDG 4 goal on education has been achieved in Rwanda, I imagine all girls and boys will have equal access to quality education. Every child will receive early childhood education, and the majority of children of school age will attend school regularly and complete 12 years of basic education. There will be enough universities with the capacity to provide quality education to everyone.

## Girls on MARS

### Mathematics Achievements in Rwandan Schools

**Location:** Four districts in Eastern Province and two districts in Western Province

**Timing:** 2017 - 2021

**Budget:** € 4,159,000

**Donor:** Belgium

**Reach:** 565,000 primary education pupils

## Mentoring and supervision system

### Mentoring and supervising teachers fresh out of college

**Location:** Four districts in Eastern Province and two districts in Western Province

**Timing:** 2017 - 2021

**Budget:** € 2,148,091

**Donor:** Belgium, The ELMA Foundation

**Reach:** 150,000 primary education pupils (directly), 565,000 pupils (potentially)



**“Local partners provide a shortcut to reaching vulnerable youngsters”**

*Children are squeezed into a straitjacket from an early age. “This is the only acceptable way to act”, they are told. All that deviates from the standard, is not OK. Diversity is not accepted, but tolerated. This is also reflected in the education system. In Suriname, VVOB strengthens teachers to better deal with the diversity of their students.*

*Maggie Schmeitz works as an education advisor for VVOB in Suriname. Maggie’s main domains of expertise are women’s rights, and sexual and reproductive rights. These competences are crucial in addressing school dropout due to teenage pregnancies and gender-based violence. Maggie is of Surinamese origin, but born-and-raised in the Netherlands. She has been living in Suriname since 1994. Only then was she really struck by the rigidity in the Surinamese education system.*

## Teacher's feedback

### Which groups of students are the most vulnerable in Suriname, and why?

**Maggie Schmeitz:** Children in the inland are a vulnerable group, clearly reflected in their poorer learning outcomes. A first reason for this is the lack of quality education there. Teachers are sent from the capital to the inland without being properly prepared to live and work in a cultural community that is very different from their own. This undermines the quality of their teaching. Students from the inland are also required to take the same tests as their peers elsewhere. They can answer these questions only with knowledge from books, not from experiences from their own reality.

### Can you immediately tell who the vulnerable students are when you visit schools?

When observing in classrooms, vulnerable learners are quite often easy to notice. You immediately see who is participating and who isn't, who is being addressed by the teacher and who isn't. Also, the teacher's feedback is an important clue. There is a big difference between: "Come on, think for a moment, you can do it!" and: "Never mind... who else can take this turn?". Some teachers don't expect much from vulnerable students and therefore do not motivate them to learn.

In Suriname you cannot rely on looks and appearances when trying to identify vulnerable students. Those who are having a hard time financially or otherwise, are often the ones that will buy the most expensive sneakers. They think they have to prove themselves.

## Groundbreaking & necessary

### What support does VVOB offer to increase opportunities for vulnerable students?

In Suriname, VVOB works in lower secondary vocational education (LBO). In other words, VVOB makes a clear choice to work with a particularly vulnerable group of students. These learners have a harder time than their peers from general education to

find their place in society. In LBO there are many students who have left their inland home for the capital to increase their education opportunities. There is also a group of students who choose to attend the few LBO schools in the inland.

Our projects strengthen the competences of LBO school teams and other actors in the LBO system. We also empower LBO students directly. For example, the iGROW project focuses on sexual and reproductive health and rights. Together with the ministry, we pass on the message that we must create a safe learning environment for all learners, regardless of their gender, sexual orientation and so on. This is really important, especially because we've been seeing a regression towards more conservative norms and values. This is why it is important to make a statement now. Our work is actually quite groundbreaking, and very necessary.

## Despite pressure

### What are the advantages of VVOB's strategy to work with local partners?

By taking advantage of local expertise, VVOB ensures that its actions are embedded in society. Partnerships create a broader support base for the often new insights that VVOB introduces. By working together with Surinamese experts, VVOB also acquires knowledge of certain cultural characteristics and peculiarities. Local partners provide a shortcut to reaching vulnerable youngsters, because they know them formally or informally. It is exactly because of this approach that VVOB is greatly appreciated in Suriname.

### Can you tell us something about an inspiring person you met during your work?

There is a school leader at one of the iGROW schools that I find very impressive. She is very dedicated to the right to education of every child in her school. And this despite all kinds of internal and external pressure. She for instance refuses to dismiss teenage mothers from school and offers pupils who display problem behaviour a genuine second chance. I want to continue to support such school leaders. It gives me such a drive!

## PROGRESS LBO

**Programme for more effective LBO schools in Suriname**

**Location:** Country-wide

**Timing:** 2017 - 2019

**Budget:** € 2,251,150

**Donor:** Belgium

**Reach:** all 11,200 LBO students

## iGROW

**Initiative for Gender-Responsive Education**

**Location:** Marowijne and Paramaribo districts

**Timing:** 2017 - 2019

**Budget:** € 567,969

**Donor:** Belgium, European Union

**Reach:** 3,700 LBO students (directly), all 11,200 LBO students (potentially)

# Diversity in preschools: an asset

*In the mountainous regions of Central Vietnam, different ethnic minorities coexist. Preschool classes are often made up of children from multiple ethnic groups. In its current programme, VVOB works with the provincial educational authorities of three provinces of Central Vietnam to support teachers in teaching such diverse groups. Using a tool called ‘process-oriented child monitoring’, they reflect on their teaching practice to identify which children are (at risk of) not learning, and adapt their approaches accordingly to include all children.*

*Trần Thị Kim Lý, education advisor for VVOB in Vietnam, explains more in detail how the programme improves quality preschool education for all by focusing on the most vulnerable children.*

## BaMi

**Mitigating Preschool Children’s Barriers to Learning in Disadvantaged and Ethnically Diverse Districts**

**Location:** Provinces of Kon Tum, Quang Nam and Quang Ngai

**Timing:** 2017 - 2021

**Budget:** € 4,142,000

**Donor:** Belgium

**Reach:** 62,000 preschool children

*Current project*





## Satellite classes

**The current programme focuses on mitigating preschool children's barriers to learning in disadvantaged and ethnically diverse districts. Who are these children and why are they vulnerable?**

**Trần Thị Kim Lý:** 65 percent of the children reached by our programme are from ethnic minority groups. We work in remote mountainous areas, where most people live in difficult conditions. These rural regions are prone to natural disasters. People live far away from public facilities and in difficult economic conditions. Children in some of the most remote areas sometimes can't even access preschool. They attend a 'satellite' class closer to home instead that caters to the children in the area. Such a classroom is often made up of children of different ages - between 3 and 5 - and different ethnic origins.

In that sense, children of those regions are vulnerable in many ways, and those of ethnic minorities even more. They grow up in a different culture, speaking a different language, which results in additional challenges for the teachers. Our intervention aims at supporting the teachers to work constructively with that diversity.

## Common language

**What are the possible barriers that prevent children from learning? How does the programme help mitigate them?**

There are many barriers to learning. Our situation analysis of the provinces of Quang Nam, Quang Ngai and Kon Tum highlighted three main types: those related to gender, to environment, and to ethnic diversity.



Trần Thị Kim Lý (middle)

Regarding the last barrier type, most preschool teachers are from the Kinh majority and speak Vietnamese. Communication between them and the children of other ethnicities can be very challenging due to the lack of a common language. To address this challenge, the programme focuses on school-based and needs-based teacher professional development. The approach that is introduced, 'process-oriented child monitoring', helps teachers find new ways to deal with the communication challenges together with the young learners, and even take advantage of the multi-lingual context.

Rather than perceiving the differences of ethnicity as a barrier, they learn to see it as an asset and to adapt their teaching to diversity. They use this process-oriented tool to reflect on their teaching practice and to guide them in finding appropriate solutions to their specific contexts.

## Miscommunication

**Thinking of all your visits to preschools, what experience has struck you most?**

During one visit to a preschool, children were role playing. Two preschoolers were pretending to be sellers: one Kinh girl owned a vegetable shop and the other child, a young girl from an ethnic minority, owned a garage. The latter child looked bored. No one came to her garage, while a lot of kids were buying vegetables.

She tried to talk to the teacher, who didn't pay attention. Either because the teacher was talking to the vegetable vendor, because the little girl spoke her own mother tongue or too quietly, or for another reason... The child looked sad that she could not communicate with her teacher and the other children during that activity.

## Understanding children's needs

**Imagine it's 2030 and SDG 4 has been achieved in Vietnam. How will preschools have changed?**

Quality early childhood education would be provided to all children in Vietnam, by capable teachers who understand the children's needs. They will know how to address the barriers to learning, so that all children can develop holistically, especially the most vulnerable ones. This would be the result of the nationwide application of the process-oriented child monitoring approach adopted by the Ministry of Education and Training in all preschools in Vietnam.

# A quest for literacy: because falling behind is not an option



Adonai Ngosa

Most Zambian children go to primary school. Unfortunately, research indicates that many of them are not learning. This is not acceptable, because once left behind, children have very little opportunities to catch up.

'Teaching at the Right Level' is a remedial teaching methodology that helps these learners. J-PAL, Pratham and UNICEF introduced the approach in 80 schools in Eastern and Southern province, and commissioned VVOB to implement it. A second phase of the project started in December 2017 in the same two provinces, this time targeting 1750 schools.

*Adonai Ngosa*, coordinator with VVOB in Zambia, participated from the very beginning of the project. She became a strong advocate of Teaching at the Right Level.

## STEEL

**Supporting Teacher Education for Early Learning**

**Location:** Central Province

**Timing:** 2017 - 2021

**Budget:** € 4,562,000

**Donor:** Belgium

**Reach:** 148,000 children

## Catch-Up

**Teaching at the Right Level in Africa: pilot project and upscaling**

**Timing:** 2016-2017 (pilot) / 2017-2019 (upscaling)

**Budget:** ZMW 2,860,706 (pilot) / USD 820,123 (upscaling)

**Donor:** UNICEF, J-PAL (pilot) / USAID via J-PAL and University of Cape Town (upscaling)

**Reach:** 80 primary schools / 1,750 primary schools

## Back on track

### What is your motivation to work in the education sector and the Teaching at the Right Level project?

**Adonai Ngosa:** Education is a right for each individual child. It is also a means for enhancing the wellbeing and quality of life for an entire society.

My background as a teacher and my passion and experience in the classroom enable me to notice when children are not learning in class. They fall behind, and once they do, they are left behind and remain behind. They just move from grade to grade on automatic pilot. However, as they did not grasp the concepts of reading, how can they learn in the higher grades?

Only this morning I was talking to a teacher. Just 4 out of 53 children in her 6th grade class can read. 4 out of 53... Imagine that! My heart bleeds when I hear stories like this. Unfortunately, these stories are all too common. Reasons? Absenteeism linked to poverty, poor teaching skills...

There were no existing initiatives that could get these children back on track. Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) however, promised that it could do the job... and kept its promise. TaRL really improves learning outcomes in all the Zambian schools. Children in schools in the pilot were learning much better compared to children in schools that did not implement TaRL.

## Fast progress

### What is Teaching at the Right Level about?

It is a remedial teaching methodology which – in Zambia – focuses on literacy and numeracy. The project helps teachers to get better results in their classes by appropriately dealing with children who have fallen behind. The project focuses on children in grades 3, 4 and 5. At the beginning of the project, all children were tested by their teachers and divided into 5 groups: beginner level (can't read), letter level (they can read out some letters), word level (they can combine letters into a syllable), simple paragraph level (they can read a simple paragraph), story level (they can read a story). A similar grading happened for mathematics.

So, all children from grades 3, 4 and 5 who could not read were placed in one group and were taught at their level by a teacher. The same happened for the other groups. A child could be good in maths but bad in reading, or vice versa. For each subject, the learner was placed in the appropriate group and taught at his or her own level for each subject.

The progress of children was monitored by teachers. As soon as a child was ready, they could move up a level. Children made fast progress, sometimes moving up to the next level within a week already.

## From 80 to 1750

### Is this a sustainable project?

Yes. The project received growing support from both parents and teachers, and it is embraced by the Ministry of General Education. The ministry will continue this approach.

### And did it?

Yes, a new project with the ministry, J-PAL, Pratham, USAID and UNICEF has started, this time covering all districts in Southern and Eastern province in 1,750 schools. The ministry implements and oversees the project. VVOB's role is to provide pedagogical guidance and coaching on the TaRL-approach.

## Research

### Feasibility Testing of the Breadth of Learning Opportunities Tools

**Location:** Country-wide

**Timing:** 1 February – 30 April 2017

**Budget:** USD 5,000

**Donor:** The Brookings Institution

## QEECS

### Quality Early Education in Community Schools

**Location:** Copperbelt Province (Kitwe and Ndola)

**Timing:** 2014 - 2017

**Budget:** € 842,910

**Donor:** Belgium, European Union

**Reach:** 4,800 children (aged 3 to 8)

## Mentoring

### Effective early childhood education teaching practice systems

**Location:** Central Province

**Timing:** 2017 - 2019

**Budget:** € 942,341

**Donor:** Belgium, the ELMA Foundation

**Reach:** 54,800 (potentially 147,966) children

# Professional learning communities: where teachers support teachers

*Many issues prevent children from learning properly in South Africa. A legacy of Apartheid, most children in poor urban and rural areas of the country still do not receive quality education. Especially black girls have a hard time. Although access to schools has increased since the end of Apartheid, quality is still low and dropout rates are high. South African schools are struggling to keep their diverse learner population in school and ensure they make progress. Schools and teachers need to become more inclusive to achieve this: some reports indicate that 50 per cent of learners drop out before participating in their final exam.*

*Paul Mphisa works for VVOB in South Africa, where he facilitates professional learning communities for teachers. He tells us more about how VVOB strengthens teachers to teach more inclusively in his country.*

## LT4Diversity

**Leadership and Teaching for Diversity**

**Timing:** 2017 - 2021

**Location:** Pretoria, and provinces of Free State and KwaZulu-Natal

**Budget:** € 4,560,000

**Donor:** Belgium

**Reach:** 1,970,000 primary school pupils

## Vulnerable South African learners

As a VVOB employee, you often speak with teachers. What challenges are they confronted with?

**Paul Mphisa:** In one area of the Northern Cape province, we formed a professional learning community (PLC) called the Foundation Builders. The teachers from this PLC shared their experiences with me. They told me stories about how their learners struggle in the foundation phase. Many of their pupils haven't benefitted from early childhood education at all and start school immediately at grade one. Or they had a very poor grounding at grade R, which is still being phased in in many areas of South Africa. Some children do not get enough food at home to cope with the demands of learning.

Northern Cape also suffers from a high rate of Foetal Alcohol Syndrome, which affects learners' cognitive development. And many teachers are not skilled enough to recognise some problems arising from lack of gross and fine motor skills in children.

On top of these challenges, the curriculum sometimes encourages teachers to follow a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching, leading to many of these learners falling through the gaps. Teachers need to be extra resourceful and aware to deal with these diverse challenges faced by their learners. They need to be inclusive so every learner can progress in the foundation phase. All these themes are discussed in PLCs, a place where teachers support each other.

## Exchanging good practices

What type of barriers do the most vulnerable learners in South Africa encounter? How do PLCs mitigate them exactly?

Generally speaking, it's not always easy to identify vulnerable learners by the way they look, but many do look unhealthy, undernourished, poorly dressed, and so on. Black girls in poor urban and rural settings are the most vulnerable learners. In traditional societies, they are not valued as an asset to the family, since they will get married and leave their families. So, when resources are scarce, boys are put ahead. Some girls miss several schooldays a month because they lack simple things like sanitary pads.



Paul Mphisa

More challenging are the systemic and pedagogical barriers that require skilled teachers and flexible district officials. The PLC works on these challenges through exchanging good practices on how to assist slower learners while also helping gifted learners to progress.

In one PLC in the Free State, for example, there is a principal who started out as a teacher at a farm school and is now a principal of this school. She was so concerned about the reading challenges her learners faced, that she developed her own reading programme. She tested it in many contexts and found it works very well. She has been sharing it in PLC sessions and demonstrating with learners how it works.

## Committed

Based on your experiences growing up, how will VVOB strengthen the education system in your country, do you think?

VVOB will help the most vulnerable learners through encouraging the development of inclusive teaching in South African schools. If this can be done, many learners will be retained in the school system and make learning progress as well. This will improve the number of learners who succeed and, in turn, the number of people with improved prospects for a better life.

South Africa is committed to the Sustainable Development Goals. When we've achieved SDG 4, our country will be set for a prosperous future as it will have an educated population and skilled workforce. This will lead to a better economy and more opportunities for everybody in the country. That should result in a society that is positive and progressive, reducing social pressure, crime and violence.

## Inclusion

Teaching and Learning for Inclusive Education

**Location:** Provinces of Free State, Northern Cape, and North West

**Timing:** 2016 - 2019

**Budget:** € 1,107,155

**Donor:** Belgium, European Union

**Reach:** 7,300 (potentially 7,132,000) pupils

## Literacy Boost

Accelerated Early Grade Reading

**Location:** Free State Province

**Timing:** 2017 - 2019

**Budget:** ZAR 1,839,714

**Donor:** Save the Children South Africa, USAID

**Reach:** 55,000 pupils (primary school grade 1 to 3)

# Learning opportunities for vulnerable learners through international dialogue



*In 2017, VVOB launched the eNSPIRED programme for equity in education. As an inspirational tool, eNSPIRED seeks out educational practices from the South to inform practices of diversity and equity in education in Flanders.*

*The eNSPIRED advisory group, consisting of representatives of the Flemish partners of VVOB, decided on the main theme of the 2017-2018 schoolyear: vulnerable learners. In November, Prof. Kwame Akyeampong gave a driven lecture on 'Learning opportunities for vulnerable children: the teacher matters!'.*

*Els Callens is a member of the eNSPIRED advisory group and a teacher trainer at VIVES University College. After attending Prof. Akyeampong's class, we asked her how the eNSPIRED programme can inspire the education field in Flanders.*

## eNSPIRED

**International Dialogue on Equity in Education**

**Location:** Flemish community

**Timing:** 2017 - 2021

**Budget:** € 1,175,000

**Donor:** Belgium

**Reach:** 19,500 student teachers, 3,600 schools

## Social exclusion

**How did you experience education in Flanders as a child? Was there equity in education?**

**Els Callens:** As a child I went to a small rural school. I remember a girl called Lydie. She was a good friend of mine, who was suddenly transferred to a special needs school. We, as classmates, protested her leaving and tried to help her out with her schoolwork, but Lydie had to leave anyway.

Later in life, this incident made me think about the concept of 'social inclusion' in the mindset of teachers. We should respect children for their talents and give them opportunities to participate. As a friend, Lydie still was invited into our homes, but she was excluded by the educational system because she had to change schools.

## The teacher matters

**Which groups are the most vulnerable in Flanders and which difficulties do they encounter?**

In Flanders, we have a variety of vulnerable groups. Single parents are a good example, especially if the parent has a low income and a poor schooling level. Migrants face a hard time finding a job due to the language barrier. Unemployment has severe consequences for children's schooling as well. A parent who loses his or her job can become isolated from society and be confronted with difficulties he or she isn't prepared for.

Schools should function as a second environment where these vulnerable groups receive basic needs. This can only be achieved when teachers learn to observe and recognise certain signals. Despite common belief, poverty isn't an issue only big cities have to deal with. Small towns and communities are confronted with it as well, but in the countryside, poverty is often well hidden, which makes it harder for teachers to recognise the signals.

**How do you prepare student teachers to deal with vulnerable learners?**

In their first year, student teachers learn how to guide learners, and how to help them discover their strengths and talents, instead of focusing on their weaknesses.

In the second year of the programme, we focus on diversity in the classroom. Our students learn how children born in poverty may have different needs, but don't necessarily need to be treated differently.

In the third year of the training, our students discover the meaning of care more in detail, parental involvement and the whole school approach. Dealing with poverty and diversity is put into practice.

**Watch Prof. Akyeampong's guest lecture in full on [www.enspired.net](http://www.enspired.net)**

## An international dialogue

**In the next three years, the eNSPIRED programme wants to contribute to equity in education in Flanders. How will the programme influence teacher trainings by 2021?**

Guest lecturer Prof. Kwame Akyeampong confirmed that our shared challenges in education connect us all over the world. Teacher trainers, teachers and schools from across the world are looking for creative solutions for mutual problems. Through powerful and inspiring practical examples, we can enrich and strengthen each other.

During his lecture, Prof. Akyeampong emphasised that teachers should always consider the emotional baggage a child carries around with them. Educators should never ignore the child's home environment. This, unfortunately, doesn't always happen in practice.

eNSPIRED shares inspiring experiences and good practices from the South. This offers new insights to improve the educational system in Flanders for the most vulnerable in society. The programme can easily be integrated in college courses. I've used the available material on [www.enspired.net](http://www.enspired.net) in many of my more specialised lectures on special needs education. We will soon integrate this curriculum in our basic courses as well.

**The eNSPIRED lectures, online tools and learning weeks offer plenty of inspiration. What else can VVOB do to reach its goals?**

The core team of eNSPIRED is expanding and consists of teacher trainers and pedagogical counselors. Now, it's a matter of warming up more colleagues to the cause and getting them to join us in our mission.

Never underestimate the power of connecting with people. Face-to-face and personal contacts make an international dialogue sustainable. Through a collective exercise, we challenge ourselves and try to create inclusive, quality and sustainable education for everyone.



## “Pupils learn to respect people who are ‘different’”

*As Belgian society diversifies, schools too are confronted with more and more cultures, religions, languages, abilities... through the children they take in. In response, VVOB’s SchoolLinks programme is developing a range of activities that puts diversity at the heart of a meaningful exchange between two schools in the form of a school link.*

*The Juan Enrique Pestalozzi school in Ecuador and the primary school Scharrel in Flanders gladly took on the role of guinea pigs to test these activities. The school in Ecuador has a mixed population of learners with and without an intellectual disability, so exercises focusing on subjects like preconceptions, privileges and diversity in general are particularly interesting for this school link.*

*Teachers **Noor** and **Lut** travelled to the city of Otavalo to meet their Ecuadorean colleagues - and friends - Patty and Mónica.*





## Privileges and prejudices

### Which diversity-related activities did you organise in your respective schools and classrooms?

**Lut:** Our pupils in the fourth and the fifth grade participated in different activities with diversity as the main theme. After playfully singling out a few characteristics our pupils have, they focused on their differences and similarities as individuals in group. When we went to visit our partner school we did the same exercise. Back in Belgium our pupils compared their characteristics to those of their peers in Ecuador. Despite the differences in culture and environment, our pupils were surprised to discover so many similarities!

**Noor:** I asked my pupils of the sixth grade what 'a typical day' in their life looks like. Once again, we gave the same instructions to the Ecuadorean pupils in Otavalo. Beforehand, I was quite sceptical about the outcome, because of the young mental age of some of the Ecuadorean learners. Fortunately, Patty showed us how to support each individual child, which made the exercise a great success! It was a beautiful learning experience for us.

We took the time to sit down and have different conversations with our colleagues from the partner school. When the topic 'privilege' came up, we discussed the privileges we do or don't enjoy, and how that affects our lives and communities. Some fascinating insights were brought up about the diversity of the Ecuadorean population groups. We discussed the privileges some enjoy, and the prejudices others have to overcome, like the Mestizos and indigena's. Afterwards, we tried to find similarities with the Belgian context. Last but not least, we focused on a more gender-related topic: the role of men and women in society and at home.

**Mónica:** In Ecuador, *machismo*, or macho behaviour and (verbal) violence towards women, is rampant. Our Belgian colleagues made us realise that treating women respectfully already is a reality in many parts of the world and that gender inequality is something we can overcome!

## Wellbeing is superior

### How did these experiences influence your teaching practices?

**Mónica:** If you want to properly support your pupils, a good relationship with their parents is essential. Thanks to our experiences and the lessons we've learnt from our long talks, we were able to share our new insights on *machismo* and other subjects with the learners, the parents and the whole school community.

**Lut:** By discovering different visions, ways of working and habits, and by immersing yourself in a culture as a teacher, your horizon broadens. This is a life lesson we are eager to share with our pupils. Every day we try to bring our two worlds closer together. Through videos, pictures and our own experiences and stories, we notice that our pupils really feel connected to their peers in Ecuador.

**Noor:** This sense of connectedness and solidarity in our pupils is heightened. They learn how to turn the differences in culture into strengths, and how to respect people that are 'different'.

### That's the right attitude! What did you learn from your partner school about dealing with diversity in the classroom?

**Mónica:** Our school has always sent out a clear message: everyone is equal, no matter their handicap, and you should treat everyone with respect. The collaboration between our schools was very enriching. We did so much more than work on our visions of diversity and equality, we actually formulated specific goals we want to reach, linked to different classroom activities. The importance of the subject could not be ignored, and it became clear very quickly that it should be implemented in the classroom.

**Noor:** At our school we have an elaborated care policy and the wellbeing of our students is very important. The teachers in Ecuador take this to the next level: the wellbeing of their learners is superior to the curriculum and other objectives. Our Ecuadorean colleagues take the time to give every child the love and affection they need and deserve.

**Lut:** The way they interpret inclusive education in Ecuador is inspiring. I saw children from different age groups, with and without handicaps, helping and reinforcing each other in their own strengths and capabilities. I saw young children taking notice of the needs of their classmates and even sacrificing their own chances of winning a game, just for the benefit of a less advanced pupil. Western teachers are preoccupied with results. The end product is what counts for us. By witnessing the inclusive education approach in Otavalo firsthand, I realised that the process is at least as important.

## SchoolLinks

**Location:** Flemish community

**Timing:** Continuous

**Budget:** € 137,000 for 2017

**Donor:** Flanders

**Reach:** 5,000 pupils in Belgium,  
5,000 pupils in the Global South

# Our expertise shared worldwide

Over the years, VVOB has specialised in a number of sectors and themes based on international research. Basic education, technical and vocational education and training, and recently also general secondary education, make up our portfolio of expertise. Thematically, we've grown into a progressive organisation gender-wise. Diversity and vulnerability in the general sense drive our activities, as well as our commitment to teachers and school leaders. We're happy to share our experiences and lessons learnt over the years with like-minded institutions. Just a few highlights of the past year:



## Technical briefs #1 and #2 published

Our series *Putting SDG 4 into Practice* bundles our educational expertise. Each publication zooms in on a specific building block of quality education, and how VVOB strengthens them, with practical examples from our partner countries.

The first edition focuses on school leadership and describes our experiences with introducing the concept in Rwanda. The second publication delves deeper into the importance of learning communities and how VVOB creates and facilitates them.



## Addressing African first ladies

In August, VVOB attended the Girls' Education in Africa Conference, organised by our partner Forum for African Women Educationalists, or FAWE. We took the stage to address the first ladies of Mali, Uganda and Zambia, among others, about our concerns about Africa's out-of-school children, disproportionately female. Colleagues from DR Congo and Zambia also presented papers on gender-responsive pedagogy.



## Sharing expertise at conferences

VVOB not only makes sure to participate in international conferences that concern us. We also regularly have the opportunity to share our own expertise with other participants. At the Distance Education and Teacher Education in Africa Conference hosted by our partners at University of Rwanda – College of Education, for example, VVOB organised a mini-symposium on professional learning communities. At UKFIET – *the education and development forum*, participants listened to our lessons learnt concerning teacher motivation from Rwanda and process-oriented child-monitoring from Vietnam.



## Joining an Asian education network

VVOB secured a seat at the Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood's (ARNEC) Steering Committee. The network summarises her Vision 2020 as follows: all young children in the Asia-Pacific region realise optimal wellbeing and development. ARNEC Director Chen: "In our region, the emphasis is on cognitive development. But learners should also have a sense of wellbeing. VVOB has expertise in educational practices that can rectify this imbalance."



## Publication in peer-reviewed journal

VVOB's paper 'Supporting Teachers in Vietnam to Monitor Preschool Children's Wellbeing and Involvement in Preschool Classrooms' was published in the *International Journal of Early Childhood*, an international peer-reviewed journal.



## Worldwide webinar

The international Teacher Motivation Working Group brings together actors working on teacher motivation and wellbeing, including VVOB. Sharing research is a crucial aspect. In a webinar, VVOB presented to an international audience the results of its research on the importance of professional learning communities for school leaders for the motivation of their teachers.

# VVOB Ambassador Van Rompuy: “Education plays an important role in development”

VVOB strives toward a sustainable world built on equal opportunities through quality education. To further its purpose, our organisation joined forces with former European President Herman Van Rompuy. As VVOB’s goodwill ambassador, he travels to our partner countries to witness the work done by our colleagues in all corners of the world. In 2017, he spoke up about his unwavering support for the fight against gender-based violence in and around schools during the official launch of VVOB’s TIGER-project in Cambodia: “School-related gender-based violence is still a serious barrier to realising the right to education, especially for girls.”

## Schools: powerful environments

It’s not surprising that VVOB found a partner in Mr Van Rompuy. As Belgium’s former prime minister and Europe’s former president, he knows the field of international cooperation, and the challenges the sector faces, inside and out. Moreover, he’s unambiguous about the necessity of VVOB’s education agenda: “Development cooperation has always been a policy area close to my heart. And education plays a crucial role in its success”, he explains. He echoes VVOB’s calls for more resources and support for the strengthening of education systems in developing countries.

This year, his third as our goodwill ambassador, Van Rompuy visited partner country Cambodia, where VVOB carries out the EU-co-funded TIGER project which creates gender-safe school environments. “School-related gender-based violence is still a serious

barrier to realising the right to education, especially for girls”, he explains. “The experience or threat of school-related gender-based violence results in poor performance, irregular attendance, dropout and low self-esteem. Schools are in a unique position to challenge social norms, create new rules and help people learn new and more equitable behaviours that will be of good use not only in school but also in society at large.”

## Meaningful dialogue

During his visit to Cambodia, the goodwill ambassador visited local NGOs working on education and gender. He also met with the Cambodian prime minister, as well as with the minister of Education, Youth and Sports who is reforming the teacher education colleges. These reforms are welcomed by VVOB as a window of opportunity that will improve the Cambodian education system as a whole: “I know VVOB is very strong in bringing government ministries and civil society organisations together for the effective implementation of education and gender policies”, Mr Van Rompuy says of VVOB’s approach. “I am therefore confident that VVOB and the consortium partners will successfully manage a meaningful dialogue between all stakeholders in this TIGER project.”

‘Teaching for Improved Gender Equality and Responsiveness’ – or TIGER in short – transforms the Teacher Education College and 40 primary and secondary schools in the Battambang province in Cambodia into centres of excellence for gender-responsive education. The project is financed by Belgium and the European Union.



# Overview of our donors in 2017

## Structural funding



Belgium/Flanders

**1 2**

Suriname

**1 3**

Ecuador

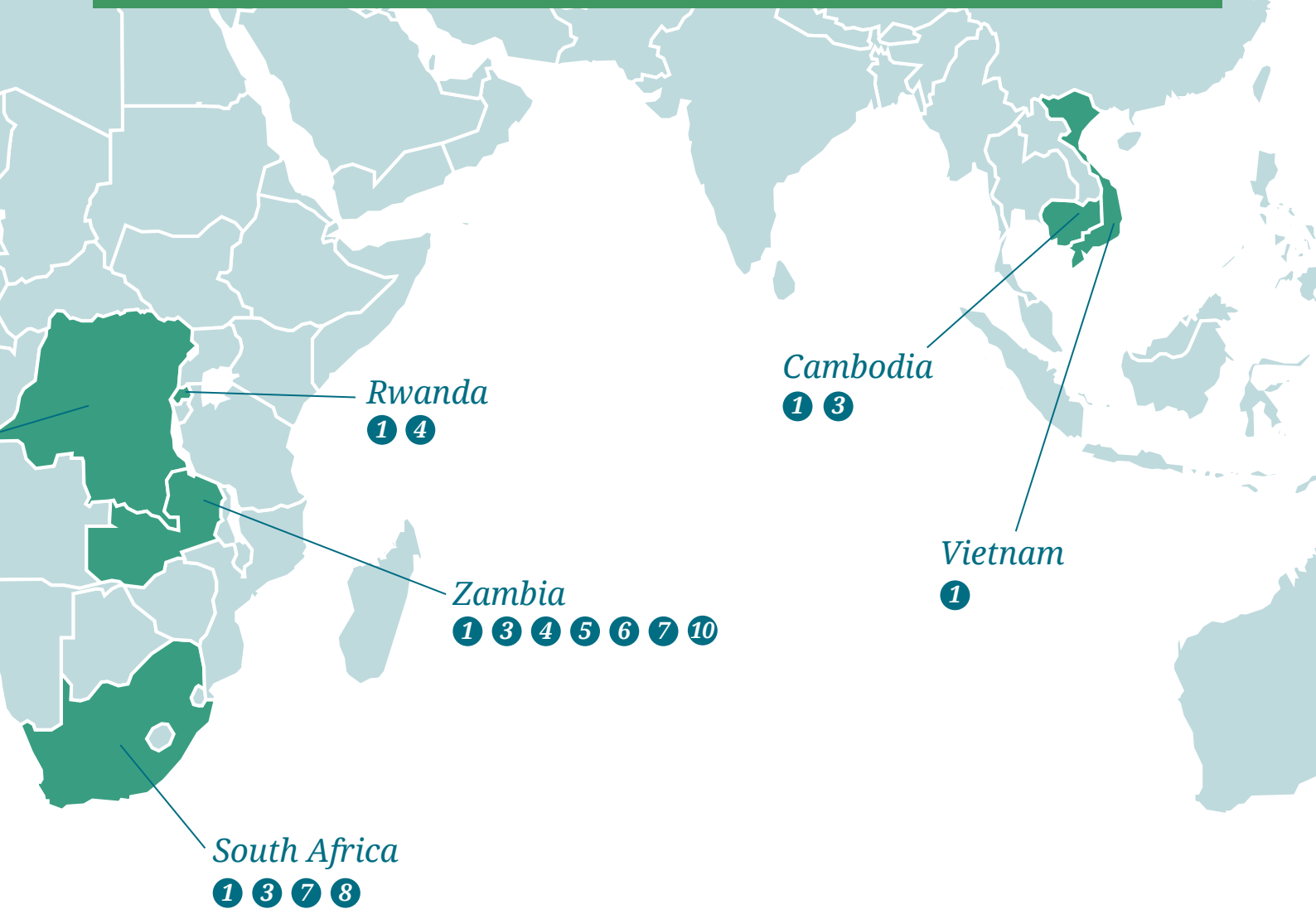
**1**

DR Congo

**1 9**

### Specific project funding

 <b>1</b> Belgium partner in development	 <b>2</b> Flanders State of the Art	 <b>3</b>	 <b>4</b> the ELMA foundation	 <b>5</b> J-PAL ABDUL LATIF JAMEL POVERTY ACTION LAB
 <b>6</b>	 <b>7</b> USAID FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE	 <b>8</b> Save the Children	 <b>9</b> museum NATURALSCIENCES.BE	 <b>10</b> BROOKINGS



# Financial Report

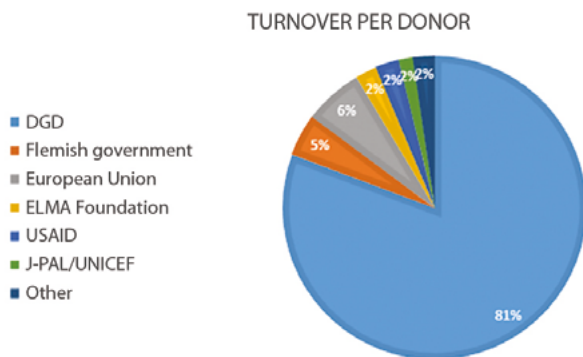
## Turnover VVOB

The total turnover of VVOB is 8,755,682 euro in 2017. This turnover is increasingly the result of investments made by various donors. It is a conscious choice of VVOB to diversify its sources of income.

DGD remains the organisation's largest donor. As 2017 is the first year of a five-year programme, the turnover of DGD resources is substantially lower than in 2016. This is explained by the cyclical pattern that correlates with the implementation dynamics of multiannual programmes.

The contribution of the Flemish government consists of a structural contribution for general working costs (270,000 euro) and specific contributions for the project SchoolLinks (137,000 euro).

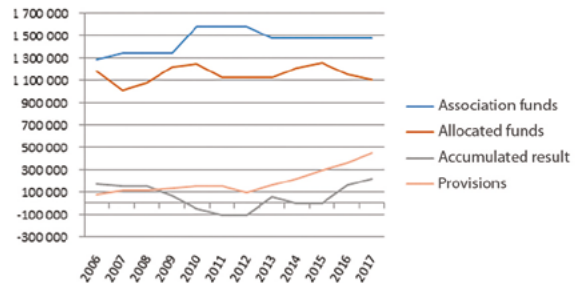
In 2017, the European Union finances 4 education programmes (in Cambodia, Suriname, Zambia and South Africa) for a total sum of 556,000 euro. The ELMA Foundation finances VVOB programmes in Rwanda and Zambia. USAID finances VVOB education interventions in both Zambia and South Africa.



In 2018, VVOB will continue its donor diversification efforts. We expect a substantial growth of international donors. Seeing financial support of these donors is project-based and thus temporary, more stable partners such as the Flemish government and DGD remain very important.

## Equity

The capacity to pre-fund programmes increased with 2.89% to 3,245,994 euro. These are resources that can be liquidated on short notice: association funds, allocated funds, accumulated result and provisions for liabilities. Seeing the growing number of donors involved, substantially higher provisions are set for risks within the programmes in the Global South.



## Results and balance

The profit of the financial year 2017 is 11,098 euro. The balance sheet total amounts to 9,064,322 euro compared to 4,983,718 euro in 2016. This difference is the result of the increase in funding advances paid on 31 December, which were not yet spent on that date.

## Audit

The General Assembly of 23 June 2016 appointed BDO the company auditor for financial years 2017, 2018 and 2019. BDO concludes without reservation that the financial statements give a true and fair view of the assets and the financial situation of the association on 31 December 2017, as well as of the results for the financial year then closed, in accordance with the accounting principles framework applicable in Belgium.

## Balance sheet

(all in euro)

	2017	2016	2015
<b>Assets</b>			
A. Fixed assets	119,774	154,351	50,058
B. Accounts receivable (due within 1 year)	804,233	406,161	306,113
C. Cash and investments	8,122,310	4,415,204	5,512,912
D. Prepaid expenses	18,005	8,002	75,267
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>9,064,322</b>	<b>4,983,718</b>	<b>5,944,350</b>
<b>Liabilities</b>			
A. Reserves and accrued profit/loss	2,802,304	2,791,206	2,743,551
B. Provisions	443,690	363,507	297,500
C. Accounts payable (due within 1 year)	5,818,328	1,829,005	2,903,298
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>9,064,322</b>	<b>4,983,718</b>	<b>5,944,350</b>

## Profit and loss statement

(all in euro)

	2017	2016	2015
<b>Costs</b>			
<b>A. Structural costs</b>	<b>824,652</b>	<b>904,627</b>	<b>840,726</b>
a. Services and diverse goods	279,438	357,340	300,171
b. Personnel costs	417,944	390,228	435,539
c. Depreciation	33,077	35,209	21,158
d. Other costs	94,193	121,849	83,858
<b>B. Management costs</b>	<b>752,501</b>	<b>1,383,916</b>	<b>967,235</b>
a. Personnel costs	691,707	1,013,743	808,743
b. Audit, monitoring and evaluation, learning processes	30,584	249,804	87,346
c. Other	30,210	120,369	71,146
<b>C. Operational costs (programme costs)</b>	<b>7,195,592</b>	<b>10,094,151</b>	<b>9,042,842</b>
a. Belgian (DGD) programme	5,931,616	9,260,561	8,224,554
b. Flemish programme ( <i>SchoolLinks</i> )	119,425	139,935	117,124
c. Other programmes	1,144,552	693,655	701,164
<b>Total costs</b>	<b>8,772,746</b>	<b>12,382,694</b>	<b>10,850,804</b>
<b>Income</b>			
a. Subsidy	8,755,682	12,429,013	10,897,061
b. Financial income	165	1,335	3,235
c. Other income	27,997	0	0
<b>Total income</b>	<b>8,783,844</b>	<b>12,430,349</b>	<b>10,900,296</b>
<b>Appropriations and withdrawing</b>			
Result before use	11,098	47,654	49,492
Profits / losses transferred from previous financial year	157,193	0	0
Withdrawal of equity	0	0	0
	<b>168,291</b>	<b>47,654</b>	<b>49,492</b>
Use of result	-50,313	-109,539	49,492
<b>Deferral of fiscal year</b>	<b>218,604</b>	<b>157,193</b>	<b>0</b>



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*Free translation*

**Statutory auditor's report to the general meeting of members of  
 Vlaamse Vereniging voor Ontwikkelingssamenwerking en  
 Technische Bijstand (VVOB) VZW for the year ended 31  
 December 2017**

In the context of the statutory audit of the annual accounts of VVOB VZW (the Organisation), we hereby present our statutory auditor's report. It includes our opinion on the audit of the annual accounts as well as our report on the other legal and regulatory requirements. These reports form part of an integrated whole and are indivisible.

We have been appointed as statutory auditor by the general meeting of members of 21 June 2017, following the proposal by the board of directors. Our statutory auditor's mandate will expire on the date of the general meeting of members which will deliberate on the annual accounts closed on 31 December 2019. We have performed the statutory audit of the annual accounts of VVOB VZW for 4 consecutive years.

**Report on the audit of the annual accounts**

***Unqualified opinion***

We have audited the annual accounts of the Organisation, which comprise the balance sheet as at 31 December 2017, the profit and loss account for the year then ended and the notes to the annual accounts, characterised by a balance sheet total of 9.064.322,30 EUR and an income statement showing a positive result for the year of 11.098,08 EUR.

In our opinion, the annual accounts give a true and fair view of the Organisation's net equity and financial position as at 31 December 2017, as well as of its results for the year then ended, in accordance with the financial reporting framework applicable in Belgium.

***Basis for unqualified opinion***

We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (ISAs) as applicable in Belgium. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the 'Statutory auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the annual accounts' section in this report. We have complied with all the ethical requirements that are relevant to the audit of annual accounts in Belgium, including those concerning independence.

We have obtained from the board of directors and the officials of the Organisation the explanations and information necessary for performing our audit.

We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

BDO Bedrijfsrevisoren Burg. Ven. CVBA / BTW BE 0431 088 289 RPR Brussel  
 BDO Réviseurs d'Entreprises Soc. Civ. SCRL / TVA BE 0431 088 289 RPM Bruxelles

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**Responsibilities of the board of directors for the annual accounts**

The board of directors is responsible for the preparation of annual accounts that give a true and fair view in accordance with the financial reporting framework applicable in Belgium, and for such internal control as the board of directors determines is necessary to enable the preparation of annual accounts that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the annual accounts, the board of directors is responsible for assessing the Organisation's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless the board of directors either intends to liquidate the Organisation or to cease operations, or has no realistic alternative but to do so.

**Statutory auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the annual accounts**

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the annual accounts as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue a statutory auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISAs will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these annual accounts.

As part of an audit in accordance with ISAs, we exercise professional judgment and maintain professional skepticism throughout the audit. We also:

- Identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the annual accounts, whether due to fraud or error, design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks, and obtain audit evidence that is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control;
- Obtain an understanding of internal control relevant to the audit in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the Organisation's internal control;
- Evaluate the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of accounting estimates and related disclosures made by the board of directors;
- Conclude on the appropriateness of the board of directors' use of the going concern basis of accounting and, based on the audit evidence obtained, whether a material uncertainty exists related to events or conditions that may cast significant doubt on the Organisation's ability to continue as a going concern. If we conclude that a material uncertainty exists, we are required to draw attention in our statutory auditor's report to the related disclosures in the annual accounts or, if such disclosures are inadequate, to modify our opinion. Our conclusions are based on the audit evidence obtained up to the date of our statutory auditor's report. However, future events or conditions may cause the Organisation to cease to continue as a going concern;



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- Evaluate the overall presentation, structure and content of the annual accounts and whether the annual accounts represent the underlying transactions and events in a manner that achieves fair presentation.

We communicate with the board of directors regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit and significant audit findings, including any significant deficiencies in internal control that we identified during our audit.

**Report on other legal and regulatory requirements**

**Responsibilities of the board of directors**

The board of directors is responsible for the compliance with the legal and regulatory requirements regarding bookkeeping, as well as for compliance with the Law of 27 June 1921 on non-profit organisations, foundations, European political parties and European political foundations, and with the Organisation's by-laws.

**Responsibilities of the statutory auditor**

In the context of our mandate and in accordance with the Belgian standard (Revised in 2018) which is complementary to the International Standards on Auditing (ISAs) as applicable in Belgium, it is our responsibility to verify, in all material aspects, compliance with certain provisions of the Law of 27 June 1921 on non-profit organisations, foundations, European political parties and European political foundations and with the by-laws, as well as to report on these elements.

**Statement related to independence**

- Our audit firm did not provide services which are incompatible with the statutory audit of annual accounts, and we remained independent of the Organisation throughout the course of our mandate.
- The fees related to additional services which are compatible with the statutory audit of annual accounts as referred to in article 17 of the Law of 27 June 1921 on non-profit organisations, foundations, European political parties and European political foundations, which refers to article 134 of the Company Code, were duly itemised and valued in the notes to the annual accounts.

**Other statements**

- Without prejudice to certain formal aspects of minor importance, the accounting records are maintained in accordance with the legal and regulatory requirements applicable in Belgium.
- There are no transactions undertaken or decisions taken in breach of the by-laws or of the Law of 27 June 1921 on non-profit organisations, foundations, European political parties and European political foundations that we have to report to you.

Zaventem, 27 March 2018



**BDO** Bedrijfsrevisoren Burg. Ven. CVBA  
Statutory Auditor  
Represented by Bert Kegels

# Annex

## Management of VVOB in 2017

**Below is the list of the members of the General Assembly of VVOB in 2017 on 31 December.  
The members of the Board of Directors are on top of the list.**

**Chairperson:** Mr Stefaan Van Mulders, Administrator-General of Youth Welfare Agency  
 Ms Heidi Vander Poorten, Team leader Equal Opportunities, Flemish Agency for Home Governance  
 Mr Koen Verlaeck, Secretary-General Flemish Department of Foreign Affairs  
 Ms Veerle Hendrickx, General Director of Karel de Grote University College  
 Mr Luc Lathouwers, Secretary-General Department of Administration Affairs  
 Dr Björn Possé, Institute for Agricultural and Fisheries Research  
 Mr Peter Van den Neucker, Department of Finance and Budget  
 Mr Marc Olivier, Honorary Chairperson of the Flemish parliament, Founding member  
 Mr Koen Van der Schaeghe, Director V.I.W. Foundation  
 Mr Luc Van de Velde, General Director of Erasmus University College Brussels  
 Mr Lieven Viaene, Inspector-General of the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training  
 Prof Paul Janssen, chairperson of VLIR-UOS, Hasselt University  
 Ms Kristien Verbrugghen, Director of VLIR-UOS  
 Mr Sigurd Vangermeersch, Deputy Chief of the Cabinet of Minister Sven Gatz  
 Mr Jos Geysels, Chairperson of 11.11.11  
 Ms Judith Kerkhof, Development and Education Expert  
 Mr Jef Tavernier, Development and Education Expert  
 Ms Elisabeth Meuleman, Member of the Flemish parliament  
 Ms Caroline Gennez, Member of the Flemish parliament  
 Ms Ingeborg De Meulemeester, Member of the Flemish parliament  
 Mr Jo De Ro, Member of the Flemish parliament  
 Mr Johan Verstreken, Member of the Flemish parliament  
 Mr Guy Janssens, Administrator-General of AgODi

Mr Lode De Geyter, General Director University College West-Vlaanderen  
 Ms Gerda Bruneel, Educational Counselor *Katholiek Onderwijs Vlaanderen*  
 Mr Patriek Delbaere, General Director OVSG  
 Mr Marc Vandewalle, General Director of Leuven University College  
 Prof Herwig Leirs, Vice-president of VLIR-UOS, University of Antwerp  
 Prof. S. Smis, member of VLIR-UOS  
 Mr Rudi Schollaert, Development and Education Expert  
 Mr Roger Standaert, Development and Education Expert  
 Ms Greta Ickx, Chairperson of V.I.W. Foundation  
 Ms Raymonda Verdyck, Managing Director of GO!

# Acknowledgements

**VVOB is a Flemish development organisation specialised in increasing the quality of education. We work in four continents in early, primary, general secondary education and technical and vocational education. In these four subsectors, we focus on strengthening local education actors to enable them to improve the professional development of teachers and school leaders. This capacity building is a means to sustainable development and poverty reduction.**

The digital and the Dutch versions of this Annual Report can be downloaded at [www.vvob.org](http://www.vvob.org).

This Annual Report is the result of a joint effort of all VVOB staff members and partners all over the world.

## Text

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## Disclaimer

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Thank you RoSa to help us safeguard the gender neutrality of this report.





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