

Putting SDG4 into practice



All means All: Inclusive and Equitable Leading and Teaching

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INTRO



Inclusive and equitable education provides all learners with the capabilities to become economically productive, develop sustainable livelihoods, contribute to peaceful societies and enhance their individual wellbeing. This technical brief explains why equity and inclusion matter and how VVOB – *education for development* contributes to fostering inclusive and equitable

leading and teaching in lower and middle-income countries, based on a set of guiding principles. The experiences of VVOB demonstrate the importance of addressing and mainstreaming equity and inclusion throughout the entire life cycle of a project, starting from development and design up until project evaluation.

Every learner matters and matters equally

Vulnerable learners and learners from disadvantaged backgrounds can benefit most from quality education. Yet, they are currently learning least. Data shows¹ that worldwide there is a learning crisis, particularly in lower-income countries. Proficiency levels in mathematics and reading for example, differ widely between income groups and regions. Within countries too — economically rich and poor — there are significant learning gaps between learners from the poorest and from the wealthiest households. These gaps often steadily widen as learners progress through the schooling system.

“Even before COVID-19, one in five children, adolescents and youth were entirely excluded from education. Stigma, stereotypes and discrimination mean millions more are further alienated inside classrooms”.

Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO,
preface of the GEMR 2020



The evidence

There is an overwhelming body of evidence that education opportunities continue to be unequally distributed. Referring to the Talis Report 2018² and the GEM Report 2020³, here are some reminders:

- Not including high-income countries in Europe and Northern America, data shows that only 18 of the poorest youth complete secondary school for every 100 of the richest youth worldwide. In at least 20 countries, mostly in sub-Saharan Africa, hardly any poor rural young women complete secondary school.
- By 2030—the same year that the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) of access to quality education for all is supposed to be achieved—it is expected that over a quarter of preschool teachers in sub-Saharan Africa will still be untrained⁴.
- Discrimination, stereotyping and stigmatisation mechanisms are similar for all learners at risk of exclusion.
- Teachers, teaching materials and learning environments often ignore the benefits of embracing diversity. One key barrier to inclusion in education is the lack of belief that it is possible and desirable.

COVID-19 as an additional stressor

The State of the Global Education Crisis Report⁵ emphasises the impact of COVID-19 as an additional stressor, exacerbating existing educational inequalities. While school closures had a negative impact on virtually all learners, those facing additional barriers were at higher risk of falling behind when school doors closed. The report reveals that children from disadvantaged households for example, were less likely to benefit from remote learning than their peers, often due to a lack of electricity, connectivity, devices, and caregiver support.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic and the switch to remote and hybrid learning also highlighted some opportunities that were underused in pre-COVID times. Remote and hybrid learning has, for example, the potential to provide additional support for learners who lag behind and help them catch up on learning losses.

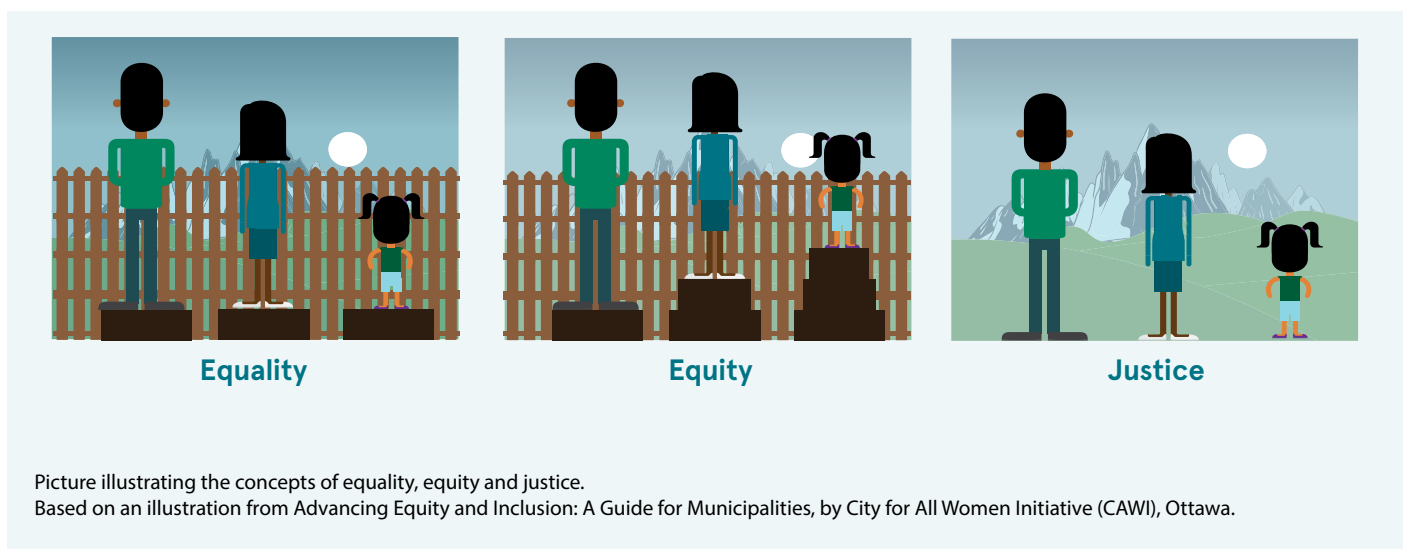
Furthermore, as distance teaching and learning became a necessity, its advantages and benefits in the continuous professional development of teachers and school leaders became apparent and more widely accepted.

The pandemic also triggered the debate on access to technology as a basic right. Or as Professor Fernando Reimers puts it: “We’re beginning to understand that technology is a basic right. You cannot participate in society in the 21st century without access to it. Too many learners have no connectivity, they have no devices, or they have no home circumstances that provide them support.”⁶

Inclusive and equitable education and SDG4

Inclusive and equitable education has been on the international agenda since the Jomtien World Declaration on Education for All in 1990. Among the various policy commitments to inclusive education that have been made since, the 1994 Salamanca statement and Sustainable Development Goal 4 stand out for their explicit focus on equity and inclusion. The signatories to the Salamanca Statement recognised that human differences are normal and that learning must be adapted to the needs of the child. This requires appropriate preparation of teachers and

school leaders to provide special needs — and more broadly, inclusive — education. SDG4 aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all. It seeks to eliminate gender disparities and to ensure equal access to all levels of education for the vulnerable, “including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations” (SDG target 4.5).



Inclusive and equitable education at the heart of VVOB's policy

VVOB underlines the importance of the global agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals and makes it clear in its vision and mission.

VVOB's definitions of inclusion and equity

With equity at the heart of SDG4 and equity and inclusion being a cornerstone of VVOB's vision, a clear and common understanding of the terminology which we use as an organisation is essential.

Equality: the state of being equal in terms of quantity, rank, status, value or degree. It is an empirically verifiable state of being equal. The risk inherent to an equality approach is that those who need it least, benefit most while possibly those who need it most benefit the least — also called the Matthew effect.

Equity: recognises that not everyone has the same starting condition and opportunities. Advantages and barriers exist. Equity is concerned with fairness; the education of all learners is seen as being of equal importance. An equity-consciousness helps to correct, compensate or address the imbalances so that everyone can reach their full potential.

Diversity: the myriad of differences that make everyone unique, including differences related to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, language, culture, religion, mental and physical ability, class, and immigration status.

Inclusion (in education): the process of responding to the diversity of needs of all learners and removing barriers, building on learners' abilities in order to increase participation in learning and reduce exclusion from and within education. It involves changes in content, approaches, structures, and strategies.

Quality education is the foundation for development. VVOB contributes to 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.

Vision of VVOB (VVOB by-laws, art. 5)

VVOB's conceptual framework on equity and inclusion

Many hurdles stand in the way of ensuring that every learner feels valued, respected and involved. The barriers which learners face are manifold and cause educational disparities around the world. In society at large, there are many social, cultural and demographic characteristics affecting learners: gender, poverty, ethnicity, disability, refugee status and living circumstance.

Society at large			
Dimension	Gender	Poverty	Ethnicity
Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Power structures and stereotyping • Sexual reproductive health • Gender-based violence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income • Socioeconomic status • Child labour • Food and health security 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Race • Language • Cultural practices • Religion
Dimension	Disability	Refugee status	Living circumstances
Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical • Mental • Learning disorder • Emotional vulnerability (refers to post-traumatic stress and grievance) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Migrant • Internally displaced • In conflict zones 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urban/rural • Remoteness/seasonal challenging • Prone to natural disaster and climate change • Orphanhood



Within the education system, disparities in the quality of education and resource distribution can cause an additional set of barriers, jeopardising inclusive and equitable education.

Within the education system		
Dimension	Policy and strategy	Structures and systems
Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal and policy barriers • Absence of or malfunctioning strategies related to access, quality and management • Inadequate curricula • Ineffective institutional arrangements to promote, roll-out, distribute and follow-up on policy and strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor facilities and infrastructure (water and sanitation, accessibility for people with disabilities) • School safety, violence and sexual harassment • Absence of support services and intersectoral collaboration • Inadequate costing, budgeting and resource distribution (human and financial) • Inadequate HR processes
Dimension	Practice	Concepts
Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor quality of teaching and teacher training • Poor quality of school and district leadership • Poor quality or lack of teaching and learning materials • Large classes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absence of baseline data and instruments for measuring equity • Existing ideologies on equity in education in general and the prevailing norms and values, efficacy and motivation related to equity and inclusion more specifically • Insufficient parental and community participation • Home learning environment

Age is also an interesting element in the equity debate, first and foremost because age can exclude a person from the education system ('too old' for a certain grade or when trying to re-enter after school drop-out). But there are other considerations, such as the fact that inequity and exclusion often starts at childhood and is henceforth repeated and perpetuated throughout a lifetime.

Inequity in education is the result of the interplay of these many dimensions and barriers. Usually, it is a combination of several factors — called intersectionality — that predict higher levels of disadvantage and exclusion from quality education. However, the mechanisms of exclusion — discrimination, stereotypes and alienation — are essentially the same, regardless of the dimension.

Understanding the barriers that impede access to education or hinder quality education is essential information for our project design, implementation, monitoring and adaptation. Categorising, identifying and targeting sub-populations however, does not mean that VVOB is labelling learners. On the contrary, VVOB focuses on the mechanism of inclusion, applying asset thinking. This is the capacity of school leaders and teachers (including the enabling policy environment) to respond to the diversity of needs of all learners and to remove barriers, building on learners' abilities.

VVOB's operational framework to inclusive and equitable education

Ensuring the provision of quality inclusive and equitable education is at the heart of VVOB's interventions, from early childhood education to primary education, general secondary education and technical and vocational education and training (TVET). VVOB supports ministries of education and national education authorities to strengthen teacher and school leader professional development systems in creating safe and supportive, equitable, and effective school environments. We want to maximise learners' opportunities to reach their full potential in line with their strengths, talents and interests, unimpeded by barriers. To that end, VVOB puts forward an operational framework which consists of two overarching objectives and four strategies.

Equitable and inclusive quality education means that learners' personal and social circumstances do not form barriers to learning. This entails that both the diversity of learners and the processes of learning as well as the inequalities in opportunities are being considered and addressed. VVOB recognises that learners are different and strives towards two overarching objectives in our efforts to realise inclusive and equitable education:

1. supporting school leaders and teachers to approach diversity as the norm.
2. strengthening education systems to promote and deliver equity and inclusion at scale.

VVOB also mainstreams four strategies of equity and inclusion throughout the entire life cycle of a project, starting from development and design until project evaluation.





Needs-based and evidence-informed programming

VVOB analyses evidence on learners' barriers to education access, participation and achievement. VVOB designs and delivers needs-based and evidence-informed inclusive and equitable education projects which are rigorously monitored, evaluated and scalable.

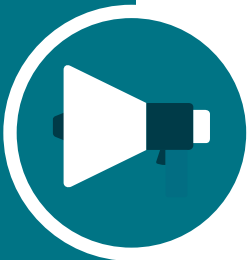
Although education data is often incomplete, with many of the most marginalised groups remaining invisible, VVOB makes use of the available statistics to guide project design. Poverty rates, poor learning performances, language differences, urban and rural challenges are examples of available — often sex-disaggregated — data that inform VVOB's projects.



Professional development for skills and competences

With a focus on teachers and school leaders, VVOB develops data-driven, contextualised and scalable capacity development interventions that strengthen skills and competences and which contribute to the eradication of inequities in the education system. Diversity adds values and offers opportunities to live together and learn from differences.

VVOB has many 'broad-brush and targeted' professional development interventions that strengthen skills and competences of teachers and school leaders in inclusive and equitable leading and teaching.



Advocacy and awareness

Through education diplomacy and strategic communication, VVOB advocates for a common understanding of inclusive and equitable education, relevant policies and structures, adequate resource allocation and staff training to support inclusion.

Through advocacy and raising awareness, VVOB capitalises on its unique position of collaborating with government structures at all levels. In each project, progress made and lessons learnt in advancing equitable and inclusive learning are used to inform and stimulate leadership.



Attitudes and belief

All children, teachers, school leaders, other education professionals, parents, caregivers and the community at large are stimulated to appreciate social justice, to discuss stereotypes and prevent prejudice. Attitudes and beliefs of educational practitioners and parents, together with their commitment, knowledge and skills are at the core of the VVOB projects.

VVOB strongly believes in and promotes a 'growth mindset', acknowledging that all learners can always gain knowledge and skills.

Country examples of applying the operational framework

Considering the high dividend in terms of learning outcomes, progression and retention, VVOB's strategy to design projects that focus on high quality teacher professional development and strengthening school leadership, in itself leverages more inclusive and equitable education. Other strategic choices are equally equity-driven: promoting early childhood education as a great equaliser; supporting TVET to battle poverty and give learners who drop out of school early a second chance; committing systematically to scaling education initiatives through government systems; and more.

In this section, we illustrate our operational framework to inclusive and equitable education through two cases: Vietnam and South Africa.

CASE STUDIES

The Case of Vietnam

Although Vietnam's enrolment rates for early education (ECE) are high, the country is facing challenges to provide inclusive and equitable preschool education. VVOB supports the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) to close the gap between ECE policy and practice through a number of projects and scaled initiatives that strengthen school leaders and teachers to treat diversity as the norm. VVOB's support in Vietnam is characterised by a twin-track approach to inclusive and equitable education.

A first track — the 'broad brush' or mainstreaming approach — focuses on pedagogical, organisational and systemic change as a whole and benefitting all children. A second track — the targeted or specific approach — addresses the common needs of specific groups of children.





Strategy 1 Needs-based and evidence-informed programming

In 2016, action research piloting the practice of process-oriented child monitoring (POM⁷) in the Nam Giang district of Quảng Nam province in the South Central Coast region of Vietnam, provided evidence that during play activities, children showed higher levels of involvement compared to during the more classical ‘chalk-and-talk’ learning style. The Nam Giang district is predominantly home to ethnic minority groups. The action research also revealed higher levels of wellbeing and involvement among children who spoke Vietnamese at home, compared to children who spoke another language — an ethnic minority language — at home. Impact research⁸ of **VVOB’s BaMi project** in 2022 showed that teachers’ capacity to observe children’s wellbeing and involvement in class positively impacts the socio-emotional and cognitive development of all preschool children, strengthening equity in the classroom. Based on this body of knowledge, **VVOB’s TALK project** further supports school leaders through professional development trainings to support their teachers in creating language-rich learning environments in their classrooms to foster emergent literacy skills in their learners.

As a result, vulnerable learners who are members of ethnic minority communities and do not speak Vietnamese at home, will be better equipped to enter primary school.

Strongly valuing evidence-informed programming, VVOB has put research at the centre of TALK, constituting an evidence base, stimulating academic interest and advocating to the national level and relevant stakeholders. This research-driven approach also ensures that the methodology advocated for is endorsed, so that both school leaders and preschool teachers can mitigate barriers to learning faced by children in rural and mountainous areas.



Strategy 2 Professional development for skills and competences

Through strengthening the Provincial Departments of Education and Training in Vietnam, teachers and school leaders in ECE are equipped to better teach children of disadvantaged and ethnically diverse districts in Vietnam. Crucially, this includes capacitating school leaders to design teacher professional development trajectories that are inclusive of remote and satellite school teachers who are often excluded from such opportunities due to time and distance. These inclusive teacher professional development practices result in an increasing number of teachers becoming familiar with the innovative POM assessment approach and the related observation scales for the different developmental domains. This initiative was further supported by **VVOB’s GENTLE project**, which addressed early gender socialisation of young children through gender-responsive play-based learning.

This is crucial to impact children’s long term cognitive and social-emotional development, and to work on the prevention and elimination of gender inequality, a precursor to gender-based violence. In parallel with the aforementioned initiatives, **VVOB’s CITIES project** addressed the challenges and barriers of vulnerable young children such as those from migrant families or with challenging socio-economic backgrounds who are particularly prone to urban stress factors. Educational and urban barriers and inequalities specific to the city of Da Nang (limited access to green spaces, limited interaction with surroundings, changes in social cohesion, lack of parental time, and increased screen time) are identified and mitigated. Teachers developed activities based on art-inspired pedagogy to differentiate practices and meet the learners’ needs.



Strategy 3 Advocacy and awareness

In all VVOB's interventions, there is a strong element of dialogue with all tiers of the Ministry of Education and Training regarding inclusive and equitable education and how to address barriers to learning and participation. In the BaMi project for example, the Ministry of Education and Training actively disseminates the project approach nationwide so other provinces can build on them. GENTLE also provided the development and testing of a toolkit in Vietnamese for teachers and school leaders on gender-responsive play-based learning in preschools, to be used by government staff in future trainings of additional schools. As a result, classroom layout is being changed, gender-neutral language to address children is being used and preschool daily schedules to encourage non-gendered play in education settings is being altered.

Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, blended learning has become VVOB's new way of working, and will remain so in a post-pandemic world too. Despite a steep learning curve, challenges remain, including negative perceptions towards online learning in Vietnam.

Fatigue as a result of excessive screen time and unequal opportunities to access remote learning (due to a lack of electricity, connectivity and devices) also pose threats to inclusive and equitable professional development. Therefore, VVOB's team in Vietnam and South Africa, together with partner organisations, are drafting a set of guidelines on how to ensure effective and efficient online and blended professional development for teachers and school leaders. Guidelines will not only focus on technical aspects and learning platforms, but will also emphasise participant involvement and participation, creativity, and elements of play.



Strategy 4 Attitudes and beliefs

The BaMi project had significant impact on shifting the focus from the prescribed curriculum, which paid little attention to the needs of children, to a focus on children's wellbeing and involvement in class activities. This shift helps teachers notice individual children and adapt and differentiate their teaching methods to ensure inclusion of all children. This shift in attitudes and beliefs in teachers and school leaders significantly improved the wellbeing and involvement of preschool children as they prepare to enter primary school. The nationwide introduction, implementation and upscaling of the POM approach by the Ministry of Education and Training continues to break down the barriers faced by ethnic minority and other disadvantaged children.

The GENTLE project transformed preschools in 14 districts in central Vietnam into environments of gender-responsive play-based learning, involving parents and fathers in particular to the fullest in the process. The project introduced nearly 25,000 parents and caregivers to gender-responsive education through widespread communication activities organised by preschools.

These parents and caregivers were seen to attach more importance to gender equality and became more involved in their children's education. Fathers and male caregivers even indicated taking up housework chores which had been previously assigned to mothers and female caregivers to set an example.

Building on the success of POM and gender-responsive pedagogy, the TALK project aims to further support teachers to acquire a comprehensive understanding of how a child develops language skills, that is emergent literacy, and subsequently hone these skills to create a language-rich learning environment in which the child will be stimulated to enjoy and playfully interact with language, with the assumption that improved learning attitudes and language skills formed in the early years will increase the likelihood of all children to continue their education longer.

The Case of South Africa

South Africa's policies for inclusion and equity are based on the post-Apartheid constitution which is founded on principles for all areas of life, including and particularly in education. South Africa has gone on to develop policies in the education sector that move from the era of discrimination and exclusivity to one aimed at inclusion and equity. Education White Paper 6⁹ is the guiding document for the policies of inclusion in the education sector. The South African Schools Act, the Curriculum and Policy Statement (CAPS), and the Guidelines for an Inclusive Education, have all been developed to fall in line with this policy and to further expound its implementation. Despite the policies in place, several data sets point to high levels of existing and perpetuated inequity in education in South Africa.

2015 research¹⁰ for example, showed a learning gap of approximately three grade levels in grade 3 between the poorest 60% of students and the wealthiest 20%. As a result, and despite low standards for passing, less than 50% of school starters finished grade 12, demonstrating that the education system insufficiently addresses social inequality in South Africa.

VVOB's projects 'Leadership and Teaching for Diversity (LT4D): responding to learner diversity by applying inclusive pedagogy for numeracy and literacy' (2017-2021) and the 'Teaching and Learning for Inclusive Education: addressing barriers to learning in primary education' (2016-2019), all pursued inclusive goals in certain areas of

education, using a mainstreaming approach. The main vehicle to achieve this was strengthening professional learning communities (PLCs). Simultaneously, **the gender-responsive pedagogy (GRP) toolkit** used a more targeted approach to address gender and the related areas of discrimination and exclusion.





Strategy 1 Needs-based and evidence-informed programming

The three projects that this case looks at, all developed activities that supported the objective of promoting inclusion and equity. They all did this through processes that were themselves inclusive, but they were also informed by research, available evidence and based on the needs in the sector.

In South Africa, PLCs are considered an important instrument to strengthen teachers' inclusive teaching practices and address pedagogical barriers. VVOB assisted the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in South Africa to put the policy on PLCs into practice through piloting and researching 12 inter-school PLCs in three provinces.

VVOB also supported training in Action Research, which is an approach built on a framework embracing the principles of human rights and social justice for all learners. Action researchers were asked to consider their role in inclusive and equitable education.

This framework, comprising six components, was derived from a self-reflection tool on inclusive pedagogy. Our training engaged four cohorts in the Free State province and two cohorts in the KwaZulu-Natal province.

This was a participatory process that allowed education officials to try out different ways of doing things in their practice. They did this by working to address an immediate challenge in their context and sphere of control.

Finally, research on the effectiveness of the gender-responsive pedagogy for early childhood education (GRP4ECE) model was embedded at early stages in the project. The GRP4ECE model was tested through a continuous professional development (CPD) approach with practitioners and leaders from 103 early childhood development centres in KwaZulu-Natal. The pilot was highly successful in getting teachers to start reflecting on their previous knowledge and attitudes, which may have been introducing gender stereotypes.



Strategy 2 Professional development for skills and competences

VVOB's 'broad-brush' approach in South Africa focused on strengthening PLCs to drive further professional development that ensures inclusive education. The geographical focus of VVOB's capacity development was in the provinces of Free State and KwaZulu-Natal. In both the 'LT4D' and 'Teaching and Learning for Inclusive Education' projects, activities involved training district officials on what PLCs were and how to start and facilitate them. The phased training on PLCs targeted all departmental officials working as 'Learner Support Advisors' (tasked with implementing inclusive education) and 'Subject Advisors' (in the Curriculum section of the department) in the Free State and KwaZulu-Natal. The PLC-training followed a consistent pattern: the background of the policy on PLCs in South Africa was traced and then the links between professional development, PLCs and inclusive education was shown.

The training then showed the function of PLCs, what effective PLCs look like, and what activities could be done in PLC. It was a skills-and-competency-based training while also allowing the officials to explore their own roles in the whole process and how it links with inclusive education.

The PLC coordinators' training trajectory reinforced this approach through practical, skills-focused workshop moments, peer learning amongst coordinators during workshop moments and in between. In evaluating this project, the external evaluator found indications that:

1. PLCs play an important role in developing positive attitudes, knowledge and skills towards inclusive teaching: valuing diversity, supporting all learners, working with others and personal professional development.
2. the involvement of the different Directorates of the National and Provincial Departments of Education, and other stakeholders led to a holistic approach that also showed that inclusion was not the responsibility of only certain directorates, defusing the tendency of the different Directorates to work in silos instead of collaboratively.



Strategy 3 Advocacy and awareness

The LT4D project, with a focus on strengthening competences of school leaders and teachers in primary schools to respond to learner diversity by applying inclusive pedagogy for numeracy and literacy, worked with the DBE at national level and with steering committees at the provinces of the Free State and KwaZulu-Nata. In this way, the project ensured that there was a high-level commitment to CPD for inclusive education. There was also constant liaison with the South African Council of Educators (SACE), the institution responsible for the registration of educators, setting professional standards for educators and promoting educators' professional development. Consequently, in each project, progress made and lessons learnt in advancing equitable and inclusive learning were used to inform and stimulate leadership. An example of such advocacy and awareness raising at the highest level can be found in South Africa, where VVOB co-organised yearly national symposia on inclusive education with the DBE.

Bringing together policy makers and practitioners, important findings, expertise and experiences obtained through VVOB projects on teaching and learning for diversity and inclusive education were shared during the symposia, reaching a wide audience of stakeholders.

As a result, DBE committed to develop a communication strategy to advocate for PLCs, including a Ministerial Circular promoting PLCs as a method of CPD. There was also a growing number of articles on PLC evaluation and pilot findings on the DBE and SACE websites (including summaries) and the development of a framework for professional development of subject advisors and the support to school-initiated CPD which would include PLCs. The events allowed the partners to reflect on the current status quo when it came to PLCs and to refocus and intensify CPD, hence contributing to better and more inclusive education.

VVOB also supported the development of Open Educational Resources (OER). **The Bambanani video series** illustrate how teachers can teach inclusively in South African classrooms. The low threshold instructional videos focus on teaching numeracy and literacy in primary education and are available in English with subtitles in Sesotho, IsiZulu and IsiXhosa.





Strategy 4 Attitudes and beliefs

When it comes to practice and implementation, structures, personal beliefs and behaviour weaken the lofty policy ambitions for inclusive education in South Africa. In the DBE for example, there is a Department of Inclusive Education. But in the case of inclusive policies, issues such as differentiating the curriculum and multilevel teaching methods become necessary. It has taken a long time to convince members of the curriculum section that this is their shared responsibility.

Therefore, all VVOB's interventions during the LT4D included some teachings and reflections on inclusive education. This included all the PLC and Action Research learning trajectories. In many cases, involved officials did not expect to play any part in implementing inclusive education. With the collaboration of some officials in the department of education in the Free State, a tool was developed to reflect on each person's role in inclusive education. This tool is self-administered and helps each person realise how their work impacts the policies of inclusion.

It is an excellent tool to raise awareness among officials and the fact that it is self-administered makes it even more impactful.

Attitudes and beliefs also played a considerable role in **the GRP4ECE project**. In order to address gender-based violence in South Africa, and considering the fact that gender stereotypes become set at young ages, the DBE requested the support of VVOB to develop an ECE gender-focused toolkit for South Africa. This resulted in a separate project GRP4ECE (2020-2021) with DBE, SACE and KwaZulu-Nata Department of Education developing a contextualised toolkit which was piloted with 72 early childhood development centers in KwaZulu-Natal. Gender stereotypes, attitudes and beliefs are so ingrained in people that most do not even notice them. The resources in this project were welcomed by many practitioners for exposing their own prejudices and for alerting them to those that they were not even aware of.



About VVOB

VVOB – *education for development* is an international organisation with over 40 years' experience in strengthening the quality of education systems in Africa, Asia and South America in close partnership with ministries of education and their institutions. Research shows that, of all school-based factors, the quality of teaching and school leadership has the biggest impact on learning outcomes of learners. As such, the professional development of teachers and school leaders is VVOB's primary priority in ensuring quality education for all. By working closely with governments, research institutions, committed donors and national, regional and international networks and expertise partners, VVOB strives to maximise the sustainability and potential for upscaling of its initiatives.

VVOB focus

Children and youth

In pursuit of quality education, VVOB focuses on strengthening the professional development of teachers and the professional development of school leaders in the following subsectors:

- early education to improve the quality of formal pre-primary education and assist the transition to primary school.
- primary education to improve literacy, numeracy and life skills.
- secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.
- secondary technical and vocational education and training to improve quality, align knowledge and skills imparted with the labour market, and integrate entrepreneurship.

Flagships

Flagships are evidence-informed and scalable initiatives with a distinct regional and international ambition. VVOB's flagships structurally address persistent educational challenges through key efforts for equitable learning outcomes. These key efforts are:

- **gender-transformative pedagogy**, to create learning environments where harmful gender stereotypes are challenged and addressed.
- **effective school leadership**, to create the conditions for effective teaching and learning.
- **skilling for sustainable futures**, to ensure young people leave school with high chances at securing decent work.

VVOB expertise

VVOB teams of experts specialise in meeting the most important education needs identified by international research and in the education strategies and priorities of VVOB's partner countries. Formalised, longstanding partnerships with governments are the steadiest pathway towards scale and sustainability. For VVOB, working in partnership with ministries of education means:

- offering structural and sustainable solutions to support and reinforce governments and national education authorities responsible for the initial education, induction and continuous professional development of teachers and school leaders.
- offering practical and technical education expertise and support for processes through a wide range of in-person, remote or blended methodologies, from classical training and workshops to mentoring, coaching and peer learning.
- ensuring that partners increasingly take the lead throughout projects to guarantee sustainability.

To facilitate learning and scaling of successful projects, VVOB invests in research and knowledge generation. Based on the evidence generated, VVOB engages governmental partners and stakeholders to influence policy and practice, and to mobilise governments towards ownership and sustainability for systems change.

Endnotes

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