



# African Centre for School Leadership (ACSL)

CONCEPT NOTE

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## Background

### The role of school leadership for quality of education

Access to basic education has significantly increased in the majority of countries in Africa over the past two decades. However, progress towards access to quality basic education for all is still slow in the region. The World Development Report of 2018 indicates that being in school is not a guarantee for learning. Children from poor families and remote areas can expect to do the least amount of learning, particularly when they are female or have a disability (World Bank, 2018).

The 2018 World Development Report attributed this learning crisis to education systems struggling to foresee in one or more of four key school-level ingredients for learning: unprepared students, poor teaching quality, focus on educational inputs that do not drive learning, and weak school management (World Bank, 2018; Global School Leaders, 2020).

Effective school leadership is critical to addressing all the four key factors underlying the learning crisis. This is because an effective school leader plays a key role in supporting teachers and in ensuring effective use of resources. The Education Commission's 2019 "Transforming the Education Workforce report" indicates that teachers are at the heart of the learning process; however, the roles of school leadership and management are also strongly associated with better education outcomes. The report highlights improved school leadership as one of the key elements necessary to leverage the broader education workforce for better learning and more resilient education systems (Education Commission, 2019).

The report also shows that this requires reorienting school leaders towards instructional leadership. This means guiding teaching and learning through clear educational goals, curriculum planning, supporting and providing feedback to teachers, and creating an enabling environment for learning, including for the marginalized. Although school leaders are increasingly viewed as instructional leaders, in practice they tend to focus on administrative and supervisory activities and are rarely selected or supported to lead activities that enhance learning. The shift towards instructional leadership at the school level can be facilitated by training school leaders to undertake instructional leadership and provide the necessary tools; and strengthening decentralized educational leadership capacity to provide coaching and support for school leaders to develop instructional leadership skills (Education Commission, 2019).

The same idea is supported by the Global Partnership for Education (2019) which states that ongoing support from head teachers and school and district leaders is necessary for sustainability of teacher training. The report indicates that the professional support teachers receive from head teachers makes a big difference in their ability to improve learning given that head teachers have the requisite training.

Similarly, Global School Leaders in its evidence review report of 2020 shows that school systems are increasingly oriented toward improving the learning levels of students, and this necessitates school leaders' roles to be focused on delivering these outcomes which is rarely the case. Additionally, school leaders are hampered in their ability to lead toward these outcomes because, among other factors, they have limited opportunities to attend pre- or in-service training. School leaders in underperforming school systems are found to have low-level leadership skills (Global School Leaders, 2020).

## The African Centre for School Leadership

To address these challenges in education systems in Africa and to ignite the potential of school leadership to improve quality of education, an African Centre for School Leadership is being set up. The Centre will build on the experience and expertise in promoting effective school leadership in Rwanda: starting from a set of five standards of “Effective School Leadership”, Rwanda has put in place a Continuous Professional Development support system for school leaders, consisting of a certified initial course for school leaders complemented by professional learning communities for school leaders. This support system leads to better performing school leaders and an improved culture of teaching and learning in schools. For this approach and the innovative blended modalities for delivery of professional development, the Government of Rwanda received recognition from the African Union twice, during the “Innovating Education in Africa Expo” in Dakar (2018) and Gabarone (2019).

The Centre will support governments and governmental agencies in the education sector to build a supportive school leadership system with the objective of improving teaching and in turn learning outcomes. While the Centre will promote effective leadership at various levels in education systems on the continent, the focus of this support is at the level of schools and school leaders in these schools. Supported by evidence on the effects of school leadership, it is understood that supportive educational leadership at policy level will enable effective and scalable continuous professional development of school leaders resulting in effective school leadership in schools.

Effective school leadership in turn will support effective school-based teacher professional development and support, resulting into improved quality of teaching and ultimately improved learning and learning outcomes.

### Target group and objectives of the Centre

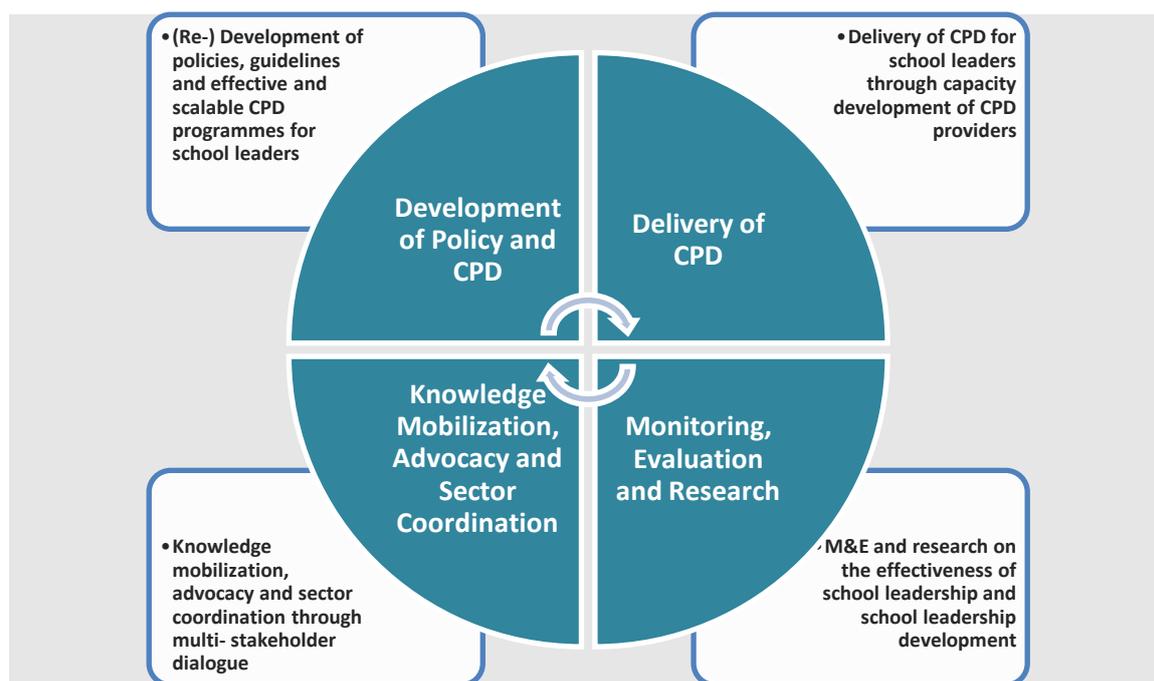
The target group of the Centre will include education policy makers and school leaders’ continuous professional development providers, in first instance government agencies, but also development partners (DP), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) and Civil Society Organizations (CSO). Indirect beneficiaries will include educational leaders at decentralized levels of the education systems as well as school leaders, both in-service as well as aspiring school leaders.

The general objective of the Centre is to assist these governments, government agencies and other partners in Africa, to build national and regional capacity in promoting effective school leadership. It will use the best expertise available in the region to ensure the delivery of high-quality continuous professional development (CPD) services, research and policy advice.

As visualized in the diagram (fig. 1) below, the specific objectives of the Centre are to support educational policy makers and school leaders’ continuous professional development providers on the following core areas of support:

- The **development or re-development of school leadership policies and guidelines** and **effective and scalable continuous professional development programmes** for school leaders.
- The **delivery of continuous professional development programmes for school leaders** through capacity development of implementing agencies and partners (CPD providers), in first instance government agencies.
- **Monitoring, evaluation and research** on the effectiveness and impact of school leadership and school leadership development.
- **Mobilization and dissemination of knowledge and learning, advocacy** on the role of effective school leadership as well as support on **sector coordination** on the promotion of effective school leadership, through multi-stakeholder dialogue.

Figure 1: Core areas of support of the Centre



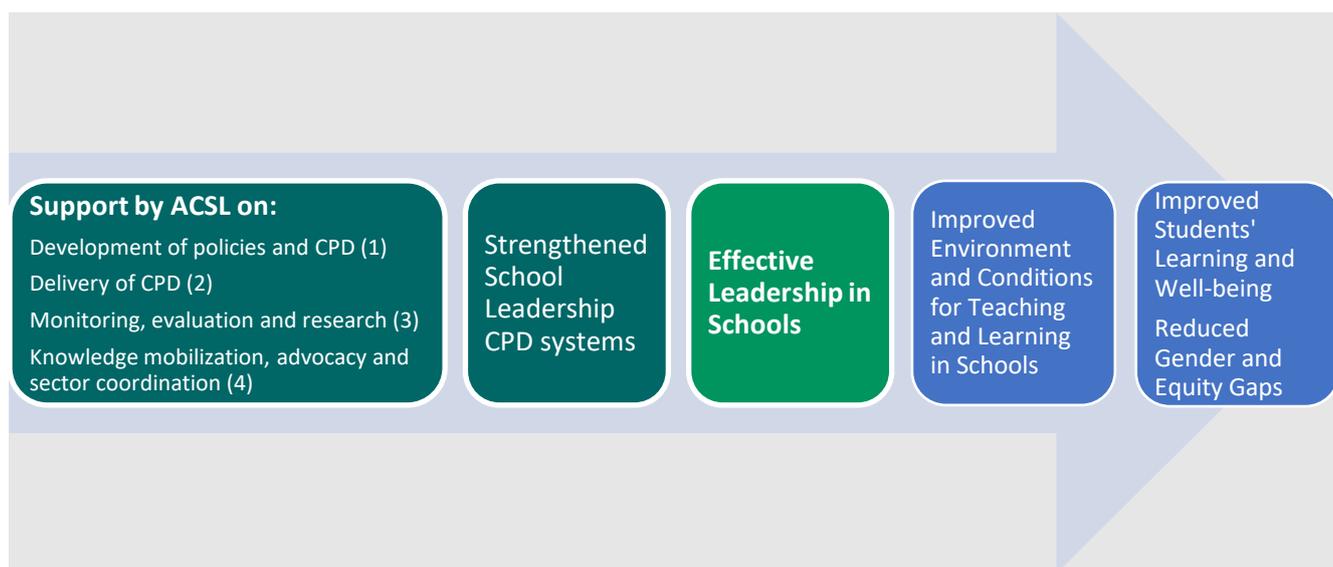
As depicted in the figure above, the four (4) core support areas of the Centre allow for a continuous iterative learning cycle to take place that in turn strengthens the expertise of the Centre and its partners.

## Theory of Change

It is expected that the whole process described above including the Centre’s commitment to evidence-informed knowledge mobilization and advocacy will strengthen school leadership continuous professional development systems leading to effective school leadership, as depicted in the Theory of Change (fig. 2) below.

The school leadership CPD systems include educational leadership policy makers, educational leadership actors at decentralized levels, providers of educational leadership CPD programmes and school leaders. The school leadership CPD systems include also Educational Leadership policies, guidelines, and standards.

Figure 2: Theory of Change



In turn, effective school leadership in schools will lead to an improved environment and conditions for teaching and learning in schools and ultimately to improved students' learning and well-being and reduced gender and equity gaps.

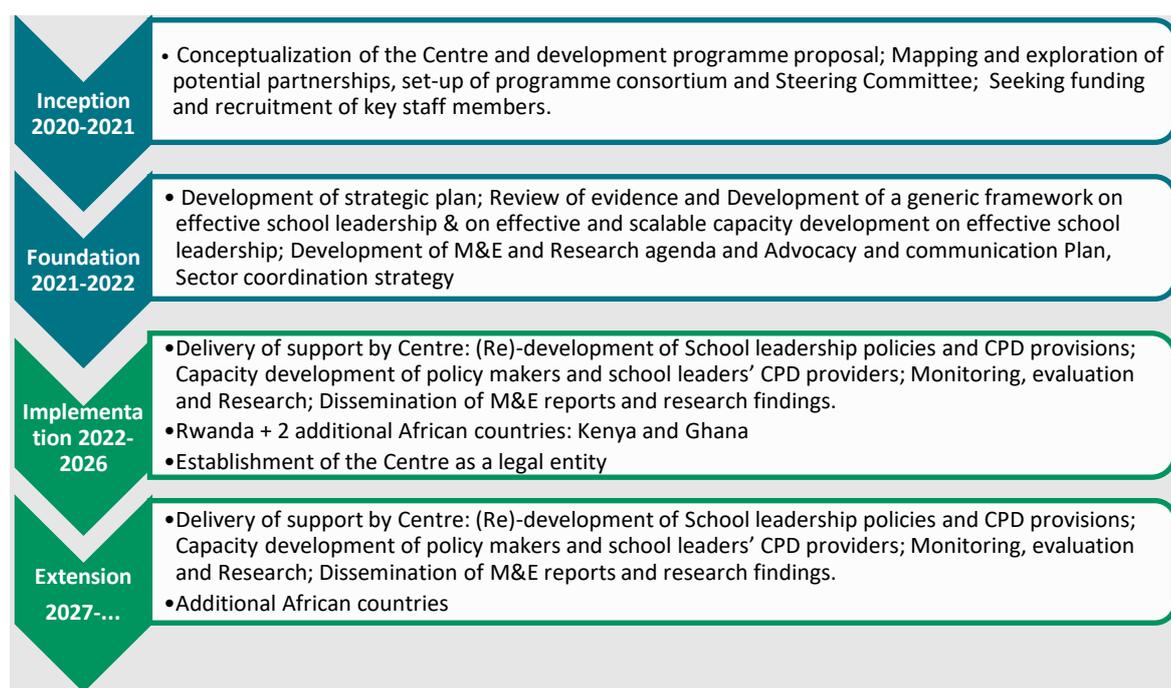
## Development in phases and partnerships

### Development in phases

The Centre will be developed in subsequent phases, as depicted in the diagram below. The phases include an inception phase, a foundation phase and a first implementation phase.

In these initial phases, it will be implemented as a programme or project by a consortium of partners. In the longer term, after implementation as a programme or project, the ambition is for the Centre to become a new organization or institute, or an entity within an existing pan-African organization.

Figure 3: Phases for development of the Centre



## Partnerships

The Centre is an initiative by and for African and African-based partners. The partnerships will be based on a clear recognition of the value added in sharing strengths with other institutions and organizations to achieve specific outcomes which will benefit the education sector in the respective partner countries.

The Centre will set up **strategic partnerships** with regional coordinating bodies and institutions in the education sector on the African continent, such as the African Union (AU), the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), Education Sub Saharan Africa (ESSA), the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) and UNESCO's International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (UNESCO-IICBA). At the national level, the Centre will partner with the Republic of Rwanda as the host country and initially with two or three additional **partner countries** through their national governments, representing the African continent. After a first implementation phase, additional partner countries will be engaged. Apart from the strategic and country partnerships, the Centre will build partnerships with **operational partners**, in first instance with government affiliated agencies that provide pre-service and continuous professional development for school leaders in the respective partners countries. Operational partnerships can also include partnerships with international and national organizations, including Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and other development partners (DPs) and agencies. The Centre will support such partners in the implementation of school leadership policies and the delivery of continuous professional development programmes on school leadership at national and regional levels. For technical support on the core support areas of the Centre, VVOB – *education for development* will be the lead **technical partner** to advice on all aspects related to the promotion of effective school leadership. Additional technical partners will be engaged to advice on other support areas, such as knowledge dissemination and advocacy. To ensure that the Centre keeps abreast of global trends, learns and continuously improves its services, a **learning partnership** will be set up with an African-based university, academia or research institution. A number of **independent members** (critical friends) of the Centre will provide advice. To be able to implement the Centre as a programme, **financial partnerships** will be established with donors.

## Hosting of the Centre and partner countries

The Centre will be hosted by the Government of Rwanda. The host country will provide a physical space for the Centre.

The main condition for selection of partner countries of the Centre will be the respective countries' need for support to initiate continuous professional development services for school leaders or to strengthen existing school leadership initiatives. A mapping exercise including a review of initiatives on the African continent is carried out to inform the selection of these partner countries. In each of the partner countries, the consortium partners will seek to set up operational partnerships and form a coalition of change. To represent the African continent, Anglophone, Francophone and Lusophone countries will be selected, preferably from East-, South- and West- and North-Africa.

Hosted in Rwanda with a core team working from Rwanda, the Centre will work with smaller satellite teams in the various partner countries where the Centre's services are delivered. The core team will provide support to these satellite teams in a blended modality where physical and face-to-face support will be combined with input and support from internationally and regionally based staff.

## Legal status of the Centre

In its initial phases, that is the inception, foundation and a first implementation phase, the African Centre for School Leadership will operate through the programmatic support of VVOB as lead technical partner, in a joint partnership with the Government of Rwanda and other partners of the Centre. As such the Centre will operate as a joint programme or project implemented by VVOB and partners and steered by a steering committee which reflects the regional ambition of the centre. At this stage, the ACSL has no separate legal status, therefore, incoming funds are consolidated in VVOB's accounting.

After these initial phases, the Centre is set to become a recognized legal entity in the region. Two options are explored for future governance of the Centre: (1) the ACSL hosted by a Pan-African organisation/centre/institute, such as the African Union (AU) or the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), (2) the ACSL as a new organisation/centre/institute without formal links to an existing organisation/centre/institute. If it is decided that the Centre will be hosted by a Pan-African organisation/centre/institute, the host organisation/centre/institute will be specified. In the initial phases, advice will be sought on the appropriate status of the Centre, including legal advice.

## Governance and organizational set-up

Initially, the ACSL will have a Steering Committee to steer the Centre as a project, composed of representatives of all partners involved in the implementation of the project (see table below), including ADEA as a strategic partner and chair, the host government of Rwanda as co-chair, operational partners from the three initial country partners: University of Rwanda – College of Education (URCE – Rwanda), Institute for Educational Planning and Administration (IEPA – Ghana) and Kenya Education Management Institute (KEMI – Kenya) and VVOB as the lead technical partner. The general function of the Steering Committee is to steer the Centre's work in its foundation and first implementation phases and its further development. The Steering Committee will meet on a quarterly basis.

The African Centre for School Leadership Technical Working Group (ACSL TWG), was established with the mandate to collaboratively conceptualize, co-create and support operationalization of the Centre. This technical working group is composed of one or more representatives from the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC), Rwanda Basic Education Board (REB) and VVOB. MINEDUC, REB and VVOB appointed a focal person in this technical working group. The ACSL TWG will meet on a monthly basis.

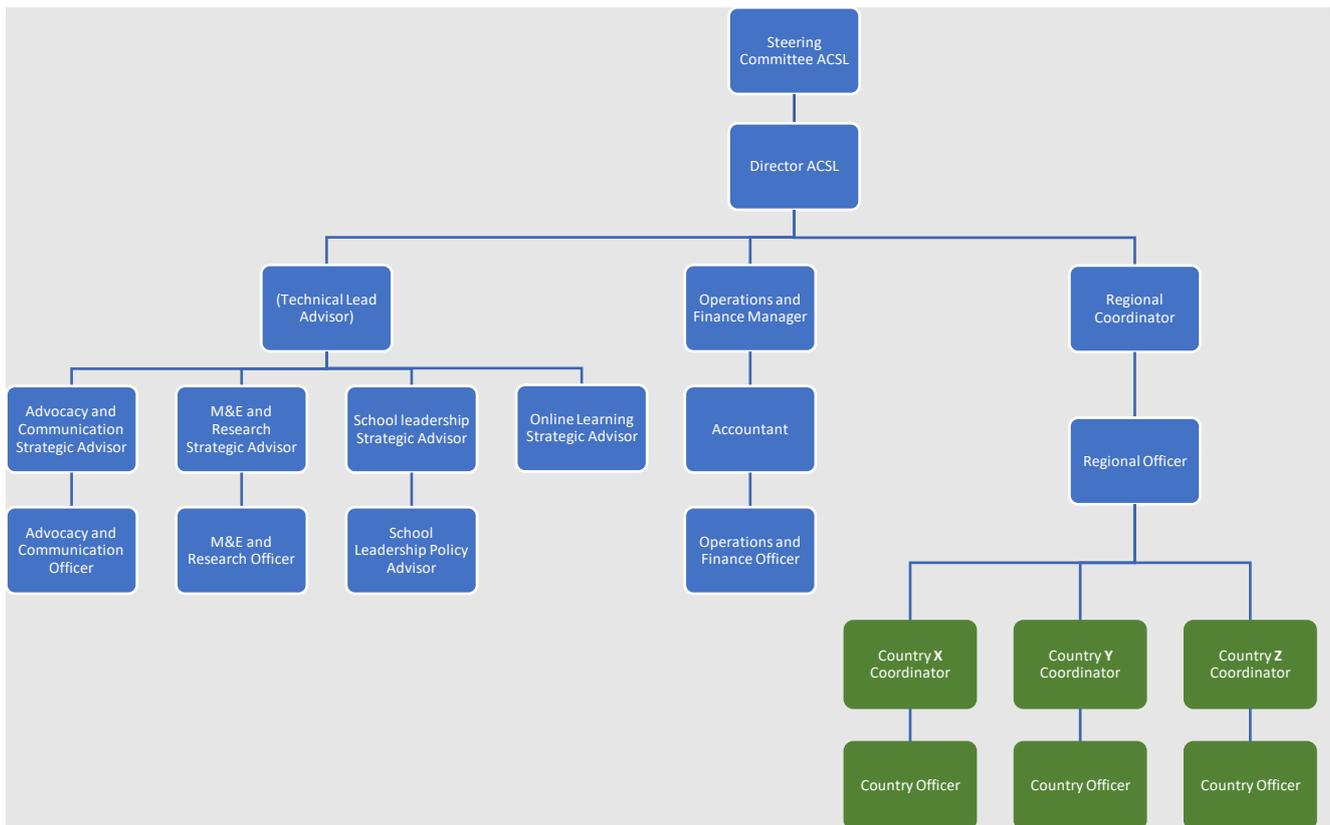
## Proposed Steering Committee

<b>Partners</b>	<b>Proposed representative</b>	<b>Main responsibilities</b>
Strategic partners	ADEA (Chair)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chairing of quarterly Steering Committee meetings, representing the strategic partners of the ACSL</li> </ul>
Host government (co-chair)	Government of the Republic of Rwanda through the Ministry of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-chairing of quarterly Steering Committee meetings as host of the ACSL</li> <li>• Provision of physical location for ACSL (as host)</li> <li>• Representation in ACSL Technical Working Group</li> </ul>
Operational partners	Institute for Educational Planning and Administration (IEPA – Ghana)  University of Rwanda – College of Education (URCE – Rwanda)  Kenya Education Management Institute (KEMI – Kenya)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participation in quarterly Steering Committee meetings, representing the operational partners of the ACSL</li> <li>• Provision of school leadership CPD in respective partner countries</li> </ul>
Technical partners	VVOB – education for development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participation in quarterly Steering Committee meetings, representing the technical partners of the ACSL</li> <li>• Representation in ACSL Technical Working Group</li> <li>• Provision of technical Support for the implementation of the Centre’s activities</li> </ul>

## Organizational set-up

In the longer term, the Centre will be led by a director, with a VVOB Advisor in an advisory role. The core team reflecting the key support areas of the Centre will consist of a School Leadership Strategic Advisor, an M&E and Research Strategic Advisor, an Advocacy and Communication Strategic Advisor and a Regional Coordinator. The Regional Coordinator will be responsible for the coordination of all activities in the region in collaboration with the Country Coordinators and with the support of a Regional Officer. In partner countries, a satellite office will consist of the Country Coordinator and a Country Officer.

### Proposed organizational structure of the Centre



## Main costs and funding strategy

Main costs for the Centre will be for human resources, with the core team working in Rwanda, and smaller satellite teams in country offices of partner countries (see organizational structure). For each of the four core support areas of the Centre (see fig. 1), an operational budget will be foreseen for specific activities, consultancies and travel. Finally, a budget will be foreseen for capital assets, including for ICT. For the foundation phase and first implementation phase (2022-2026) a budget of roughly 25 million USD is targeted to finance the human resources and activities of the Centre, including for activities implemented in partner countries.

In the foundation phase and first implementation phase, the Centre will be funded through grants, including seed funding by the Centre's financial partners and donors. In kind support will be provided by the host government for the physical location of the Centre and by all partner countries and operational partners for human resources. As lead Technical Partner, VVOB will support the Centre in overall coordination, through embedding experts within the Centre and support in organization of key activities. The Centre will reach out to financial partners and donors through a call for funding and will express interest in and apply to any relevant call for proposals by such donors. When such funding is secured, the Centre will provide financial support to government agencies and CPD providers in partner countries through sub-grants.

In the longer term and in the expansion phase, the Centre will initiate income generating activities, for example through the provision of consultancies to additional partners in partner countries and beyond. Regional capacity development trajectories and trainings can be initiated by the Centre for which participants will be charged.

## Next steps: Inception and Foundation Phase

### Inception phase (2020-2021)

During the inception phase, the Centre was being conceptualized and a programme proposal was put together, including a detailed activity plan. Partnerships with strategic partners, countries, operational, learning, and financial partners were explored, starting from a mapping of potential partners on the continent. The inception phase was concluded with the [highlight](#) of the Centre on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2021 during the 13<sup>th</sup> Policy Dialogue Forum of the International Task Force on Teachers hosted in Kigali and the set-up of the Advisory Board of the Centre.

Also, during the inception phase, some key staff members have been recruited.

### Foundation phase (2021-2022)

The Foundation phase overlaps partially with the Inception phase. In the Foundation phase, two foundational studies have been implemented, the [first one](#) to review and identify what constitutes effective school leadership and school leadership continuous professional development on the African continent that has the potential for scaling. Complementary to the first study, the second study was a [consensus building exercise](#) with a representation of policy makers, CPD providers and development partners on the African continent to develop a consensus on the key findings that came out of the review and on the ambitions of the Centre.

The knowledge generated through a review of empirical evidence and the consensus building exercise will lead to the development of a draft framework on key competences and practices associated with effective school leadership and key design features of effective and scalable CPD for school leaders on the African continent.

## Road map for setting up the Centre

Timing	Activity
2020-2021	Bi-lateral meetings with the Government of Rwanda and potential partners, leading to endorsement of the idea of setting up an African Centre for School Leadership (ACSL)
November 2021	Appointment of a Technical Working Group (TWG) of the ACSL to work on conceptualization and operationalization of the Centre
2 December 2021	Conclusion of the inception phase of the ACSL with announcement by the Minister of Education during UNESCO's Teacher Taskforce Policy Dialogue Forum in Kigali
14 December 2021	Co-creation session with ACSL TWG on conceptualization and operationalization of the Centre and regular progress meetings with the ACSL TWG
30-31 March 2022	<a href="#">Consensus building exercise</a> on foundations of the Centre with panel of key stakeholders
14 July 2022	Dissemination of two foundational studies of the Centre
August – December 2022	Kick-off of Foundation Phase project of ACSL, funded by Mastercard Foundation
	Approval of the concept note of the ACSL by Government of Rwanda (represented by the Ministry of Education) as the host of the Centre
	Development of a framework on Effective School Leadership in Africa
	Studies on Ubuntu School Leadership and on the interplay between Gender and School Leadership
	Presentation on ACSL during <a href="#">ADEAs Triennale</a> in Mauritius
	First meeting of the ACSL Steering Committee in Rwanda

## Planned initial activities (July 2022 – December 2023)

The following activities organized around the four core support areas of the ACSL are planned to close off the foundation phase and to start the implementation phase of the Centre (July 2022 –

December 2023). The activities will be implemented using the seed funding expected from Mastercard Foundation and other financial partners.

African Centre for School Leadership (ACSL) Activity plan (July 2022 – December 2023)								
ID	Task	Planned Complete	Approximate Timing					
			YEAR 1		YEAR 2			
			Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
<b>1</b>	<b>Development of policy and CPD</b>							
1.1	Development of regional standards on effective SL	Q2 2023	x	x	x	x		
1.2	Development of CPD content on Ubuntu SL and Gender	Q4 2023			x	x	x	x
<b>2</b>	<b>Delivery of CPD through capacity development</b>							
2.1	Capacity strengthening of CPD partners in the field of developing CPD content (Gender – Ubuntu)	Q4 2023		x	x	x	x	x
2.2	Capacity strengthening of CPD partners in the field of designing and delivering (blended) CPD	Q4 2023			x	x	x	x
<b>3</b>	<b>M&amp;E and Research</b>							
3.1	Study on Gender and School Leadership	Q4 2022	x	x				
3.2	Study on Ubuntu School Leadership	Q2 2023			x	x		
3.3	Needs assessment of Operational partners	Q1 2023		x		x		
3.4	Development of M&E framework on core support areas of Centre	Q4 2023			x	x	x	x
<b>4</b>	<b>Knowledge mobilization, communication, sector coordination and advocacy</b>							
4.1	Development of identity of Centre (profiling)	Q1 2023	x	x	x			
4.2	ACSL website + social media presence	continued	x	x	x	x	x	x
4.3	High level meetings and follow-up on partner countries	Q4 2023		x		x		x
4.4	High level launch and regional conference	Q4 2023						x

## References

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Moorosi, P. and Bush T. (2019) Preparation and Development of School Leaders in Africa. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338310490\\_Preparation\\_and\\_Development\\_of\\_School\\_Leaders\\_in\\_Africa](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338310490_Preparation_and_Development_of_School_Leaders_in_Africa)

World Bank (2018). World Development Report 2018: Learning to Realize Education's Promise. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2018>

## Appendices

Appendix number	Title	Report
Appendix 1	Building a Consensus on School Leadership in Africa: Panel workshop report	 20220502 Report of the panel Workshop
Appendix 2	Report of Regional dissemination of the foundational studies of the African Centre for school leadership	 20220805_ Report dissemination event
Appendix 3	Foundation study one: A review of empirical research on school leadership in Africa	 acsl_working_paper_v0.0_20220327 (1).p
Appendix 4	Foundation study two: A consensus building exercise with a panel of experts on effective school leadership in Africa	 ACSL_Delphi%20Study_presentation%20