



Putting SDG4 into practice

School leadership

Inclusive and equitable quality education provides all learners with the capabilities to become economically productive, develop sustainable livelihoods, contribute to peaceful and democratic societies, and enhance individual wellbeing. This technical brief describes why school leadership matters for quality education and the evidence-based approach VVOB takes to introducing and embedding school leadership in developing countries. The experiences of VVOB show the value of identifying an appropriate entry point, working with governmental agencies responsible for training educators, demonstrating the ‘what, who and how’ of school leadership through pilot programmes, and institutionalising school leadership in the education system. As described in the case study of VVOB work in Rwanda, developing and embedding school leadership requires long-term commitment and solid partnerships.

Why school leadership matters

School leaders have a vital role in creating the conditions for effective teaching and learning. No school sustainably improves the quality of education in the absence of effective school leadership. Good leaders identify the aspects of their schools on which to focus in order to help students learn. They do this through a set of leadership behaviours that affect student learning.

Successful school leaders

School leaders who are successful:

- **define their values and vision to raise expectations, set direction and build trust**
- **structure the organisation and assign roles and responsibilities**
- **shape conditions to enhance the quality of teaching and learning**
- **enhance teacher quality**
- **enrich the curriculum**
- **build strong relationships inside the school community**
- **build relationships outside the school community.**

Source: *10 strong claims about school leadership*. National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services. 2010.

The evidence

International literature identifies effective leadership as a critical factor in raising the achievement of learners. Research has shown that school leadership matters for quality education because:

- school leaders who develop, support and evaluate the quality of teaching have a big influence on learning outcomes
- the impact of school leadership on learning outcomes is second only to the quality of teaching and learning
- effective school leadership is critical for raising learners' achievement
- effective school leadership is particularly important in improving poorly performing and disadvantaged schools
- successful school leadership has a positive impact on the entire school.

“School leadership has become a priority in education policy agendas internationally. It plays a key role in improving school outcomes by influencing the motivations and capacities of teachers, as well as the school climate and environment. Effective school leadership is essential to improve the efficiency and equity of schooling.”

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

School leadership and Sustainable Development Goal 4

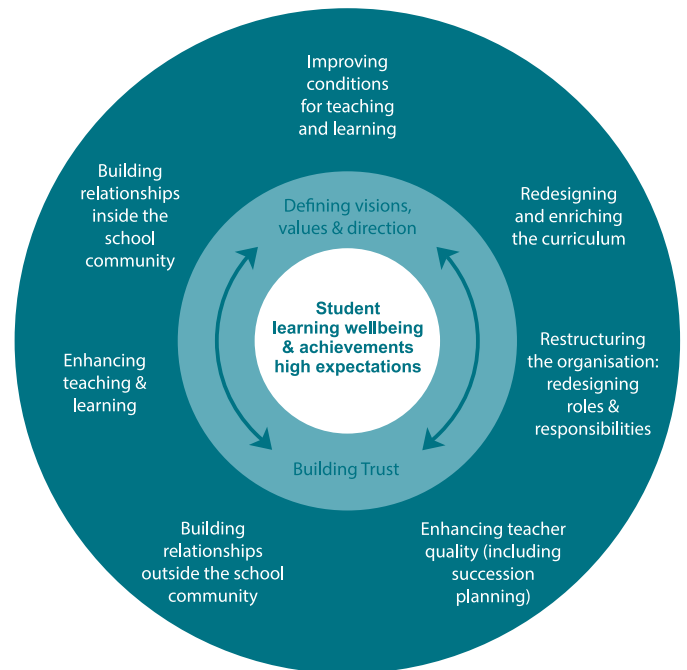
School leadership plays an important part in realising Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4): ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. A key strategy in the vision for education to achieve SDG4, the *Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action* adopted by the World Education Forum 2015, is to “Strengthen school leadership to improve teaching and learning”.

VVOB approach to strengthening school leadership

VVOB programmes use a model of the dimensions of leadership affecting student outcomes developed from research as a starting point.

The approach VVOB takes in a country adjusts this model according to the country’s experience, challenges and needs. This means assessing the context and identifying who exactly needs support to improve school leadership. Local education partners – ministries of education and institutions that are responsible for the professional development of school leaders – may need support to empower school leaders to improve the quality of education. Professional development providers may need assistance from experts. VVOB deploys a wide range of methodologies, from classical training and workshops to mentoring, coaching and peer learning, as appropriate to particular circumstances.

Dimensions of successful school leadership



Source: *10 strong claims about successful school leadership*. National College for Leadership of Schools and Children’s Services. 2010.





Building capacity in school leadership

In practice, building capacity in school leadership starts with building the capacity of those who provide professional development for school leaders. Initially, this means working to introduce the concept of school leadership in ministries and other institutions. Once the concept has been accepted, understood and tested by these partners, VVOB endeavours to institutionalise school leadership practices in a country's education system.

The professional development of school leaders throughout their careers is one of the linchpins of the VVOB approach to school leadership. Experience has shown that top-down strategies alone, such as building the capacity of those who provide professional development for head teachers, are ineffective and need to be complemented by strategies that involve school leaders themselves. Programmes follow six principles in developing leadership practices associated with improved learning.

Building capacity in school leadership

Programmes to build capacity in school leadership:

- are embedded in the overall school leadership support system
- are stimulated by education leadership at higher levels
- are tailored to school leaders' existing knowledge, practices and context
- are sustained, ongoing and intensive, with regular follow-up support in schools
- emphasise learning-by-doing and reflective practice, and are oriented to implementation in schools
- focus on student wellbeing and learning outcomes.

Leadership practices associated with improved learning

Leaders who improve learning:

- build a vision
- get the basics right
- share leadership
- lead for learning
- improve teaching
- enrich the curriculum
- engage the community.

Source: *Learning achievement: engaging with evidence. A working evidence paper – version 1.* UK Department for International Development. 2014.

Case study: building school leadership in Rwanda

In 2014, net enrolment in primary education in Rwanda was 96.8%; enrolment in secondary schools is rising rapidly. The emphasis has thus shifted from enabling access to improving the quality of education. Since 2003, VVOB has supported the push for quality education in Rwanda, initially focusing on school management and more recently concentrating on school leadership.

Aligning with transition

At the time VVOB began working in Rwanda, the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) was already in transition towards demand-driven, competency-based schooling. The ministry and VVOB funded a three-year pilot project to enhance the managerial competencies of school leaders and school administration support staff in 30 pilot schools; the aim was to develop the pilot schools to serve as resource centres for neighbouring schools. The pilot project proved successful and VVOB, jointly with the ministry, organised training in school management nationally, and developed and disseminated training manuals for school leaders and school administrative support staff in all primary schools.

In 2007, this initial phase culminated in the ministry distributing a handbook setting out who does what in school management to guide school managers across the country.

Institutionalising change

To consolidate and sustain progress, the thrust then became to institutionalise school management in the education system. In 2008, the ministry and VVOB began looking at how and where to set up a department responsible not only for school management but also for school leadership. In 2011, this collaboration led to the formal establishment of the School Management and Leadership Unit within the ministry. The unit is mainly responsible for the quality of school leadership and management in basic education and, in particular, for pre- and in-service training, peer learning, and monitoring and evaluation of school leaders. To establish an in-depth understanding of the principles and practice of school leadership in the new unit, VVOB drew on its extensive network to train the staff.

The establishment of the School Management and Leadership Unit shows the extent to which partners took school leadership on board and are willing to continue to develop school leaders in Rwanda. Testifying to this, head teachers who have passed through the training now hold senior leadership positions in the ministry, districts and sectors and are therefore helping spearhead school leadership across the country.

Building capacity to sustain momentum

By 2013, the School Management and Leadership Unit was well established and tasked with providing effective, gender-sensitive, professional development for head teachers. Work began on

developing a system to extend such professional development to head teachers across the country. VVOB and the College of Education, a research and training institution under the University of Rwanda and the ministry, joined forces to design courses in school management and leadership, a collaboration that led to the introduction of a Post-Graduate Diploma in Effective School Leadership recognised by the Rwanda Education Board, the institution in charge of policy implementation within the ministry. The first cohort of 416 head teachers, one from each sector, was awarded the diploma in effective school leadership in 2016.

Creating an enabling policy

To embed school management and leadership firmly in the education system, the ministry and VVOB continued to work together to integrate school leadership in a Teacher Development and Management policy, with the aim of making the diploma in school management and leadership compulsory for all head teachers and new appointees. Once the government has formally adopted the policy and has allocated a budget for implementation, professional standards for effective school leadership will be applied. Standards cover in-service assessments, professional development, certification and recruitment, and provide a framework for monitoring and evaluating head teacher performance, head teacher reflection and self-evaluation, and promotion.

Continuing professional development

The Teacher Development and Management policy requires school leaders to maintain and advance their knowledge and skills through continuing professional development. Anticipating the approval of the policy, the School Leadership and Management Unit and VVOB have developed, piloted and researched professional learning networks for head teachers as a cost-effective complement to pre-service and in-service training courses provided by experts. Experience had showed that a strict focus on individual learning needed to be accompanied by group learning. Sharing professional problems helps head teachers gain from others' experiences and become more competent leaders. Learning networks and coaching build on the foundation laid by training courses.

Learning networks and coaching

Piloting professional learning networks involved training sector education officers to lead networks and provide ongoing coaching for head teachers. The 116 sector education officers now organise learning networks that meet every two months and reach 962 head teachers. Each professional learning network includes at least one head teacher enrolled in the Post-Graduate Diploma. The Rwanda Education Board and sector education officers use the standards and norms for school management and school leadership developed by the School Leadership and Management Unit to monitor performance. VVOB regularly visits the networks to assess learning and behaviour change among head teachers. A VVOB research project funded by the UK Department for International Development has concluded that professional learning networks are a cost-effective strategy for continuing professional development.

“... but when we are there we compare the theory and the practices, so we gain more knowledge and experience from other schools ...”

Head teacher

Linking head teachers and school leaders

Linking the networks and network members, Rwanda Education Board publishes a magazine (*Urunana rw'Abarezi*) that features articles and testimonies on key issues, such as school drop-outs and the role of parents in education, and provides a space for sharing experiences and perspectives.

The challenge over the next five years is to enrol many more in-service and all newly appointed head teachers in the diploma programme. VVOB, together with the ministry, is exploring ways to deliver the diploma course efficiently through, for example, online modules.

Committing to long-term partnerships

Experience in strengthening school management and leadership in Rwanda demonstrates the value of long-term commitment to stable partnerships, understanding and aligning with government strategy, and providing technical and financial support in crucial aspects. VVOB partnerships actively engaged government, non-governmental and development agencies involved in the education sector, coordinating two task forces, one of which was on school leadership. Interaction helps ensure that programmes align with standards and policies, and maximise use of resources.

VVOB programmes supporting school management and school leadership

School Management and School Leadership for Secondary Education 2008–2013

School Leadership and Management Unit legally installed in the Ministry of Education and 30 resource centres established. 2,500 head teachers trained in school management. Standards for school leadership developed.

Common Belgian Technical and Vocational Education and Training Support 2010–2015

Focus on school leadership to lead and support reforming the education sector towards practice-based, demand-driven, competency-based pedagogy.

Coaching School Leadership to Achieve High-level Learning Outcomes 2013–2015

120 sector education officers trained to lead and coach professional learning networks for head teachers. Head teachers brought together to meet, interact and discuss specific school issues and best practices that address them.

Learning Outcomes in Primary Education Programme 2014–2016

Post-Graduate Diploma in Effective School Leadership developed and recognised by the Rwanda Education Board. 416 head teachers enrolled.



Tools and processes for strengthening school leaders

VVOB has developed products that help Rwandan partners understand, internalise and put learning into practice:

Professional standards on effective school leadership

Standards define benchmark practices for assessing head teachers' performance. The standards are now incorporated in the Rwandan Teacher Statute.

Training needs assessment

Training needs assessments ensure that programmes start by considering the needs of schools and head teachers when developing approaches to building capacity.

Head teacher performance assessment tool

Assessment tools include performance assessment criteria and a description of the types of evidence that head teachers can collect to demonstrate that they can perform or behave according to the professional standards for effective school leadership.

Head teacher self-assessment tools

Self-appraisals and portfolios of evidence demonstrate head teachers' competence. Self-assessments allow them to reflect on practice, how to use what they have learned, and what works best in their schools.

Quality audits

Ongoing mentoring and coaching in schools follows up on capacity development, helping head teachers address challenges.

Professional learning networks

Professional networks provide a structure for continuous professional development for head teachers, recognising that learning stems from learners collaborating rather than from an expert imparting knowledge.

Going forward

Establishing school leadership and school management on the Rwandan education reform agenda has led to a shift in attitudes. Providers and recipients of capacity building have come to believe in themselves as agents of change.

Going forward, VVOB is working to strengthen head teachers' leadership in two critical areas: learning outcomes in mathematics and girls' learning outcomes. This involves introducing and building capacity in school leadership to support gender-responsive and student-centred mathematics pedagogies, assessing the changes in outcomes these pedagogies bring about and the timeframes in which changes can be realistically realised. When tested, this model for strengthening leadership could be applied to improving learning outcomes in subjects where student performance is most critical.

Wider outreach shares experiences on school leadership and gender with VVOB programmes in other countries through online learning events. Papers published with the University of Rwanda in the Rwanda Journal of Education, and presentations at conferences and meetings, disseminate findings more widely.



School leadership for improving learning 2017–2021

Programmes for 2017–2021 adapt approaches to school leadership that have worked well in Rwanda to other countries. Work in Rwanda has showed that school leaders need to steer their own learning with respect to teaching teachers to improve learning outcomes. VVOB programmes thus increasingly involve school leaders themselves to complement the top-down tactics of developing the capacity of providers of professional development for school leaders. Programmes for 2017–2021 work with school leaders to improve learning and close achievement and gender gaps in literacy, mathematics and science.

Rwanda

In Rwanda, 46% of students in fourth grade do not achieve the objectives for numeracy. The VVOB programme 2017–2021 supports the Ministry of Education, the Rwanda Education Board and the University of Rwanda College of Education to enhance school leadership to effectively improve learning outcomes in mathematics, particularly with respect to disadvantaged girls in the Eastern Province and Western Province. This is done by reinforcing the professional learning networks for head teachers and the diploma course on school leadership. The programme reaches 533 school leaders.



South Africa

South African primary schools deliver poor learning outcomes. A culture and pedagogy of inclusivity is needed to avoid drop-out of vulnerable learners. Inclusivity is addressed through continuous professional development of school leaders and teachers, and support at national, provincial and district level. The VVOB programme 2017–2021 partners with stakeholders at all three levels and supports district-level and school-based continuing professional development for inclusivity. Cooperation with district officials directly supports school leaders and teachers, addresses practical implementation in schools, strengthens collaboration within district teams, and provides feedback to the provincial level.



Vietnam

In Central Vietnam, 3–5-year-old children in ethnic minorities struggle to learn. VVOB focuses on improving the quality of learning in early childhood education in poor ethnic minorities in districts in three provinces. To do this, in collaboration with local, Belgian and international partners, the VVOB programme 2017–2021 builds capacity to set up a professional development track for preschool leaders and teachers in departments and bureaus of education and training. To ensure deep learning among all children, the programme reaches out to 3,410 preschool teachers and 571 preschool leaders. The focus is on process-oriented child monitoring, gender, environment and removing ethnic barriers to learning.



Ecuador

In Ecuador, VVOB aims to create safe school environments that enhance the wellbeing of youngsters in technical education, and that improve their prospects in the labour market. The VVOB programme 2017–2021 reinforces the capacity of the government services responsible for continuous professional development of school leaders and teachers. The programme reaches 250 school leaders and 335 vocational teachers in three provinces struck by the 2016 earthquake.



Putting SDG4 into practice: *School leadership*

Suriname

In Suriname, school leaders' attitudes and work practices hamper badly needed vocational education. Students in vocational education are a very vulnerable group, often from broken homes or families with a low socio-economic status. They have an urgent need for school environments that nurture their wellbeing and for vocational education that is more active, competency-based and learner-centred. The VVOB programme 2017–2021 supports school leaders and teachers in strengthening vocational schools and strengthens the capacity of local professional development institutions. The programme reaches 100 school leaders across the country.



Democratic Republic of the Congo

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, technical agricultural education does not align with the needs of communities and the world of work. In two provinces, Kongo Central 1 and Kongo Central 2, the VVOB programme 2017–2021 partners with the Ministry of Primary, Secondary and Professional Education and the Ministry of Technical and Professional Education in supporting school leaders to improve technical education in agriculture. The programme reinforces the capacity of the provincial inspection services and divisions to offer quality professional development to school leaders and teachers in agricultural schools. The programme reaches 30 school leaders and 240 teachers.



Zimbabwe

The VVOB programme in Zimbabwe focuses on the continuous assessment of child wellbeing and involvement as the driver of teaching and learning processes in early childhood development. High levels of wellbeing and involvement ultimately lead to high levels of child development. Part of the programme strengthens departments of early childhood development in order to build the capacity of school leaders to mentor student teachers during teaching practice. The programme reaches 300 school leaders.



About VVOB

VVOB is a Belgian non-profit organisation with more than 30 years' experience in sustainably improving the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of education. VVOB's annual budget is approximately €11 million.

VVOB focus

In pursuit of quality education, VVOB works in two niches, the professional development of school teachers and the professional development of school leaders, in:

- 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.

As a fundamental principle, VVOB firmly believes that quality education can only be achieved if equity, and particularly gender equity, is achieved in the education system.

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 partner countries. We do this through capacity development and technical assistance.

Developing the capacity of local education authorities

For VVOB, developing the capacity of local education authorities means:

- professionalising teachers through strengthening teacher training institutions and professional development organisations, and mentoring and coaching systems
- professional development of school leaders through professional development organisations, and mentoring and coaching systems
- enabling a strong policy environment for the professionalisation of teachers and school leaders, by enhancing dialogue, communication and collaboration among stakeholders.

Providing technical assistance

For VVOB, providing technical assistance means:

- offering structural and sustainable solutions to support and reinforce the capacities of governments and local education authorities responsible for the professional development of teachers and school leaders

- offering practical and technical education expertise and support for processes through a wide range of methodologies, from classical training and workshops to mentoring, coaching and peer learning
- ensuring that partners increasingly take the lead throughout programmes to guarantee sustainability.

How VVOB works

Addresses local needs and contexts

VVOB aligns its work with national education strategies to inspire policies adapted to local needs and contexts.

Collaborates with a network of educational partners

VVOB develops educational expertise based on its know-how and exchanges within its worldwide and Flemish network of educational partners – teacher training institutions, universities, ministries of education, educational service providers and international organisations.

Operational partners

VVOB partners with ministries of education, teacher training institutions and organisations focusing on professional development. Partners range from national and regional governments to institutions, individual schools, school leaders, teachers and students.

Financial partners

Local governments finance programmes from their own budgets and with support from national and international donors, including the Belgian and Flemish governments, the European Union, the British government, international non-governmental organisations and foundations.

Stimulates cooperation

VVOB stimulates cooperation between educational institutions across continents.

Where VVOB works

VVOB works in 11 countries – Belgium, Cambodia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ecuador, Rwanda, South Africa, Suriname, Uganda (soon), Vietnam, Zambia and Zimbabwe – and on assignments in other countries.

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