

African Centre for School Leadership

CONCEPT NOTE

March 2024

The African Centre for School Leadership is a coalition of partners in Africa coordinated by ADEA, ESSA and VVOB.

Ushirika wa Maendeleo ya Elimu Barani Afrika
الرابطة لأجل تطوير التربية في إفريقيا
Association for the Development of Education in Africa
Association pour le développement de l'éducation en Afrique
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Background

The role of school leadership for quality of education

Africa stands at a pivotal juncture with significant strides made towards expanding access to basic education. 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). This situation has not changed. In fact, COVID-19 exacerbated the learning challenges that children from poor families and households face (Stacy et al., 2023).

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 (Global School Leaders, 2020; World Bank, 2018). New research has shown that effective school leadership is critical to addressing all the four key factors underlying the learning crisis (Baron et al., 2023). 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 marginalised. 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 decentralised 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

As the continent seeks to enhance the quality of its education systems and tailor it for contemporary relevance, the transformative role that effective school leadership can play becomes increasingly evident and crucial. To address the challenges and opportunities in education systems in Africa and to ignite the potential of school leadership to improve quality of education, the African Centre for School Leadership (ACSL) was initiated in 2021.

The Centre has been built on the experience and expertise in and of promoting effective school leadership in Rwanda. Starting from a set of five standards of "Effective School Leadership", Rwanda has put in place a school leadership support system for school leaders, consisting of certified courses in effective school leadership and educational mentorship and coaching, 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 (VVOB & Three Stones International, 2021). 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 Gaborone (2019).

The Centre now collaborates with governments and governmental agencies in the education sector to build supportive school leadership systems with the objective of improving teaching and in turn learning outcomes. The Centre promotes effective leadership at various levels in education systems on the continent with a focus on 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 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 in improved quality of teaching and ultimately improved learning and learning outcomes.

Theory of Change

As reflected in the Theory of Change (fig. 1), the Centre partners and collaborates with key stakeholders to build supportive school leadership systems to promote effective school leadership in schools in Africa, in all subsectors (ECE, Primary Education, General Secondary Education, and TVET). Effective school leadership support systems will help school leaders create positive instructional environments for teachers. Improved school environments and improved conditions for teaching and learning in schools will, in turn, result in improved students' learning, wellbeing and reduced gender and equity gaps.

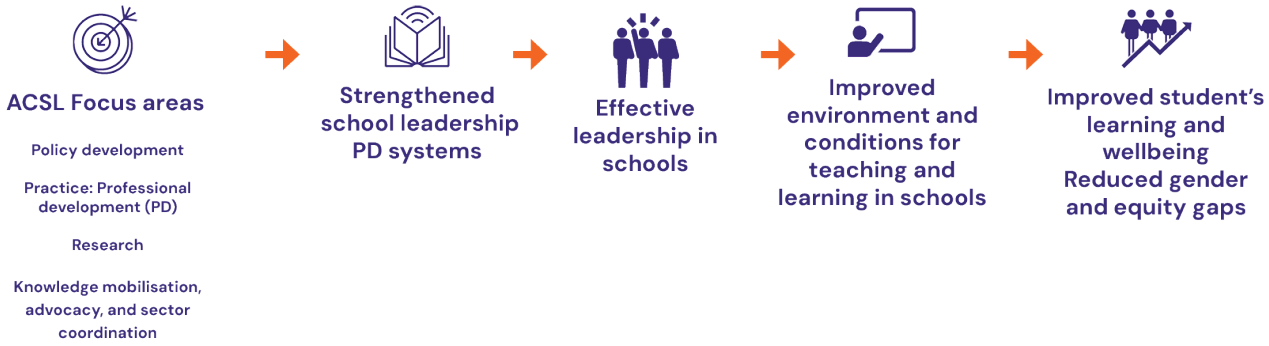


Figure 1: Theory of Change

Objectives of the Centre

The target group of the Centre and key partners includes education policy makers and school leaders' professional development providers, in the first instance government agencies, but also development partners (DP), Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) and Civil Society Organisations (CSO). Indirect beneficiaries include educational leaders at decentralised 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 partner and collaborate with governments, government agencies and other partners in Africa on the promotion of effective school leadership. The Centre uses the best expertise available in the region to ensure the delivery of high-quality professional development (PD) services, research, and policy advice.

The ACSL is building a vision for promoting school leadership on the continent. Through its activities, projects, and especially its partnerships and collaborations, it will develop contextualized school leadership models in Africa, initiate policy development, promote effective school leadership professional development, identify, and share best practices and drive and support African intellectual thought leadership on school leadership across the continent. Through the Centre, a sustainable approach is established whereby policy, practice, and research will be coordinated, connected, and strengthened from within Africa.
As visualised in the diagram (Fig. 2) below, the specific objectives of the Centre are to partner with educational policy makers and school leaders' professional development providers on the following focus areas (FAs):

- **Policy:** development or re-development of effective school leadership policies and guidelines
- **Practice:** development and delivery of professional development programmes for school leaders
- **Research:** research on the effectiveness and impact of school leadership and school leadership professional development
- **Knowledge mobilisation, advocacy, communication and sector coordination:** mobilisation and dissemination of evidence, insights, learning; advocacy on school leadership; coordination of partners and stakeholders involved in promoting school leadership.



Figure 2: Focus areas of the African Centre for School Leadership

As depicted in the figure above (Fig. 2), the four (4) focus 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. Collaboration between partner organizations is a mutually beneficial and interactive process in which each partner actively participates, shares resources, knowledge, and efforts to achieve common objectives around the Centre's focus areas. This dynamic interaction enhances synergy, fostering a cooperative environment that leverages the strengths of each organization, for collective impact.



Development in phases and partnerships

Development in phases

The Centre is being developed in phases. The phases include an inception phase (2020-2021); a foundation phase (2022-2024); an implementation phase (2025-2027); and a scaling phase (2028-2030). Key activities in each phase are depicted in Fig. 3.

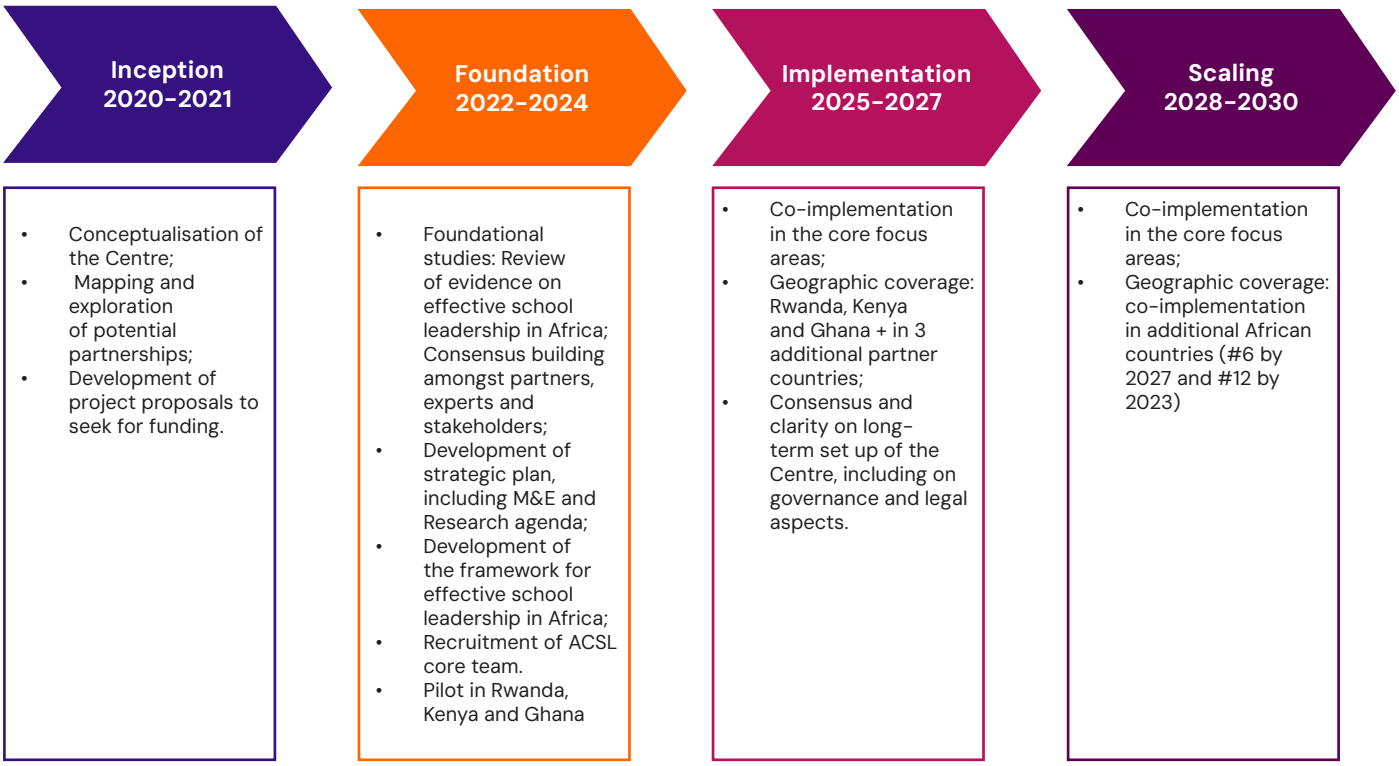


Figure 3: Developmental Phases of the African Centre for School Leadership

In the initial phases (inception foundation and first implementation phases), the Centre is developed through projects implemented by VVOB and partners. In the longer term, the ambition is for the Centre to become a new organisation or institute, or an entity within an existing pan-African organisation (see info on governance).

Partnerships

The Centre is an initiative by and for African and African-based partners and partners that share the goal of advancing the quality of education in Africa through school leadership. Partnerships are based on the recognition of the value of sharing strengths with other institutions and organisations to promote effective school leadership in Africa and to achieve specific outcomes which will benefit the education sector in partner countries.

Following the interest and momentum witnessed by the Centre, the ambition to expand the scope, reach of the Centre, and deepen its impact on the quality of education, three regional partners take up a convening and coordinating role towards other regional and in-country partners. These partners share equal responsibility, representation, and coordinate on the critical focus areas of the Centre:

- The Association for Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) convenes regional activities related to the development of policies and guidelines on school leadership in Africa. ADEA co-creates in the first instance with national government partners in this area, but also collaborates with relevant continental and regional bodies such as the AU, ECOWAS, SADC, and EAC to promote school leadership on the continent.

- Education Sub Saharan Africa (ESSA) convenes and coordinates regional activities related to research on school leadership in Africa. ESSA collaborates in the first instance with learning organizations, universities, and academic institutions, including with individual researchers.

- VVOB – education for development convenes and coordinates regional activities related to professional development for school leaders. VVOB also collaborates in the first instance with government-affiliated partners responsible for the professional development of school leaders. In addition, VVOB also coordinates with other technical partners, including nonprofit organizations that work with government agencies on the professional development of school leaders in ACSL partner countries.

In addition, ADEA convenes regional efforts as it relates to communication, advocacy, and sector coordination, in consultation with the other regional coordinating partners.

Hosting of the Centre and partner countries

As one of the founding members, the government of Rwanda through the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) played a critical role in the creation of the Centre. The Centre is currently hosted by the Government of Rwanda and as the host, provides a physical space for the staff members of the Centre on the premises of Rwanda Basic Education Board.

For the selection of the initial partner countries, i.e. Rwanda, Kenya and Ghana, a scoping review of empirical evidence on school leadership in Africa was carried out, which included a mapping of initiatives on the African continent. An important criterion for the selection of additional partner countries of the Centre is the countries' interest in collaboration to develop or strengthen their school leadership support systems. Interested country partners are invited to complete a country-level mapping exercise and situational analysis to identify where a partnership with the Centre could add value. In each of the partner countries, the Centre seeks to set up operational partnerships (with operational partners and learning partners) and form a coalition of change. To represent the African continent, Anglophone, Francophone and Lusophone countries will be selected, preferably from East, Central, South and West Africa.

Hosted in Rwanda, with a core team working from Rwanda, the Centre intends to work with smaller satellite teams in the various partner countries where the Centre's partnerships are implemented. Such satellite teams are ideally embedded within the Centre's partner organisations. The core team will provide support to these satellite teams in a blended modality where in-person support will be combined with remote input and support from internationally and regionally based staff.

Systemic outcomes and expected impact

The Centre operates as a coalition of African and African-based regional and country-level partners to ignite the potential of school leadership and transform education systems from within. At the regional level, partners will collect, disseminate, and share best practices from ACSL partner countries. Within countries, the Centre will support and collaborate with coalitions that reflect the same interplay between policy, practice and research. The outcome of this double-tiered approach will be strengthened school leadership support systems at the regional and national levels, and stronger leadership in schools. At regional and national level, outcomes include locally led research and data-collection that informs effective policy reforms, as well as standardization of school leadership standards, qualifications and school leadership professional development, leading to a more consistent and recognized set of skills and competencies among educational leaders across the continent. At the level of schools, systemic outcomes include enhanced leadership capacity that emphasized data-led decision taking, an improved school culture, and teaching and learning environment.

Ultimately, the goal of the Centre is to positively impact quality of education for students of all ages across the continent and this in all education sub-sectors:

- In Early Childhood Education (ECE): ensuring a smooth transition from early childhood to primary education.
- In Primary Education (PE): ensuring that children acquire foundational and transferable skills by the

end of primary education.
- In general secondary education and secondary TVET: ensuring that young people acquire transferable, digital and entrepreneurial skills by the end of secondary education to enable their transition to meaningful and dignified employment (in line with the Mastercard Foundation's Young Africa Works strategy).
- Reduced gender and equity gaps: proactively eliminating barriers to learning and other forms of discrimination.

Legal status of the Centre

In its initial phases, that is, the inception, foundation and first implementation phases, the African Centre for School Leadership is developed through multi- and single-country projects implemented by VVOB, in cooperation with relevant partners.

Currently, as of November 2023, three such projects have been initiated:

- ACSL Foundation Phase Project (May 2023 – October 2024), in partnership with the Association for Development of Education in Africa, the Ministry of Education in Rwanda, Rwanda Basic Education Board, the University of Rwanda – College of Education, the Kenya Education Management Institution, the Institute for Education Planning and Administration and the Mastercard Foundation
- Leadership Communities of Practice in Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Ghana (May 2023 – October 2024), in partnership with Sabre Education and the Jacobs Foundation
- Research on school leadership competences in Sub-Saharan Africa (June 2023 – December 2023), in partnership with Prof. Ann Lopez (University of Toronto) and UNESCO – Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report.

At this stage, the ACSL has no separate legal status, therefore, incoming project funds are consolidated in VVOB's accounting. After these initial phases, the Centre is set to become a recognised legal entity in the region. Different options are explored for the future governance of the Centre.

In the initial phases, advice will be sought on the appropriate status of the Centre, including legal advice.



Governance and organisational set-up

As the Centre is initially being developed through a series of projects, depending on size and strategic importance of the projects, project steering committees are set up to play an oversight and advisory role. Project steering committees should represent the partnerships of the respective projects and reflect the regional ambition of the Centre.

Due to the critical importance of the ACSL Foundation Phase Project (supported by the Mastercard Foundation), a Project Steering Committee was established with the mandate to act as an Advisory Board for the Centre during the project's period.

This Project Steering Committee (PSC) is 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, the Mastercard Foundation as donor, operational partners from the three initial country partners: Rwanda Basic Education (REB), 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 Forum of African Women Educationalists (FAWE) and Education Sub Saharan Africa (ESSA) have been selected as critical friends and independent members of the Project Steering Committee. The general function of the Project Steering Committee is to steer the ACSL Foundation Phase Project as well as the Centre's work in its foundation phase. The Steering Committee meets on a quarterly basis. The Project Steering Committee will cease to exist when the ACSL Foundation Phase Project comes to an end, currently foreseen by October 2024. The Project Steering Committee may evolve into an Advisory Board for the African Centre for School Leadership afterwards.

The African Centre for School Leadership Technical Working Group (ACSL TWG), was established with the mandate to collaboratively conceptualise, co-create and support operationalisation of the Centre in Rwanda. This technical working group is composed of 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 meets monthly.

ACSL Foundation phase project steering committee

Table 1: ACSL Foundation phase Project steering committee members and responsibilities

Partners	Representative	Main responsibilities
Strategic partners	ADEA (Chair)	Chairing quarterly Steering Committee meetings, representing the strategic partners of the ACSL
Host government (co-chair)	Government of the Republic of Rwanda through the Ministry of Education	• Co-chairing quarterly Steering Committee meetings as host of the ACSL • Provision of physical location for ACSL (as host) • Representation in ACSL Technical Working Group
Operational partners	• Institute for Educational Planning and Administration (IEPA – Ghana) • University of Rwanda – College of Education (URCE – Rwanda) • Kenya Education Management Institute (KEMI – Kenya)	• Participation in quarterly Steering Committee meetings, representing the operational partners of the ACSL from partner countries. • Provision of school leadership CPD in respective partner countries
Technical partners	VVOB – education for development	• Participation in quarterly Steering Committee meetings, representing the technical partners of the ACSL. • Representation in ACSL Technical Working Group • Provision of technical support for the implementation of the Centre's activities
Donors	Mastercard Foundation	Participation in quarterly Steering Committee meetings, representing the financial partners of the ACSL
Critical friends/ independent members – representing partner organisations	Education Sub Saharan Africa (ESSA), represented by Lucy Heady (CEO) and Pauline Essah (Director of Research and Programmes) Forum of African Women Educationalists, represented by Martha Muhwezi (Executive Director and Secretary to the FAWE Africa Board)	Participation in quarterly Steering Committee meetings, using their unique personal skills, expertise and networks to advise and connect the Centre to new resources, organisations and opportunities.

Organisational set-up

In the initial phases of the Centre, when activities are implemented through VVOB projects, a core team of VVOB staff members is put in place. This core team reflects the focus areas of the Centre and consists of:

- a Technical Lead (School Leadership),
- an M&E and Research Strategic Advisor,
- an Advocacy and Communication Strategic Advisor,
- a Gender and Equity Strategic Advisor (consultant), and
- a Regional Coordinator.

Additional support is foreseen through the Operations and Finance Manager and an Accountant at VVOB in Rwanda, and a Global Strategic Education Advisor at VVOB Headquarters.

In partner countries, a satellite office may consist of a Country Focal Person/Coordinator and a Country Officer, and this is embedded within operational partners of the Centre.

Main costs and funding strategy

For the foundation phase, the main costs for the Centre are for human resources, with the majority of staff working in the core team in Rwanda, and smaller satellite teams in country offices of partner countries. Through project funding, an operational budget is foreseen for specific activities, consultancies, and travel for each of the four core areas of the Centre (see fig. 2). Finally, a budget is foreseen for capital assets, including for ICT. For the implementation and scaling phases (2025-2030) a combined budget of about 25.000.000 USD (indicative amount) is targeted to finance the human resources and activities of the Centre, including for activities implemented in 12 partner countries.

In the foundation phase and first implementation phase, the Centre is funded through grants, including seed funding by the Centre's financial partners and donors. In kind support is provided by the host government for the physical location of the Centre and may be provided by other partner countries and operational partners for human resources. In the foundation phase, VVOB supports the Centre in overall coordination, through embedding experts within the Centre's projects and support in organisation of key activities. As regional coordinating and strategic partners, ADEA, ESSA and VVOB are reaching out to financial partners and donors through calls for funding and expressing interest in and applying to any relevant calls for proposals by such donors. When such funding is secured, the Centre will provide financial support to government agencies and PD providers in partner countries through sub-grants.

In the longer term and in the scaling phases, the Centre may 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.

Progress made: Inception and foundation phase

Inception phase (2020–2021)

During the inception phase, the Centre was being conceptualised and a programme proposal was put together, including a detailed activity plan for the foundation phase. Partnerships with strategic partners, countries, operational, learning, and financial partners were explored, starting from a mapping of potential partners on the continent. During the inception phase, VVOB staff members coordinated conceptualisation, planning and partner engagements.

The inception phase was concluded with the highlight of the Centre on 2nd December 2021 during the 13th Policy Dialogue Forum of the International Task Force on Teachers hosted in Kigali.

Foundation phase (2022–2024)

In the foundation phase, two foundational studies were conducted. The first one to review and identify what constitutes effective school leadership and school leadership professional development on the African continent. Complementary to the first study, the second study was a consensus building exercise with a representation of policy makers, researchers, PD 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 the review of empirical evidence and the consensus building exercise led to this consolidated concept note on the African Centre for School Leadership, with stated ambitions on the four focus areas of the Centre (see Figure 1).



Participants to a panel discussion held on in March 2022, to share findings and insights on school leadership in Africa, and to build a consensus on what constitutes effective school leadership in Africa.

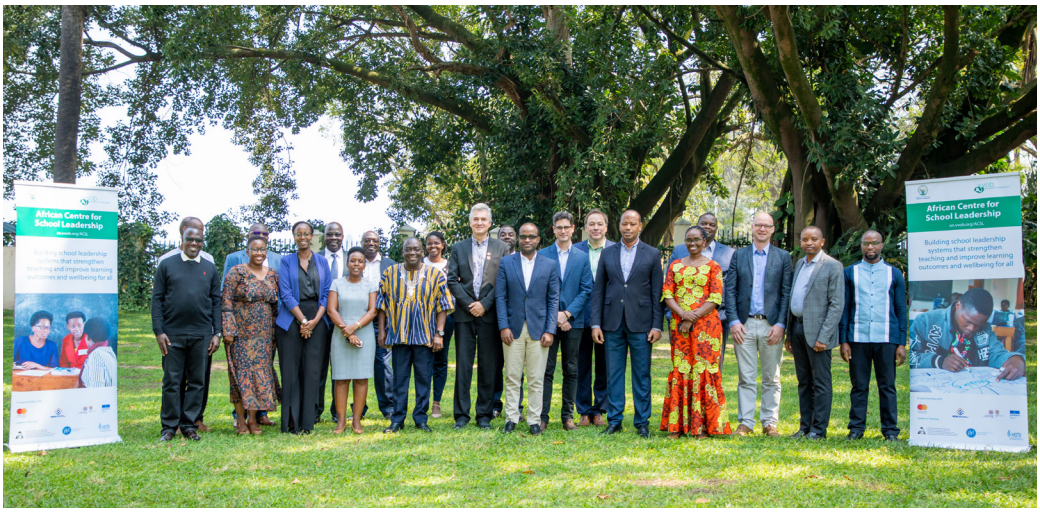
In the foundation phase, the Centre is being piloted and developed through single and multi-country projects being implemented by VVOB and other partners in 3 countries:

- ACSL Foundation Phase Project (May 2023 – October 2024), in partnership with the Association for Development of Education in Africa, the Ministry of Education in Rwanda, Rwanda Basic Education Board, the University of Rwanda – College of Education, the Kenya Education Management Institution, the Institute for Education Planning and Administration and the Mastercard Foundation.

- Leadership Communities of Practice in Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Ghana (May 2023 – October 2024), in partnership with Sabre Education and the Jacobs Foundation.

- Research on school leadership competencies in Sub-Saharan Africa (June 2023 – December 2023), in partnership with Prof. Ann Lopez (University of Toronto) and UNESCO – Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report.

In July 2023, a co-creation workshop was organized with key partners of the Centre to jointly work on the finalization of the foundation phase of the Centre and to plan for the implementation phase. . During this co-creation workshop, the first Steering Committee of the ACSL Foundation Phase Project (FPP) was also organised.



Participants to a co-creation workshop held on in June 2023, to discuss and achieve consensus on key aspects of the Centre, map the way forward and plan for activities in the first Implementation Phase.

Road map for setting up the Centre

Table 2: Road map of activities conducted for the set-up of the Centre

Timing	Activity
Inception phase	
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 conceptualisation and operationalisation 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 operationalisation of the Centre and regular progress meetings with the ACSL TWG
Foundation phase	
30-31 March 2022	Consensus building exercise on foundations of the Centre with a panel of key stake-holders.
May 2023	Kick-off of Foundation Phase project of ACSL, funded by Mastercard Foundation.
May 2023	Kick-off of "Leadership Communities of Practice in ECE in Ghana" project (May 2023 – October 2024), funded by the Jacobs Foundation.
July 2023	Co-creation workshop with partners in Rubavu - Rwanda The first meeting of the ACSL Foundation Phase Project Steering Committee in Rwan-da.
June 2023 – March 2024	Research on school leadership competences in Sub-Saharan Africa, supported by UNESCO.
February 2024	Consultative workshop in Naivasha – Kenya The second meeting of the ACSL Foundation Phase Project Steering Committee.
February - October 2024	School leadership matters - Webinar series
June 2024	Partners exposure visit in Cape Coast - Ghana
	Meeting with ADEA and ESSA

Planned initial activities (May 2023 – October 2024)

The following activities organised around the four focus areas of the ACSL are planned to close off the foundation phase and to start the implementation phase of the Centre (May 2023 – October 2024). The activities will be implemented through the ACSL Foundation Phase project with the support of the Mastercard Foundation.

Table 3: Planned activities May 2023 - October 2024

African Centre for School Leadership (ACSL) - Activity plan (May 2023 – October 2024)										
ID	Task	Planned Complete	Year 1				Year 2			
			Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
0. Development of the ACSL										
0.1	The establishment of the ACSL legal entity structure	Q1 2024			x	x	x			
0.2	Co-creation workshop	Q2 2023		x						
0.3	Advocacy meetings at Cabinet level of Ministry of Education in partner countries	Q2 2024		x		x		x		
	Development of policy									
1.1	A framework on effective school leadership in Africa	Q1 2024		x	x	x	x			
1.2	Guideline/ policy brief on how to overcome gender barriers in school leadership	Q3 2024					x	x	x	
2. Delivery of CPD										
2.1	Concept note on blended delivery of CPD	Q3 2024					x	x	x	
2.2	Exposure visits of SL CPD initiatives-learning and experience sharing	Q2 2024					x	x		
3. M&E and Research										
3.1	Development of M&E framework and research plan on core support areas of Centre	Q4 2023		x	x	x				
3.2	Study on Ubuntu School Leadership	Q1 2024			x	x	x			
3.3	Research on school leadership competences in Sub-Saharan Africa, supported by UNESCO.	Q1 2024			x	x	x			
3.4	Needs assessment of Operational partners	Q4 2023		x	x	x	x			
4. Knowledge mobilisation, communication, sector coordination and advocacy										
4.1	Advocacy & Communication plan including a resource mobilization strategy of the Centre	Q2 2024	x	x	x	x	x			
4.2	ACSL website + social media presence	Q1 2024			x	x	x			
4.3	Development and dissemination of videos of best practices of SL in Africa	Q2 2024					x	x		
4.4	Organization of at least 2 Dialogue spotlight on research of the Centre	Q3 2024			x			x		
4.5	High level launch and regional conference	Q3 2024							x	

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