

Annual report 2020

Blended learning: the future of education?



Content

3 *Introduction*

4 *Teachers and school leaders on the frontlines*

8 *Stories*

8 **Teachers** | Finding resilience and new opportunities for teachers in difficult times

12 **School leaders** | 3 insights to supporting school leaders through a pandemic

16 **International dialogue** on equity in education: not to be stopped by COVID-19

20 *Overview of our network*

24 *Sharing our expertise – virtually or otherwise – in 2020*

26 *Financial report*

33 *Management of VVOB in 2020*

35 *Acknowledgements*

Introduction

2020 will be remembered as an exceptional year. The world was confronted with a pandemic. Countries went into lockdown; societies were completely disrupted. The education sector suffered too.

COVID-19 is not loosening its grip in the first half of 2021: Many countries are experiencing a second or even third peak in infection rates. Some schools are again obligated to turn away their learners or to resort to part-time or online education. Other schools remain closed altogether. More than 1.5 billion learners around the world are or have been affected by school and university closures. For many learners, especially the most vulnerable, school closures equate to an interrupted education. Distance learning necessitates resources that not all learners have. And studies have repeatedly shown that paused education entails a risk of dropping out of education altogether.

Learning can take place in many environments, but the classroom is still its main driving force. Today's school closures have an undeniable effect on children's and youth's learning process. And we are not just talking about the impact on their cognitive development; we cannot ignore the degree to which the socio-emotional development of children and youth is curbed too. Schools are often a safe haven for learners growing up in a vulnerable home environment.

Keeping schools open in areas that are hard-hit by the pandemic would be irresponsible if the conditions are unsafe for learners, teachers and their communities. Most health systems cannot carry the weight of the consequences of rapidly spreading infections, often devastating. At the same time, closing schools prematurely or not offering alternatives for children and young people to continue learning can be every bit as devastating for their education. We cannot forget about them. This dilemma requires flexible solutions.

Over the past decades, digitalisation has been laid out as the road to go down for education. Many initiatives have been set up in that spirit, and digitalisation has shown its relevance in the 2020 crisis. But in parallel to this positive outcome, some

challenges have also surfaced: in many countries, learners have limited or no access to these digital solutions; in others, the gap between rich and poor households has widened.

We want the solutions – digital or otherwise – to this crisis to leave no one behind. **This calls for customised solutions that fit specific contexts. VVOB believes that teachers and school leaders are the ideal partner in making education initiatives work for all learners.**

Teachers and school leaders understand their learners and their specific situation and needs best. Everyone reading this has a fond memory of an educator that inspired them growing up. And these past few months, they have once again shown how crucial they are for learning. Especially in the most challenging times.

But we cannot expect teachers and school leaders to bear the brunt of today's education disruptions by themselves. In our quest to mitigate this and future crises the best way we can, we need to invest in professional development and support for teachers and school leaders. Starting in initial teacher education and progressing into continued professional training, we call to integrate discussions and modules on ensuring learners' cognitive and socio-emotional development throughout crises.

Let us not waste any time and prioritise support and professional development for teachers and school leaders. Taking a needs-based and safe approach, we can work with them in blended modalities. In this annual report, you can discover how VVOB puts this into practice.

Enjoy!

Stefaan Van Mulders
Chairperson

Sven Rooms
General Director

Teachers and school leaders on the frontlines

At the peak of the global lockdowns imposed to counter the spread of COVID-19, 1.6 billion children were out of school. This is a staggering number, but if they all return to school as society begins to adjust to a new normal, teachers and school leaders will be able to help them catch up, and the long-term effects will be manageable.

What a year!

Unfortunately, not all children may return to school. Even before this crisis, 250 million children were already out of school, and now many more are likely to not return. Parents may not feel safe in sending children back, the cost of fees may be too great as the economic crisis tightens its grip, or children may need to work to recover family incomes lost during the crisis.

Too many of those who do return, may not be learning. The pandemic has affected the education of 90 per cent of the world's children, deepening a global learning crisis that impacted millions of children even before the pandemic. In low-income countries, a staggering 90 per cent of children experience "learning poverty": they do not learn to read a basic text by the age of 10. This number stands to increase amid COVID-19 unless drastic action is taken.

The pandemic has not impacted us equally. The resulting global crisis in teaching and learning has had a disproportionately big effect on vulnerable and disadvantaged learners. COVID-19 may not have caused but it has certainly deepened the already existing structural inequalities in education systems everywhere.

We paint a bleak picture. But amidst the turmoil, there is still much to give us hope. If we place teachers and school leaders front and centre of COVID-19 responses, they can play a critical part in the solution to the crisis. When children receive the quality education they are entitled to, they can fulfil the roles society needs to build more resilient systems for the future. Throughout this crisis, we have been inspired by the many powerful examples of resourcefulness and resilience our staff, our partners and teachers and school leaders have shown to keep children learning throughout the crisis. Around the world, many have united in a drive for change, putting education at the very top of the recovery agenda.

Health and safety first

Since the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, WVOB has taken very strict measures to ensure the health and safety of its staff and partners, in alignment with government and World Health Organization guidelines. Teleworking quickly became the new norm for many of our teams. Scheduled in-person capacity development activities were reorganised to take place from a distance. We went the extra mile(s) to uphold the quality and continuity of our operations in these exceptional circumstances, all the while prioritising the wellbeing, health and safety of all people involved.

Going remote with our capacity development

After recovering from the initial shock of finding ourselves in a global pandemic, the logical first step for VVOB was to reinstall the communication with, and capacity development of, our partners: ministries of Education, teacher training institutions, providers of continuous professional development for teachers and school leaders, and decentralised education structures.

Pre-pandemic, we nurtured our relationships with our valued partners primarily through in-person contact and relied heavily on face-to-face capacity building trajectories. Training, coaching, peer learning,... all these methods for working with our partners had to be rethought and adapted to uphold the quality and continuity of our support from a safe distance. This led to a number of innovative and creative examples where readily available technology was used to ensure the continuity in the communication with partners and implementation of capacity development activities.

In Cambodia for example, we created a manual on how to conduct coaching sessions online or over the phone. The manual specifically supports coaches to continue their individual coaching sessions in times of physical distancing with the management and teaching staff of schools that are undergoing a transformation into gender-responsive schools. An Action Guide was developed for that transformation and any obstacles schools experience when putting the Action Guide's theory into practice, are addressed during individual coaching sessions. These sessions were then organised online and over the phone by the coaches from VVOB, the teacher education colleges and partner civil society organisations.

In another example from Zambia, coaching of relevant officials in the ministry of Education was moved from a face-to-face modality (monitoring visits), to the popular messaging app WhatsApp. These 'master trainers' have the important responsibility to, in turn, train early childhood teachers. Having divided these master trainers up in geographical groups first, VVOB shared a video on a specific early childhood education topic every week through these WhatsApp groups. In the group, master trainers interact and discuss the video. At the end of the week, this was followed up by tele-conference calls facilitated by VVOB staff, using mobile phones, for more in-depth discussions about the content of the video. With this new remote approach to strengthen master trainers, we combine coaching and peer learning.

Specific COVID-19 responses

VVOB not only changed and adapted its existing projects to react to the crisis, but also developed new projects in response to the crisis. Thanks to a swift reaction and increased investments by two valued partners of VVOB - the Mastercard Foundation and the LEGO Foundation - we were able to quickly respond to emerging needs in Rwanda, Vietnam, Zambia and South Africa. Resilience and play are at the heart of these specific COVID-19 response and resilience projects.

In Rwanda, continuous professional development services are now available online and adapted to include modules on school hygiene and distance learning, among other themes. We are ensuring key educators and school leaders have the competencies and skills needed to manage future crises that disrupt education.

During this crisis, we need to step up our support in the education sector to mitigate against the loss of learning, particularly among the most vulnerable groups. We also need to see this as an opportunity - a chance to invest in the future, which will undoubtedly be marked by greater digitisation, convenience, technological advancements, and, if we take the right actions and make the right investments, inclusion for all. Enabling educators to deliver e-learning can lead to a fairer and more equitable world."

Rica Rwigamba, Country Head, Rwanda at the Mastercard Foundation



In Vietnam, Zambia and South Africa, we made sure that learning losses are minimised with learning through play, and that young learners' physical and socioemotional wellbeing is prioritised. In South Africa, we developed online trainings for teachers and school leaders to set up new or use existing professional learning communities to address challenges exacerbated by COVID-19 and how learning through play can help respond to issues of socioemotional wellbeing in primary school learners. In Vietnam, VVOB developed short television clips for teachers and parents to apply learning through play in their daily practice. The series focuses on the five developmental domains young children are expected to excel in to participate fully in primary school, and that learning through play is known to foster. In Zambia, VVOB worked on getting the play-based Catch Up project ready for national scaling in response to the learning crisis worsened by school closures.

Stronger together

Never before have we witnessed educational disruption on such a scale. Partnership is then the only way forward. That is why VVOB joined other organisations in coordinated and innovative action to unlock solutions that support learners, teachers and school leaders both now and through the recovery process, with a principle focus on inclusion and equity.

In March 2020, VVOB worked with the Teacher Task Force, hosted by UNESCO, and several of its member organisations on a Call for

Action to urge governments, funders and all relevant partners to do their utmost to ensure teachers are protected, supported and recognised during the crisis. In April, VVOB joined UNESCO's Global Education Coalition to make sure learning never stops, by supporting countries in scaling up their best distance learning practices and reaching children and youth who are most at risk. We then jointly worked on policy guidance on supporting teachers in back-to-school efforts and contributed to a toolkit for school leaders.

VVOB also joined the mEducation Alliance, which focuses on the evidence-driven and sustainable role of technology in education to advance quality educational outcomes. Through this alliance, VVOB is able to share and learn more about how to embed and scale effective ed-tech innovations in education systems. We will indeed continue to increase the use of relevant ed-tech to maximise our reach and impact.

VVOB won the 2020 edition of the Prize 'Digital for Development (D4D)' with its Bambanani video series. These open educational resources support teachers in South Africa to embrace diversity and to strengthen their inclusive teaching practices. In Cambodia, VVOB developed an interactive and free story-telling app to address gender stereotypes and gender-based violence. We are also looking at future-proofing the skills of young students, e.g. with a project in Rwanda to develop teachers' capacity to stimulate their learners' coding skills.

VVOB joined the Research for Equitable Access and Learning (REAL) Centre of the University of Cambridge in a call for a consolidation of existing evidence to better prepare us for future disruption.



tions. Implementers of education reforms should open up their interventions to researchers, so that more timely, relevant and applicable research can be generated and shared. Researchers will also benefit from this closer collaboration with implementers, as it allows them to better integrate tacit knowledge into their research. Strong partnerships between educational implementers and researchers are an essential pre-condition for achieving better results for all children, and VVOB will further strengthen its investment in such partnerships.

Disruption can lead to innovation

We were taken by surprise by this crisis. Nevertheless, we believe VVOB responded well, by being resilient and adaptive, continuing to support our partners, and rapidly reacting to new and emerging needs. Going forward, we are also seeing some positive effects of this major disruption in our day-to-day business. Blended learning is becoming our new way of working. Where possible, we now combine face-to-face activities with remote support, and we mix synchronous and asynchronous professional development. Regardless of whether VVOB's support is delivered in a face-to-face, remote or blended format, it follows the same principles of effective professional development, including the embedding of new knowledge into practice and providing ongoing opportunities for collaboration and continuous improvement.

We have enriched our traditional capacity development trajectories with the use of innovations such as remote coaching, micro-learning support systems, virtual libraries, podcasts, interactive voice response systems, video messaging and automated chat bots – innovations we could not have imagined using so extensively before the crisis.

Without decisive, bold action, the global learning crisis will only worsen amid the social and economic challenges exacerbated by COVID-19. Addressing challenges to children's education is urgent, but it is not too late. Leveraging innovations and tools already at our disposal as well as the creativity and commitment of teachers and school leaders, there is a massive opportunity to come together and improve the quality of education for millions of children and young people.

Teachers and school leaders: unsung heroes who deserve more support

We praise and thank teachers and school leaders for their tireless efforts in support of learners throughout this crisis, encouraged by their ministries of Education and decentralised support structures. Teachers and school leaders are navigating a constantly shifting landscape, with not only their own health, but also the health of learners and the community at large at stake. As schools closed their doors, teachers and school leaders reinvented the way they teach and lead. When schools reopened, teachers and school leaders returned courageously to their classrooms and schools and made the necessary arrangements for health precautions and learning continuity.

At VVOB, we are happy we have been able to continue our support to teachers and school leaders through our partners. Teachers and school leaders are the backbone of education systems and should be appreciated more for the key roles they play in navigating this crisis. They have been rapidly mobilising and innovating to facilitate quality distance learning for students in confinement, with or without the use of digital technologies.

In developing strategies to continue teaching and learning, teachers and school leaders have had to consider many factors, including their own access to technology, understanding of their learners' access to and use of technology platforms, and knowledge of how their learners learn. Teachers have adapted their teaching practices accordingly, while remaining emotionally available for their learners throughout the process. Teachers and school leaders are playing a key role also in communicating measures that prevent the spread of the virus, ensuring that children are safe and supported. We need to keep ensuring that teachers and school leaders are protected, supported and recognised.

Teachers and school leaders will have a crucial role in the recovery phase when schools reopen. VVOB therefore calls on governments and donors to help us unlock teachers' and school leaders' massive potential to ensure continued learning for all during and after this crisis – without losing sight of the most vulnerable.

Finding resilience and new opportunities for teachers in difficult times

The COVID-19 crisis and subsequent school closures threw huge challenges at the global teacher workforce. Throughout 2020, VVOB and education partners have been more determined than ever to ensure teachers are properly supported and encouraged. Collaboration, resilience and creativity on everyone's part made it possible to continue to support teachers; and to continue learning.

Unprecedented challenges

All around the world, teachers are coping with the effects of the COVID-19 crisis the best way they can. Sudden school closures forced them to find new and remote ways to support children's learning and wellbeing in times of crises and disruption. Even in cases where schools were able to reopen, business was not as usual: teachers have to deal with new health and safety regulations; many teachers are rightly concerned about the possible impact of COVID-19 on their own health and safety; teachers have had to adapt their teaching to large groups of children who have missed out on learning and who struggle with socio-emotional wellbeing; teachers need to find their way around adapted curricula and school calendars. And so on.

In other words, teachers are in dire need of support. However, our tried-and-tested recipes for supporting teachers through professional development trajectories have mostly been based on face-to-face methodologies pre-pandemic. Considering the circumstances, these familiar recipes were not appropriate, and we had to adapt – fast.

From the very outset, VVOB teams and partners showed great resilience and creativity in adapting existing VVOB programmes, planning and capacity development trajectories to the new situation. Gradually, we also started developing novel responses to the challenges that teachers specifically faced. This reflective process uncovered new opportunities and innovations that will not only allow us to better support teachers during the current pandemic, but that will also allow VVOB and partners to reshape the way we support teachers and learners in a post-pandemic world.

Reaching teachers remotely – without internet

Faced with the prospect of long-term school closures and very limited options for face-to-face training of teachers in early childhood education (ECE) in Zambia, VVOB and the Ministry of General Education (MoGE) are experimenting with the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) technology for trainings.

IVR is a high-frequency, cost-effective and measurable remote training solution that does not require a smartphone or internet access, and does not involve costs for participants. The telephony system interacts with callers, and it gathers and routes information to the selected recipients. The IVR automated system provides ECE teachers with pre-recorded voice messages that briefly

introduce a specific element of the training content. After the delivery of the content, teachers are given a short pop-quiz to test to what extent they have been able to process the information. Finally, they are given a small task or exercise that they can work on at home or in their classroom in cases where schools are open. The use of IVR fits in a broader blended teacher professional development trajectory that makes use of high-quality resources (teacher manuals), face-to-face trainings, IVR messaging and teleconference call coaching to provide deeper level learning opportunities for teachers. While initially set-up as an emergency alternative for face-to-face trainings in times of physical distancing measures, MoGE and VVOB are quickly discovering the potential of the IVR system for regular teacher professional development.

Supporting teachers to support each other

In South Africa, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and VVOB have a long history in strengthening teacher professional development through professional learning communities (PLCs). PLCs allow teachers to collectively determine their own learning goals and trajectories. PLCs can be used to discuss, test, and reflect on educational innovations and how they can be translated into classroom practice.

When the pandemic hit, regular professional development for teachers through, for example, workshops and training sessions, came to a grinding halt. At the same time, teachers were faced with new realities, challenges, and questions: How can I best provide remote teaching to my learners? How do I deal with health and safety issues when schools reopen? How can I support my learners' wellbeing? How do I implement the adapted curriculum?





PLCs really add value to the quality of teaching and learning for our learners as they offer content and methodologies to teachers that allow them to learn from one another”

Participant in an online workshop for District Officials on promoting PLCs

PLCs offered an opportunity for teachers to continue to learn with each other through small and safe gatherings or in online sessions. To support teachers in these challenging times, DBE and VVOB developed an online course for teachers on ‘PLCs in times of COVID-19’. This online course supports teachers in two ways:

- Firstly, it provides teachers with information and support on how to organise face-to-face PLCs safely or how to organise them in an online environment.
- Secondly, the online course provides guidance to teachers and their PLCs to engage in professional development around a number of key COVID-19 issues, including: understanding COVID-19; ensuring teacher wellbeing; supporting learner wellbeing; organising remote teaching and learning.

Complementary to these online PLC courses for teachers, VVOB supports District Education Officials to use these online courses as part of their outreach to schools and PLCs. Through online capacity development trajectories, these Officials are in turn trained to use these online resources effectively.

Involving parents and communities too

Traditionally, VVOB is concerned with supporting ministries of Education in the (very) long term. The crisis, however, prompted us to reflect on VVOB’s role in dealing with the more immediate effects of the pandemic: How do we support our partners to make up for lost time learning? How do we make sure that every learner, the most vulnerable ones included, find their way back to school and continue learning in a way that safeguards their physical and socioemotional wellbeing? In addition to rethinking the ways in which we support our traditional target groups and beneficiaries, this also meant developing approaches towards other target groups, like learners’ parents and their communities.

Supported by the LEGO Foundation, VVOB initiated emergency response projects in South Africa, Zambia and Vietnam to minimise learning losses and to ensure physical and emotional wellbeing of the youngest learners by promoting learning through play, not only at school but also in their homes.

Learning through play is vital to children’s psychological emotional and cognitive health and development, regardless of their background and geography, and it equips children with the skills and competencies they need in a changing world. Learning through play is particularly important in crises like the COVID-19 pandemic because it helps children build resilience during times of adversity while providing stability to their lives”

*Sarah Bouchie, Chief Impact Officer,
The LEGO Foundation*





In Vietnam for example, VVOB harnessed the power of social and mass media communication to encourage and support teachers and parents to apply learning through play in their daily practice, helping children to catch-up on learning losses and to deal with the socioemotional challenges of the pandemic and school closures.

A happy school is a place where students are loved, respected and feel safe to express themselves. When building a happy school, school's administrators and teachers must stand from the learner's perspective to let them express their talents and thoughts"

Mai Huy Phuong, Deputy Director of Quang Tri Province's Department of Education and Training

As part of the mass communication campaign, VVOB developed a video series which aired on the national education television channel VTV7. It focussed on learning through play and the role of play in fostering crucial developmental domains. Through the online campaign, teachers and parents were encouraged to come up with creative playful responses to challenges that were shared via social media. Combined, the social and mass media communication campaign allowed VVOB and partners to reach over six million people and to actively engage over 70,000 people on the importance of learning through play for children's learning and wellbeing in times of crisis.

Socio-emotional wellbeing matters!

While students spend most of their time at home during the COVID-19 lockdown in Ecuador, the need to support students in their home environment grew rapidly. Students were struggling to cope with the health-related, emotional, psychological and economic strains of the pandemic. As a comprehensive community approach, restorative practices were perfectly placed to fulfil that need. Pre-pandemic, schools were encouraged to apply the tools of restorative practices when mitigating peer-on-peer violence in educational settings: active listening, restorative dialogue, non-violent communication, and restorative circles. The strategy seeks to repair and strengthen relationships between individuals and build stronger communities, for instance in the case of violence, bullying or conflict.

VVOB and partners set out to develop a range of resources that were made available to officials, teachers and parents to form a comprehensive response to support student's wellbeing in times of crisis. As part of the response, the team developed a series of videos and booklets which provide parents and teachers with ideas and suggestions to apply the tools of the restorative approach in their families during the pandemic. Through the school counsellors, the response also involved setting up a number of online 'restorative circles': spaces for communication and dialogue around the repercussions of social distancing and lockdown on human wellbeing and relationships.

It is so important for a child or adolescent to be listened to and not to be judged as a certain type of person because of their actions. We have to involve every student in the process of repairing harm and provide them with the opportunity to propose actions and strategies to achieve this. Restorative practices provide these opportunities to listen to and involve children and adolescents, even in times of crisis"

Sheyla Massay, Student Counsellor in Ecuador

Looking back at 2020, there is little to rejoice. However, at VVOB we do feel that thanks to the resilience and creativity of our teams and partners, new opportunities and new perspectives have arisen. Opportunities that will allow our partners, teachers and learners to continue to recover from this COVID-19 crisis and to bounce back better.

Supporting school leaders

through a pandemic: 3 insights

In 2020, COVID-19 slammed the door firmly shut on all aspects of everyday life and it disrupted schooling globally. Across VVOB's partner countries, school leaders found themselves in the unenviable position of being the pinch point in the education system: relying on guidance from COVID-19 responses and protocols from above and facing serious health and wellbeing issues and huge risk of learning loss around them. School leaders have had to work in demanding and chaotic circumstances, with limited options and no precedents. While it is too soon for definitive conclusions about how to best support school leaders through such a pandemic, some important insights are emerging from Ecuador, Rwanda and Suriname, where VVOB focuses, among other things, on school leadership development.

Connectedness and connectivity are critical for school leaders

A first set of insights from the COVID-19 crisis is related to the professional learning communities (PLCs) that VVOB promotes as a modality for school leadership development in Ecuador, Rwanda and Suriname. PLCs are a platform where relatively small groups of school leaders meet with the objective of learning with and from each other through solving challenges and sharing good practices.

In all three countries, support to PLCs by VVOB predated the pandemic. The crisis truly brought to light just how important these communities are for school leaders' rapid learning and wellbeing. Given the myriad of challenges that COVID-19 has created for them, school leaders have a great need to connect, share, learn and network their way through uncharted territory. In this respect, well-facilitated PLCs have much to offer, according to preliminary findings from a research project that VVOB is conducting in Ecuador together with researchers from the *Université Catholique de Louvain* (UCL).

In focus group discussions, school leaders from the provinces of Manabí and Esmeraldas emphasised just how much the solidarity and unity with colleagues have meant to them during the crisis. A head teacher from Manabí testified, for instance, that as the head teacher of the only secondary technical school in town, he missed having a connection with colleagues, "but here [in the PLC], we solved that and we share knowledge." Another said that "thanks to the PLC, a group of professionals has been united through the bonds of friendship." These stories are confirmed by the PLC facilitators, who feel the ties deepening over time as well.

The contact, joy and happiness of seeing each other are clearly noticeable during the meetings. When the school leaders say goodbye, they say 'I hope you are well, take care, protect the family, we will see each other again'."

Armando Pineda, Pedagogical Counsellor, Esmeraldas, Ecuador

In several districts, the PLCs were in relatively early stages of piloting at the beginning of the pandemic. *Asesores* – pedagogical counsellors - worried that the switch to online ways of working would be detrimental to the group spirit. While some PLCs welcomed the move to Microsoft Teams, some indeed saw a decrease in participation due to connectivity problems.

With support from VVOB, the *asesores* drastically shortened the meetings from a whole day face-to-face to maximum two hours online, focused the agenda, and set up WhatsApp and email groups so that school leaders could stay in touch in between real-time meetings. For the most part, this strategy has been successful: in Esmeraldas, the PLCs were able to gather virtually almost as often as they previously met face-to-face; in Manabí, the support helped to kick-start virtual meetings. Though the meetings have gone virtual, the atmosphere of mutual care and learning remains palpable, so the researchers from UCL found.



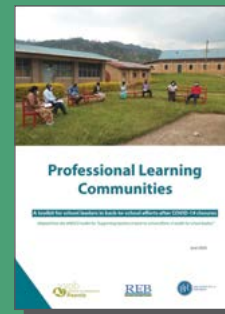
Raising school leadership to the top of the policy agenda has never been more important

Despite ample evidence speaking to the great contribution that effective school leaders make to the well-being and learning outcomes of children and youth, school leadership does not yet receive the policy attention that it deserves. In 2020, VVOB has continued to use its membership in international fora to advocate for school leadership development, especially during a pandemic.

As part of the Teacher Task Force (TTF), VVOB collaborated with UNESCO, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and other members to put the spotlight on school leaders' key role in guaranteeing the continuity of learning and safe school reopening. From the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, the TTF called on policymakers to make resources available to train school leaders in recognising signs of distress in teachers and learners and taking appropriate action.

The TTF also designed a toolkit to support school leaders in setting priorities, making trade-offs and helping them identify key actions.

In Rwanda, VVOB adapted the TTF toolkit for active use in PLCs for school leaders. The contextualised toolkit stimulated rapid and practical learning on questions that head teachers were facing on a daily basis: How can we ensure distance learning? How do we protect the well-being of students and teachers? How do we communicate the reopening of schools? Which strategies can be used during the crisis to maintain hygiene and the security of school materials and property? Supporting collegial learning through PLCs proved to be a very effective response mechanism. VVOB's work is featured in the second edition of the TTF toolkit.



School leaders need to become technologically savvy

The phrase 'connect to learn, learn to connect' describes the daily reality of school leaders, teachers and learners trying to work together in this pandemic. Moving forward, school leaders increasingly feel the need to improve their own digital literacy and to be well-informed about the many digital solutions on offer for their schools.

Backed by government policy that considers ICT in education as a strategic lever for transforming Rwanda to a knowledge-based society, VVOB has heavily invested in strengthening school leaders' ICT capacity since 2017. Already in 2019, the University of Rwanda – College of Education (UR-CE) had a blended diploma course in Effective School Leadership up and running with VVOB's support, with the first cohort graduating that same year. In 2020, as part of VVOB's COVID-19 response, the course moved fully online as did all continuous professional development (CPD) courses that UR-CE and VVOB had co-created.



From research and experience, we learnt that investing in school leaders' ICT capacity is necessary to ensure their engagement in online CPD during and beyond school closures and to assist teachers in effectively delivering distance learning to students. ICT capacity has two pillars: access to ICT equipment (especially laptops) and internet; and ICT skills. For Rwanda's female school leaders, the learning curve is especially steep as they proved to have less prior experience with ICT and less access to adequate devices. Fortunately, VVOB was able to attract additional funding to deliver laptops to schools in all 30 districts of the country and to enroll, among others, (deputy) head teachers from previously uncovered schools and districts in a course on basic ICT skills for distance and online learning. We have been very encouraged by the positive attitudes that these school leaders have on ICT leadership and the use of ICT.

As a school leader, ICT enables you to keep in touch with your staff, education leaders and relevant stakeholders at different levels. In other words, as physical meetings and face-to-face learning and teaching become more difficult due to the COVID-19 pandemic, ICT remains a viable alternative to keep things moving forward."

Gerard Bahizi, Head Teacher, Rubavu district, Rwanda

Distributed leadership is becoming the default

A third important insight that emerged "thanks to" COVID-19, is that distributed leadership is becoming the norm rather than the exception. Though Ecuador, Rwanda and Suriname are very different in many respects, a year ago we would have described

school leadership in all three countries as a top-down affair, with teachers accountable to head teachers who are, in turn, accountable to their hierarchical superiors at the district and/or national levels. This, however, has changed considerably and maybe even irreversibly because of COVID-19. Staff at all levels of ministries of Education have had to place their trust in school leaders in order to find the most context-responsive answers to the COVID-19 crisis. Similarly, school leaders have had to trust teachers to take on a range of tasks to keep the school community on course.

In Suriname, VVOB's support to the Sub-Directorate for Lower Secondary Vocational Education and Training (SD LS VET) of the ministry of Education and to the Centre for Continuous Professional Development Suriname (CENASU) helped to accelerate this trend in a number of ways. For one, VVOB has been supporting the introduction of a school-wide support system for newly qualified LS VET teachers since 2017. This included identifying and training school-based mentors who, as teacher leaders, could share head teachers' responsibility of introducing new teachers to the school community. In 2020, the last batch of 30 school-based mentors was trained and now all of the country's LS VET schools have such a mentor in place. In parallel, VVOB and the SD LS VET worked together to set up PLCs for school leaders, facilitated by staff from the Sub-Directorate. Topics such as building strong relationships with parents, supporting teachers in classroom management and positive discipline and mentoring new teachers have been high on the agenda of the PLCs. Importantly, facilitating the PLCs has given ministry staff more insight in the ins and outs of the 54 LS VET schools that fall under their authority, while also putting them in a coaching rather than a controlling position.



The so-called 'collegial consultation' in the PLCs greatly contributed to the knowledge and collaboration among school leaders. This has definitely had a positive effect on policy implementation. The training also enhanced their ability to think outside the box and motivate the teachers in their schools."

Marina Jap-A-Joe, Director, Sub-Directorate for Lower Secondary Vocational Education and Training, ministry of Education, Suriname

As VVOB is set to leave Suriname in 2021, we were pleased to crown these achievements with an online workshop week for all LS VET teachers and school leaders, organised at the end of 2020. The last goodbyes from our longstanding partners will not be easy, but we can take our cue from Ecuador and say: "Be well, take care!"

International dialogue

on
equity in
education:

not to be
stopped by

COVID-19

The experiences and insights gained by VVOB in its partner countries tremendously enrich the Belgian education sector. With programmes eNSPIRED, SchoolLinks, and Educaid.be, VVOB builds sustainable bridges between education professionals and schools across borders – founded on equity – to learn from each other about common equal access to education-related challenges. Given that travel and conferences were not an option in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, international cooperation worked somewhat differently than the usual run of events.



eNSPIRED: multilingualism, a shared narrative

VVOB's eNSPIRED programme inspires teacher trainers, school leaders and (future) teachers through international talks on equity in education. Belgium could learn a lot from how VVOB's partner countries approach their educational challenges. eNSPIRED and its partners – the Belgian university colleges and educational networks – introduce and embed educational practices from other continents into the Belgian teacher training curriculum, as well as in teacher and school leadership training courses.

International talks were held in 2020 through a digital learning week dedicated to multilingualism in education, a topic about which there is no shortage of things to be said. As a result, there are plenty of new challenges and insights to be considered – not just in Belgium, but all over the world. And that is why over 450 teacher trainers, (future) teachers, and school leaders from all over the world participated in eNSPIRED's first ever digital learning week.

Participants met every morning from 17 through 26 November to converse with speakers from various organisations, such as UNICEF Vietnam, Funda Wande, ChildFund Vietnam, CPUT Cape Town, Brussels Education Centre, Artevelde University of Applied Sciences, VIVES University of Applied Sciences, and Odisee, for an hour and a half. As hostess, Hanan Challouki, kicked off the opening session

via live stream. There were talks on multilingualism and education in Vietnam, South Africa, and Belgium, three countries with three different contexts but with a host of common challenges. In her keynote, Anh Phuong Ha, Top 10 finalist of the 2020 Global Teacher Prize, stressed the importance of the role of teachers.

In the days that followed, participants were able to deepen their knowledge and understanding, and gain new inspiration during themed Zoom sessions, featuring even more speakers from Vietnam, South Africa, and Belgium. They shared their expertise on developing learning materials, reading for meaning, and professional development. After all, how can you learn a language without stories and books, or without well-trained teachers? The digital learning week rounded off with a live stream closing session in which various lessons learnt were shared. Kira Boe of Oxfam Ibis gave a closing keynote in which she stressed how essential multilingualism in education is to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) – quality education. By prioritising multilingualism in education, we ensure greater equity and a higher quality of education.

“The keynotes and exchange confirm that in whatever context you work, there are a handful of universal principles that apply: a language policy and approach cannot be imposed from the top down; creating a robust language learning environment is always essential; all stakeholders must be taken into account; beliefs and convictions are relevant; context determines a lot; there is no place where every language shares the same status; identity and emotions play a role in language acquisition and must be taken into account”, said a participant in the online post-assessment.

Anyone who was unable to attend or missed a session can rewatch the entire digital learning week on www.enspired.net.

A creative outlook

The drawings shown on the right were made by illustrator Nilu Kuhpour. She put her own spin on what she heard during the opening and closing sessions of the eNSPIRED digital learning week on multilingualism in education.

Spoken word artist Sarah Bekambo concluded both live streams with stirring words about her multilingual and multicultural experiences. Check out her contributions on the eNSPIRED website.





Meryame Kitir
Belgian Minister of Development Cooperation



Educaid.be: inclusive education in Belgium's international development cooperation

As a platform for structured dialogue for Belgian development actors working in the field of education and training, Educaid.be assists in developing and supporting the Belgian policy as well as improving the quality of Belgian education programmes abroad.

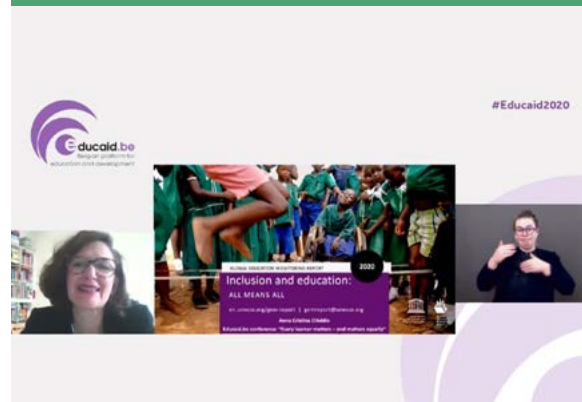
The peak of the Educaid.be year is its international conference. Educaid.be brought together over 600 education professionals in 2020 at a digital conference entitled '*Inclusive Education. Every learner matters – and matters equally.*' Inclusive and equitable are keywords in SDG 4's phrasing: 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.'

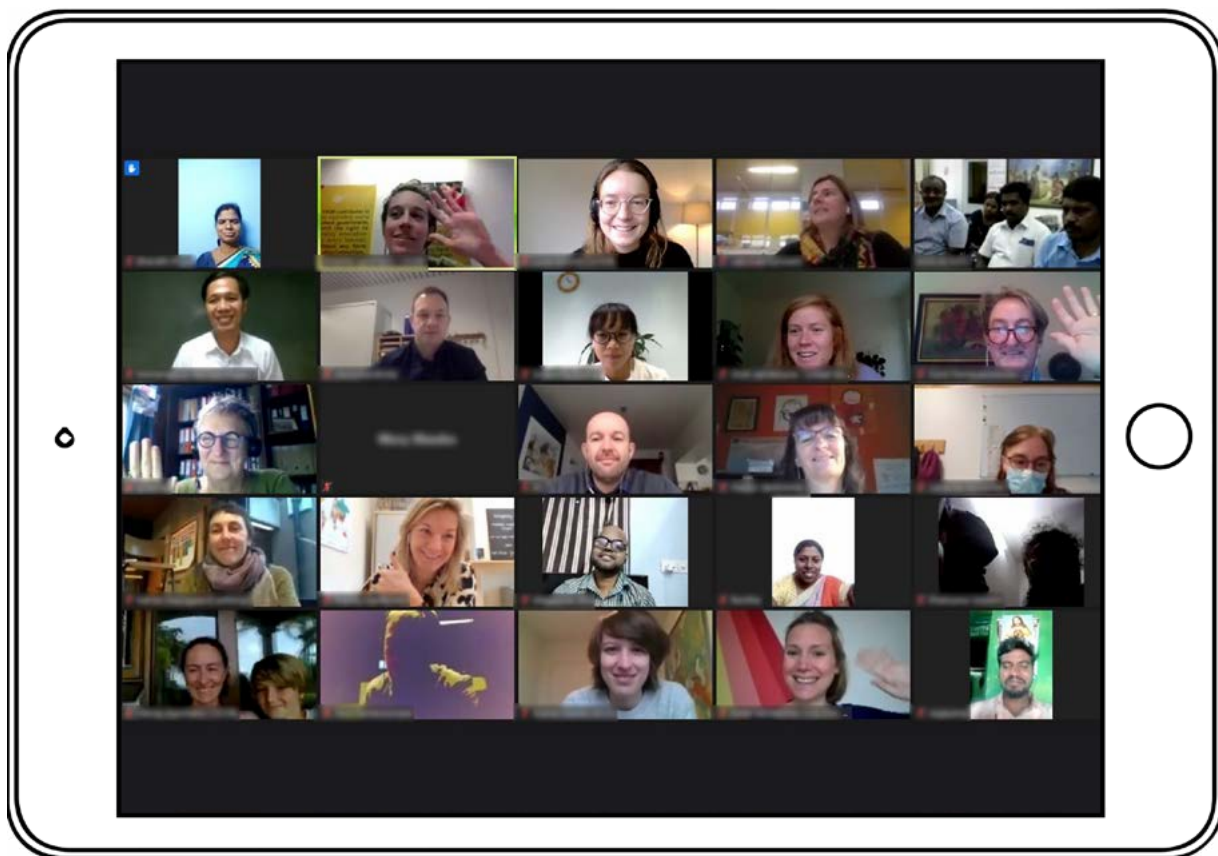
Participants gathered from all over the world virtually, on 15 and 22 October, to reflect on how every child, regardless of gender, economic status, ethnicity, religion, language, disability, etc. can gain access to quality education. Naturally, the conference focused on the pandemic's impact on education and how school closures were affecting the development of children and youth. Fifteen speakers from twelve different countries, including Dr Kwame Akyeampong (Open University, UK), Michelle Mathey (Department of Higher Education and Training, South Africa), Kira Boe (Oxfam Ibis), Subekshya Karki (Humanity & Inclusion, Nepal), shared their experiences and insights and engaged in dialogue with the participants. Meryame Kitir, the Belgian Minister of Development Cooperation, concluded the two-day event with a message on the importance of cooperation and international solidarity.

Anyone who was unable to attend or missed a session can (re)watch the complete conference proceedings on the [Educaid.be website](https://www.educaid.be).

2020 GEM Report: official launch

The digital conference was the perfect occasion for the official Belgian launch of the 2020 Global Education Monitoring Report, *Inclusion and education*. Anna D'Addio, Senior Policy Analyst on the GEM Report team, presented the main findings and emphasised how the impact of COVID-19 presages new challenges in terms of inclusion in education.





One of Educaid.be's key objectives is to support member organisations (and the public at large) by providing education-related expertise. In this context, Educaid.be organised a smaller-scale webinar with VET Toolbox, a partnership dedicated to promoting inclusive vocational education. The VET Toolbox partnership consists of the British Council, Enabel, GIZ, LuxDev, and AfD. It organised a series of webinars on specific topics related to inclusive vocational education. Educaid.be contributed to one of these webinars in November 2020 with the topic '*Labour Market Analysis: which kind suits your situation?*' featuring keynote speakers Kevin Hempel of Prospera Consulting and Caroline Mancel of Actiris, as well as testimonials from the field, including from Haiti and Niger.

The complete webinar can also be accessed on the [Educaid.be website](https://www.educaid.be).

Members of the 'Gender and Education' project group also partnered with Le Monde selon les Femmes on a publication that pleads for a reduction of or amendment to the ingrained practices that generate and reinforce inequalities. They study the impact of a gender-specific approach at different stages of life and how they affect these learning environments, from formal to informal education, and from pre-school to adult education.

SchoolLinks: learning from each other across borders

SchoolLinks facilitates meaningful, sustainable partnerships between Belgian schools and schools abroad. Its primary focal point is developing global citizenship in Belgian teachers and school leaders.

Over 40 teachers, school leaders, and educational organisation employees from six different countries participating in a school link met virtually in November 2020. It was an online exchange in which they discussed how the SDGs are prioritised in their school link and how to continue exchanging theory and practice online during a period in which exchanges in person are less feasible.

SchoolLinks also used its website to share tips on how schools can keep their relationship with their partner school alive, digitally. What's more, incorporating an international perspective into (online) classes helps students develop global citizenship and intercultural skills.

Overview of our network

Belgium



Educaid.be

- Provides a platform for exchange and collaboration for Belgian development actors to strengthen and defend the education sector in international cooperation.

📍 Belgium

🤝 APEFE; 50 member organisations (details: www.educaid.be)

🇧🇪 Belgium

eNSPIRED

- Facilitates a dialogue on equity challenges in education between international experts that inspires the teaching practices of Belgian (future) educators.

📍 Flemish community

🤝 11 university colleges; 2 education networks; 2 universities; 1 adult education institution; RoSa; UNICEF Belgium (details: www.enspired.net)

🇧🇪 Belgium

SchoolLinks

- Builds partnerships between schools in Belgium and schools in Africa, South America and Asia to foster global citizenship and exchanges on SDG topics.

📍 Flemish community

🤝 86 schools (43 in Belgium, 43 abroad) (details: www.scholenbanden.be/en)

🇧🇪 Flanders

Cambodia



SMART: strengthening maths results and teaching

- Improves math teaching and learning in primary education through improved initial teacher training.

📍 Provinces Phnom Penh, Battambang, Kandal and Kampong Cham

🤝 Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport

🇧🇪 Belgium

TIGER: teaching for improved gender equality and responsiveness

- Implements gender-responsive pedagogy in primary and lower secondary education through professional development of teachers (PRESET and INSET) and school leaders, and through community engagement.

📍 Province of Battambang

🤝 Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport; Ministry of Women's Affairs; Puthi Komar Organization; Kampuchean Action for Primary Education; Gender and Development for Cambodia; 5 local CSOs

🇧🇪 Belgium; European Union

DR Congo

ETAGE: improving the quality of technical education and agricultural entrepreneurship

- Integrates entrepreneurship education in secondary agricultural schools through professional development of teachers (INSET) and school leaders.

📍 Province of Kongo Central (educational provinces 1, 2 and 3)

🤝 Ministry of Primary, Secondary and Vocational Education; Inspection Services

🇧🇪 Belgium



Legend

Logos: Ministries of Education and financial partners

- Focus
- 📍 Region
- 🤝 Local partners
- 🏦 Financial partners per project

Rwanda



Belgium
partner in development



Girls on MARS (mathematics achievements in Rwandan schools)

- Improves math teaching and learning in primary education (with a special focus on girls) through professional development of teachers (INSET) and school leaders.
- 📍 Eastern Province and Western Province
- 🤝 Ministry of Education; Rwanda Education Board; University of Rwanda – College of Education; FAWE; Rwanda Environmental Management Authority
- 🏦 Belgium

Induction system for newly qualified teachers

- Focuses on mentoring, monitoring and supervising new primary school teachers.
- 📍 Eastern Province and Western Province
- 🤝 Ministry of Education; Rwanda Education Board; University of Rwanda – College of Education
- 🏦 Belgium; The ELMA Foundation

Leaders in Teaching

- Enhances professional development services for teachers (INSET) and school leaders through diploma courses and professional learning communities.
- 📍 Eastern Province, Western Province, Northern Province and Southern Province
- 🤝 Ministry of Education; Rwanda Education Board; University of Rwanda – College of Education; FAWE
- 🏦 Mastercard Foundation

Scratch²h 2050: coding skills in secondary education

- Supports secondary school teachers in integrating Scratch into ICT and STEM lesson plans and in facilitating after school coding clubs.
- 📍 Kayonza district (Eastern Province)
- 🤝 Ministry of Education; Rwanda Education Board; Rwanda Coding Academy (RCA)
- 🏦 Wehubit (funded by Belgium through the Wehubit programme implemented by Enabel)

Building (education) resilience in times of crises

- Builds resilience of key education actors to manage the current COVID-19 crisis as well as future crises.
- 📍 Nationwide
- 🤝 Ministry of Education; Rwanda Education Board; University of Rwanda – College of Education (UR-CE), Laterite
- 🏦 Mastercard Foundation (COVID-19 Recovery and Resilience Program)

Ecuador



Ministerio
de Educación



Belgium
partner in development



F-EFTP (strengthening technical and professional education and training)

- Increases the relevance of secondary technical education through professional development of teachers (INSET) and school leaders for increased chances at decent work.
- 📍 Provinces of Esmeraldas, Manabí, and Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas
- 🤝 Ministry of Education; Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador; Universidad Técnica de Manabí
- 🏦 Belgium

Skilling for Sustainable Tourism

- Strengthens the relevance and sustainability of tourism-related courses in secondary schools through professional development of teachers (INSET).
- 📍 Province of Manabí and Cantón Quito
- 🤝 Ministry of Education; Ministry of Tourism
- 🏦 Belgium; Dubai Cares

South Africa



basic education
Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



Belgium
partner in development



Flanders
State of the Art

Leadership and teaching for diversity

- Implements inclusive pedagogy in primary education through professional development of teachers (INSET) and school leaders.
- 📍 Pretoria, and provinces of Free State and KwaZulu-Natal
- 🤝 Department of Basic Education; South African Council of Educators (SACE); South African Principals Association
- 🇧🇪 Belgium

Keep it Cool: climate change education

- Makes climate change education part of school and classroom practice through professional development of teachers (INSET) and school leaders, and supports coherence of the theme at all policy levels.
- 📍 Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo
- 🤝 GreenMatter, Department of Environmental Affairs, Department of Basic Education, Department of Higher Education and Training, Universities involved with Fundisa for Change
- 🇧🇪 Flanders

GRP4ECE: gender-responsiveness in the early years

- Promotes gender-responsive pedagogy in early childhood education through professional development of teachers (INSET) and school leaders.
- 📍 KwaZulu-Natal Province
- 🤝 Department of Basic Education (DBE), Provincial KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education (KZNDOE), South African Council of Educators (SACE)
- 🇧🇪 Belgium

Suriname



Belgium
partner in development



PROGRESS LBO: increasing effectiveness of lower secondary vocational schools

- Strengthens the quality and relevance of lower secondary vocational education through professional development of teachers (PRESET and INSET) for increased chances at decent work for youth.
- 📍 Country-wide
- 🤝 Ministry of Education, Science and Culture; teacher training college for vocational education and training; Centre for in-service training
- 🇧🇪 Belgium

Uganda



Belgium
partner in development



From classroom to land: Teaching Agriculture Practically

- Ensures quality and relevant agricultural education and training through professional development of teachers (PRESET and INSET).
- 📍 Central Region, Northern Region
- 🤝 Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES); NTC Mubende; NTC Unyama; National Instructors College Abilonino (NICA)
- 🇧🇪 Belgium

Teaching at the Right Level in refugee hosting communities

- Implements Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) for over-age-for-grade adolescent primary school students in refugee hosting communities
- 📍 Arua district; Isingiro district
- 🤝 Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) Uganda, UNICEF, TaRL Africa
- 🇧🇪 UNICEF

Zambia, South Africa & Vietnam

Learning through play in times of COVID-19

- A multi-country effort that integrates COVID-19 recovery measures into ongoing activities, to react to the new educational challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 📍 South Africa, Vietnam, Zambia
- 🤝 South Africa: Department of Basic Education (DBE), South African Council of Educators (SACE)
- 🤝 Zambia: Ministry of General Education (MoGE), UNICEF, TaRL Africa
- 🤝 Vietnam: Ministry of Education and Training (MoET), National Women's Union (NWU), VTV7 (Vietnam national education channel)
- 🇧🇪 The LEGO Foundation

Vietnam



BaMi: mitigating preschool children's barriers to learning in disadvantaged and ethnically diverse districts

- Identifies and mitigates barriers to learning in early childhood education through professional development of teachers (INSET) and school leaders.
- 📍 Provinces of Kon Tum, Quang Nam and Quang Ngai
- 🤝 Ministry of Education and Training (MoET)
- 🇧🇪 Belgium

GENTLE: gender-responsive teaching and learning in the early years

- Implements gender-responsive play-based learning in early childhood education through professional development of teachers (INSET) and school leaders.
- 📍 Provinces of Quang Nam and Quang Ngai
- 🤝 Ministry of Education and Training (MoET); Research Center for Gender, Family and Environment in Development
- 🇪🇺 European Union; Belgium

CITIES: ECE in urban contexts

- Identifies and then mitigates urban barriers to learning in early childhood education through professional development of teachers (INSET) and school leaders.
- 📍 Da Nang (Son Tra district)
- 🤝 Ministry of Education and Training (MoET); Da Nang Department of Education and Training (DOET), University of Science and Education (University of Da Nang)
- 🇵🇹 Porticus

iPLAY: play-based primary education

- Integrates pedagogies of learning through play in primary education through professional development of teachers (INSET) and school leaders.
- 📍 Provinces of Thai Nguyen, Hanoi, Quang Tri, Da Nang, Quang Ngai, Ho Chi Minh City, Lai Chau, Ha Giang
- 🤝 Ministry of Education and Training (MoET); National Women's Union (NWU); Hanoi (HNUE), Ho Chi Minh City (HCMCUE) and Da Nang (DNUE) University of Education
- 🇵🇹 The LEGO Foundation

Zambia



Catch Up: remedial teaching

- Implements remedial teaching in primary education through professional development of teachers (INSET) on Teaching at the Right Level methodology.
- 📍 Eastern Province; Southern Province
- 🤝 Ministry of General Education; Pratham; J-PAL Africa; Innovations for Poverty Action; UNICEF; University of Cape Town; Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), TaRL Africa
- 🇺🇸 USAID; Co-impact

STEEL: supporting teacher education for early learning

- Supports the implementation of learning through play pedagogies in early childhood education through professional development of teachers (PRESET and INSET) and school leaders.
- 📍 Central Province
- 🤝 Ministry of General Education; Examinations Council of Zambia; Malcom Moffat College of Education; Kitwe College of Education; Chalimbana University; FAWE
- 🇧🇪 Belgium

USAID Let's Read

- Strengthens play-based emergent literacy activities in early childhood education through professional development of teachers (INSET).
- 📍 Provinces Eastern, Muchinga, North Western, Southern and Western
- 🤝 Ministry of General Education (MoGE), Education Development Center (EDC); Kentalis; Resonance
- 🇺🇸 USAID, through Education Development Center (EDC)

Sharing our expertise – virtually or otherwise – in 2020

In our efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by the fast-approaching deadline of 2030, we take every opportunity – even create our own – to share as much as we can with others about our experiences and lessons learnt regarding quality education. As is the case with people: no organisation is an island.

2020 made that last statement abundantly clear. While face-to-face events were being cancelled left and right, we all found new ways to come together, and learn together. For the most part, this happened online. What follows are just a few highlights.

New partnerships brought colour to our year

Moving the development agenda forward can only be successful when all stakeholders – implementing organisations included – join forces, exchange views and get to work for quality education together. 2020 threw some serious curveballs at education systems worldwide, but we were exhilarated to have felt a similar sense of responsibility in other organisations to not pause our efforts.

Partnerships are not new for VVOB. Pre-pandemic, we invested time and effort in forging alliances to maximise impact. During the pandemic, this “spirit of partnership” was consolidated with a number of new formalised collaborations, including the following ones:

- With **Aflatoun International**, we look forward to integrating quality social and financial education in formal education systems and classroom practices;
- We are taking our ‘ICT in education’-plans to the next level as a member of **mEducation Alliance** by learning more about how to embed and scale effective ed-tech innovations in education systems;
- We also became a member of the **Regional Education Learning Initiative** (RELI), a partnership that focuses on policy engagement and building evidence of what works;
- In 2020, we pledged our commitment to the Global Initiative on **Decent Jobs for Youth**. Focussed on Uganda, our commitment aims at strengthening the initial education for teachers/instructors.

Our colleague Marianne Kiggundu (Deputy Country Programmes Manager of VVOB in Uganda) shared at the RELI annual convening experiences on how VVOB has supported learning in Uganda in these challenging times.



Special days to celebrate together

One week after we announced our commitment to Decent Jobs for Youth, we were invited to speak at **World Youth Skills Day** (15 July) organised by ILO, the UN Envoy on Youth, UNESCO, and Sri Lanka and Portugal.

When we say “we”, we mean colleague Ronald Ddungu: VVOB Education Advisor in Uganda, champion of agri-entrepreneurship and 2015 Global Teacher Prize nominee. Ronald discussed the role agricultural education can play for COVID-19 recovery; the importance of connecting youth with inspiring mentors through technology (for now); and soft skills development for resilience.



World Teachers' Day is another cause for international celebration we mark in our calendar. UNESCO celebrated the 2020 instance with a weeklong event, at which we co-organised a session on *'Professionalisation of early childhood care and education personnel: the missing piece for strong leadership?'* with the government of Zambia, VSO and the Teacher Task Force.

Our Partnership Manager Anna Murru shared insights and recommendations from VVOB research in Zambia on teacher motivation and teacher leadership in early childhood care and education.

Visit the 'Meet us at' and 'Publications' section of our website, where we share our expertise in real-time.



You chose Bambanani! Thank you to all who voted

Prize D4D is organised by the Royal Museum for Central Africa and supported by the Belgian Development Cooperation. It is awarded to “outstanding initiatives that use digitisation and (new) technologies as a lever for development towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals”.

VVOB's Bambanani video series – open educational resources that support teachers in South Africa to embrace diversity and to strengthen their inclusive teaching practices – won the public award iChoose. “This recognition is encouraging to us for two important reasons: it shows people's support for inclusive education and making it a reality for all, but it will also create opportunities for VVOB to further invest in D4D initiatives”, VVOB General Director Sven Rooms responded.

Another in our series of technical briefs 'Putting SDG4 into Practice'

Our series of technical briefs grew with the publication of number 5: **Gender-responsive pedagogy for early childhood education** (GRP4ECE). GRP4ECE empowers preschool teachers and school leaders to create learning environments where harmful gender stereotypes are challenged and addressed.



The technical brief (i) explores the concept of GRP4ECE in detail; (ii) delves into the areas of professional development that put GRP4ECE into teaching practice; and (iii) discusses the GRP4ECE learning and research agenda. The technical brief was developed in partnership with the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) and illustrates the GRP4ECE model with examples from VVOB projects in South Africa, Vietnam and Zambia.

Previous editions delved into our experiences with: School leadership; Professional learning communities; Learning through play; Adolescent wellbeing, learning and opportunities.

Financial report

Result and equity

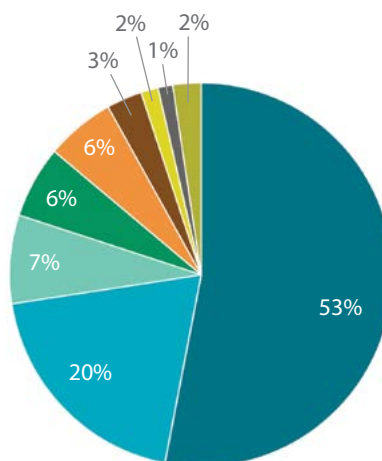
Revenues for 2020 amounted to 14,076,857 euros, which is at the same level as the record year 2019, despite the difficult circumstances resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, which presented the organisation with many challenges in 2020. Over the past 9 years, the average income was 10,617,000 euros. 2020 revenues represent an increase of more than 33% over this period. This increase is the result of a deliberate donor diversification strategy.

The operating result of EUR 484,228 is significantly higher than 2019 (146,693 euro), but this is mainly due to a partial reversal of the previously created provision for disallowed expenses on programmes amounting to EUR -207,216. VVOB is still very cautious, but unless there are indications of risks of disallowed expenditure or unless the collaboration with a donor has only recently started and there is therefore no track record of successful projects, no provision is made or maintained.

The financial result is negatively taxed by booking a translation difference on the bank balances in foreign currencies according to the closing rate method at year-end, amounting to -789,430 euros. This was mainly caused by the fact that VVOB had outstanding USD 9,283,709 at the end of 2020 and the dollar exchange rate weakened significantly against the euro at the end of 2020. According to accounting legislation, this negative exchange rate difference should be attributed to the result, which also happened. It is important to mention that this conversion difference is temporary in nature and this difference will not be realised, due to the fact that VVOB also has to pay a large part of its obligations in USD.

Taking into account the financial result of -731,162 euros, the financial year closed with a loss of -246,934 euros. This loss is allocated to the reserves carried forward from the past. This brings the association's equity capital to 2,760,970 euros at the end of 2020.

INCOME PER DONOR



Cash position

The balance sheet total amounts to 15,686,399 euros compared to 9,807,155 euros the previous year. The net financial debt, calculated as the difference between current assets and liabilities less than one year, is positive and amounts to 3,104,490 euros, which implies a very strong liquidity position.

Impact of COVID-19

It goes without saying that the COVID-19 crisis has an impact on the activities and operation of the organisation. This impact is of course partly determined by the severity and duration of the COVID-19 crisis in the various countries where VVOB is active. At the moment it is extremely difficult to make estimates about this. The Board of Directors and the management monitor the situation in the countries, as well as the implementation of the programmes and the results, and can thus determine changes in the strategy and take measures where and when necessary. In 2020, no-cost extensions were negotiated and obtained in this context with a number of donors for current projects where, as a result of the closure of the schools, the achievement of the results within

the initial timing was threatened. In the meantime, a 'blended approach' was also chosen within all projects and programmes, in which face to face activities are organised where possible, and digital alternatives are put in place when necessary. This means that, despite the difficult circumstances resulting from COVID-19, the organisation continuously puts forward creative and flexible solutions in order to achieve the intended results. Due to this continuous follow-up and adjustment, as well as - where necessary - adjusted agreements with donors, COVID-19 has had no negative effects on the financial situation of VVOB in 2020.

Audit

The General Assembly of 26 March 2020 appointed BDO the company auditor for financial years 2020, 2021 and 2022. BDO concludes without reservation that the financial statements give a true and fair view of the assets and the financial situation of the association on 31 December 2020, as well as of the results for the financial year then closed, in accordance with the accounting principles framework applicable in Belgium.



Balance sheet

(all in euro)

	2020	2019	2018
Assets			
A. Fixed assets	90,501	89,869	105,598
B. Accounts receivable (due within 1 year)	1,795,149	1,233,285	512,478
C. Cash and investments	13,793,920	8,474,092	8,005,621
D. Prepaid expenses	6,829	9,908	24,907
Total assets	15,686,399	9,807,155	8,648,605
Liabilities			
A. Reserves and accrued profit/loss	2,760,971	3,007,905	2,838,994
B. Provisions	470,021	677,237	537,716
C. Accounts payable (due within 1 year)	12,455,408	6,122,013	5,271,894
Total liabilities	15,686,399	9,807,155	8,648,605

Profit and loss statement

(all in euro)

	2020	2019	2018
Costs			
A. Structural costs	1,506,984	1,069,889	937,981
a. Services and diverse goods	378,429	397,613	358,304
b. Personnel costs	571,966	527,498	528,830
c. Depreciation	22,023	23,077	26,957
d. Other costs	534,566	121,701	23,890
B. Management costs	1,056,008	964,627	825,052
a. Personnel costs	976,344	827,952	740,856
b. Audit, monitoring and evaluation, learning processes	25,442	70,712	41,893
c. Other	54,222	65,963	42,303
C. Operational costs (programme costs)	11,710,664	11,671,518	9,599,398
a. DGD programme	6,480,749	6,886,932	6,135,364
b. SchoolLinks (Flemish government)	74,794	138,603	165,638
c. Other programmes	5,155,121	4,645,983	3,298,396
Total costs	14,273,655	13,706,034	11,362,431
Income			
a. Subsidy	14,026,531	13,872,775	11,392,748
b. Financial income	0	2,119	6,373
c. Other income	190	50	0
Total income	14,026,721	13,874,944	11,399,121
Appropriations and withdrawing			
Result before use	-246,934	168,911	36,690
Profits / losses transferred from previous financial year	392,847	392,847	218,604
Withdrawal of equity	0	0	0
	145,913	561,758	255,294
Use of result	-6,227	168,911	-137,553
Deferral of fiscal year	152,140	392,847	392,847



T : +32 (0)2 778 01 00
F : +32 (0)2 771 56 56
www.bdo.be

The Corporate Village
Da Vincilaan 9, box E6
B-1935 Zaventem

STATUTORY AUDITOR'S REPORT TO THE GENERAL MEETING OF VLAAMSE VERENIGING VOOR ONTWIKKELINGSSAMENWERKING EN TECHNISCHE BIJSTAND (VVOB) VZW FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2020

In the context of the statutory audit of the annual accounts of VVOB vzw ("the Association"), we hereby present our statutory auditor's report. It includes our report on the annual accounts and the other legal and regulatory requirements. This report is an integrated whole and is indivisible.

We have been appointed as statutory auditor by the general meeting of 26 March 2020, following the proposal formulated by the administrative body. Our statutory auditor's mandate expires on the date of the general meeting deliberating on the annual accounts closed on 31 December 2022. We have performed the statutory audit of the annual accounts of the VVOB vzw for 7 consecutive years.

REPORT ON THE ANNUAL ACCOUNTS

Unqualified opinion

We have audited the annual accounts of the Association, which comprise the balance sheet as at 31 December 2020, the income statement for the year then ended and the notes to the annual accounts, characterized by a balance sheet total of 15.686.399,17 EUR and an income statement showing a negative result for the year of 246.933,95 EUR.

In our opinion, the annual accounts give a true and fair view of the Association's net equity and financial position as at 31 December 2020, as well as of its results for the year then ended, in accordance with the financial reporting framework applicable in Belgium.

Basis for unqualified opinion

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

We have obtained from the administrative body and the officials of the Association the explanations and information necessary for performing our audit.

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

BDO Bedrijfsrevisoren CVBA / BTW BE 0431.088.289 / RPR Brussel
BDO Réviseurs d'Entreprises SCRL / TVA BE 0431.088.289 / RPM Bruxelles

BDO Bedrijfsrevisoren - BDO Réviseurs d'Entreprises CVBA/SCRL, a cooperative company with limited liability, is a member of BDO International Limited, a UK company limited by guarantee, and forms part of the international BDO network of independent member firms.
BDO is the brand name for the BDO network and for each of the BDO Member Firms.



Responsibilities of administrative body for the drafting of the annual accounts

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

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

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

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the annual accounts as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue a statutory auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISAs will always detect a material misstatement when it exists.

Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these annual accounts.

When executing our audit, we respect the legal, regulatory and normative framework applicable for the audit of annual accounts

in Belgium. However, a statutory audit does not guarantee the future viability of the Association, neither the efficiency and effectiveness of the management of the Association by the administrative body. Our responsibilities with respect to the administrative body's use of the going concern basis of accounting are described below.

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

- Identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the annual accounts, whether due to fraud or error, design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks, and obtain audit evidence that is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control;
- Obtain an understanding of internal control relevant to the audit in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the Association's internal control;
- Evaluate the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of accounting estimates and related disclosures made by the administrative body;
- Conclude on the appropriateness of the administrative body's use of the going concern basis of accounting and, based on the audit evidence obtained, whether a material uncertainty exists related to events or conditions that may



cast significant doubt on the Company's ability to continue as a going concern. If we conclude that a material uncertainty exists, we are required to draw attention in our statutory auditor's report to the related disclosures in the annual accounts or, if such disclosures are inadequate, to modify our opinion. Our conclusions are based on the audit evidence obtained up to the date of our statutory auditor's report. However, future events or conditions may cause the Association to cease to continue as a going concern;

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

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

OTHER LEGAL AND REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

Responsibilities of the administrative body

The administrative body is responsible for the compliance with the legal and regulatory requirements regarding bookkeeping, with the Code of companies and associations and with the Association's by-laws.

Responsibilities of the statutory auditor

In the context of our mission and in accordance with the Belgian standard (version revised 2020) which is complementary to the International

Standards on Auditing (ISAs) as applicable in Belgium, it is our responsibility to verify, in all material aspects, the compliance with certain provisions of the Code of Companies and Associations and of the Association's by-laws, as well as to report on these elements.

Aspects related to the management report

In the context of our audit of the annual accounts, we are also responsible for considering, in particular based on the knowledge we have obtained during the audit, whether the management report contains a material misstatement, i.e. information which is inadequately disclosed or otherwise misleading. Based on the procedures we have performed, there are no material misstatements we have to report to you.

Statement related to independence

- Our audit firm and our network did not provide services which are incompatible with the statutory audit of annual accounts and our audit firm remained independent of the Association during the terms of our mandate.
- The fees related to additional services which are compatible with the statutory audit of annual accounts as referred to in article 3:65 of the Code of companies and associations, were duly itemised and valued in the notes to the annual accounts.

Other statements

- Without prejudice to certain formal aspects of minor importance, the accounting records are maintained in accordance with the legal and regulatory requirements applicable in Belgium.



- We do not have to report to you any transactions undertaken or decisions taken in breach of the by-laws or the Code of companies and associations

Zaventem, 30 March 2021

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and lines, extending from the left towards the right.

BDO Réviseurs d'Entreprises SCRL
Statutory auditor
Represented by Ignace Robberechts
Auditor

Management

**Below is the list of the members of the General Assembly of VVOB in 2020 on 31 December.
The members of the Board of Directors are at the top of the list.**

Board of Directors

- **Chairperson:** Stefaan Van Mulders, Administrator General of Youth Welfare Agency
- Julie Bynens, Secretary General of the Department of Foreign Affairs
- Ann Verhaegen, Secretary General of the Department Education and Training
- Johan De Tavernier (Prof Dr), Dean of the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies of the Catholic University of Leuven
- Lieven Viaene, Inspector General of the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training
- Judith Kerkhof, Development and Education Expert
- Jef Tavernier, Development and Education Expert
- Fabienne Van Den Eede, Development and Education Expert
- Frederick De Gryse, Development and Education Expert
- Thien Pham, Development and Education Expert
- Caroline Gennez, Member of the Flemish parliament
- Annabel Tavernier, Member of the Flemish parliament
- Jean-Jacques De Gucht, Member of the Flemish parliament

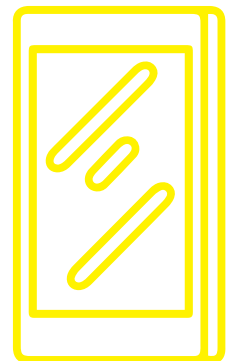
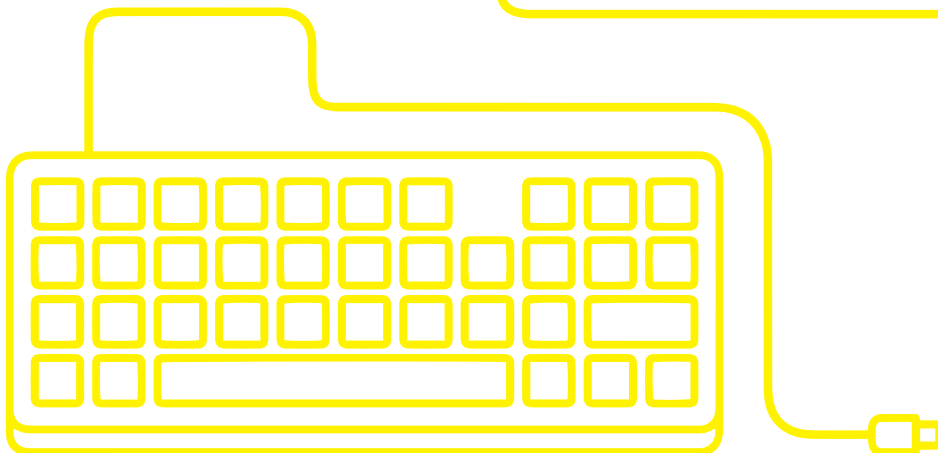
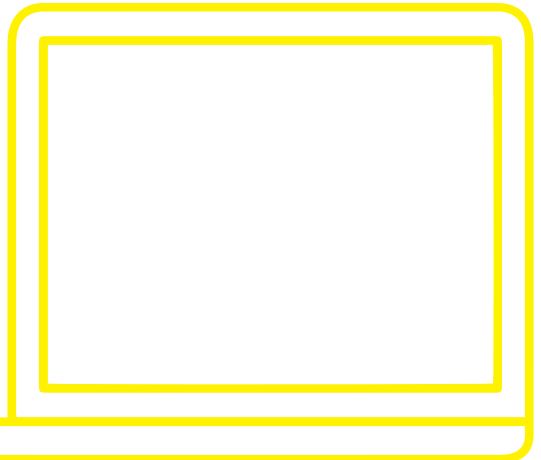
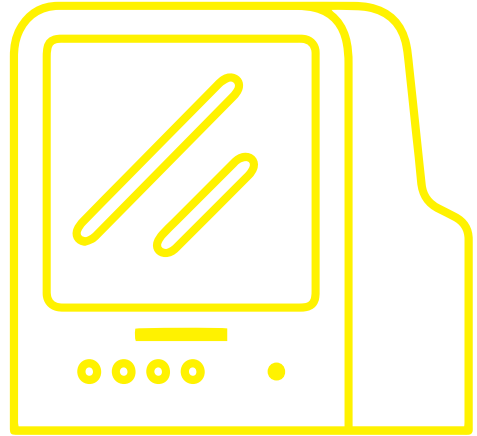
General Assembly

- Lode De Geyter, General Director University College West-Vlaanderen
- Machteld Verhelst, Pedagogical Director *Katholiek Onderwijs Vlaanderen*
- Patriek Delbaere, General Director of OVSG
- Marc Vandewalle, General Director of Leuven University College
- Prof S. Smis, member of VLIR-UOS
- Jens Vermeersch, Internationalisation Policy Coordinator of GO!
- Ann Brusseel, General Director Erasmus University College Brussels
- Kristien Verbrugghen, Director of VLIR-UOS
- Elisabeth Meuleman, Member of the Flemish parliament
- Loes Vandromme, Member of the Flemish parliament
- Prof Guido Van Huylenbroeck, member of VLIR-UOS
- Els Hertogen, Director of 11.11.11

Integrity: a core value for VVOB

In 2018, VVOB was one of the first organisations to sign the Belgian government's Integrity Charter for Belgian development actors. We renewed and formalised our own comprehensive Integrity Policy, all VVOB employees received a copy in a brochure, and key staff – the focal person Integrity and country teams' programme managers among others – enrolled in workshops on addressing and dealing with integrity issues.

In 2020, no cases of potential violations of the integrity policy were reported.



Acknowledgements

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

The digital and the Dutch versions of this annual Report can be downloaded at www.vvob.org.

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

Text

Hans De Greve, Lisse Moons, Katelin Raw, Sven Rooms, Maud Seghers, Koenraad Van Den Steen, Stefaan Van Mulders, Tom Vandenbosch

Coordination and editing:

Els Broothaers, Lisse Moons, Katelin Raw

Lay-out: Els Broothaers

Responsible editor:

Sven Rooms

VVOB - education for development

Julien Dillensplein 1 bus 2A

1060 Brussels | Belgium



Belgium

partner in development



Flanders

State of the Art

Disclaimer

The Flemish and Belgian governments cannot be held responsible for the content of this publication.



www.vvob.org

 **VVOB vzw**

 **@VVOBvzw**

 **VVOB**

VVOB - education for development

Julien Dillensplein 1 bus 2A | B-1060 Brussels | Belgium

T • +32 (0)2 209 07 99

E • info@vvob.org



Belgium
partner in development



Flanders
State of the Art