

In the communities where the Whole School Approach has been implemented, parents are more active in monitoring the performance of their children, general school performance and the quality of education provided. As a result, there are stronger linkages between the school and home as well as between parent and child, especially around matters of school readiness and attendance.



Development Partners

Kenya Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
 United States Agency for International Development (USAID)
 Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD)
 Daraja Civic Initiatives Forum
 Women Kind Kenya
 Girl Kind Organization
 Habiba International

move quickly with the formulation and implementation of School Development Plans, others require regular follow-up and support, mainly where there is a history of poor relations between the school administration and the community. Participation in Whole School Approach activities across regions is quite mixed. In rural non-arid areas, participation of men and women is fairly equal. However, in the arid North Eastern part of Kenya, participation is largely confined to women. Moreover, the enthusiasm and commitment often displayed by rural communities in WSA activities greatly differs from that seen in informal urban settlements. In the latter case, spatial dynamics such as housing arrangements, transport infrastructure, quality of housing, and lack of water and electricity present further challenges. The WSA participatory process with increased emphasis on providing regular follow-up and support successfully managed to mobilise the school communities even in the informal settlements.

Scheduling of training programmes and other activities for parents living in the informal settlements can be problematic since they rely on daily paid labour for their subsistence. While a training session in rural areas can take up to a full day, in the informal settlements it may only be possible to meet parents for a maximum of three hours as they require the remaining time to search for paid work. AKF introduced flexible timing and half a day of WSA training to address the needs of these parents.

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The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) is a group of private development agencies working to empower communities and individuals, often in disadvantaged circumstances, to improve living conditions and opportunities, especially in Africa and Asia. Its agencies work in over 30 countries for the common good of all citizens, regardless of their gender, origin or religion. Its underlying impulse is the ethic of compassion for the vulnerable in society.

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KENYA



A Community-Based Approach to School Development

With the introduction of Free Primary Education (FPE) nationally in 2003, the net enrolment in primary education in Kenya increased from 69 percent in 2002 to 96 percent by 2009, as reported by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics. However, despite such gains in matriculation, access and quality remain overarching challenges for the Kenyan education system. Teachers face large and over-enrolled classes, over-age learners and curriculum challenges. In addition, girls living in arid and semi-arid regions and poor urban settlements have a particularly difficult time with educational access and achievement. This latter problem has been widely attributed to retrogressive cultural practices, limited infrastructure and female household responsibilities.

As a result, it is estimated that 20 percent of children are not enrolled in primary schools, many do not complete the primary cycle and drop-out rates

have increased exponentially. According to the 2012 UWEZO Learning Assessment Report for Kenya "Are Our Children Learning?", only 22 out of 100 children are able to read a full paragraph by age eight (Class three) nationally. Innovative strategies are therefore needed to enable schools and teachers to offset this decline in enrolment and provide quality education to as many children as possible.

The Whole School Approach

To address these challenges, since 2006 the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) in partnership with the Government of Kenya, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (2006-2014), the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD), Canada (2013-2017) and local partners have been implementing a comprehensive school reform strategy aimed at increasing equitable

access to quality education in primary schools in the Coast and North-Eastern provinces and informal settlements in Nairobi region. In line with the Foundation's participatory approach to development, AKF implemented its tested Whole School Approach (WSA) model within its school reform strategy. This approach mobilises and facilitates school communities – children included – to come together to chart their own education development. It supports school communities to undertake a critical analysis of the key challenges relevant to their school and prioritise their needs and develop a roadmap of activities to achieve them.

The Whole School Approach involves a participatory process by which entire school communities can analyse the problems facing their children's education, identify practical solutions to these problems, and agree on roles and responsibilities to bring about



While Free Primary Education (FPE) removed school levies, government grants to schools are unable to adequately accommodate the influx of students. Teachers face large and over-enrolled classes, over-age learners and curriculum challenges. Innovative strategies to enable schools and teachers to adapt to this challenging environment are therefore needed.



the desired changes. It begins with community mobilisation and training where parents, women, local leaders, teachers and schoolchildren are guided through lively role plays to explore their perceptions about poverty, development and the quality of education. AKF implements the training using facilitators who speak the local language and uses role play to focus group discussions around local contexts. The community is then guided through detailed discussions to identify issues affecting access and participation of children in education. Special emphasis is placed on gender, analysing the needs of marginalised children and children with special needs.

Contrary to top-down planning mechanisms which exclude the context and needs of a community, WSA strives to stimulate *local ownership and accountability* for the delivery of relevant, quality education at the community level. This exercise culminates in the prioritisation of desired changes for the school and a roadmap of activities to achieve them, which is formalised into a School Development Plan (SDP). This plan clarifies the objectives and targets to be achieved within a specific time frame – usually three years – as well as sources of funding.

Under the leadership of a newly constituted inclusive School Management Committee (SMC), the school community then implements the activities outlined, undertaken with the support of the various

stakeholders identified in the School Development Plan. All the while, follow-up visits to schools are made by trained government education officials supported by AKF to review and track progress. At the end of the three-year time frame, the plans are reviewed with the school community. Lessons arising from this review are then fed into the development of a new plan, which runs for another three years following the same process (see Figure 1 on opposite page).

Key Successes

Children are receiving quality education.

AKF's experience with the Whole School Approach has demonstrated that communities can be a powerful catalyst of their own change. Armed with the correct knowledge and tools, communities can map out their vision and implement activities that contribute to achieving quality education for their children.

To date, AKF has facilitated the implementation of this approach in over 1,050 primary schools, reaching more than 60,000 parents (62 percent women) in Kenya. Moreover, 292 girls' forums, 75 boys' forums and 81 children's councils were established and supported to enhance participation of children in the learning process. The approach has been instrumental in nurturing partnerships between communities, the schools' management and the government. The net effect

of this partnership is demonstrated through better governance of schools as well as strengthening of the education institutions. Further, improvements in pupils' performance, retention and transition have been registered as a result of the approach.

Parents are monitoring their children's learning and keeping the schools accountable.

In the communities where the WSA has been implemented, the entire community has become increasingly involved in school education development and efforts. Parents are more active in monitoring the performance of their children, general school performance and the quality of education provided. In such schools, it is common to see parents supporting the school administration, while still holding the administration accountable for sound management and improved learning outcomes for children. Parental and community involvement has been seen to create linkages between the school and home, which in turn facilitates the interaction between parents and their children, especially around learning, attendance and retention.

Communities are securing funds from local government to improve their schools and reporting better rapport with government officials.

The emphasis on communities investigating their own potential and resources before looking to other



Figure 1: The Whole School Approach (WSA) Process

donors to support their development programmes has enabled communities to undertake resource inventories of their own social and economic capital. The WSA process has also enhanced communities' capacities for advocating for increased allocation of resources to their schools from government's Constituency Development Funds (CDF). Community members have, for example, successfully secured funds from the CDF, Local Authorities Transfer Fund and the Local Authority Service Delivery Action Plan to improve classroom conditions and infrastructure.

As a result of the WSA, communities now also have greater access to information pertaining to government

policies and plans in education. This has in turn expanded the perspective of school development beyond a fixation on infrastructure to also include a focus on other important education dimensions such as access, governance and quality of learning. Communities better appreciate the fact that the government cannot achieve the county's education objectives and goals without their input. Furthermore, with the adoption of this holistic approach, many schools testify to a much better rapport and building of mutual trust between schools and government officials, especially in the informal settlements, where many schools are not formally registered with the government.



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Government has adopted the Whole School Approach nationally.

In April 2014, the Government of Kenya took note of AKF's successes and adopted the Whole School Approach for more than 3,600 of Kenya's public primary schools across the country. In doing so, it has committed to supporting children in a comprehensive way – looking not only at the physical infrastructure or the curriculum, but also at the whole school's community. AKF's WSA contributions have also been recognised in the Kenya's National Education Sector Strategic Plan. The Foundation will provide technical support to the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MOEST) as it expands the WSA model. By influencing national policy and practice, AKF has made a lasting contribution to Kenya's education system.

Kilio huanza mwenye, as one community member summed it up in Kiswahili:

"The wearer of the shoe knows where it pinches most."

As the owners of the school, the community members see that they have a better understanding of the problems facing their school and are thus more likely to develop realistic solutions to these problems.

Lessons Learnt

While some communities are able to