



## Putting SDG4 into practice

# *Enhancing adolescent wellbeing, learning and opportunities*

**Inclusive and equitable quality education provides all learners with the capabilities to become economically productive, develop sustainable livelihoods, contribute to peaceful and democratic societies, and enhance individual wellbeing. This technical brief explains why it is important to provide quality education to adolescents and presents the evidence-based approach VVOB takes to increase access to and improve the quality and relevance of secondary education in lower and middle-income countries (LMICs). The experiences of VVOB demonstrate the importance of creating safe and supportive schools, ensuring equity, and enabling smooth transitions to work and further learning.**

### Why adolescence matters

There are over 1.2 billion adolescents in the world today, which is an all-time high. The vast majority of these 10-to-19-year-olds live in lower and middle-income countries (LMICs). Adolescence is a transformational phase of human life, characterised by profound physical, cognitive, emotional, social and moral development. The changes that boys and girls undergo at this stage substantially shape their wellbeing and their capacity to positively engage in work, leisure, family life and society later in life. But adolescence is a period of heightened risk and vulnerability as well. In many LMICs, education for adolescents falls short in terms of quality, and decent jobs for those of legal working age are in short supply. A disproportionately high disease burden, social norms that still condone early marriage, and existing attitudes towards interpersonal violence also have damaging and long-lasting effects. Through a combination of factors, adolescent girls tend to face greater disadvantage than their male peers.

#### Priority levers for change

VVOB is committed to strengthening the competences of those that have the greatest impact on adolescent wellbeing, learning and opportunities: teachers and school leaders. Together with them, we focus on three priority levers for change:

- **Creating safe and supportive secondary schools:** Quality secondary schools are free from violence, set high expectations for their students and provide support where needed.
- **Ensuring equity:** Quality secondary schools promote norms and behaviours that dismantle patterns of unequal power, social status and opportunity.
- **Enabling smooth transitions to work and further learning:** Quality secondary schools have connections and provide students with linkages between schooling and participation in the world of work and in life-long learning.

#### The evidence

International literature identifies quality secondary education as a pivotal factor in raising the future opportunities of adolescents. Research has shown that secondary schooling, whether general, technical or vocational, makes a critical difference when:

- all dimensions of adolescent development are addressed to build a breadth of skills for wellbeing, further learning and employment
- efforts are made to prevent early school leaving, specifically targeting those factors that increase the risk of drop-out
- education provided is gender-responsive, actively challenging social norms and attitudes that hinder gender equity
- schools foster social relations that expand adolescents' future opportunities in terms of employability and wellbeing.

## Adolescent wellbeing, learning and opportunities and SDG4

Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) focuses on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting life-long learning opportunities for all. It differs from its predecessor, Millennium Development Goal 2, in three important ways.

First, instead of merely increasing access to education, it calls for investment in quality education, leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes. Qualified teachers are crucial in this respect (SDG target 4.C.).

Second, SDG4 no longer focuses on children of primary school age alone, but on all learners. In addition to ensuring access to primary education, it therefore calls for free secondary education as well (SDG

target 4.1.). Particularly girls and other vulnerable groups often fail to find their way to secondary school or drop out early, a situation SDG4 seeks to redress (SDG target 4.5.). Creating a safe, non-violent and inclusive learning environment which considers adolescents' wellbeing can help to keep these groups in school and ensure they, and their peers, are effectively learning (SDG target 4.A.).

Finally, SDG4 also wants to smoothen the transition to work and further learning, emphasising the need to focus on teaching relevant skills for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship. Vocational training is an important way forward in this regard (SDG target 4.4.).

*“Ecuador’s education reform looks at technical secondary education as a public policy measure in service of the needs of young people, aiming to strengthen their life projects. It develops core life skills, such as self-awareness, empathy, conflict resolution, self-management and decision-making. It provides a means for youth to continue further studies or to make the link to work, thanks to strong alignment with the social and productive sectors and with national priorities. We appreciate the valuable strategic support, the tools and methodologies that VVOB offers in this area.”*

**Dr. Milton Luna Tamayo, Minister of Education, Ecuador**



## VVOB’s approach to enhancing adolescent wellbeing, learning and opportunities

Enhancing adolescent wellbeing, learning and opportunities is at the heart of our interventions in secondary education. VVOB supports Ministries of Education and local education authorities to strengthen teacher and school leader professional development systems in creating safe and supportive, equitable, and effective school environments. We want to ensure that adolescents, now and in the future, feel well in school, are learning, and gain relevant skills to unlock future opportunities.

**We prioritise three interrelated levers of change: safe and supportive school environments, equity, and smooth transitions to work and further learning.**

### Safe and supportive school environments

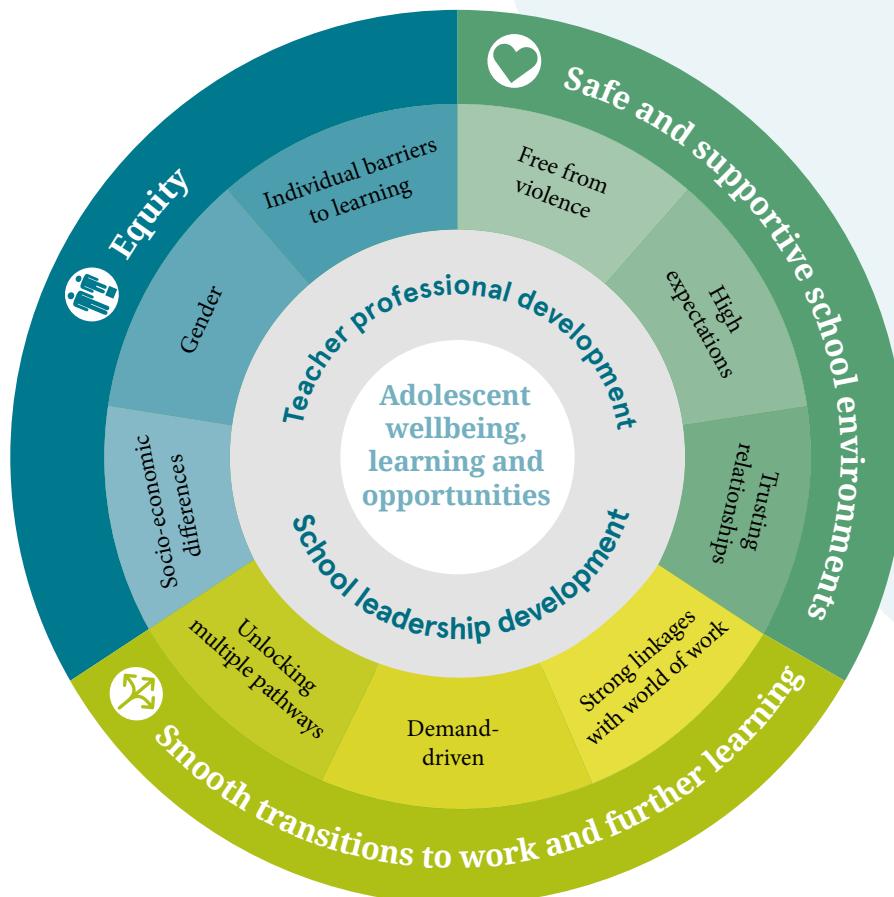
Negative experiences, whether in the form of bullying, verbal insults or sexual intimidation, can severely impact adolescents’ wellbeing and hence school performance. As adolescence is already a vulnerable phase in life, it is crucial that adolescents feel safe and supported at school. VVOB supports teachers to use positive rather than punitive discipline. We also work closely with school leaders to build a trusting and motivating school culture. Wherever possible, we collaborate with local civil society organisations to make sure parents and youth are actively engaged.

### Equity

Socio-economic, urban-rural and gender differences are already present at primary level, but become even more pronounced at secondary level. Vulnerable groups are at a higher risk of dropping out and face more challenges in school – whether in the form of bullying, social-emotional problems, difficulties in performing at grade level or accumulated completion delays. As role models, teachers and school leaders have an impact on group norms and self-expectations that can make or break opportunities. VVOB raises awareness among school leaders and teachers of the detrimental effects of biases and discrimination, and provides tools to prevent or address them.

### Smooth transitions to work and further learning

Quality secondary education, whether general, technical or vocational, decreases the period of ‘waithood’ when youngsters are not in employment, education or training (NEET). It enables adolescents to obtain stable and long-term employment and pursue further learning opportunities. VVOB ensures that professional development for teachers and school leaders focuses on valued student outcomes. We also strengthen linkages between education and work, in particular through the provision of career guidance, quality apprenticeships and entrepreneurship education.



## Ensuring Rwanda's secondary education offers quality learning for all



As laid out in Vision 2020, Rwanda wants to shift from an economy heavily dependent on agriculture and mining towards a service-based, ICT-led knowledge economy. Hence, there is an urgent need to develop a skilled labour force, to improve literacy and numeracy, and to promote gender equity. Despite progress in enrollment and retention, learning outcomes remain very low and girls still hesitate to choose STEM-related fields. In general, secondary enrollment rates remain low. By strengthening school leadership and enhancing teachers' skills and competences at primary and secondary level, particularly in the field of STEM, VVOB aims to improve the quality of education and to ensure a smooth transition to secondary education and beyond. STEM education facilitates economic development and job creation. This enables Rwanda to meet Vision 2020 and provides opportunities to the country's 2,606,000 adolescents.

### Challenging entry into secondary education

While the gross enrolment rate at primary education soared in recent years, only 38.2% of the school-age population attends secondary education. To stimulate access to secondary education, the Rwandan government lifted school fees at the secondary level. Still, only 74.5% of primary school learners pass the national examinations required to transition to secondary education. Various factors are at play, of which low learning outcomes are probably the most significant. Only 75% of pupils completing primary education is able to read. What is more, many pupils do not participate in the national exams because they have dropped out of school prematurely. Others are above the expected age when taking the exams, having repeated grades. Increasing access to secondary education and improving its quality therefore requires efforts at primary level too.

### Investing in teachers is investing in learning outcomes

The quality of teaching is the single most determinant factor of learning outcomes. Therefore, VVOB aims to influence the motivations and capacities of teachers to create a learner-friendly school environment and, ultimately, improve learning outcomes. Across 800 secondary schools and 612 primary schools in 17 districts of Rwanda, VVOB is training school-based mentors (SBMs) and STEM subject leaders to coach and mentor their colleagues to enhance their teaching competences and skills. The training is co-organised and certified by the College of Education of the University of Rwanda (UR-CE) and the Rwanda Education Board (REB), key partners of VVOB.

VVOB also supports SBMs and subject leaders to set up professional learning communities\* (PLCs). Teachers gather in a PLC to discuss common challenges, learn from each other, and identify contextualised ways forward. Since the introduction of a new competency-based curriculum, primary mathematics teachers have to teach statistics and probability theory. In a PLC, they help each other make sense of the content and develop appropriate teaching resources and lesson plans. Research shows that PLCs are a very effective way of learning and, above all, they empower teachers to improve their own practices and deal with the challenges they face.

### Supporting a learner-friendly school climate through school leadership

Second only to teaching quality, is the impact of school leadership on learning outcomes. School leadership matters firstly to the quality of teaching. Effective school leaders motivate teachers to invest in their professional development and encourage exchange and learning from each other. PLCs can also only run effectively when supported by school leaders. School leaders play an important role as well in creating and sustaining a learner-friendly school environment where learners can prosper. In cooperation with UR-CE and REB, VVOB implements a continuous professional development diploma course 'Effective School Leadership'. Over the course of 8 weekends, school leaders of 17 districts learn to implement Rwanda's 5 professional standards of effective school leadership:

- creating strategic direction for the school
- managing the school as an organisation
- working with parents and the local community
- leading teaching
- leading learning.

Among other things, they learn how to motivate teachers, how to create an inclusive and gender-responsive school environment, and how to lead school-based professional development for teachers.

*"The most important task, is evaluation and giving feedback. Before, I only did evaluation. I told the teachers their weaknesses. But now I know feedback is very important for change. I write things down, and we discuss them together. We reflect on their practice and I ask them questions like: What do you think of your practice?"*

**Marie-Ange Niyonyugura, school leader**



\* Also see: VVOB's technical brief no. 2 "Professional Learning Communities in Education"

## Boosting entrepreneurship in agricultural schools in the DR Congo



The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is demographically one of the youngest countries in the world. According to the latest statistics, 17.4 million inhabitants or 22.8% of the population are between 10 and 19 years old. The majority of these young Congolese live in rural areas and, despite rapid urbanisation, this trend will persist the coming decennia. With vast amounts of fertile, arable land available, agriculture will continue to be the employment sector that absorbs most Congolese youth. By investing in the quality of secondary technical agricultural education in Kongo-Central, a province with a strong agricultural vocation, VVOB supports young people in finding sustainable economic opportunities in the sector and in contributing to its productivity.

### Introducing entrepreneurship education

VVOB has been reinforcing secondary technical agricultural education in the DRC for a decade. In a first phase, we worked hand in hand with the Ministry of Primary, Secondary and Vocational Education at national level to develop a competency-based curriculum for six streams, ranging from production and husbandry to post-harvest transformation. A major innovation was the introduction of a course in agricultural entrepreneurship for students of the last two years. Agribusiness development is one of the priorities of the DRC's *Plan National d'Investissement Agricole 2014-2020*, and technical agricultural education can make an important contribution in terms of skills development. The manuals for the entrepreneurship course were co-created with staff from the Ministry's Directorate for School Programmes and Teaching Materials and experts from I&Fentrepreneuriat, one of the longest established agribusiness incubators in the country.

By the end of 2016, the manuals were disseminated to more than 160 secondary technical agricultural schools in Kongo-Central. Since then, VVOB has started working mostly at the level of the three educational provinces in this region – Bas-Fleuve, Cataractes and Lukaya. Together with the provincial inspection services, we focus on continuous professional development (CPD) of teachers and school leaders to make sure the new curriculum is effectively put into practice at school and classroom level. Thirty schools have been selected to participate in a CPD trajectory on entrepreneurship education. Besides CPD, VVOB's support includes investment in a selected number of school-owned production units, which generate income for the schools and constitute an important space for students to engage in entrepreneurial practice.

### Energising curricula with active learning

To spark students' entrepreneurial mindset and stimulate entrepreneurship, it is crucial for secondary teachers to use an active pedagogy in the classroom and on the practice fields, and to challenge students to deploy a broad range of skills. Teachers should incorporate activities that involve problem-solving, creativity, risk taking, and (financial) planning to maximise students' cognitive potential. Equally important is giving students ample opportunity to practice social skills, such as collaboration and communication. For teachers in Kongo-Central, this is quite a challenge because their own role models relied on lectures and rote memorisation.

Through a CPD trajectory that combines training and coaching VVOB supports teachers to innovate their teaching practice.





Teachers experiment with various brainstorming techniques, encouraging students to generate business ideas; they guide students through group work to analyse the potential of various ideas, taking into account the specifics of the context; and hone students' problem-solving skills by involving them in the management of their school's production units.

Besides the teachers of the entrepreneurship course, VVOB also involves those teaching the practicums and core technical courses in the CPD trajectories. As a group, they benefit from a range of support measures – teaching materials, equipment, training and coaching – that enable them to run viable production units on their school's premises and to deploy these as a learning resource for students.

To make sure the teachers have time and space to exchange experiences and collaborate, VVOB works with school leaders to organise so-called *unités d'action pédagogique* (UAP) – a type of school-level professional learning community for teachers. Such teacher collaboration is especially important at the level of secondary education, where students interact with multiple teachers, each teaching a separate subject, during the school day.

### Cultivating linkages

The introduction and/or optimisation of agricultural production and marketing brings the selected schools closer to the realities of the world of work. Thanks to VVOB's support, teachers now involve students in market analysis, accounting, marketing, costing, management and organisation of production, etc. so that they gain the practical experience they will need as 'agripreneurs', to make farming a business. In addition, the pilot schools have expanded and

strengthened their linkages with farmer organisations, commercial farms and small agri-enterprises in their vicinity.

For sure, the agricultural entrepreneurship ecosystem in Kongo-Central is still far from self-sustaining. Success will consist of a handful of people acting as catalysts. Identifying and supporting those change agents is crucial to VVOB's approach. Among the success stories are the collaboration between the Institut Technique Industriel (ITI) Mvuzi and Gratitude Ntonda Mandiangu, the owner of a profitable organic juice business; the Lycée Kiese in Boma and Eugene Thubulu Malonda, a master pastry maker; and the Institut Technique Agricole et Vétérinaire (ITAV) Bolingo and Florian Mbandu Ndoluvualu, an expert agronomer who supported the school in developing a business plan for its production unit of scallions.

Thanks to these linkages, students also connect with positive role models and gain access to know-how and contacts that can help them even beyond their studies.

*“Most girls opt for nursing, pedagogy or administration. Few girls choose an agricultural or horticultural school. My parents thought it was great that I wanted to study veterinary. They hope that I can start my own business and generate a good income for myself and my family.”*

**Lavvu Makiese, student**

## Skilling future 'agripreneurs' in Uganda



Uganda has some fundamental characteristics in common with its western neighbour, the DRC. Most notably, Uganda is home to a youthful population of 9.9 million adolescents striving for economic opportunities and has an agricultural sector that, for the foreseeable future, will remain the backbone of the economy. Uganda Vision 2040 identifies an important opportunity in the rising domestic and global demand for agricultural products to increase production and productivity and to add value to a variety of agricultural outputs. Agriculture is also likely to remain the key to absorb most of the youth-oriented jobs. Many young Ugandans see a future for themselves in the sector, not simply as farmers producing for household consumption, but as 'agripreneurs'. To fulfil these aspirations, they need relevant skills.

"Skilling Uganda", the government's strategic plan for technical and vocational education and training (TVET), puts the expansion and improvement of agricultural TVET high on the agenda. Equally indicative, a recent curriculum reform retained agriculture as a compulsory course at O-level, because most lower secondary students are set to enter the labour market upon graduation. But the education

system is not yet properly equipped to address the needs of the youth cohort. As of 2019, VVOB contributes to improving the quality of formal agricultural education and training (AET) in Uganda. Our first programme in the country is dedicated to strengthening the competences of teachers and instructors.

### **Bolstering AET's contribution to the entrepreneurship ecosystem**

Agripreneurs are most likely to thrive when a combination of support measures is in place, such as financing aimed at starting or growing a business, networks that allow information to flow between them and other actors (e.g. government, business support service providers, funders), etc. Quality education and training has a critical place in the entrepreneurship ecosystem, providing individuals with the mindsets and skills needed to participate and succeed in entrepreneurial activities. AET could make a key contribution to the training pillar of the ecosystem, in terms of skills development of Uganda's future agripreneurs. AET can also help to unlock the resources and support available to these youth. Improving the quality of AET teaching and instruction is an important step towards that goal.



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### Engaging future teachers and instructors in practical agriculture

In consultation with the Ministry of Education and Sports, our support is directed to two national teachers' colleges (NTCs) – NTC Mubende and NTC Unyama – and to the National Instructors College Abilonino (NICA). NTC Mubende and NTC Unyama both prepare O-level agriculture teachers. NICA, for its part, is the only institute in Uganda that trains teachers – ‘instructors’ – for TVET. Agriculture is the college's largest department. The three institutes are unanimous about how to deliver better qualified graduates: by training student teachers and student instructors in a practical way, so that they, in turn, will engage their students in practical agriculture as well.

Motivated to improve their training practices, the teacher and instructor trainers of the agriculture departments at the NTCs and NICA are setting out on a series of micro-innovations: every few weeks, during two academic years, they plan to experiment with at least one method for practical agriculture that they have not tried before. Throughout the process, collegial preparation and feedback as well as mentoring and coaching from VVOB stimulate motivation and continuous learning. These innovations are then documented and made available as teaching and learning materials.

### Linking schooling with entrepreneurial activities

By the end of their pre-service training, NTC and NICA graduates should also master the main principles and skills for setting up and maintaining an agri-enterprise.

To achieve this objective, the NTCs want to see their school farms boost entrepreneurship teaching and learning. Over the past years, both Mubende and Unyama have made good progress in generating more income through their school farms, but there are opportunities for further improvement in management and student-teacher involvement in management processes. The NTCs also see their school farms as breeding grounds for student-teacher enterprises.

The diploma course at NICA also has some very interesting features when it comes to training instructors that have the competences to expand adolescents' future opportunities in agri-entrepreneurship. Student instructors spend two periods of six weeks in ‘industrial training’, enjoying the benefits of learning on the job from established actors in the agricultural entrepreneurship ecosystem. To ensure that NICA students use this opportunity to the best advantage, expanding and strengthening NICA's linkages with agricultural research centres, farmers' associations, agribusiness incubators, etc. is high on the agenda. Equally important is to make sure that NICA lecturers can provide support supervision during these ‘industrial training’ periods. This way, future instructors gain first-hand experience of effective workplace learning. They also build social relations that can later serve their own adolescent students.



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## Building gender-responsive school climates in Cambodia



Cambodia has one of the youngest populations in South-East Asia. Of a total population of 15,518,000 Cambodians, 3,052,000 are in adolescence. The majority of those adolescents (1,567,000) are girls. While nearly every girl these days attends primary school for at least a couple of years, a significantly lower number of girls enter secondary education – despite higher levels of achievement in primary. For many adolescent girls, schools become unsafe. Parents and girls fear harassment at school or on the way to school. Others cannot afford menstrual products or the school they attend lacks decent female restroom facilities. Even more pervasively, cultural gender norms continue to stall girls’ secondary education. Traditional gender norms prioritise sons over daughters in education. VVOB and its partners in Cambodia’s Battambang province aim to transform these gender norms and create gender-responsive school climates that are free of violence and harassment, offering equal opportunities to both boys and girls.

### Changing gender norms

Cambodian gender norms are outlined in the so-called *Chbab Srey* (Code of Conduct for Women) and *Chbab Proh* (Code of Conduct for Men), two pieces of Khmer poetry dating back to the 16th century. The poems prescribe what behaviours are expected of girls and boys, or men and women. Notably, the *Chbab Srey* advises girls to obey

their husbands and normalises violence against girls and women. The poems used to be studied and memorised in secondary school. Since 2007, Cambodian learners only study a subset of these verses in an effort to introduce gender equity in the curriculum – but the poems remain influential. In 1997, textbooks were revised for gender-fairness: textbooks now count as many male as female depictions, although girls and women continue to be represented in traditional gender roles such as housekeepers, and not as scientists, doctors or mathematicians.

In cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport and three civil society partners – Kampuchean Action for Primary Education (KAPE), Puthi Komar Organization (PKO) and Gender and Development for Cambodia (GADC) – VVOB aims to challenge social norms and beliefs that hinder gender equity. Hereto, we develop capacity among school leaders, teachers and school support committee members of 40 primary and lower-secondary schools in Battambang province. The goal is to create gender-responsive school environments that enable girls to stay in school, progress to (further) secondary education and choose a field of study of their liking. The trainings are supported by a self-assessment tool and an action guide including ideas, information, tools and strategies to teach or lead a school in an equitable and gender-responsive manner.





### Gender screening

The self-assessment tool enables school leaders to evaluate their school through a gender-responsive lens. It looks at the school structure and policies, school leadership, teaching and learning practices, and at school-community relations, all from a gender perspective. If the assessment shows school regulations and policies lack measures to guarantee gender equity, the action guide offers suggestions of what a gender policy can entail. If the assessment shows that teachers have many gender stereotypes in their teaching, then the action guide explains the negative impact of gender stereotypes in teaching, and offers a list of actions that teachers can take to eliminate these stereotypes as well as guidelines on how to use gender-responsive language.

### Ending school-related gender-based violence

Violence, especially based on gender, has no place in a gender-responsive school environment. It increases the risk of drop-out, particularly among girls, and affects learners' wellbeing. Research shows that many learners in Cambodia have already been victim of school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) - particularly verbal violence, but also physical and/or sexual. Therefore, VVOB's activities aim to put an end to SRGBV. VVOB focusses, for example, on positive discipline. Because of large class sizes, many teachers face challenges to manage their class. When they have the feeling that they lose control, teachers tend to fall back on negative and abusive disciplinary measures. In our trainings, we provide teachers with proven alternatives to change such behaviours. School leaders play an

important role in this respect as well. They should support teachers through this change, by creating a positive and inspiring atmosphere, by mitigating problems that were to arise and by prioritising this change and keeping it dynamic. To empower school leaders to take on this new role, VVOB rolls out professional development activities honing their coaching skills.

### Community involvement

Gender norms and gender-based violence are not confined to the school environment. On the contrary, they originate in society. Therefore, VVOB looks beyond the school walls. At so-called gender cafés and men dialogues, we bring together school leaders, school support community members and parents to discuss gender norms and formulate actions to change attitudes and behaviours. VVOB also sets up awareness raising activities in the community. You can also tune into our monthly radio broadcasts on gender.

### Getting (and keeping) girls in secondary education

Traditional gender norms and SRGBV increase the likelihood of girls dropping out of school before or in the early years of secondary education. Gender norms also continue to stand in the way of girls choosing more STEM-related fields of study. By changing gender norms and putting an end to SRGBV through capacity development of school leaders, teachers and school support committee members, VVOB aims to clear the way for girls to progress to and complete secondary education in the study field of their own choice.

## Expanding youth possibility in Ecuador



Ecuador's population is young and rapidly growing. Compared to other VVOB partner countries, the three million Ecuadorian adolescents achieve, on average, higher levels of literacy and reading proficiency, and are more likely to complete secondary education. But when it comes to adolescent wellbeing, high rates of adolescent pregnancy are a serious concern. They are a major cause of early school leaving and delayed secondary school completion. Other causes are related to violence, discrimination and child labour. For adolescents of legal working age, the transition to the world of work is all but smooth. The age group of 15-29 is marked by high levels of underemployment and unemployment as well as precarious working conditions. Against this backdrop, VVOB has opted to invest in the quality of upper secondary technical education (*Bachillerato Técnico*, BT), paying special attention to creating safe and supportive schools, gender equity and linking schooling and employment.

### Paving the way to decent work

BT students constitute a relatively vulnerable group within the Ecuadorian education system. More concentrated in public schools and in rural areas, technical education enrolls relatively many indigenous students, and many students from families with higher levels of household poverty, where the mother enjoyed a lower than average level of education. As many of them need to start generating income for their families, BT students value their education because

it represents a pathway to employment. VVOB specifically invests in BT fields that are known to generate employment for youth, such as agriculture and construction, and that prepare young people for promising sectors of the economy, like tourism.

Still, an extra effort is needed to ensure that the BTs offered are properly aligned with the demands of the world of work. To this end, VVOB and the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) co-developed a model for collaboration between clusters of BT schools that offer the same trade and employers from the sector that absorbs the graduates. The model consists of three components: continuous professional development (CPD) for technical teachers, who need both technical and pedagogical upgrading; teaching materials and/or equipment; and workplace learning for students. Each component entails collaboration between actors from technical education and from the labour market. In the province Manabí and Cantón Quito, for instance, we are currently piloting such collaboration, linking the two existing tourism-BTs to sustainable hotel business and community tourism. In Manabí, an alliance was forged between the electricity sector and schools offering electrical installations, equipment and machines. In total 20 models have been piloted in 6 fields, ensuring youth develop the required skill sets and helping businesses maintain a healthy talent pipeline.



### Keeping adolescent parents in school

Ecuador has among the highest rates of adolescent pregnancy in Latin America. In 2015, 23% of newborns had at least one adolescent parent. Adolescent parenting is a major cause of drop-out in upper secondary, and it not only has a negative effect on the future opportunities of the young parents, but also on their child's. Whereas suspension used to be the standard response to teenage parents, the Department for Student Counseling of the Ministry of Education is now convinced that schools must enable adolescent parents to finish their education. VVOB strengthens this Department's corps of student counselors (DECE) stationed at district- and at school-level. DECE not only offer services to students, they are also responsible for the CPD of teachers and school leaders on themes and practices that help them build a safe and supportive school environment.

Together with the Department, VVOB developed a protocol that schools can apply to help pregnant and parenting teens and keep them from dropping out. The *Protocolo de actuación frente a situaciones de embarazo, maternidad y paternidad de estudiantes en el sistema educativo* was validated by the Ministry of Health and by UNFPA. To disseminate the document, MINEDUC is organising workshops for educators. The protocol can also find its way to schools through professional learning communities for school leaders, where student wellbeing is a much-discussed topic.

### Restorative practices to prevent early school leaving

A recent study showed that one in five 11-to-18-year-old students suffer school-related violence such as bullying. There has also been a spike in the number of complaints to MINEDUC about sexual violence occurring in school settings. Understandably, the issue has become a priority of the government. VVOB has collaborated with MINEDUC to promote the implementation of restorative practices in schools that offer upper secondary technical education as a way to prevent conflict, handle rule infractions, and re-engage students after an infraction has occurred. Restorative practices are an effective means for reducing suspension rates, increasing student attendance and improving the school climate as well as teacher-student relationships. In that way, they also reduce the risk of early school leaving.

Over the past 2.5 years, VVOB has supported MINEDUC in establishing the policy framework for the use of restorative practices in school settings. We also developed a modular training and coaching package for district-level DECE and trained Ecuador's 140 district-level DECE in restorative practices. These district-level DECE have already trained the DECE that are appointed to schools, on a national scale. To support the further expansion of restorative practices, MINEDUC has made all materials available on its website and VVOB will publish a pocket guide for educators.



## Whole-school approach to safe learning in Suriname



In Suriname, 98,000 adolescents – 17.7% of the population – face barriers to educational and professional success that might not be expected of an upper-middle income country. Only about half of children make it to the final grade of primary school within the official six years, meaning that by early adolescence many are already at a serious disadvantage in terms of education. Indicatively, the adolescent birth rate also remains high. Since 2014, VVOB has supported a particularly vulnerable group of adolescents: those in lower secondary vocational education (*lager beroepsonderwijs*, LBO). Our goal? To make sure they complete their schooling by offering them quality training in a safe and supportive learning environment.

### Whole school approach for safe and supportive schools

When listening to LBO teachers and school leaders, it is striking how quickly they frame their adolescent students as ‘problem youth’. Educators struggle with students’ behaviour on a daily basis. Parents are often blamed for the situation – domestic violence, for instance, is rampant in Suriname – but this leaves teachers and school leaders less empowered to transform the classroom and school climate. Drop-out rates in LBO schools are high (28.4%), especially for boys. Hustling in the informal economy to gain quick cash can become an attractive alternative to schooling, especially when teachers’ and school leaders’ expectations are low.

In partnership with the Sub-Directorate Vocational Education (ODB) of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, the Center for In-Service Training (CENASU) and the national Vocational Teacher Training Institute (LOBO), VVOB is developing a whole school approach for safe and supportive schools. Together, we opted for an approach that cuts across different levels of school management, policy and practice. Close to 1,000 in-service teachers from all 54 LBO schools in Suriname are getting trained to prevent and address ‘problem behaviour’. VVOB is accompanying LOBO in a curriculum reform, making sure preventive approaches are also included in the institute’s pre-service pedagogical courses. Under the direction of ODB, LBO school leaders exchange strategies and school policies through professional learning communities. We also prepare school leaders and school-based mentors to take newly qualified LBO teachers under their wings, as this group tends to have more difficulty with classroom management and exercising positive discipline.

### Through the gender lens

In 10 LBO schools, located in particularly vulnerable districts, VVOB collaborates with other specialised non-profits to actively prevent and address gender-based violence. Many issues negatively affecting adolescent wellbeing, learning and opportunities are strongly related to persisting traditional gender roles and norms.

‘Gender’ is therefore one of the key topics addressed early on with all stakeholders. Very often the term is understood as synonymous with the ‘the fight for women’s rights’. To discuss the social construction

of gender and gender norms, equality, stereotypes and bias, VVOB developed a series of age- and target-group appropriate reflective exercises. During ‘the baby shower’ exercise, for instance, participants must decide on a gift to bring, not knowing whether the newborn is a boy or a girl. This quickly confronts them with the stereotypes underlying an ‘appropriate’ choice.

Similarly, it is important to build a shared understanding of ‘gender-based violence’. Special attention goes to sexual violence because of the high incidence of unhealthy, unsafe and transactional sex and violent relationships. To train and coach teachers and school leaders in responding to unacceptable sexual behaviour with a pedagogical rather than a punitive approach, we contextualised the Flag System, an evidence-based tool developed by Sensoa, the Flemish member of the International Planned Parenthood Federation. The Flag System helps LBO teachers and school leaders to discuss student behaviour more openly, arrive at a shared assessment and weigh the most appropriate educational response.

*“I’ve gotten a better grasp of the issues thanks to the Flag System, and my colleagues and I now approach challenging behaviour in a similar way. There was a huge gap between my culture and the school where I teach. I was brought up very differently, but thanks to this training, our learners now have a better chance with education.”*

**Mahinder Rajaram, teacher**



## About VVOB

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

### VVOB focus

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

- early education to improve the quality of formal pre-primary education and assist the transition to primary school
- primary education to improve literacy, numeracy and life skills
- secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes
- secondary technical and vocational education and training to improve quality, align knowledge and skills imparted with the labour market, and integrate entrepreneurship.

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

## VVOB expertise

VVOB teams of experts specialise in meeting the most important education needs identified by international research and in the education strategies and priorities of VVOB partner countries. We do this through capacity development and technical assistance.

### Developing the capacity of local education authorities

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

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

### Providing technical assistance

For VVOB, providing technical assistance means:

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

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

## How VVOB works

### Addresses local needs and contexts

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

### Collaborates with a network of educational partners

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

#### *Operational partners*

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

#### *Financial partners*

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

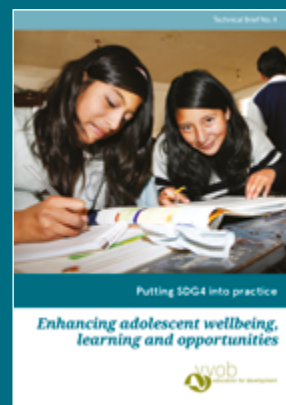
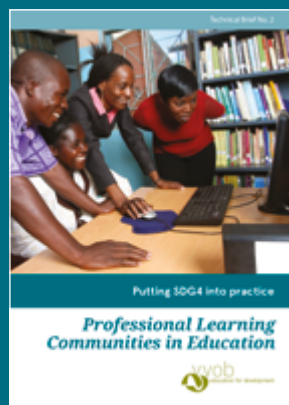
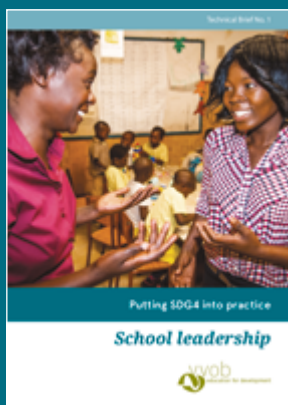
### Stimulates cooperation

VVOB stimulates cooperation between educational institutions across continents.

## Where VVOB works

VVOB works in 10 countries – Belgium, Cambodia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ecuador, Rwanda, South Africa, Suriname, Uganda, Vietnam, and Zambia – and on assignments in other countries.

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