Greetings from Zizi!
The year is past the halfway mark. The months seem to fly by, but time does fly when we are having fun. We had an eventful second quarter and are delighted to share our achievements and progress so far.

In this edition of the Zizi Impact, we explore the strategies ZAF and its partners are employing to accelerate the incorporation of values and life skills in education curricula in East Africa. We also share how we continue to leverage data and evidence generated from the Whole Youth Development (WYD) program to unlock youth development and economic opportunities through Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) skills. We inform you how our evidence and data are enriching discourses on education locally and beyond and how ZAF is supporting access to education and the acquisition of foundational skills.

Moreover, we tell you why we are sharpening our focus on gender, knowledge management, organizational learning, and staff well-being. We also tell you how ZAF is responding to the most vibrant generation in town, in light of the recent Gen Z movement.

Finally, in our ongoing series of getting to know the People at ZAF better, we profile Dr. Purity Ngina, the outgoing ALiVE Manager in the story ‘From the Lecture Halls to Life Skills Assessment: The Story of the Courage to Be and to Do.’

Exciting things await. Happy reading!

Editorial Team

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Accelerating the incorporation of Values and Life Skills in the curricula in East Africa.

Through the Action for Lifeskills and Values in East Africa (ALiVE) program, ZAF and her partners continue to employ multiple strategies to accelerate the incorporation of key competencies in the curriculums and educational assessments across Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. Working with curriculum institutes to enfranchise life skills and values in the curriculum of 3 countries in East Africa, ZAF has established formal partnerships with the curriculum institutes in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania (Mainland and Zanzibar) through policy advocacy and capacity-building initiatives aimed at sharpening curricula and building capacities for governments to embed values and life skills in the education system.

In Kenya, ZAF collaborated with the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) to review and finalize Values-based Education (VbE) materials. ZAF developed the pilot plan and ideated an innovation for developing life skills that aligned with the Whole Schools Approach. In Uganda, similar engagements are ongoing with the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) and the Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB) to strengthen expertise, clarify curriculum elements, develop skills progressions, and build assessment capacity for life skills and values. In Tanzania, ZAF is working in partnership with Zanzibar Institute of Education (ZUE) to co-create new teacher-training approaches for primary schools. These collaborations aim to develop stand-alone modules that focus on nurturing and assessing life skills.

The Action for Lifeskills and Values in East Africa (ALiVE) Academy launched.

I n order to increase the number of experts who are competent to embed competencies in the curriculum and assess them, ZAF and her partners under the ALiVE program have launched the ALiVE Academy. As part of laying the foundation, the ALiVE Academy recently conducted a nine-week workshop led by Professor Esther Care, where 13 Master Trainers were trained on 21st-century skills. These trainers, mainly from local experts in Phase One, are now capable of training others, reviewing and revising curricula, and providing technical advice to organizations like PAL Network. The trained Master Trainers have been reviewing and revising curricula in Uganda, Tanzania, Zanzibar, and Kenya, focusing on integrating life skills and values into other learning areas.

Open-Sourcing values and lifeskills assessment tools for greater adoption and use.

ALiVE has partnered with Strathmore University in Kenya to develop an open-source platform for assessment tools. The platform will be available globally and is scheduled to launch in September 2024. All the documentation for the open-source tools has been completed, including terms and conditions, instructional videos, and a comprehensive user manual. ALiVE has created a website to host the open-source platform, which will make the assessment tools more visible, more accessible, and better promoted.
Unlocking youth development and economic opportunities through TVET skills across Kenya.

In the second quarter, ZAF rekindled her collaboration with the TVET Curriculum Development, Assessment andAccreditation Council (CDACC) through workshops with industry experts and sector skills committees for occupational analysis and packaging of Horticulture Level 3 & 4 curricula. Also, ZAF engaged the Kenya School of TVET (KS-TVET) to finalize revisions of the essential skills curriculum, picking up from last year in readiness for a pilot with trainees.

ALiVE conducted classroom observations and discussions with teacher educators, teachers in teacher training colleges, and Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE) institutions to identify gaps in integrating and assessing life skills and values. An area of focus is reviewing courses and supporting ECDE teachers to ensure these modules are effectively embedded in their training programs.

ALiVE is currently creating and testing three key modules: Introduction to Life Skills and Values, Integration and Pedagogies to Nurture Life Skills and Values, and Assessment of Life Skills and Values in teacher training colleges and universities across East Africa. It also conducted a study to gather evidence about nurturing interventions in Sub-Saharan Africa. It analyzed 168 works and plans to share the findings in July.

ALiVE is also collaborating with the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) to incorporate its tools into datasets addressing Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and Social Skills (SS) measurement challenges, making these tools more useful in wider contexts.

ALiVE assessment of Life skills and values in Tanzania.

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The initiative involves reviewing diploma courses to integrate ALiVE modules and exploring additional support for ECDE teachers to ensure these modules are effectively embedded in their training programs.

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Assessment of Life Skills and Values among Adolescents in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania.

As part of the efforts to ensure that learners acquire 21st-century skills and values that would enable them to learn and thrive at school and later in life, the ALiVE project continues to generate evidence on the levels of proficiency in life skills among children in East Africa. The assessment of life skills and values is among the many efforts ALiVE undertakes to play its role in easing the implementation of competency-based curricula across East Africa.

In April 2024, the Action for Life Skills and Values in East Africa (ALiVE) conducted assessments for life skills and values in Taita Taveta, Nyieri, and Kisu in Kenya. The assessment targeted adolescents aged between 13 and 17 across 1,125 households in the three counties. In May 2024, Uwezo Uganda partnered with the Luigi Giussani Foundation (LGF) to pilot tools for assessment in Jinja, Kaase, and Oyam districts in Uganda reaching a total of 1,125 adolescents aged 13-17. The pilot is expected to not only enable further generation of data on these competencies but also be used to yield a repository of tools for the ALiVE open-source platform as well as those that can be used by partners to evaluate programs that focus on life skills and values integration and nurturing. In June, a total of 1,878 adolescents were assessed in Tanzania and Zanzibar covering 1,430 households across six districts (3 in Zanzibar and 3 in mainland Tanzania). The targeted adolescents were assessed on competencies of problem solving, self-awareness, collaboration, and respect. The exercise was coordinated by the Milele Zanzibar Foundation (MZF) in Zanzibar and the Organization for Community Development (OCCODE) in Tanzania mainland. Currently, the teams are analyzing data for a report that will be released later this year. ALiVE sought to assess three life skills (Collaboration, Problem solving, and Self-awareness) and one value (Respect).

Trip to Samburu National Park.

ALiVE assessment of Life skills and values in Taita Taveta-Kenya.

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Advancing youth employment in the Hospitality and Tourism sector

The Future of Work (FoW) project in partnership with the Global Development Incubator (GDI) convened a stakeholder engagement forum with key actors in the youth employment space on 26th June 2024 at the Sheraton Regency Hotel, Mombasa. These key actors comprised employers in the Hospitality and Tourism (H&T) sector, trainers, civil society organizations, and policymakers at the national and county levels.

Among other objectives, the event brought together the stakeholders to learn and understand the youth employment space and the potential contribution of the H&T sector to youth employment. It also aimed to connect the ecosystem players with a view of identifying opportunities (if any) for supporting the ecosystem to amplify the urgency for evidence-led advocacy strategies and approaches in addressing youth unemployment.

The forum was attended by participants from GDI, employers, youth representatives, national and county governments, and training institutions (Technical University of Mombasa, and Mombasa National Polytechnic). There are ongoing engagements with the donor and partners and new collaborations, such as with the University of Nairobi’s African Center of Excellence for Inequality Research as an advisory partner.

In the third quarter, the Future of Work project will hold a co-creation workshop to validate the research tools, review research questions, and prepare for a baseline survey. Other activities will include forming the research team, training, and recruiting research assistants, collecting data, disseminating results, and finally setting up the labor market observatory.

Using Data and Evidence to Enrich Discourses on Education Locally and Beyond

Evidence from ZAF research and the implementation of education innovations continue to enrich conversations around supporting the acquisition of foundational skills in Kenya and beyond.

ZAF at the Nation Leadership Forum 2024

ZAF’s Executive Director, Dr. John Mugo, was part of the high-level panel in this year’s edition of The Nation Leadership Forum held at the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD). The forum, dubbed “NMG Leadership Forum”, seeks to encourage dialogue on key issues affecting the country such as economy, agriculture, health, governance, and financial markets. This year’s theme was “Global Perspectives in Kenya’s Education Reforms.” Please watch the debate here.

ZAF was featured at the Africa Regional Conference on Education and Skills Development 2024

ZAF’s Executive Director gave the keynote address on the statistics of youth and employment at the 2024 conference held in June. The Africa Regional Conference & Exhibition on Education and Skills Development (ARC-EDS) is an initiative of the ESDEV Foundation Africa and was organized this year in partnership with Ghana’s premier Technical University, Accra Technical University. The conference sought to provide solutions to the pressing challenges of unemployment and skills development for employability among Africa’s youth population.

Additionally, it sought to advocate for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) as a viable pathway to empower young people with entrepreneurial knowledge and skills, contributing to reduced unemployment and dependency in Ghana and Africa.

ZAF’s Whole Youth Development (WYD) work highlighted in the British Council’s podcast

In a podcast episode, “Youth Skills in a Rapidly Changing World”, hosted by Christine Wilson of the British Council, ZAF’s Executive Director, Dr. John Mugo, and Ms. Beria Wawira spoke about the need to equip young people with essential skills to face modern challenges and capitalize on emerging opportunities.

The conversation was a spotlight on ZAF’s work which is actively seeking to bridge this gap through the Whole Youth Development program, which focuses on holistic youth development, that involves mentorship, quality education, and funding for disadvantaged youth. The program also emphasizes close monitoring of academic and personal growth and encourages participation in sports for holistic development. Through targeted actions and impactful programs, organizations like Ziizi Afrique are making significant strides in preparing the next generation for the future.

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Dr. John Mugo

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Dr. John Mugo
Upscaling efforts for a 100% transition to secondary school

Supporting Access to Education and Acquisition of Foundational Skills

In supporting the acquisition of foundational skills, ZAF continues to strengthen engagement around the 100% transition project. In addition, ZAF embarked on the preparatory work for the new Early Childhood Development (ECD) project through stakeholder forums and meetings. Upscaling efforts for a 100% transition to secondary school

Building a Strong and Transformative Organization for Greater Impact and Systems Change in Kenya and the Region

Informed by the mid-term review of its Strategic Plan 2021–2025, ZAF began a journey of transformation that reviewed her approaches in areas such as gender, organizational learning, advocacy, and leadership capacities.

- Strengthening our focus on gender: Towards a gender transformative organization
  - ZAF began the journey of transformation towards becoming a strong organization, from being a knowledge repository to take the lead. This focus will enable us to anchor gender equality as a guiding principle in all our organizational procedures and activities. To achieve this, we have deliberately begun an inward-to-outward-bound assessment through a gender audit to assess the key areas of improvement and opportunities that we can leverage to promote the understanding of gender equality in the organization.
  - To set the ball rolling, a Gender Audit of the organization was carried out. The report indicated that generally, ZAF is a gender-responsive organization and is making great strides in actualizing the equality agenda. However, the audit revealed that the organization faces many challenges in implementing and in the people/community ZAF works with. Additionally, we seek to position and identify our role in strengthening gender in the ecosystem. ZAF is part of and coordinates the Gender and Education Dialogues (GEDS), a collaborative of nine organizations working in the Gender space in Kenya whose focus is to create a platform for collective impact on gender and education that will eventually lead to a girls’ education movement.

- Recalibrating our Knowledge Management architecture: A new approach to how we work
  - ZAF recognizes the importance of integrating knowledge management into our work. We are committed to learning and redefining how we manage and leverage our knowledge to ensure that the foundation’s programs and activities are evidence-based, relevant, and impactful. It also helps to foster a culture of learning and continuous improvement within the organization. Our approach is three-fold: developing and maintaining a knowledge management framework; improving and maintaining knowledge management systems; and enhancing business intelligence within the organization.

In the second quarter, we developed and launched the new Zizi Afrique website. The website is a modern reflection of our work and we are modeling it into a knowledge repository for external dissemination of our work. This will include comprehensive dashboards exposing on our work and our research findings, a central database for all data sets produced within the organization, and knowledge management infrastructure—particularly Microsoft 365, our solution of choice. This has resulted in uploading key organization reports and documents within the intranet to ensure that information stays within the culture but more so to promote collaboration within teams. People are now able to seamlessly work together, track changes, and accomplish more much faster.

As an organization, we are looking forward to continuing our learning journey on effective knowledge management. Our goal remains to empower our work and how we tell our story with the most up-to-date evidence and storytelling. We invite you to interact with our platforms to see what we do and how we could be part of the change.

- Toward a learning organization
  - ZAF has been implementing a process of institutionalizing a learning culture within Zizi Afrique and its partners. This approach focuses on developing a learning system through Organizational Learning Capacity Assessment (OLCA), identifying learning champions, creating learning tools, and providing training. Lessons learned so far highlight the importance of structured learning systems, customized tools for documentation of learning, and comprehensive training. By the end of the year, each directorate has demonstrated evidence, embed evidence use, engage with the government, transition to sub-granting, and secure unrestricted funding. They have also played a crucial role in ensuring that learning is purposeful and integrated into regular meetings, impacting the organization and its partners. These efforts aim to create a sustainable learning culture that can be a model for other organizations, driving change and impact within the Regional Education Learning Initiative (RELI) and beyond.

- Prioritizing staff well-being: A look at Zizi Afrique Foundation’s wellness initiatives
  - At Zizi Afrique Foundation, we prioritize the well-being and cohesion of our staff through physical and mental activities. Every Tuesday and Thursday, our team participates in fitness sessions designed to promote physical health and overall well-being. In addition, ZAF staff members also take chess lessons to take a stimulating break from routine, sharpen their cognitive skills, and promote strategic thinking. The lessons serve as an opportunity for our staff to unwind while engaging in friendly competition, further enhancing camaraderie within the organization.

In what started as a protest against the Government’s proposed Finance Bill in 2024, the growing power of technology, and the ever-growing power of technology. We invite you to interact with our platforms to see what we do and how you could be part of the change. People are now able to seamlessly work together, track changes, and accomplish more much faster.

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A key highlight is our monthly hiking program, which commenced in March 2024 at Kakura Forest. A venture to William Hill Hike (Mai Mahiu) and Kington Nathan (Kijabe) respectively. These hikes reinforce our commitment to staff wellness and work-life balance while fostering a sense of unity and shared accomplishments within the organization.

The Kenyan public discourse has recently been dominated by the word “Gen Z.” Also referred to as the Zoomers, it is the demographic cohort succeeding Millennials and preceding Generation Alpha and refers to people born between 1997 and 2012.

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The Inaugural East African Community:

The objective of the roundtable was to identify ways IWG members can promote the uptake of research and improve the quality of African educational systems. The Executive Director, John Mugo, gave a keynote address titled, "International Working Group Learning Roundtable: SDP Daara Retreat (28th – 30th May 2024)." The second retreat was convened in Naivasha, Kenya, and drew members from different organizations such as the Zia Foundation Afrique (ZAF), eBase Associates in Research and Development for Education (ARED), LARTESS-PADN, Lead Africa, Shiftmax, the Action Foundation (TAF), Rays of Hope, Teaching at the Right Level (TARL) Africa, Finsida, and The Education Partnerships (TEP). Also in attendance were representatives from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Railway Training Institute (RTI), Engineers, LCSAOD, Echidna Giving, and Better Education Partnerships for超高ordan, Tanzania, and Uganda.

The SDP Daara Retreat took place at the Tendai Wema initiative. The previous tournaments have attracted high-level participants, and the 4th edition of the annual Sara Cup, taking place in Arusha, Tanzania, will bring together members of the network from Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania to share knowledge, review progress, and plan for the next year.

The RELI Convening is scheduled for August 15th, 2024, in Arusha, Tanzania. It will bring together members of the network from Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania to share knowledge, review progress, and plan for the next year.

Upcoming Events

EAC-REL Convening
August 12th – 14th 2024
The inaugural East African Community Regional Education Conference Commemorating the AU Year of Education “Educate an African Fit for the 21st Century.”

RELI Convening
August 15th, 2024
The RELI Africa Regional Convening The 2024 RELI Africa Regional Convening will take place in Arusha. It will bring together members of the network from Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania to share knowledge, review progress, and plan for the next year.

4th Edition of Sara Cup
September 29th, 2024
The 4th edition of the annual Sara Cup, established in 2021, is scheduled to take place at Nairobi Primary School. This event celebrates Dr. Sara’s contributions to education, facilitates networking among key stakeholders, and serves as a fundraiser for the Tenda Wema initiative. The previous tournaments have attracted high-level participation from key stakeholders. We welcome everyone to participate and contribute to advancing learning outcomes for children furthest behind.

SDP Daara Retreat
August 12th – 14th 2024
The inaugural East African Community Regional Education Conference Commemorating the AU Year of Education “Educate an African Fit for the 21st Century.”

Before joining ZAF, she was a Mathematics lecturer at the Institute of Mathematical Sciences, Strathmore University. She recently got appointed to a Public Service role. As we congratulate her on her new appointment, she shares her reflections on her experience working for ZAF and what it has been like to lead such a groundbreaking initiative.

What would you say is your passion?
I am passionate about girls and women’s empowerment and keen to see more girls and women pursuing STEM careers. During my leisure time, I run a high school mentorship program aimed at demystifying mathematics and inspiring girls to embrace STEM courses.

How was your transition during this period?
My transition to the organization was quite challenging, given it was the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. I decided to make a meaningful impact and focused on ensuring that the youth left behind acquired hands-on skills through TVET. Working with community leadership in various counties including Mandera, Wajir, Nairobi, Tana River, and others was both demanding and rewarding. The opportunity to offer full scholarships to youth lowest on the pyramid and seeing the transformation it brought to families and young people always brought me tears of joy. So far, over 2,000 young people have benefited from this cause, which has made the transition truly fulfilling.

Please describe a challenging project or initiative you took on in your career and how it contributed to your professional growth and development.
A few months after joining ZAF, that is September 2020, I transitioned to work on a new project, dubbed the “Assessment of Life Skills, and Values in East Africa” (ALiVE). This groundbreaking initiative, though complex due to its focus on the assessment of core competencies, has been instrumental in my career growth, leadership development, and social capital. I remember when the Executive Director mentioned this new project and asked if I was interested. I did not hesitate to say a loud YES, even though I had no idea what it would entail. Embracing new challenges is one of my character traits and I always believe that if someone else has done it, or could do it, then why not me?

My supervisor did not disclose that this project would span Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda and that I would be collaborating with eight other organizations, each with its CEO, leadership structure, and vision. He also did not mention that we would only achieve impact through collective effort. In retrospect, if he had revealed all these details at once, I might have declined, opting to continue working.
Please provide an example of a significant milestone or achievement that you have accomplished within this role.

The ALiVE initiative was designed to address gaps identified in the implementation of competency-based education. These gaps included limited contextualized assessment tools for core competencies, a lack of clear understanding of core competencies in context, and few experts (curriculum development, assessments, and researchers) in the field of core competencies and values. Through this program, we have achieved significant milestones. We developed two sets of contextualized assessment tools for evaluating problem-solving, collaboration, respect, and self-awareness. These tools have been used to assess 49,000 adolescents in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. We have authored a book, and have been included in three book chapters, and eight peer-reviewed papers. Additionally, we have visited 40,000 households to engage parents on their role in education, particularly in nurturing values and life skills. Furthermore, we have contributed to the decolonization of the African movement by rigorously training 47 East Africans on tool development, competency-based curriculum development, teacher training, the future of teaching, action research, and many other areas.

Please highlight three key lessons learned while at Zizi Afrique Foundation.

One: Leadership is key to achieving collective impact. Every time I speak with the Executive Director, he always talks about collaboration. He often would say to me, “Purity we cannot do this as Zizi Afrique, we need other people. We are not competing; it is about children learning.” Though collaboration is not easy, ALiVE has achieved all this by working collectively with others. I invite other leaders to harness the spirit of togetherness and Ubuntu, only then will we eliminate learning poverty. For sure if you want to go far walk with others.

Two: Do not point fingers, act. The implementation of any new curriculum will always face challenges. It is easy to blame others, often the government, but have you ever asked yourself what contribution you could make if you acted? What if you supported your neighbour’s children in learning to read, opened your family library to them, or shared your ideas for improvement with schools? This is what acting is all about.

Three: Through the ALiVE program, we continue to make improvements through the system, working with teacher educators in teacher training colleges and universities, curriculum developers, item writers, and researchers. Only through such concerted efforts can we make progress.

What is your parting shot for ZAF staff?

The courage to be and to do. Any person or organization needs courage to disrupt the status quo. At Zizi Afrique, we venture into unchartered territories with the hope of a win. It may not always be the case, but the lessons learned are all worth it. In the 21st century, one needs the courage to try new things.

What is the closing message you would like to leave with the readers?

As I leave Zizi Afrique and ALiVE, again at a very delicate moment not due to COVID-19, but during the rise of Gen Z, I carry with me lessons of courage and collective impact to my new assignment as the Commission Secretary/Chief Executive Officer of the National Gender and Equality Commission. To any young person struggling with the decision of letting go of the familiar—what you studied in school—I encourage you to have the courage to try new things. You never know how much you are capable of until you do it.

What is your mantra?

“The courage to be and do is what we all need to thrive.”
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