



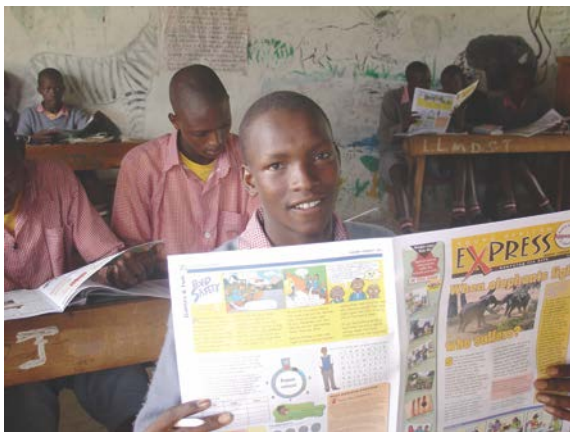
United Nations
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Success Stories

Young African Express: innovative approach to sustainable learning

by David Aduba



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Riding on the power of digital media, the *Young African Express* is revolutionising learning in Kenyan schools by offering innovative and interactive multimedia content. This education tool, which can be continuously evolved to keep up with our rapidly changing world, has been developed by Jacaranda Africa, a Nairobi-based enterprise.

Young African Express provides up-to-date, interactive and integrated content for hundreds of thousands of learners in primary schools, filling a void and bringing the curriculum to life. It is based on the idea that learning is an integrated process and that children master concepts better when they relate to their everyday experiences. Complete with illustrations, the magazine is published six times a year in print, while the online editions are updated regularly. The online content is interactive and allows for self-learning.

Previously introduced as part of the learning tools of the *Chanuka Express* initiative, this curriculum-based magazine has diversified while winning many accolades. At its start, in 2007, *Chanuka Express* offered an outreach programme to youth whereby it conducted peer-to-peer advocacy training on social and educational issues — working out of an multi-media equipped bus and distributing copies of the *Express* magazine to students.

While this approach was successful, its reach was limited. In recent years, *Chanuka Express* and the *Young African Express* have metamorphosed into a powerful, soon-to-be launched, multimedia learning platform: *Express Academy™ Africa*, which will offer print and digital interactive content.

At its height, *Chanuka Express* was supporting youth advocacy programme by providing a team of experts who travelled to schools in a specially designed bus and conducted open sessions that discussed social issues that affected learners. This initiative gained momentum as it offered innovative and practical solutions to some difficult issues that the schools usually overlooked. The *Express* magazine provided learners and teachers with the practical references, guidelines and innovative core curriculum content, enabling them to sustain practical learning approaches.

More recently, the focus has shifted towards the use of multimedia platforms, the idea being to extend and evolve the educative print magazine content and application through online digital channels.

Interaction between experts and school children

In an interview, Ms Susan Scull-Carvalho, who is the main driver behind the initiative, says the objective is to adapt curriculum content in a practical way and create a direct link to the world of work and, thereby, enhance subject and skill mastery. Indeed, the motto of the *Express* magazine is: “Learning for a better life”, i.e. finding a simpler way of communicating the concept of education for sustainable development.

“The initiative promotes learner participation: they make decisions on the content, share knowledge they have and apply the new knowledge they acquire and that is empowering,” says Ms Scull-Carvalho, adding, “it marks a significant break from the normal classroom teaching, where learning is teacher-centred and most of the time, involves cramming rather than mastering concepts.”

Young African Express incorporates digital and print products that are shared among many schools through an elaborate network of religious groups, civil society organisations, and other players.

The curriculum content is broken down into simple, everyday life experiences and spiced up with practical examples. Also taught are emerging issues such as conflict resolution and peace education, citizenship and globalisation, intercultural co-existence and environmental conservation, as well as life skills.

The focus is learners in grades five to eight, who ultimately sit the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) exams and who require additional reference materials. All these materials have been approved by Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), which is the national agency that regulates what is taught and examined in schools.

Tackling broad and culturally-sensitive subjects

A defining trait of *Young African Express* is that it helps learners and their teachers to create links between different concepts and subjects. For example, a topic such as the environment is used to teach English, science, social studies and religious education. While ecosystems and agroforestry are used to teach science, business, mathematics and literary skills.

“The publication is extremely youth-friendly and culturally appropriate, and helps volunteers broach what are otherwise broad and sensitive subjects,” says Tameisha Henry, a US Peace Corps teacher who has used the magazines to teach in Malindi, Kenya’s coastal region, an area that suffers high illiteracy levels.

Moreover, there is strong emphasis on practical application when teaching life skills, with learners trained to sharpen observation and pro-active attitudes by taking part in 'problem-solving' activities. For example, instead of complaining about unhygienic conditions at their schools or homes, learners are encouraged to fix the problem by cleaning toilets and making 'Tippy Tap' hand-washing dispensers.

As Ms Scull-Carvalho puts it: "Equipping and enabling learners to become more self-reliant and less dependent is a pillar of education for sustainable development."

Human rights and sexual offences

Other spin-offs of the magazine are learning and teaching aids such as posters that focus on specific subjects. There are many examples of these posters. For example, in 2010, Kenya adopted a new Constitution with 18 chapters and 264 clauses. An advisory from the Education Ministry asked schools to incorporate elements of the constitution into their curriculum under a subject called 'social studies'. Because new textbooks would take a long time to develop, *Young Africa Express* took up the information challenge by developing a double-sided, bilingual, English-Kiswahili poster that summarised the entire document in simple terms.

The contribution of *Young African Express* to education for sustainable development is clear. Kenya has about 30,000 primary schools, with an estimated enrolment of 10 million children. Learning is free, but in reality, there are few resources to go round. Statistics indicate that 20 per cent of learners do not have access to textbooks. Teaching and learning aids and reference materials are in short supply. Not surprisingly, some children leave primary schools without acquiring basic reading, writing and arithmetic skills.

In the context of these shortcomings, *Young African Express* fills many gaps by providing inspiring innovation and serves as a basis for promoting education for sustainable development more widely.

Further information:

<http://www.youngafricanexpress.net/site>

As lead agency for the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014), UNESCO promotes an education that allows every human being to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values necessary to shape a sustainable future.

Education for Sustainable Development means including key sustainable development issues into teaching and learning; for example, climate change, disaster risk reduction, biodiversity, poverty reduction, and sustainable consumption. It also requires participatory teaching and learning methods that motivate and empower learners to change their behaviour and take action for sustainable development.

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