

Interview with

Rosemary Bosibori Onyancha

Winner of the 2023 African Union
Continental Best Teacher Award

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Interview conducted by Quentin Wodon

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IICBA: Could you please tell us a bit about yourself?

My name is Rosemary Onyancha. I am the second-to-last born in a family of eight, born to Mr. and Mrs. Johnstone Onyancha. I am happily married to John Kebaso and together we are proud parents of three wonderful girls. I am a native of Nakuru, where I was both born and raised. Education has always been a significant part of my life. I hold a degree in Education Science, which I earned from Kabarak University. Currently, I am pursuing a Master's Degree at Kenyatta University.

One of my passions is being a trained invention educator. I find great fulfillment in providing solutions to real-life problems and guiding learners to achieve the same goal. To nurture creativity and innovation among students, I initiated a platform called the "Virtual Talent Search," where learners can showcase their creative talents. In addition to my teaching and educational pursuits, I am a dedicated volunteer with the President's Award Scheme. In this role, I serve as an award leader at the Moi Forces Academy Lanet award center. This involvement allows me to help young learners become "World ready" by instilling essential life skills and values in them. I actively contribute to the holistic development of our students at school by engaging in various activities aimed at molding well-rounded individuals. This multifaceted approach not only enhances their academic pursuits but also plays a vital role in reducing delinquency. Activities I am involved in include Swimming Coaching, Organization and Running of Meets, Clubs Activities virtually with Parpus Software

Background: Best Teacher Awards recognize outstanding teachers. These awards can raise the appreciation of teachers in society while demonstrating that hard work and innovation by teachers makes a difference. The African Union Commission instituted the Continental Best Teacher Award in 2019. Winners receive cash gifts and are celebrated. The Award is important to celebrate the unique contribution that teachers make to their students, their communities, and societies. The African Union Commission and UNESCO IICBA, the coordinating agency for the Teacher Development Cluster under the African Union's Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016-2025, encourage countries that have not yet done so to create national (as well as regional and local) teacher awards. This series of interviews shares insights from the winners of the 2023 Continental Best Teacher Award.



Development Institution, and Cultural Days. By engaging in these activities, I aim to contribute to the overall development of our students, equipping them with life skills, values, and a sense of responsibility. This proactive approach helps create a positive and enriching school environment while reducing the likelihood of delinquent behavior among the student body.

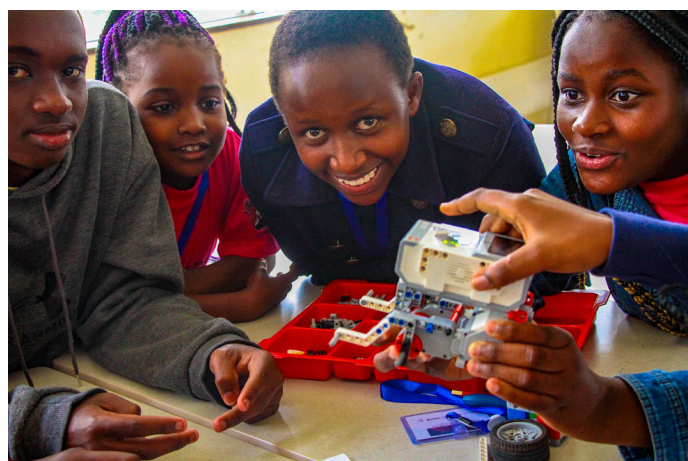
My commitment to volunteerism extends beyond the classroom and school grounds. I am actively engaged with various communities and organizations that collaborate with industry leaders such as Google, Microsoft, Facebook, and HP. Together, we work on initiatives aimed at equipping children, youth, teachers, and parents in Kenya with essential digital literacy and coding skills. Moreover, our efforts focus on ensuring that individuals are safe while navigating the online world. In summary, my life revolves around education, innovation, volunteerism, and empowering individuals with digital skills and knowledge. I am deeply dedicated to making a positive impact on the lives of learners and communities in Kenya, and I look forward to continuing my journey of service and learning. I am quick to express my gratitude to my employer, the Teachers Service Commission (TSC), for providing a supportive environment that has enabled me to fulfill my duties. My journey with TSC has been nothing short of rewarding, culminating in my nomination for the African Union (AU) Continental Teacher of the Year 2023 award.

IICBA: What do you teach, at what level, and where?

I am a teacher in Computer Studies and Business Studies at Moi Forces Academy Lanet. This esteemed institution is a national girls' high school situated in Lanet, Nakuru City, Kenya.

IICBA: For how long have you been a teacher, and what motivated you to become one?

I have been a teacher for 15 years. My Inspiration and motivation in pursuing a career in education include providing educational equity. Witnessing the educational disparities that exist in our society ignited my determination to ensure that every student, regardless of their background or circumstances, has equal access to a quality education. Achieving a 100% return of girls to school during the pandemic exemplifies my commitment to this cause. My motivation is further fueled by a belief in gender equality. I am dedicated to empowering young girls through education, breaking down barriers that may hinder their educational journey, and ensuring they have every opportunity to succeed. I am also enthusiastic about STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education as these subjects provide students with valuable skills and knowledge that are essential for their future careers and for addressing the challenges of our rapidly evolving world. As I currently teach Computer Studies as a subject, I am pleased to observe that Computer Science is now recognized as a





STEM subject in the new Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) within the Kenyan education system. Finally, my involvement in initiatives like providing free online instruction in STEM subjects highlights my commitment to innovation in education. I believe in the transformative power of technology and its ability to bridge gaps in access to learning. I am convinced that capacity development benefits not only students but also fellow teachers, creating a thriving educational community. In summary, my inspiration in pursuing a career in education lies in my dedication to educational equity, gender equality, the promotion of STEM education, and a deep commitment to leveraging technology and innovation to empower students and teachers alike. These principles continue to drive my passion for teaching.

IICBA: What are you most passionate about in your teaching?

As a Kenyan teacher at Moi Forces Academy Nakuru, several aspects of teaching ignite my passion: (1) as I mentioned it, I am passionate about incorporating technology into education to enhance learning experiences and prepare students for the digital age – this includes using tools like Google Classroom and Teams for remote and distance learning; (2) I am committed to addressing educational disparities and ensuring that all students, regardless of their circumstances, have access to quality education – for example in the face of the pandemic, we strived to provide access to remote learning including via mobile phones; (3) regarding STEM education, we have tried to provide free online instruction in STEM subjects for Form 4 students to empower students with valuable skills - this initiative was spearheaded by Dr. Tom Okaya, the Kangema Sub County Teachers Service Commission (TSC) Director then, and I helped for a smooth operation of the online learning platform; (4) I

am also passionate in fostering collaborations between teachers, including using with the Google Educators Group (GEG Kenya); (5) Another area of interest is exploring emerging technologies like Generative Artificial Intelligence (Generative AI) – these technologies have the potential to revolutionize education and prepare students for the future; (6) Finally I am an active member, volunteer, and contributor to the Robotics Society of Kenya (RSK), a non-profit promoting computing in institutions and communities through various domains, including robotics, AI, physical computing, makerspace, Internet of Things, STEAM, chess education, and research – our goal is to build a thriving community of passionate educators, volunteers, partners, and sponsors dedicated to bringing the benefits of technology to schools, classrooms, and communities in Kenya and beyond.

IICBA: What are some of the challenges teachers face today, and what can be done to overcome these challenges?

Common challenges in the teaching profession in Kenya's education system include: (1) Lack of resources: Insufficient teaching materials, outdated textbooks, and inadequate classroom facilities can hinder effective teaching (potential solution: advocating for increased funding for education to improve infrastructure and provide up-to-date learning resources); (2) Teacher workload: Heavy teaching loads and administrative tasks can lead to burnout and reduced teaching quality (potential solution: implementing workload management strategies, including better teacher-student ratios and administrative support); (3) Teacher training: Inadequate pre-service and in-service teacher training may result in teachers lacking the necessary skills for modern teaching methods (potential solution: investing in comprehensive teacher training programs that incorporate innovative teaching approaches and technology); (4) High cost of living: This makes educators focus on other income generating activities and hinder the retention of talented individuals in the profession (potential solution: advocating for competitive and sustainable teacher salaries to attract and retain skilled teachers); (5) Large class sizes: Overcrowded classrooms can make it challenging for teachers to provide individualized attention to students (potential solution: building more classrooms and employ more teachers to reduce class sizes and improve student-teacher interaction); (6) Inequality in access: Disparities in access to quality education between urban and rural areas and among different socioeconomic groups remain a significant issue (potential solution: developing policies and initiatives to ensure equitable access to education, including targeted support for marginalized communities); (7) Assessment pressure: Overemphasis on exams and standardized



testing can limit creative and critical thinking in students and teachers (potential solution: promoting a more holistic assessment approach that includes project-based assessments and performance evaluations); and (8) Parental involvement: Insufficient parental involvement in students' education can hinder student success (potential solution: encouraging parental engagement through workshops, open communication, and involvement in school activities). Addressing the above challenges in the Kenyan education system requires a concerted effort from educators, policymakers, parents, and the community. Collaborative strategies and sustained investment in education can lead to positive changes and improvements in the teaching profession.

IICBA: What are some of the opportunities that teachers could seize and what could be done to empower them to do so?

Continuous learning comes to mind as teachers can further their education, attend workshops, and participate in online courses to stay updated with the latest teaching methods and technologies. I am personally committed to this. I would encourage teachers to pursue the internationally recognized Google Workspace for Education certifications for educators – becoming a Google for Education Certified Trainer, Innovator, or Coach. Another achievement is becoming a Microsoft Certified Educator – implementing the twenty first century skills during the delivery of lessons. Teachers should have passion in volunteerism, particularly in the context of empowering fellow educators with the skills and knowledge acquired through interactions with available tools and emerging technologies. There is a need to encourage teachers to identify gaps in their own educational environments and leverage the available tools and emerging technologies to find creative solutions. This approach not only fosters a culture of innovation but also contributes to the growth and development of the education sector as a whole. Every educator has the potential to make a positive impact, and by sharing our knowledge and experiences, we can collectively work towards a more innovative and effective educational system. Writing sessional papers about emerging issues in education and attending conferences organized locally

and internationally by bodies like UNESCO, research bodies and Universities also helps further research skills which in turn makes the educational landscape worthwhile.

IICBA: You have been recognized as an outstanding teacher. What practical advice do you have for other teachers?

Perhaps I could suggest some broader initiatives for improvement for education systems? Along the lines I already mentioned, teachers as well as I could contribute to (1) Educational Workshops: Organize and lead workshops for teachers in Kenya to share innovative teaching methods, best practices, and the latest educational technology; (2) Curriculum Enhancement: Collaborate with educational authorities to revise and modernize the curriculum to meet the needs of the 21st century; (3) Accessible Education: Promote initiatives to improve access to quality education, particularly in underserved regions of Kenya and other African countries; (4) Advocacy: Use the platform to advocate for increased government investment in education, better teacher training, and reduced education inequality; (5) International Collaboration: Forge partnerships with educators and institutions across Africa and globally to exchange ideas and resources for educational improvement; (6) Research and Development: Invest in educational research to identify and implement evidence-based teaching strategies that can benefit students worldwide; (7) Promote Inclusivity: Focus on inclusive education to ensure that children with disabilities and marginalized communities have equal access to education; (8) Mentorship: Establish mentorship programs to support and empower aspiring teachers, especially young educators in Kenya; (9) Global Outreach: Share my experiences and expertise at international forums, contributing to discussions on global education reform; and (10) Technology Integration: Encourage the integration of technology in education and digital literacy, keeping pace with the evolving educational landscape. By leveraging this recognition, I hope to make a lasting



impact on education in Kenya, Africa, and the world, fostering a brighter future for all students and educators.

IICBA: Looking back, if there is something you could do differently in your career as a teacher, what would that be?

Reflecting on my teaching career, I would have invested more in continuous professional development, attending workshops, conferences, and training programs. This would have kept me updated with the latest teaching methodologies and technologies, positively impacting the quality of education I provide. I might also have shifted my teaching approach earlier towards a more student-centered one, focusing on individualized learning and encouraging critical thinking. This change could have fostered greater student engagement and academic success. Embracing technology in the classroom sooner would have allowed me to leverage digital tools for interactive and personalized learning experiences, making lessons more engaging and relevant for students. Establishing mentorship relationships with other experienced educators and collaborating with peers would have enriched my teaching journey. It would have provided me with new insights and strategies to effectively address challenges in education. Engaging more with the local community and parents could have positively impacted the learning environment. Building stronger relationships with stakeholders can lead to greater support for educational initiatives and student well-being. Prioritizing inclusive education practices from the start could have ensured that all students, including those with disabilities or special needs, received equitable access to quality education. Advocating for education reforms and improvements at a broader scale within Kenya and Africa would have allowed me to make a more significant impact on the educational system and address systemic challenges. These changes, if implemented earlier in my teaching career, could have positively influenced my journey by enhancing the quality of education I provide, increasing student achievement, fostering professional growth, and allowing me to contribute more substantially to educational advancements in Kenya and Africa.

IICBA: What does being recognized for the Award mean to you? Do you plan to use this recognition to further promote quality education?

I am deeply honored and humbled to receive the African Union Best Teacher Award for Africa 2023. This recognition fills me with immense pride, not just for myself, but for my students, colleagues, and my beloved country, Kenya. The award inspires me to continue my mission of enhancing education in Kenya, Africa, and beyond.

IICBA: Finally, could you please share a personal anecdote about yourself?

One of our proudest accomplishments has been achieving a 100% return of girls to school to the school after the pandemic. This was in part because even in the face of the pandemic, access to remote learning was possible, including via mobile phones. Another moment of pride stems from my role in initiating a collaborative effort with my fellow educators, resulting in our school receiving recognition as an HP Innovation and Digital Education Academy (HP IDEA) School. Our project, titled "Digital Presentation in Learning Enhances Communication Skills," helped for this recognition. Our Principal, Madam Jedidah Mwangi, was among the distinguished fellows involved in this initiative. Another high point was students coming up with a glider using carton boxes making them recyclable, reusable, and thus reducing wastage. This is one of the methods of conserving the environment and it is a practical action in the Sustainable Development Goals. As I reflect on my journey, my enthusiasm remains unwavering.

Disclaimer & Acknowledgment

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