

Interview with

### Jocelyne Cyiza Kirezi

Economist and Monitoring and  
Evaluation Specialist with VVOB

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*Interview conducted by Quentin Wodon*

*Interview series in collaboration with the  
Women, Gender, and Youth Directorate  
of the African Union Commission*



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

My name is Jocelyne Kirezi, and I am a Rwandan with a background in economics. I completed my bachelor's and master's degree in economics at the Université Libre de Bruxelles - Solvay Business School of economics and management. Currently, I work as a researcher for VVOB, an organization dedicated to improving the quality of education in various countries. My journey in economics and research has allowed me to explore and contribute to various projects aimed at enhancing education, professional development, and leadership in the field. I am passionate about data and using research to make a positive impact on education, particularly in the context of Africa.

#### **IICBA: Where do you work and what are your responsibilities?**

I am working as Strategic Education Advisor at VVOB – education for development in Rwanda, where I oversee Monitoring, Evaluation, and Research. My responsibilities include designing and implementing research projects related to school leadership, monitoring, and evaluating the effects and impact of our programs and contributing to the strategic development of educational initiatives using evidence.

**Background:** This series of interviews was prepared for Africa Youth Day celebrated on November 1 each year. Youth are defined by the African Union as the population from 15 to 35 years of age. The African Union Commission through the Women, Gender, and Youth Directorate (WGYP) is commemorating African Youth Day 2023 through month-long activities under the theme “1 Million Next Level is Knocking: Youth-led Movement that Transcends Borders.” The theme is a call to all youth development stakeholders, member states, and partners to mobilize, implement and support the 1 Million Next Level Initiative through creating and accelerating opportunities for youth in the 4Es +H (Education, Employment, Entrepreneurship, Engagement + Health and wellbeing). The youth featured in this series of interviews are exemplary in their work in service to others in the areas covered by 4Es+H.



**IICBA: Why is it important to invest in school leadership in Africa?**

Investing in school leadership in Africa is crucial because it directly impacts the quality of education and, consequently, the future of the continent. Effective school leadership ensures that teachers are well-supported, resources are utilized optimally, and the learning environment is conducive for students. By focusing on school leadership, we can improve educational outcomes, address disparities, and create a stronger foundation for Africa's development.

**IICBA: What are examples of good (and maybe not so-good) practices to strengthen school leadership?**

In terms of good practices to strengthen school leadership, it is crucial to provide clear frameworks for leadership, continuous professional development, and training for school leaders. Effective mentoring and coaching programs are also beneficial. Collaboration among schools and fostering a supportive community can also strengthen leadership. On the other hand, not-so-good practices might include appointing leaders without adequate preparation, lack of transparency, and insufficient support for school

leaders. Other not-so-good practices often involve a lack of resources, support, or recognition for school leaders, which can hinder their ability to lead effectively. In addition, building evidence on school leadership practices is crucial for accountability, improvement, and ensuring effective educational outcomes.

**IICBA: You have a background in statistics and STEM. How does that help you in your work?**

My background in statistics and STEM has been beneficial to my profession because it has provided me with analytical and problem-solving skills. This, together with curiosity and a willingness to learn new things, I feel, makes these skills. It allows me to approach educational research with a data-driven mindset, ensuring that our programs are evidence-based. I can design rigorous research methodologies, analyze complex data, and make informed recommendations for educational improvement, all of which are essential for monitoring, evaluating, and advancing school leadership in Africa.

**IICBA: You could have chosen to work in the private for-profit sector. What made you choose VVOB?**

I believe in the transformative power of education. I chose to work at VVOB because of its strong commitment to



education and sustainable development. VVOB's mission aligns with my passion for improving education in Africa. Working in the education sector provides a unique opportunity to make a lasting impact on individuals and communities, and I wanted to be a part of that positive change. I also enjoy contributing to the generation of evidence that helps to shape programmes and policies.

***IICBA: What could governments and other stakeholders do to improve opportunities for youth in Africa?***

I believe that everything starts with quality education whether formal or informal, so I think that governments and other stakeholders can enhance youth opportunities by investing in quality education, vocational training, and skills development. This includes developing policies that focus on inclusive and equitable education, vocational training, and entrepreneurship support. Moreover, fostering innovation and digital literacy is essential to prepare youth for the demands of the modern job market.

***IICBA: What advice do you have for other youth in Africa?***

My advice to other young people in Africa is to remember that the journey may not be easy, but your passion for your goals, being open to continuous learning, and unwavering perseverance will always yield results. Seek opportunities to make a positive impact in your community and be open to exploring different career paths. Most importantly, believe in your ability to drive change.

***IICBA: Looking back, is there something you would do differently in your studies or career?***

Looking back, I wouldn't change my academic and career choices, as they have led me to where I am today. When

I finished my master's degree, I was thinking of pursuing a career in Finance, because I liked playing with numbers and I felt that with my background that would be the most appropriate career path. When I came back in Rwanda after my studies, I had an opportunity of an internship in a think tank which led to a full-time job after one month and since then I am a researcher.

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

A personal anecdote that comes to mind involves my experience as a qualitative researcher. In my previous workplace, I was conducting field surveys in a rural village to gather qualitative data for a poverty analysis project. The research involved drafting life stories of participants to understand the pathways leading into poverty or out of it. The field was challenging emotionally because you are basically working through the life of a person with most of the time a large set of socio-economic challenges and but also successes. It was a profound reminder that research is not just about data: it is about understanding and connecting with the people you are trying to help. This experience continues to shape my approach to research and education today.

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