

Interview with

Francis Bizoza

Pan Africanist and education enthusiast

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Interview conducted by Quentin Wodon

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Women, Gender, and Youth Directorate
of the African Union Commission*



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

I am Francis Bizoza, the “African Travelling Teacher”, a Pan Africanist and education enthusiast and project-based curriculum designer at Learning Equality. I travel across Africa with a passion for teaching and exploration. I am a LEAP Social Entrepreneur Fellow at Solve-MIT and a graduate from Makerere University with a degree in Education. I am also a Master Teacher Program alumnus under the ALforEducation Network of the African Leadership Academy, an experience that gave me a deep appreciation for the extreme challenges that teachers and students face on a daily basis.

My goal is to traverse my lovely continent by road. So far I have been to remote areas of East and Central Africa on a mission to offer a unique approach to education and share fresh perspectives on African history, culture, and nature to inspire a network of teachers who are informed and appreciate their continent’s potential. As a young advocate, my passion for empowering teachers has been fueled by diverse experiences working outside my country and engaging in youth fellowships. These opportunities unveiled the daily challenges educators face due to limited exposure, hindering their ability to inspire students. But while youth fellowships foster learning and connections, their urban-centric nature restrict our understanding of the continent’s full potential. This realization propels my commitment to an adventure aimed at exposing teachers to the richness of their own continent, simultaneously fostering impactful change within Africa’s education ecosystem.

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: You are called the “African Travelling Teacher.” How do you spend a typical day?

My daily routine integrates my role as a curriculum designer at Learning Equality with my passion for exploration. Traveling, for me, is an adventure that unfolds when I have accumulated sufficient savings and free time during vacations. During work breaks, my focus shifts to digging into literature about education in Africa, exploring connections between educational injustices, our history, culture, and nature, and contemplating actionable solutions. When on the road, I make it a point to visit historical sites, connect with the elderly to gather their wisdom, and immerse myself in schools, where I not only teach what I hope are impactful lessons but also engage with fellow educators to contribute to the dialogue on advancing education in Africa. In each new country I aim to engage learners in school sessions that focus on topics such as Global Citizenship, the SDGs, Climate change and environmental conservation and how these relate to our African heritage, using localized resources. In the same schools I also provide a session to engage with teachers for us to reflect on our profession and expose them different platforms where they can seek professional development and teaching resources. Examples include open content platforms like Learning Equality’s Kolibri.

IICBA: Why is it so important to promote professional development for teachers in Africa?

There is a shortage of 15 million teachers in sub-Saharan Africa for the region to achieve the 2030 education goals. Professional development for teachers and inspiring young people to join the profession is critical. Prevailing teacher professional development endeavors often fall short of teachers’ needs, failing to align with the demands

of our evolving world. We must recognize how current professional development initiatives merely scratch the surface of what is truly essential.

IICBA: What are examples of good (and maybe not so-good) approaches to training teachers?

Good approaches include hands-on experience: The school practice or call internship as pre-service teachers is not sufficient. Experience in real classrooms in different contexts would help them develop practical skills. This can include student teaching, classroom observations, and internships. The paradigm of learning must also extend beyond the traditional classroom confines. Project-based learning should constitute the crux of education to foster the development of adept problem solvers. An illustrative case is Uganda’s adoption of a new competency-based curriculum, a significant investment intended to revolutionize education. However, the efficacy of this initiative is impeded by a critical gap—teachers lack the requisite skills to effectively implement it.

Other useful approaches include: (1) Pairing new teachers with experienced mentors to allow for the transfer of knowledge, skills, and effective teaching strategies; (2) Offering regular workshops on teaching methodologies, classroom management, and the integration of new technologies to keep teachers updated on the latest educational trends and research.; (3) Encouraging collaboration among teachers within a school or across schools to foster a culture of continuous improvement; (4) Incorporating reflective practices into teacher training to encourage self-assessment and continuous improvement; (5) Providing training on cultural competency to help teachers understand and respect diverse backgrounds in their classrooms, fostering an inclusive and supportive learning environment.

IICBA: You manage a YouTube Channel. What does the channel provide to teachers that can empower them?

Going back to the adventurous spirit in me , I thought a lot about what I can do to expose my fellow teachers to Africa and different approaches to education in different contexts through the travelling opportunities with a goal of creating a network of teachers across the continent- the YouTube Channel,"The African Travelling Teacher" came in handy! Through my immersive videos, teachers will delve into untold stories, marvel at landscapes, and find practical advice on travelling on the continent, learn about opportunities for EduTourism to foster knowledge and create inspiring learning experiences.

IICBA: You have worked with the African union. How have you been able to contribute to the African Union's work?

As mentioned earlier, my approach involves engaging learners in school sessions that focus on crucial topics such as Global Citizenship, Sustainable Development Goals, Climate Change, and Environmental Conservation. These sessions are designed to not only educate students but also to instill a sense of responsibility towards their communities and the continent. My involvement extends beyond student engagement to empowering teachers. The ultimate impact of these efforts is to nurture responsible and informed citizens. By aligning my work with the principles and objectives of Agenda 2063, I try to actively contribute to the African Union's vision of a united, prosperous, and peaceful Africa, driven by its citizens and playing a dynamic role on the global stage.

IICBA: What could governments and other stakeholders do to improve teacher professional development in Africa?

Complaints have been widespread about the curriculum employed in schools across many African countries, noting a lack of emphasis on the continent's rich heritage. Addressing this concern involves not only reforming the curriculum but also building the capacity of teachers. This approach not only enhances the quality of education but also ensures that young minds are nurtured to appreciate the diverse potential of the continent and are well-prepared to harness its resources. The current state of teacher training curriculum and pedagogy is outdated, requiring a fundamental shift. A modernized curriculum should emphasize hands-on skills as I mentioned it earlier.

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

To effectively advocate for meaningful system changes, we must first educate ourselves about the vast potential that our continent holds. Learning about the potential of Africa places us at the forefront of change, enabling us to envision and champion sustainable solutions that address societal needs. As Youth we should find joy in exploring our own continent. There is a prevailing belief among peers that success is exclusively found in America, Europe, or Asia, leading to tragic losses as individuals embark on perilous journeys across seas or seek employment abroad. Meanwhile, opportunities for rewarding careers exist within Africa. As young people, we must actively advocate for a shift in mindset, challenging the notion that success can only be achieved beyond our continent.





By promoting the idea that we can create and thrive in meaningful, prosperous careers right here at home, we can deter unnecessary risks and contribute to the growth and development of our own communities

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

As an African travelling teacher, cultivating an open mind would be a top priority for me. Nurturing an open mind is crucial because it broadens one’s horizons, allowing for more learning connections and the opportunity to build valuable networks. In the teaching profession, it is common for educators to inadvertently limit themselves by sticking to what they believe they already know. However, the potential for growth and enrichment lies in actively seeking exposure to diverse perspectives, methodologies, and educational practices.

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

In my two-year teaching experience at a primary school in one of East Africa’s most underprivileged communities, I encountered a transformative opportunity. Many of my young learners had never laid eyes on a smartphone or a laptop. Recognizing the potential of digital literacy in shaping their futures, I used my laptop and smartphone to introduce them to the digital world. Witnessing the sheer joy, curiosity, and enthusiasm with which they embraced this novel experience, and how rapidly they grasped the details of operating these gadgets, became an emotional revelation. This simple act underscored the incredible potential within African children when provided with access to quality education—an experience that remains etched in my memory as a testament to the profound impact education can have on shaping the aspirations and capabilities of the youngest minds in our communities.



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