

CLUSTER MEETINGS: THE HEARTBEAT OF CHANGE IN WAJIR'S ECDE CLASSROOMS



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— Nasir Serman

CEO - Wajir Peace & Development Agency

MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

Before the INSPIRED Project, many early childhood classrooms across Wajir were quiet spaces of repetition. Teachers stood before rows of children, guiding them through memorized lessons, while learners recited words they barely understood. Collaboration among teachers was rare, and "learning through play" was a concept yet to find its footing in most ECDE centres.

Then came the cluster meetings—a simple but Collaboration among teachers was rare, and "learning through play" was a concept yet to find its footing in most ECDE centres.

Today, that story is changing. Through targeted training, continuous coaching, and the provision of curriculum designs, teacher guides, and learners' textbooks, the INSPIRED Programme has empowered teachers to prepare quality professional documents, strengthen classroom practice, and create engaging, learner-centred learning environments where every child has the opportunity to thrive.

UPCOMING EVENTS

International Youth Day 12th August, 2026

"Youth Advancing Multilateral Cooperation Through Technology and Partnerships." This theme highlights the critical role young people play in shaping global cooperation, driving innovation, and leveraging digital tools to address sustainable development challenges

World Humanitarian Day 19th August, 2026

"Strengthening Global Solidarity and Empowering Local Communities" focus on critical, actionable priorities: Protecting humanitarian workers, promoting locally led responses to global crisis and demanding accountability and enforcing International Humanitarian Law to ensure violations do not go unpunished

Our Partners





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Before the INSPIRED Project, many early childhood classrooms across Wajir were quiet spaces of repetition. Teachers stood before rows of children, guiding them through memorized lessons, while learners recited words they barely understood. Collaboration among teachers was rare, and “learning through play” was a concept yet to find its footing in most ECDE centres.

Then came the cluster meetings, a simple but powerful intervention that redefined teaching and learning. Convened under the Institutional Strengthening of Policy Implementation to Reduce Education Disparities (INSPIRED) project, the county cluster meetings became dynamic spaces where teachers shared

experiences, reflected on classroom challenges, and co-created solutions that worked.

From Wajir East to Buna, and from Habaswein to Tarbaj from Sabuli to Eldas, 375 ECDE teachers came together in eleven sub-counties to learn from one another. They brought with them their creativity, curiosity, and the courage to transform their classrooms.



“Before the training, I thought teaching was mainly about giving instructions,” said Abdullahi Diyat Birik of Sarman ECDE Centre. “Now I understand that children learn best through play, interaction, and exploration.”



Through these forums, teachers began to see themselves not just as instructors but as facilitators of holistic learning. Songs, storytelling, games, and dramatization became integral to daily lessons. The once silent classrooms came alive with laughter, songs, and motion.

“One day, I had a learner who was shy and never answered questions,” shared Fatuma Siyad Mahamud of Chalalaqa ECDE. “After learning about positive reinforcement, I started praising her small efforts. Within weeks, she began participating confidently.”

Inclusivity also took root. Teachers learned to adapt lessons for children with diverse learning needs and to integrate Islamic and cultural



“One day, I had a learner who was shy and never answered questions,” shared Fatuma Siyad Mahamud of Chalalaga ECDE

values into their teaching. “Strategies for inclusion have made me more attentive to learners with different needs,” said Hassan Osman Ali of Funanbua ECDE. “I now adapt activities so that every child participates.”

“Every cluster meeting gives me new ideas, strengthens my confidence, and empowers me to create better learning experiences for the learners.” Hasna Ali of Tulatula ECDE Centre, teacher living with a physical disability.



A hallmark of the cluster meetings was innovation in Teaching and Learning Materials (TLMs). Using locally available resources cardboard, bottle tops, recycled fabric, and clay teachers created tactile tools that made abstract concepts tangible for young learners.

“The use of locally available teaching and learning materials has been the biggest change—it makes lessons more practical and engaging for children,” remarked Fozia Bare from Sabuli ECDE Centre.

The ripple effect has been profound. Teachers now plan lessons better, manage classrooms more effectively, and engage learners more actively. Peer collaboration has blossomed into mentorship, creating a vibrant community of practice that continues to grow stronger.

“The emphasis on positive teacher–learner interaction improved my relationship with the children; I encourage them more instead of scolding,” said Elizabeth Kajuju of Ndege ECDE.

Today, ECDE centres across Wajir County echo with joyful learning. The transformation is visible in the confidence of teachers, the enthusiasm of learners, and the strengthened bond between schools and communities.

The cluster meetings have proven that professional growth thrives in connection. When teachers learn together, they teach better and when teachers teach better, children thrive.

The INSPIRED Project has done more than improve skills; it has cultivated a culture of reflection, collaboration, and creativity. It has turned isolation into teamwork, instruction into inspiration, and classrooms into communities of joy and discovery.

Indeed, the heartbeat of change in Wajir’s ECDE sector can be heard in every song, every smile, and every moment of play.

DUKSI INTEGRATION PRONOUNCEMENT A WELCOME START, BUT DEEPER REFORMS AWAIT - ABDINASIR SAMAN (CEO)

When President William Ruto addressed the people of Wajir on the historic Madaraka Day and directed the Ministry of Education to begin developing a framework for integrating Duksi and Madarasa into Kenya's formal education system, the new 10,000-seater stadium roared.

President William Ruto struck a chord with the audience as he spoke to a community that has long suffered from education policy biases, which have pushed thousands of children in the region into educational exclusion.

His pronouncement acknowledges a painful reality that generations of children in Northern Kenya have faced for decades. Rigid education structures have denied many children access to formal schooling by forcing families to choose between Qur'anic education, which is central to their faith, and conventional education.

By overlooking the role of Duksi and Madarasa Islamic schools in education and literacy, the national education system has favored an unyielding, secular curriculum that excludes many school-age children from accessing formal education.

Yet from a human rights viewpoint, this is not merely an education question, it is an interrogation of equity, inclusion, and justice within the education sector, requiring urgent reforms to ensure that Duksi and Madarasa Islamic schools are seamlessly integrated into the national framework.

Duksi has never hindered formal education. On the contrary, it opened the door to secular education in Northern Kenya in the late nineteenth century, when local communities rejected the church-led model of schooling. Sharif Shibley's innovative integration of Duksi at Wajir Primary School, and later in other public schools, pioneered a new approach that reconciled religious and formal education and expanded access to learning for generations of children.

Duksi is a cherished Islamic educational institution that continues to command deep respect across generations. For many children, it serves as their first centre of learning, instilling discipline, literacy, moral values, and a strong sense of identity. Through Duksi, generations have acquired not only religious knowledge but also the character and social values that underpin community life.

The integration of Duksi and Madarasa therefore represents the much-needed education reform that safeguards the rights of marginalised communities who continue to live on the margins, constrained by a lack of suitable resources and infrastructure.

Quick Stats

- Nearly 700 Duksi schools serve Mandera East compared to only about 20 public ECDE and primary schools—a ratio of approximately 35:1, highlighting the urgent need for education system integration.
- Thousands of children in Northern Kenya begin formal schooling at ages 8–10, well beyond the recommended ECDE entry age of four, increasing their risk of educational exclusion.
- For every public early learning institution available in many parts of Northeastern Kenya, dozens of Duksi centres are already providing foundational learning within communities.
- Evidence from the INSPIRED project demonstrates that integrating Qur'anic education with foundational literacy and numeracy improves attendance, learner discipline, and community trust.

Impact of exclusion

The exclusion of Duksi and Madarasa has been upsetting, and it risks becoming even more hurtful in the future if reforms are not fast-tracked to integrate the traditional system into national education pathways, ensuring children in Northern Kenya can access quality education.

Many children spend their early years entirely in Duksi, entering formal schooling only at eight, nine, or even ten years of age, while others never enroll at all. Although government policy encourages children to begin pre-primary education at four years, it does not sufficiently replicate the realities of pastoralist and Muslim communities, where Quranic education is often prioritized.

Reducing the gap in access to basic and primary education requires policymakers to remove barriers and build bridges between the two systems. Such reforms can help mitigate low enrolment and poor literacy outcomes in some of the country's most disregarded regions.

The stark disparity between the number of Duksi and formal schools in the Northeastern region underscores the urgent need to formalize the traditional system if the country is serious about expanding access to education.

In Mandera East alone, only about 20 public ECDE and primary institutions serve the community, compared to nearly 700 Duksi

Qur'anic Islamic schools. Across Northern Kenya, far more children attend Duksi than are enrolled in early childhood centers, underscoring the scale of the region's education access challenge which requires a roadmap for change.

These figures do not show that communities have turned their backs on formal education. Instead, they challenge policymakers to confront a billion-dollar question: why has the state failed to create an education model that embraces the lived realities of its own citizens?



Nearly 700 Duksi schools operate in Mandera East compared to only about 20 public ECDE and primary schools, revealing a significant education access gap



Many children enter formal education between ages 8 and 10 after years in Duksi, delaying their learning journey.



A 35:1 ratio of Duksi to public schools demonstrates the need for an integrated education model that reflects community realities.



Many Duksi teachers continue to educate children without formal incentives, structured training, or professional recognition.



Education integration is an equity issue that can reduce exclusion among marginalized and pastoralist communities.

Good news

At Wajir Peace and Development Agency (WPDA), we have witnessed firsthand that integration works. Through the UK-funded INSPIRED project, implemented alongside partners and anchored on the community led Duksi-ECE integration model, communities in Wajir and Mandera have embraced a blended approach that combines Quranic learning with foundational literacy and numeracy.

Parents who once saw schools and Duksis as competing institutions now increasingly view them as complementary pathways. As a result, learner attendance has improved, discipline has strengthened, and relationships between schools and communities have grown closer.

Duksi teachers have acquired new pedagogical skills, while learners are benefiting from a more all-inclusive educational experience that balances faith-based instruction with formal learning. This progress demonstrates that integration is not only possible but also practical by and large.

While the pilot integration programme has recorded notable progress, it also reveals several challenges that remain solvable. These include inadequate time allocation and the absence of a standardized curriculum for integration.

The National Council for Nomadic Education in Kenya (NACONEK), a semi-autonomous agency under the Ministry of Education, is spearheading efforts to standardise the Duksi curriculum. However, the initiative requires broader stakeholder support and accelerated implementation to ensure that it delivers meaningful and lasting reforms.

Many Duksi teachers continue to work with minimal support and receive no formal incentives. Communities also lack sufficient awareness of the system's evolving needs, while policymakers have yet to establish a comprehensive legal and policy framework to ensure its long-term sustainability. At this stage, there is no doubt integration can improve access to quality primary education if it is pursued through an all-inclusive approach that addresses existing bottlenecks.

As stakeholders, we advocate for a whole-of-society approach to integration that conserves, rather than replaces, the traditional system. Local communities are not calling on the government to take the reins of religious institutions. Instead, they are seeking an inclusive framework that allows children to learn the Quran while simultaneously gaining foundational skills in literacy, numeracy, and critical thinking.

All stakeholders including the Ministry of Education, the county governments, religious leaders, parents, Quran teachers and civil society need to establish a nationally recognized integration framework which is smooth to accommodate communities, their children and teachers.

For integration to work with minimal hurdles, policymakers need to recruit more teachers, standardize learning materials, and improve infrastructure, including classroom conditions and sanitation. At the same time, Duksi instructors should receive financial and training support to boost their morale, while timetables must be redesigned to balance both curricula without overburdening learners.

More importantly, education authorities must urgently establish accelerated learning pathways for over-age children who have spent years in Duksi and now seek entry into formal schooling. The system cannot afford to leave thousands of learners behind simply because they began their education journey later than expected. There is also a need to develop structured accelerated programmes that recognise prior learning, allowing Qur'anic education to count as credit and enabling learners to transition smoothly into appropriate academic levels and age-appropriate grades.

There is still much more to be done at this stage, particularly by building on the presidential announcement and the ongoing pilot integration programme, which has already demonstrated how the integration of Duksi and Madarasa can help address longstanding challenges in early childhood education in Northern Kenya.

03

BRIDGING FAITH AND LEARNING IN WAJIR COUNTY-WAJIR PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

INSPIRED Project – Islamic Integration- By Fatuma Bishar Gedi -INSPIRED

How integration of Duksi and formal education is transforming early childhood learning. In the heart of Wajir County, a quiet revolution in education is taking shape. Once known for its low enrollment and struggling Early Childhood Education (ECE) system, the county is now witnessing a powerful transformation — one rooted in faith, community, and collaboration.



For decades, many parents in Wajir faced a difficult choice: send their children to Duksi (Quranic schools) or to formal ECE centers. With strong cultural and religious ties to Quranic education, most chose Duksi, leaving formal pre-primary classes with empty desks and dashed dreams. By 2022, enrollment stood at a mere 39%, far below the national average.

Schools lacked trained teachers, learning materials were scarce, and makeshift classrooms served as a daily reminder of the county's struggle to offer its youngest learners a solid foundation.

But that narrative is beginning to change thanks to the INSPIRED Project

A New Beginning: Faith Meets Formal Learning

When the INSPIRED Project arrived in Wajir, it brought with it a bold idea: Why not blend faith-based and formal learning instead of forcing families to choose between the two?

Through open dialogue and community workshops, the project introduced the integration of Duksi/Madrasa education into formal ECE. The model respects Islamic traditions while nurturing literacy, numeracy, creativity, and life skills bridging the gap that had long divided communities and classrooms.

During one of the key stakeholder sessions, Dr. Koriyow, the County Director of Education, captured the urgency for reform:

“Significant gaps still exist in ECDE, and partnerships like INSPIRED are crucial to bring back the many children who remain out of school.”

Parents, religious leaders, and teachers came together in support of the initiative a first for many. “It was as if a door finally opened between two worlds that had always stood side by side,” Ahmed Wardere -CECM-Education.

The Power of Integration



By integrating Quranic instruction into the daily school routine, children now receive both spiritual and academic nourishment — and parents no longer have to choose one over the other.

At Alfurqan Integrated Academy and Hubsoy Primary School, this blended model has already shown remarkable results. Teachers coordinate lessons in both Arabic and English, using tools like Smart TVs to make learning interactive. Attendance has risen sharply, and children are thriving both morally and academically.

Scaling Up: A County-Wide Movement

Encouraged by these early successes, the Wajir County Department of Education has taken the lead in expanding integration across the county. To make this sustainable, it has deployed Duksi teachers to 12 additional public schools.

“Duksi and secular teachers plan lessons together, blending Islamic and formal education seamlessly. The change is already visible: more children are showing up, fewer are dropping out, and communities are rallying behind their local schools.” Noor Abdullahi, Sub-County coordinator -Wajir East.



A Ripple Effect of Change

The results of this integrated approach are inspiring: **Improved Enrollment and Attendance** – Children no longer have to choose between school and Duksi, leading to higher attendance rates.

Holistic Learning – Learners grow both spiritually and intellectually, mastering Quranic verses alongside math and reading.

Community Acceptance – Religious leaders and parents now view formal education as compatible with faith.

Teacher Empowerment – Educators are being trained in innovative teaching methods, including digital learning tools.

Policy Support – The County Assembly has pledged legislative backing to make integration part of the county's long-term education plan.

A Bridge Between Faith, Community, and the Future

The integration model has become more than an education strategy — it's a symbol of unity. It reflects what is possible when faith and modern education walk hand in hand toward a shared goal: giving every child in Wajir a fair start in life. Schools that once struggled with absenteeism currently hum with laughter and learning. Parents who once hesitated now proudly walk their children to class, knowing that faith and knowledge coexist harmoniously.

The INSPIRED Project's intervention in Wajir County has shown that when communities are engaged, traditions respected, and education reimagined, transformation follows. What began as a pilot has now grown into a county-wide movement one that promises a brighter, more inclusive future for every child.

From Duksi to classroom, from prayer mat to blackboard Wajir's journey toward integrated education is proof that true learning begins where hearts and minds meet.

04

FROM CHALKBOARDS TO CURIOSITY: HOW TEACHER TRAINING SPARKED A CLASSROOM REVOLUTION IN WAJIR



Before INSPIRED: Silent Classrooms and Chalk-Dusted Teachers

Before the INSPIRED Project began, many ECDE classrooms in Wajir County reflected the challenges of under-resourced early learning. Chalk-dusted teachers stood before rows of quiet children, teaching through rote routines such as memorizing, repeating, and reciting leaving little room for curiosity or inclusion. Learners with disabilities sat quietly at the back. Play corners were empty, and inclusive practices were scarcely understood.

Many teachers confessed that they felt “ill-equipped to teach the new curriculum” uncertain how to reach learners with different abilities or how to connect Islamic values with modern learning approaches.

“Before the training, I didn't know how to make learning fun or inclusive. My classroom was silent.” — Abdirahim, ECDE Teacher, Ama Primary

Then came the INSPIRED Teacher Trainings & with them, transformation.

Across dusty sub-county halls and cluster centres, something extraordinary unfolded. Teachers gathered, some attending their first professional development since CBC began to rediscover the art and heart of teaching.

“Before INSPIRED, I felt lost with the new curriculum. I wanted to help my learners, but I didn’t know how to bring the lessons to life.” — Khalif Adan, ECDE Teacher, Dif Old Dam Primary

The sessions were alive with songs, laughter, and color as pre-primary teachers gained hands-on experience in play-based learning, inclusive teaching, formative assessment, and classroom organization.

They crafted low-cost teaching materials from bottle caps, sticks, clay, and fabric scraps, turning everyday items into tools of creativity and joy.



Blending Faith, Play, and Inclusion

For the first time, teachers explored how Islamic values, Akhlaq, Qira’a, and Tawheed, could blend seamlessly with the Competency-Based Education (CBE) approach, nurturing both moral and intellectual growth. “Integration changed everything. Parents saw that their children could learn both the Qur’an and classroom skills without losing faith, it built trust and opened doors.” — Abdi Shukri, ECDE Teacher, Barmish Primary

They practiced inclusive strategies with empathy, learning how to adapt lessons to every learner’s pace and ability.

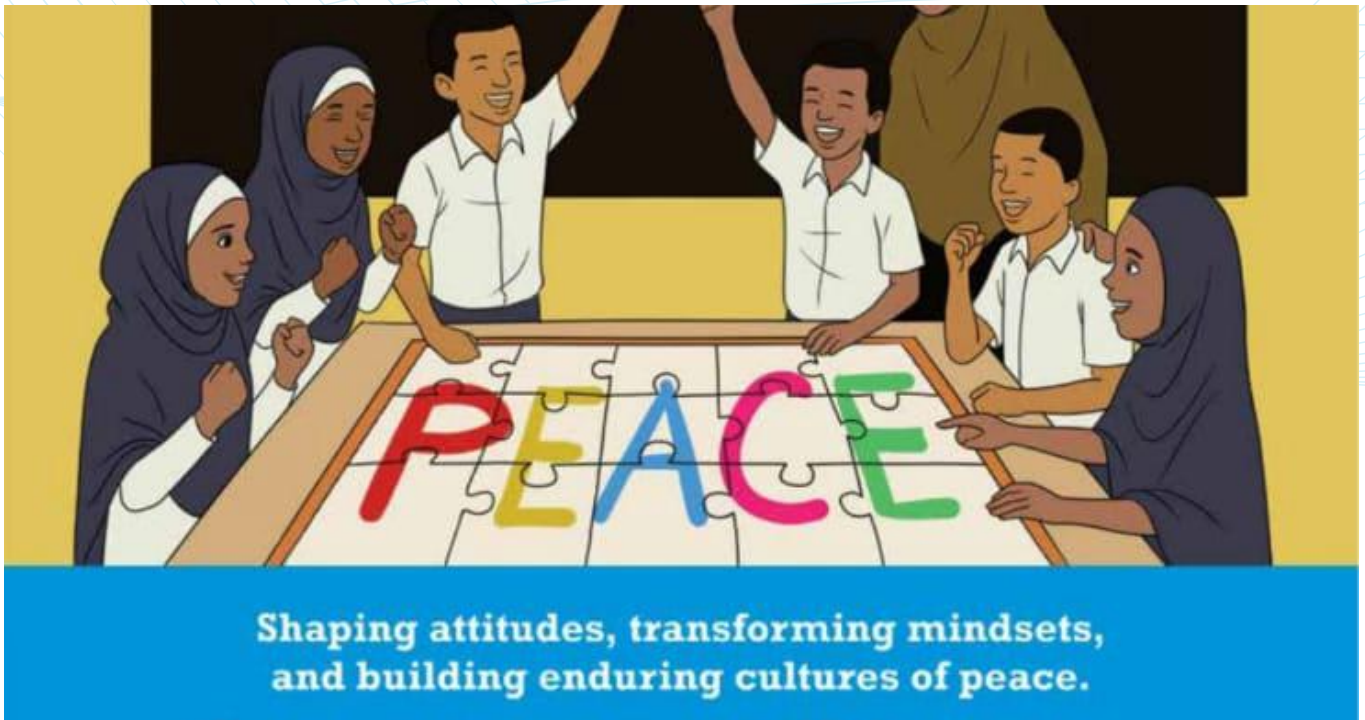
Formative assessment became a living practice, not a distant theory, as teachers used observation, encouragement, and reflection to guide learning.



A New Dawn in Wajir’s Classrooms

Today, ECDE centres across Wajir echo with laughter, curiosity, and purpose. Teachers speak with pride, plan with precision, and teach with heart. Classrooms once silent are now filled with storytelling, songs, and discovery. Learners with disabilities participate fully through adapted activities and Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). INSPIRED didn’t just train teachers, it reignited purpose, trust, and joy in early learning across Wajir County.





05

MELODIES OF HARMONY: HOW A VETERAN PEACEBUILDER'S PICTURE BOOK ADVANCES PEACE EDUCATION IN WAJIR

By Abdullahi Jamaa

In Wajir, peace did not come easily, it came at a cost not only of lives but also through the fearless efforts of patriotic peace actors who played a leading role in sustaining harmony among local clans.

When it comes to peace, there is much to learn from Wajir, which now ranks among the safest towns in Kenya, thanks to sustained, broad-based initiatives to prevent and resolve conflict.

Wajir had patriots who stood firm during times of crisis, including the renowned Al-Fatah Elders and Wajir Women for Peace, who left no stone unturned in restoring normalcy to a county that had long known no respite from clan conflict.

With unmatched adoration for their role, the community continues to preserve the legacy of veteran peacebuilders in schools, community centres, and under the shade of trees.

Living peace legends like Mrs. Nuria Abdullahi continue to inspire the current crop of peace builders through invigorated peace education that instill values of harmony, dialogue, and coexistence.

Mrs. Nuria is one of Wajir County's most accomplished peacebuilders, having dedicated decades to transforming a landscape once defined by conflict into a beacon of hope, dialogue, and resilience.

Alongside a committed group of women colleagues, she played a pivotal role in building a pragmatic grassroots peace movement that helped silence the drums of war. Drawing on her knowledge and deep understanding of local community dynamics, Mrs. Nuria has navigated real-life conflict situations that demanded timely action to prevent escalation, manage tensions, and resolve clan conflicts.

Mrs. Nuria, author of *Forced by Fate* and *Driven by Faith*, a book that chronicles the true story of Wajir's peacebuilding journey has long championed peace education. She has integrated it into life skills education and advocated for its transformative role in shaping resilient and peaceful communities.

Through her work with Wajir Peace and Development Agency (WPDA), she has been instrumental in advancing the idea that peace education should not remain abstract, but must be lived, taught, and embedded in everyday learning.

Melodies of harmony

She has since taken that vision a step further by authoring another graphic, pictorially illustrated book designed to help young learners understand the peacebuilding process.

Titled *The Melodies of Harmony*, the book goes beyond being a teaching tool to serve as an entry point for nurturing peace. Mrs. Nuria maintains that investing in education today lays the foundation for a more harmonious tomorrow.

“Nurturing peace in young minds demands careful cultivation from the start. Society must embrace the spirit of Ubuntu to guide children towards becoming caring and peace-oriented adults” asserts Mrs. Nuria.

The illustrations simplify the art of peacebuilding by breaking down concepts that are often complex or difficult to grasp in text form. For many learners, particularly in conflict-prone areas, words alone may not sufficiently communicate the message of peace.

The picture book, set in a fictional African village named Amani, depicts a looming war between two neighbouring clans. Before bloodshed erupts, elders engage in peace talks, involve local security mechanisms, and ultimately restore peace and order, teaching children the entire process of conflict prevention and peace promotion. Picture by picture, students theoretically enter the world of conflicts, record incidences, engage in peer mediation, and participate in word games that help them learn and retain key peacebuilding concepts. And for many young people, visual storytelling goes beyond literacy levels, opening their hearts and minds to embrace ideas of empathy, cooperation, and reconciliation within their communities. Through her work, Nuria has shown that peace education equips individuals with the skills to mediate conflicts, foster unity, and plant the seeds of a more inclusive society.

Peace education

“Given the region’s history and its long association with conflict, equipping our youngest learners with a strong foundation in peacebuilding from the outset is crucial,” says Mr. Samaan. At the moment, WPDA leads a bold peace education campaign targeting community stakeholders across Wajir County.

The programme integrates diverse methodologies to strengthen community participation in peacebuilding, while engaging elders as resource persons to share lived experiences of the harsh realities of conflict.

“Given the region’s history and its long association with conflict, equipping our youngest learners with a strong foundation in peacebuilding from the outset is crucial,” says Mr. Samaan.

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“Peace education integrates elements of peace curricula into classroom learning, alongside drama, traditional performances, and public forums designed to foster harmony and coexistence,” says Ahmed Madey, programme technical lead. “At the classroom level, the objective of peace education is to emphasise the value and importance of sustainable peace within the community while addressing the root causes and impacts of conflict,” added Mr. Madey.

A key component of the project is social and emotional learning, which places strong emphasis on equity, equality, and peaceful coexistence to nurture social ethics and values among young people.

“We instill social ethics to shape students’ character, values, and behaviour, empowering them to drive positive social transformation and become champions of peace and agents of change within the communities.” Through peace education, WPDA challenges divisive narratives and fosters a culture of harmony by planting the seeds of peace at the grassroots level and strengthening peaceful coexistence across all community structures.

Peace education networks

The organization established Peace Education Networks in collaboration with schools, teachers and ministry officials positioning them as key stakeholders in its grassroots initiative to embed lessons on peace in a curriculum that fits to local context and needs. The team at WPDA takes education as the pulse of peace with a strong conviction that education itself is a peace building tool, where children and teachers hold sway.



The programme identifies young people as key actors in lasting peacebuilding initiatives, placing their contribution to community cohesion at the centre of peace related activities. "Education remains an effective tool to shape attitudes, transform mindsets, and build enduring cultures of peace," says Mr Abdullahi Hassan Maalim, Education and Governance Sector Lead at the Frontier Counties Development Council (FCDC).

"Lasting peace cannot come from interventions alone. It must be nurtured intentionally to promote dialogue, tolerance, mutual respect and peaceful coexistence among younger generations"

The programme trains teachers as peace actors who instill in students and young people the values and norms needed to make Wajir a lasting beacon of peace and prosperity.

In various schools, WPDA has established peace clubs that enable students to learn from Wajir's history of conflict and how elders resolved it. Through these lessons, students are empowered to serve as peace ambassadors within the community.

"This approach seeks to nurture students and young people into peace ambassadors within the community," notes Madey. "It also helps them understand the realities of historical conflicts while fostering compassion and strengthening community cohesion."

Peace clubs also publish magazines highlighting positive community stories that underscore the importance of mutual coexistence. Students write essays and articles documenting lasting peacebuilding efforts while strengthening the role of young people.

The classroom practices extend to school assemblies, where outstanding peer mediators are recognized and celebrated as Peace Champions for their leadership, commitment, and positive influence on their peers.

Peace is taught as a shared responsibility that begins with every member of the community. WPDA peace education efforts extend beyond classrooms and conference halls to the shade of acacia trees, where elders mentor young people in mediation, reconciliation, and negotiation while passing on invaluable wisdom drawn from their lived experiences.

Peace education focuses on multiple stakeholders in peacebuilding, including various segments of the community and government structures such as the police and chiefs.

And children are no longer on the periphery of peacebuilding, with the book *Melodies of Harmony* coming in handy in advancing peace education across the vast county.

06

LIGHTING THE PATH OF LEARNING: TRANSFORMING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN WAJIR COUNTY



In the quiet classrooms of Wajir County, the hum of new beginnings can now be heard. Bright-eyed learners flip through freshly printed textbooks, teachers beam with renewed confidence, and colorful learning aids hang proudly on classroom walls. This transformation marks a historic milestone — the distribution of instructional materials and teaching and learning aids to 264 Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE) centres across the county, led by the Wajir Peace and Development Agency (WPDA) through the INSPIRED Project.

The goal was clear: to provide timely, age-appropriate instructional materials and teaching aids for both PP1 and PP2 classes, ensuring no child is left behind. Textbooks, teacher guides, number cards, charts, puzzles, and learners work book found their way into classrooms — covering six key learning areas: Language kis/eng, Mathematics, Environmental, Religious, and Creative Activities.

A New Chapter for Early Learners

Since the inception of the county government, ECDE centres had operated without structured learning resources. Teachers, though passionate, often relied on improvised materials to teach fundamental literacy and numeracy. Recognizing this gap, WPDA through the INSPIRED Project embarked on a mission to restore dignity and quality in early learning to promote foundational learning.



Voices from the Field

The response from communities was heartfelt and immediate.

"For years, we have been teaching without proper materials," shared Mrs. Saadia Hussein Takoy, an ECDE teacher from Waso Girls Centre. "These new resources make learning more exciting and interactive for our children. We finally have the tools to teach effectively."

Inspired coach distributing instructional material in Basanicha ECD centre in Tarbaj subcounty. Parents echoed the same joy. Mr. Ahmed Noor from Diif in Wajir South expressed, "Our children now have access to the same quality resources as learners in urban areas. This gives them hope and motivates us as parents to stay involved." Centre managers, too, were moved. Mr Jimale Mumin from Gotade ECD centre in Wajir East summed it up best: "This is the first time in years that our ECDE centres have received such meaningful support. WPDA and the INSPIRED Project have restored confidence in our education system."

Transformative Impact

The ripple effects of this initiative are already being felt across Wajir county. Teachers report improved lesson delivery and classroom engagement.

Learners once shy and passive, are now active participants - curious, creative, and eager to learn. The materials have not only improved the quality of instruction but also strengthened inclusivity, ensuring that even the most remote ECDE centres benefit equally.

Parental involvement in education has grown significantly. With visible progress in their children's learning, parents are more willing to collaborate with teachers and centre managers. The initiative has also enhanced equity and community trust, vital ingredients for quality and inclusive education - the very pillars on which the INSPIRED Project stands.



Building Foundations for the Future

- **Education is often described as the great equalizer** — a belief that lies at the heart of WPDA's mission. By bridging the resource gap in early learning, this initiative is not just about textbooks, but about planting the seeds of opportunity, resilience, and hope.
- **The distribution of instructional materials has become more than a logistical achievement** - it is a symbol of renewal, a promise kept to the youngest learners of Wajir County, and a testament to what collective action can accomplish.
- **As the INSPIRED Project continues its mission, WPDA remains steadfast in supporting the county government's education agenda** - ensuring that every child, no matter where they live, has access to quality early learning in Wajir county.

07

WHY DESIGN MATTERS: A PARENT'S JOURNEY FROM EXCLUSION TOWARDS INCLUSION

When schools closed in 2020, millions of Kenyan learners were cut off from their classrooms. Like many countries, Kenya turned to radio, television and digital platforms. Globally, more than 1.5 billion learners were affected, with the greatest impact on those already marginalized.

"Who am I supposed to follow, the teacher or the interpreter?"

My son asked me this question while watching a televised lesson during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The lesson included both a teacher and a sign language interpreter - an important step towards inclusion. Yet his question revealed a deeper challenge. Accessibility had been added to the lesson, not designed into it.

As an inclusive education specialist and the mother of a deaf child, I had long believed that technology could help transform learning. What I did not realize then was that connectivity and inclusion are not the same.

That lesson became painfully clear during the COVID-19 pandemic.

For many deaf learners, including my son, learning did not move home. School simply disappeared.

My son was not alone. Before the pandemic, about 136,000 learners with special needs were enrolled in Kenyan primary schools, some 13,600 of them with hearing impairments at the primary level alone. Many of them depended on school not only for academic instruction, but for their primary exposure to Kenyan Sign Language. When schools closed, that lifeline closed with them.

Radio lessons became a lifeline for hearing learners. For my son, the signal reached our home and the device was on, but he was entirely excluded.

Kenya's experience reflected a pattern documented by UNICEF's Beyond Barriers report and the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report (GEM): when accessibility is not built into education systems, learners with disabilities are the first to be excluded in crises and the last to recover.

The pandemic did not create these inequities. It exposed them.

When inclusion is an add-on

When television lessons were later introduced through KICD Edu TV, I felt hopeful. Finally, there was a platform that could potentially reach deaf learners.

Sign language interpretation and other accessibility features were introduced to reach more learners, but they also uncovered a challenge that would shape how I think about digital learning.

The interpreter was present, but the learning was not designed for deaf learners. Attention shifted constantly between teacher, interpreter and content. The pacing assumed hearing students. The pedagogy remained unchanged.

As UNICEF's Beyond Barriers report highlights, this is not unique to Kenya. In many countries, accessible digital learning content remains scarce, fragmented and difficult for many families to find and use.

Beyond access: The language gap

For deaf learners, the implications of inaccessibility go beyond missed lessons to language development itself.

Around 90 per cent of deaf children worldwide are born to hearing parents who do not initially know sign language. In many countries, including Kenya, school is often where sustained exposure to sign language begins. Language development, communication and academic learning are therefore tightly linked.

When that access is cut off, the impact extends beyond the academic to include the loss of language acquisition at a formative stage.

My son's experience shows why this matters. His Kenyan Sign Language skills improved, but some pandemic learning loss remains, particularly in English and across the broader curriculum.

The challenge was not the absence of accessibility, but the absence of accessibility by design.

The impact is measurable. Kenya's National Assessment System for Monitoring Learner Achievement (NASMLA) 2026 midline study shows persistent gaps among learners with hearing impairment: only 31.1 per cent reached the highest assessed level in English. These results do not reflect learners' potential—they reflect fragmented access, where some resources are accessible but the broader curriculum is not.

This is why accessibility must be treated as a design principle. National sign languages are not optional layers; they are core to how many learners access education in the first place.

From access to participation

Even where systems expanded access, these layered challenges meant many learners still could not benefit. The issue is not a single gap, but how multiple barriers interact.

Kenya invested significantly in digital learning before and during the pandemic through initiatives

such as Edu TV, the Kenya Education Cloud, and the Digital Literacy Program—a government-led effort to equip primary schools with devices and digital content.

This improved access yet families still faced barriers—unreliable connectivity, shared devices, limited digital skills and low awareness. Even when content existed, it did not always reach those who needed it most.

This reflects the global assessment found in the latest UNESCO GEM report: the digital transformation of education risks deepening existing inequalities when investment in infrastructure does not include support to ensure accessible content, affordability, digital literacy and community awareness.

But when learning is designed differently, the experience changes completely.

Inclusive design in practice

About six months after schools closed during Covid, we discovered accessible digital stories developed in Kenyan Sign Language through eKitabu Studio KSL and others. These range from television broadcasts to on-demand digital resources, self-paced and in my son's own language.

I will never forget the first time he watched one.

He called everyone into the room.

"Come and see my teacher!"

The joy on his face is something I will carry with me for the rest of my life.

What he saw was more than a signer on a screen. He saw a story he could follow independently, without gaps. Most importantly, he saw that the content had been created with him in mind.

Experiences like this point to a clear set of priorities for policymakers.



Implications for policy

Countries are now investing in connectivity at scale, through broadband expansion, school internet initiatives and AI in education. These are important steps. But a connected classroom that excludes learners with disabilities is not progress. It is the same exclusion at higher speed.

Start with accessibility. It must be embedded from the outset—in curriculum, platforms and procurement—not added later.

Invest in content as much as connectivity. A connected school is not inclusive if learners cannot use what is delivered.

Design with learners. Learners with disabilities and their families should be part of the process. Co-design is not a courtesy, it improves outcomes.

Build inclusive AI now. AI is already being used to generate sign language avatars, produce captions and create accessible content at scale. AI can expand access, but only if inclusion is built into its foundations.

Measuring inclusion

My son's story is not unique. That is exactly why it matters, and why it is a reason for optimism.

It shows both what is possible, and what is still at risk when systems fall short.

Some of the learning lost in those months after schools closed has not come back. He is still catching up in areas where language access was broken when it mattered most.

When I watch him now, learning independently, in his language, I see what inclusion looks like: learning designed with the child in mind from the start.

He has not yet caught up to where he needs to be, but the system around him is improving. Today, he helps develop accessible learning materials, including resources like Studio KSL's ABC Sign Language dance. He is no longer just receiving education, he is helping shape it.

School connectivity should be measured not only by how many schools are online, but whether every learner can meaningfully participate once they are.

Because the goal is not access to technology. It is access to learning.

Leah Nguata is an inclusive education specialist in Kenya and mother of a deaf child. She founded the Inclusive Haven for Children, a platform focused on education policies, learning materials and implementation practices to support equitable learning for all children.



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