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Image 1: Learner at Jomo Kenyatta Primary School demonstrates a Scratch Project to IREX CEO, Dr. Kristin Lord during her visit on March 7th, 2023

Welcome note.

Welcome to KPLAY's Newsletter. In this issue we share highlights from project implementation since February 2023 and some upcoming events and activities. Among the key highlights for this period is the visit by the IREX President Dr. Kristin Lord in March 2023. During her visit she met with Kwale County Stakeholders to support the team's relationship building with both County Officials and National Government representatives at county level. Dr. Kristin also had the opportunity to interact with learners and teachers from Jomo Kenyatta Primary School in Msambweni Zone.

With 100 Schools identified for the 2023 Cohort, the project has been working to prepare these schools for implementation. This has included inducting Heads of Institutions (primary schools head) and conducting sensitization on changes in the implementation model to Education Officials at County level to ensure we have the day-to-day support required for the project's activities. Further KPLAY embarked on a process of adapting the Training of Trainers (TOT) Manual for Special Needs Education (SNE). The process was led by two SNE Curriculum Support Officers (CSOs) who also consulted with Teachers working with children with special needs particularly hearing impaired.

Further the team had an opportunity to interact with Lego Foundation's team during a learning session on playful learning on April 4th 2023. The session was an opportunity for the team to deepen their understanding on the principles of playful learning through different activities in the session. Lastly, KPLAY has launched a Youtube channel that is an additional resource for teachers as it will host demonstration videos for creative coding and of how LTPT can be implemented in different learning areas. We are pleased to share these highlights and more and appreciate the continued support by partners and local stakeholders in the progress made so far in the project.

KPLAY Team

KPLAY Hosts IREX CEO in Mombasa

On March 7th and 8th March 2023, KPLAY had the opportunity to host Dr. Kristin Lord, IREX President and CEO, in Mombasa Kenya. The President was accompanied by the Leadership Practice Director Mr. Roshan Paul and Mr. George Kogolla the East Africa and Kenya Country Representative. During the visit, the President met with the Kwale County Governor. H.E. Fatuma Achani as well as the Ministry of Education's County Director of Education Mr. Ahmed Abdi. Dr. Kristin's visit with Government Stakeholders bolstered KPLAY's relationship building activities at County and National level which is critical for project implementation and sustainability. Mr. Ahmed Abdi, County Director of Education expressed his willingness to support the KPLAY program and affirmed the importance of partners in the education space in Kwale. The Kwale County Governor H.E. Fatuma Achani on her part expressed appreciation for KPLAY's support which contributes to the County's focus on strengthening basic education by ensuring that all schools within Kwale have an Early Childhood Education Centre. Dr. Kristin also had the opportunity to visit the PlayLab at Jomo Kenyatta Primary School that has continued to be a beacon institution in the implementation of Learning through Play with Technology (LTPT).

The learners at Jomo Kenyatta Primary School showcased their use of Scratch in creating projects for different learning areas supported by their teachers and their Head of Institution, Mr. Kanundu Ngumbao.



Image 2: Dr. Kristin Lord and IREX team in discussions with Kwale County Director of Education Mr. Ahmed Abdi

Induction of Heads of Institutions

The first Heads of Institution (HOI) induction was held on March 17th, 2023, in two parallel meetings in Kwale and Kilifi Counties. This session was aimed at providing the HOIs from the 2023 cohort of schools with information about the project, the activities, and responsibilities. In Kwale the meeting was opened by Mr. Ahmed Abdi, Country Director of Education Kwale County and closed by the TSC Director, Mr. Moses Wachira. Another meeting was held on 31st March 2023 at Mwareni Primary School for HOIs who missed the initial session. A total of 97 HOIs were reached through these sessions. Since then, HOIs have shared with IREX information on their schools including a selection of six teachers to participate in the project as well as school infrastructure to inform the establishment of PlayLabs in each school. It was agreed in this meeting that at least two other meetings with HOIs will be held to keep them updated on project progress and how they can be of more support to teachers in their schools.

Steering Committee meetings in Kwale and Kilifi

KPLAY continues to be committed to ensuring that stakeholders stay updated on the progress of the project and contribute to project strategy. The 2nd quarterly Steering Committee meeting in Kwale and Kilifi County was held on 5th and 6th April 2023 respectively. The meetings were attended by representatives from the Ministry of Education, the Teachers Service Commission (TSC), the County Government's Department of Education, Kenya Primary School Heads Association (KEPSHA) and the Kenya Private Schools Association (KPSA). In this meeting, committee members listened to project progress including results from classroom observations, parents and community members engagements and the updates from establishment of PlayLabs. Further, the committee was updated on the proposed training model for 2023. Finally, the committees brainstormed on project sustainability, a discussion expected to continue across the year as part of the process of development of county level sustainability plans.

Classroom Observation

In March, Curriculum Support Officers (CSOs) conducted classroom observations to assess the extent to which learning through play has been implemented in the classroom. A total of 98 teachers were observed in 48 schools. Most of the lessons observed were between grades 4 to 6. Observations were also mainly for Mathematics, Science and Technology and English learning areas. This round of observations was also seeking to establish the extent of use of technology in the classroom and especially implementing creative coding using scratch. Only four lessons observed were exclusively using scratch, three in Kilifi and one in Kwale. Among the concerns raised was the number of gadgets available. In many schools the functional gadgets are significantly fewer than the average number of learners per class. In addition, CSOs highlighted that additional training and support to teachers will improve teachers' skills in using scratch. Only 23% of the lessons observed were in the PlayLab but there was evidence that teachers are using materials from the PlayLab in the classroom.



Image 3: Learners work on a scratch project

KPLAY Learning Sprints

KPLAY project in collaboration with partners Humans Who Play (HWP), Education Design Unlimited (EDU) and Edutab have been working on reflecting on the project model that include LTPT practice in the classroom, Communities of Practice, Parental Empowerment and Engagement and PlayLabs. In a bid to improve these components of the program, the project is implementing a series of learning sprints to deep dive into the expectations of teachers and parents and structures that exist that can support implementation beyond the project period. On April 1st, 2023, the first sprint on Teaching practice was held in both Kwale and Kilifi Counties with 16 teachers drawn from different schools participating in the project. Among the key learnings drawn from this sprint is that project needs to empower the schools on how to manage the sharing of the devices to ensure all trained teachers have access. On April 12th a second learning sprint was held in Nairobi that brought together various organizations that have experiences in setting up Communities of Practice (CoPs). The sprint was aimed at sharing experiences, best practices, and innovative approaches to CoP implementation. Among the lessons gathered in the session is that the role of the organization goes beyond setting up the CoPs to include working towards sustainability by mentoring teacher trainers and other system leaders who will eventually support the CoP.

Field Monitoring visit by Ministry of Education Officials

KPLAY had the opportunity to host officers from the Ministry of Education (MoE) for a field monitoring visit as part of the process of renewing the MoU with the Ministry. The visit, which took place from 17th to 19th April 2023, was led by the Director of Policy Planning and East Africa Affairs, Mr. Charles Mwita, who was accompanied by two colleagues, Deputy Director Ms. Elizabeth Otieno and Ms. Catherine Matara. The purpose of their visit was to understand the project better as well as monitor the progress made since the last interaction. The team visited Kwale school for the Deaf and Mwamgunga school in Kwale and Malau Primary School and Kakoneni Primary Schools in Kilifi. The team's feedback was that the program was addressing core issues like enhancing curriculum delivery through play and technology, it was utilizing the digital devices provided by schools, and working closely with the government. At the classroom level, the teachers had been re-tooled to bring out the CBC competencies like learning to learn, collaboration, and creativity among others, the learners were more engaged and had play materials provided. This resulted in the retention of and by learners, improved learning outcomes,

and learner participation. The team also appreciated the challenges that the program has had to overcome including limited ICT devices at the school level, internet connectivity, and large classroom sizes. The project will continue to work with officers from the Directorate of Policy Partnerships and East Africa Affairs for the next steps leading to the signing of the MoU between IREX and the Ministry of Education.



Image 4: MoE officials and KPLAY Director meeting with Malau Primary School's Head of Institution

Parents and Community Engagement

The partner CBOs from Kilifi and Kwale Counties continued to conduct parental and community engagement activities in their sub-counties. A total of 43 sessions have been held since January 2023 with parents and local stakeholders. These sessions reached 2216 community members (854 male, 1362 female) through community meetings in schools and community halls to sensitize and demonstrate to parents the importance of Competence Based Curriculum (CBC) and integration of playful learning. Parents expressed their new understanding of the hands-on approach and the request from schools to bring in materials. The month of March marked the end of the first cycle of community engagement and a review of performance of the partner CBOs is on-going to inform next steps. The project targets over 20,000 parents and community members in Kwale and Kilifi and is seeking more effective ways to achieve this.



Image 3: Parents at Zibani Primary School participate in a session hosted by 2ko Na Hope CBO in Ng'ombeni Waa Zone Kwale County



Image 4: Community leaders participate in a sensitization session hosted by WIMA CBO in Kakoneni Zone, Kilifi County

KPLAY TOT Manual adaptation for Special Needs Education

As part of on-going work to finalize the KPLAY TOT Manual, the project commenced the process of adapting this resource for Special Needs Education (SNE). This is in keeping with the recommendations of the Technical Committee formed in May 2022 comprising of stakeholders from the Ministry of Education (MoE), Teachers' Service Commission (TSC), Kenya Institute of Special Education (KISE), and Kenya Institute of Curriculum Education (KICED). The adaptation process involved the establishment of a committee that comprised of the KPLAY team and two technical experts Mr. Rumba Nyamawi Rumba and Mr. Alphonse Gona, both Special Needs Education, Curriculum Support Officers (CSOs) from Kwale and Kilifi respectively.

The committee held a series of meetings to develop a deeper understanding of the manual as well as the needs for SNE. These meetings included a half day focus group discussion on 14th April 2023, with a team of SNE teachers from Kinango School for the Deaf and one teacher from Sajahanad Special School in Kilifi. The forum was led by the two CSOs and helped validate the recommendations that had been made for the adaptation of the manual for educators working with Hearing Impaired learners. Among the adaptations made to the manual is that anywhere the teacher or learners are to 'SAY' or 'SPEAK' for instance, then 'SIGN or FINGERSPELL' should be inserted for use by the teacher teaching learners with hearing impaired.

Conclusion and next steps

Among the key activities planned in the next three months include:

1. Commencement of Training Academy 1 and 2 which involves a Training of Master Trainers and teachers' workshops at zonal level. The Master trainers will consist of Curriculum Support Officers, Headteachers and Play Ambassadors from participating schools from 2021 and 2022 who have demonstrated skills to be trainers.
2. Learner assessment: This is aimed at demonstrating changes in learning outcomes resulting from the use of learning through play in the classroom.
3. School visits to offer support to teachers: These will be conducted by Curriculum Support Officers (CSOs), IREX KPLAY team and sub-awardee Edutab. These visits will include classroom observations and focus group discussions with teachers.
4. Presentation of KPLAY at E-learning conference.

