



Nairobi, Kenya

Still I Rise International School, Nairobi

**Celebrating difference amongst
diversity**



**WORLD'S
BEST SCHOOL**
Community
Collaboration

FUNDAÇÃO

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**WORLD'S
BEST SCHOOL
PRIZES**

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Introduction

Still I Rise International School, Nairobi an international school in Nairobi, Kenya, is the first school in the world to offer the International Baccalaureate to refugee children, free of charge. Located in the heart of Mathare slum, one of the largest slums in Africa, the school works to celebrate differences among its diverse students and tackle the inequalities they face, providing them with two meals a day, uniforms, transport, stationery and health insurance.



Profile:



Country:

Kenya



Region:

Nairobi



School type:

Private/Independent –
International School



Location area:

City



Student population:

101 to 200



Prize Category:

Community Collaboration

“We are building a community together where everyone feels appreciated, where every child, every parent has a space and can give something to building this community.”

– Racheal Wanjiru,
Principal, Still I Rise
International School,
Nairobi.



In-depth look

CONTEXT AND CHALLENGE

Still I Rise International School, is located in the heart of Mathare, a slum of some 600,000 people where unemployment, crime and poverty are rife. The school was set up to extend educational services to the neediest and vulnerable around Mathare and the wider community, which has had an influx of refugees from neighbouring countries. Around half of its students are refugees from Congo, Burundi, Ethiopia, Uganda, Somali, South Sudan, and Rwanda, the rest are Kenyans from vulnerable backgrounds. The school caters for students from many tribes and sub-tribe ethnic groups.

This has brought challenges to harmonious integration with

complexities in student's understanding of each other's language and culture. Some students could only communicate in their native languages, while tensions arose around some ethnic groups feeling superior to others. Besides language, students also exhibited a lack of trust in themselves, which impacted their level of engagement in their academic work. During school meals, some students refused to eat because the food was of a different ethnic origin. Some students feared possible judgement from others if they participated in discussions or responded to questions in class.



“The understanding of the role of culture in how people perceive, feel, think and behave in the world influences how students interact and relate amongst themselves, particularly those perceived to be ‘different,’” says Racheal Wanjiru, the Principal of

Still I Rise International School, Nairobi. “Evidently, the more culturally diverse an institution is, the more likely they would experience bridges, walls, or both. Our school, being international, was not exceptional.”



“There was a need to promote language diversity and an appreciation of acceptance among the students and among the staff because the staff also have their origins from different countries and different tribes and subtribes.”

- Daniel Onginjo, Mathematics Teacher at Still I Rise International School, Nairobi.




EXPERTISE AND APPROACH

In response to the ongoing friction between students, the school worked to celebrate differences among its students, encouraging them to see each other as equals worthy of mutual respect.

The school's initiative Jenga Pamoja, which means "Building Together", in Swahili, sought to bring together students regardless of culture and create a learning environment where all ethnic groups are appreciated, beginning with a personality test that showed students from different cultures they have plenty in common. Students are encouraged to speak their native language at least once a week and on occasion teachers and students attend school in an outfit of their choice that shows off their unique heritage. Students have taken to crafting traditional artefacts, reciting traditional poetry and singing their own national anthems.

The school fosters a culture of inclusivity and mutual respect between the students and teachers. It works to break down traditional relationships typical of the average school environment – teachers are seen more as mentors and students refer to teachers by their given names. This helps encourage a sense of belonging within the school environment and makes students feel they are in a safe environment. Language and Literature Teacher, Amos Orendo, says: "We really mentor the students... that mutual understanding that we create with the students makes the environment conducive and facilitates learning."





“First, we want to make the students feel that they are at home. One of the beliefs that we have is that this school is the home that they have now.”

- Amos Orendo, Language and Literature Teacher at Still I Rise International School, Nairobi



OUTCOMES AND RESULTS

As a result of the Jenga Pamoja initiative, students went beyond appreciation to respecting each other's cultural heritage. The Jenga Pamoja initiative also engaged parents in the social development of the children through workshops. Parents were proactive in supporting their children and helped share key information about their heritage.

The initiative sought to bring shared values of humanity, promote equity, and appreciate language diversity and the aesthetic values of various communities in the school. The programme culminated in a day of cultural value with students and teachers displaying their unique attire representing their various communities.

This encourages equality in terms of cultural values, practices, and beliefs. Language practice was also

observed to be instrumental in promoting intercultural learning and open-mindedness and helped learners to perceive language as an important instrument for human interactions.

The initiative has also demonstrated a positive impact on the well-being of the school community by incorporating the views and/or actions of students, staff, and other stakeholders beyond school leadership as part of the initiative. Parents proactively guided the students to practice their native languages, traditional dances as well as traditional wear. Interacting with other students from different cultural backgrounds helped foster team spirit and a sense of belonging and in turn ensured a healthy co-existence within the school community.



Key Steps



ORGANISING COMMITTEE

The Jenga Pamoja initiative was first organised by the Language Philosophy Steering Committee which consists of an Educational Management Team, teachers and four parents. In order to fully engage the students, a personality test was conducted which looked for commonalities in their personality attributes. They were regrouped into four special groups called homerooms: Explorers, Sentinels, Analysts and Diplomats. The test helped create awareness among the students that despite their cultural differences they still have a lot in common. The aim of the homeroom was to bring students of the same personality traits but of different cultures and/or nationalities together in order for them to appreciate cultural diversity. These homerooms were in turn used to help students collaborate while coming up with solutions to Homeroom Challenges identified to be affecting the school and by extension the general community.





ADMINISTERING HOMEROOM CHALLENGE

All the homerooms were asked to come up with an action plan to discover and promote the different cultures of the school. The aim was for the homerooms to brainstorm and deliberate on realistic and cost-effective events to be organised at school that would help promote cultural diversity. This activity was carried out for a period of two weeks. Students aided efforts by interviewing their teachers, parents, and staff in the school, making observations at home and videos under the supervision of teachers. Students used their real-life experiences to come up with these ideas.

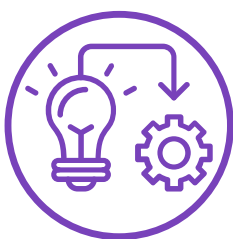


CHALLENGE FINDINGS

The final documents were collected from each homeroom leader. The Education Management Team had a meeting to allocate points as per the findings – then the winning homeroom was awarded coloured balls to represent points that homeroom



members acquired in a fortnight. The criteria focused on Authenticity: considering real-life situations/experiences of the actual communities experiences represented in the school; Creativity: how the students presented their ideas, for example, the use of posters, drama, and pictures, drama among others; and Feasibility: ideas that the school could implement within the two weeks of Jenga Pamoja and by using the locally available resources in Still I Rise School. Despite the winning homeroom being identified and made public, the Educational Management Team considered ideas from all the homerooms as important and were synthesised and later on put in place for implementation during Jenga Pamoja Week.



IMPLEMENTATION WEEK

The Jenga Pamoja initiative officially started on Monday 21st June 2021 with an assembly on the value of cultural pluralism. At the start of the launch, signs showcasing greetings from different ethnic groups were posted on the doors. Activities include the playing of cultural-based music accompanied



by dances during lunchtime, drawing the flags of the different counties represented by the students and posting them on the walkways. Over two weeks, traditional meals from the students' cultures were prepared during breakfast and lunchtime. During English classes, the teachers introduced and analysed poems written by various authors from different countries. The poems were then posted in the Common Hall and on notice boards in the school. There was an exhibition week where students were allowed to display their artwork in a gallery to showcase their talents and appreciate cultural diversity in the school community. These artworks consisted of crafts and cultural attire. The whole event culminated in a presentation of the different learner profile attributes based on the results of the tests students took.



Advice and Guidance

The first step is to acknowledge the diversity in the school environment and that this should be something to be celebrated. It is important to determine what are some of the causes of social friction between students from different backgrounds, as this will enable schools and other institutions to find easier solutions to help mend any social fragmentation. “They have to present a message of equality to all,” Olive Mumbo, the school’s Advocacy Officer, advises. “And they have to be willing to address issues of inequality within the school environment itself”, she says. Another factor would be hiring and retaining a staff that is diverse as well, ensuring that a range of different perspectives are incorporated in determining how some of these issues should be addressed.

More information

 [@stillirisegnd](https://twitter.com/stillirisegnd)

 [Still I Rise](https://www.facebook.com/StillIRise)

 [Still I Rise](https://www.linkedin.com/company/StillIRise)

 [@stillirisengo](https://www.instagram.com/stillirisengo)

 <https://www.stillirisengo.org/>

Learn more about their work by watching their event at 2022's T4 World Education Week: [watch here](#)

