

Annual Report

2025-2026



Message From The Chairperson

"When a complex system is far from equilibrium, small islands of coherence in a sea of chaos have the capacity to shift the entire system to a higher order."

- Ilya Prigogine, Nobel Prize-winning Chemist

This year, Citizen Leader Lab turned 15. It is a milestone worth pausing to appreciate — not just for how far we have come, but for the many people who have been part of this journey. One year into my role as Chairperson, I remain deeply moved by what this organisation has built and continues to build.

That spirit of collective commitment, often in the form of small groups of people choosing to act, has always been at the heart of what we do. As Margaret Mead reminds us:

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

- MARGARET MEAD

From the very beginning, our purpose was clear: To develop public sector leaders who are change ready, aware of their context, and genuinely committed to the collective good. Over 15 years, that purpose has taken shape through our programmes, our partnerships, and the communities we work alongside.

Shifts in Action

Our leadership development work has shifted how school, municipal and business professionals lead: Moving away from controlling and directing towards listening, enabling, and building trust. Citizen Leader Lab's programmes are designed to support exactly these kinds of shifts and, year after year, we see real change in the individuals, teams, and communities we serve.

Our impact cannot be measured in numbers alone. At its heart, our work is about changing mindsets, and with changed mindsets comes hope for a better South Africa. This is the output of collective agency where many of us have put our hands up and said yes to wanting something different for our schools, local government, and health sector.

Our outcomes reach beyond senior leadership all the way to young people who become inspired to find their voices and work towards creating futures that are both meaningful and inclusive.

Perhaps most encouragingly, we see that our transformational leadership work tends to sustain itself. As the African proverb puts it:

"Wood already touched by fire is not hard to set alight."

- AFRICAN PROVERB

Message From The Chairperson

Citizen Leader Lab's impact shows up in stronger leaders, motivated teams, and environments where everyone feels genuinely able to contribute. It also reaches beyond organisations into families and communities because, when we change how we relate to one another, those changes ripple outward.

This impact is also reflected in the relationships we have built over 15 years - relationships grounded in trust, consistency, and a shared commitment to growth. We have maintained long-standing partnerships, welcomed new supporters, and expanded our reach across South Africa.

Yet we hold all of this with humility. Growth and impact require us to slow down as much as to act. Bayo Akomolafe captures this well:

"The times are urgent; let us slow down."

- BAYO AKOMOLAFE

We are clear-eyed about the current challenges. The problems facing our organisations and communities are real and constantly changing. They require leadership that is not only skilled, but self-aware, able to hold complexity, work across difference, and act with both clarity and care.

How we meet these challenges is shaped by three things we hold close. We stay curious: Willing to question what we think we know, to learn from what is emerging, and to change course when needed. We lead with compassion, grounded in the understanding that ubuntu is not just a value but a practice: Our wellbeing is genuinely tied to the wellbeing of others, and our work must reflect that. And we hold to courage, staying open to the hard feedback, the honest challenge, and the deeper conversations that keep us aligned with our purpose.

Our Board plays a vital role in keeping us accountable while ensuring good governance, upholding dignity and care, and making sure we maintain our *raison d'être*.

Into The Next Chapter

Looking ahead, we are focused on deepening and widening our impact. This means making our programmes more accessible, building our capacity to work effectively in digital and hybrid spaces, and continuing to grow networks of practice that support learning long after formal programmes end.

What has not changed — and will and must not change — is our belief in people, their ability to learn, to lead, and to help shape systems.

To every partner, facilitator, participant, staff member, board member, and supporter who has contributed to Citizen Leader Lab over the past 15 years: Thank you. Your presence and commitment make this work possible.

We move into the next chapter with a strong foundation, directed by a clear sense of purpose, and motivated by an enduring commitment to leadership in service of the collective. May we continue to grow stronger, together.

Fifteen years in, the work continues. And if the past is any guide, the next fifteen will be shaped, as they always have been, by people who care enough to show up.



Dr Sharon Munyaka

*Chairperson,
Citizen Leader Lab*

Message From The CEO

"Hope is not a passive feeling. It is the courageous work of building the world we wish to see."

One of the joys of my role is visiting the schools that we partner with and engaging with the leaders that we support. This is surprising to some as many South African schools have highly challenging circumstances. Walking into a South African public school can be heartbreaking as one sees first-hand the obstacles that young children face in our country.

Yet in many schools, a different story unfolds. Despite the socio-economic hardships, our work uncovers leaders who are determined to change the narrative for their learners and communities. These principals choose to participate in our leadership development programmes because they want their schools to thrive.

Visiting these schools feels like discovering oases of hope. Yes, they grapple daily with socio-economic realities. Yes, their learners face immense challenges. But if I look beyond the deficits, I see something else: A quiet energy, a sense of purpose. Children laugh and play at break time. They run to greet their principal with hugs. At the buzzer, they return quickly to neat classrooms filled with colourful, hand-made posters carrying positive messages.

I leave these schools inspired. I see educators giving their best, supported by leaders who believe in them. I see learners focused and flourishing in environments of love. I see innovation, perseverance, resilience and above all, I see hope.

In these unsettled times, when global leadership often falters, our alumni schools remind me that awakened leaders exist — leaders who put the greater good above personal gain, who work tirelessly to uplift their communities.

But these leaders cannot do it alone. They need tools and practices to harness engagement and deliver results. They need access to networks and expertise beyond the borders of their communities. They need cheerleaders. They need thinking partners.

For 15 years, Citizen Leader Lab has had the privilege of providing this support. We have worked with over 2,280 school principals, while enabling 2,280 business leaders — active citizens — to make deep, meaningful contributions to strengthening public education. Together, we have strengthened leadership, cultivated hope and enabled brighter futures for more than 1.9 million learners.

The work hasn't been easy, but we are determined to continue our contribution. We are deepening our work in education with collaboration projects that leverage the foundations laid by strong leadership and which aim to deliver improved outcomes in foundation phase literacy, STEM achievement and youth employability. We are creating leadership development opportunities for future school principals and for District Officials, and we are growing our alumni support.

Beyond Basic Education, we are extending our leadership and cross-sector collaboration model into local municipalities with two new exciting projects in the pipeline. None of this would be possible without your partnership. Thank you for walking this journey with us.

May we continue building a prosperous, peaceful and just nation that is #TheFutureWeWant.

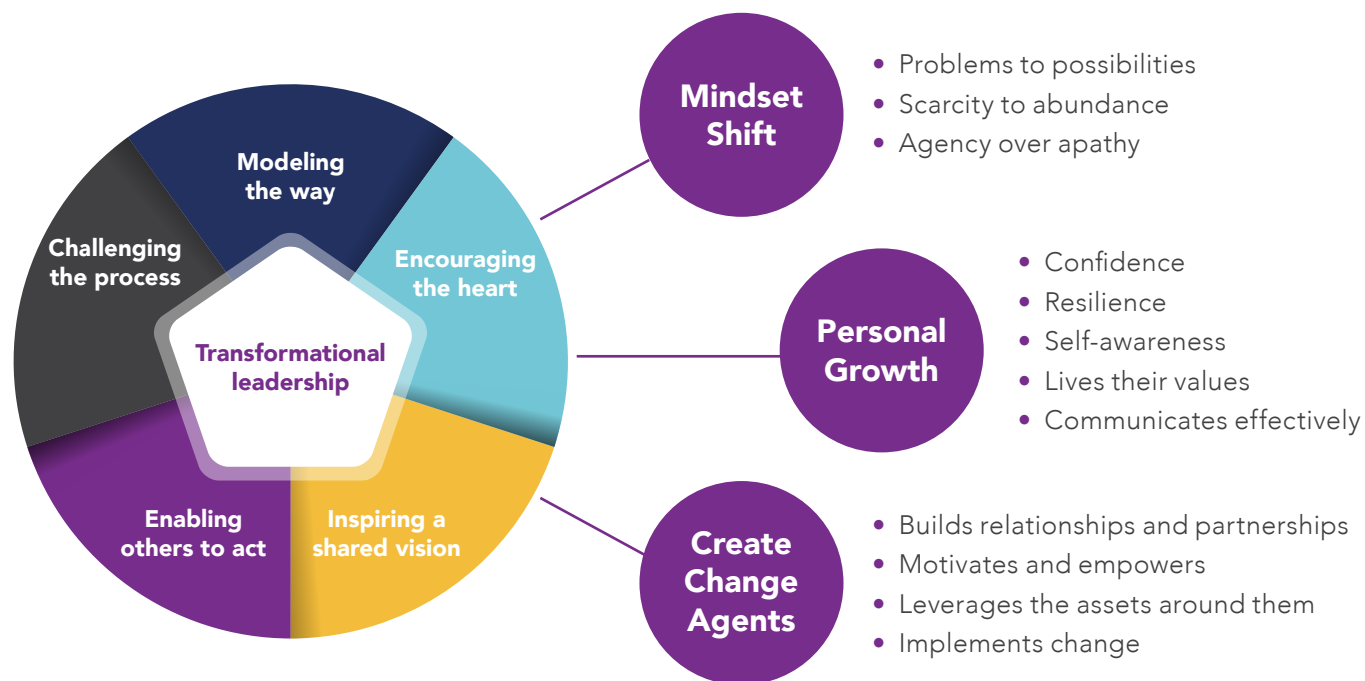


Komala Pillay

CEO, Citizen Leader Lab

Who We Are

Citizen Leader Lab develops transformational leaders with the purpose of strengthening local leadership to solve local challenges. The leaders are supported to shift their mindsets, grow their personal skills, engage stakeholders and their teams to achieve positive change.



Our unique approach to leadership cultivates change agents who actively identify and address barriers to performance.

Who We Are

At Citizen Leader Lab, we are dedicated to nurturing leadership and providing support to create resilient, accountable and responsible leaders who drive positive change in their communities and society at large.

Our Vision

Leadership that builds a better future for ALL.

Our Mission

Utilise innovative leadership development models to develop leaders who catalyse positive change in their communities and broader society.

Facilitate cross-sectoral collaboration to strengthen connections and partnerships across boundaries.

Create opportunities for active citizenship.

Engage with key public sectors, with education being an important focus area.

Our Purpose

To develop conscious leadership that builds social cohesion, uplifts communities and works towards achieving a just society.

Our Strategy

Deepening impact in education and expanding impact to other public sectors.

Strategy Update: Education

Leaders for Education is the foundational piece as school principals are key change agents within the education system.

The new programmes complement and enhance this work; deepening impact and sustainability of change.



Strategy Update: Education



Flagship Programme

Targeted Impact

LEADERS FOR EDUCATION
(formerly *Partners for Possibility*)

Empowering school principals to lead transformative change in their schools and communities, in partnership with a business leader.
As of February 2026, we have reached 2,280 school principals across all nine provinces.

Flagship Programme

Targeted Impact

ALUMNI SUPPORT

On-going support for alumni from Citizen Leader Lab and partner organisations to support school leaders in their school improvement journeys.

Support includes:

- School Leadership Forum
- On-line collaboration platform Zibuza.net
- In development: Strategic AI for instructional leaders

MULTI-YEAR COLLABORATION PROJECTS

Leveraging the ‘fertile ground’ laid by leadership development to support targeted change objectives in primary and high schools. For example, improved foundation phase literacy, STEM and youth employability outcomes.

Projects include:

- Leaders for Literacy in collaboration with Khanyisa Inanda Community Projects
- STEM improvement in collaboration with Osizweni Science.
- In development: Improving youth employability in partnership with Keep a Child Alive, Tomorrow’s Leaders in Training and Worksheet Cloud

SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAM LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME

Supporting senior school managers in the transition from leading self to leading others and strengthening the school leadership pipeline in Leaders for Education alumni schools

DISTRICT LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

In development: Increasing sustainability of change through leadership development of District Officials in collaboration with the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT).

Strategy Update

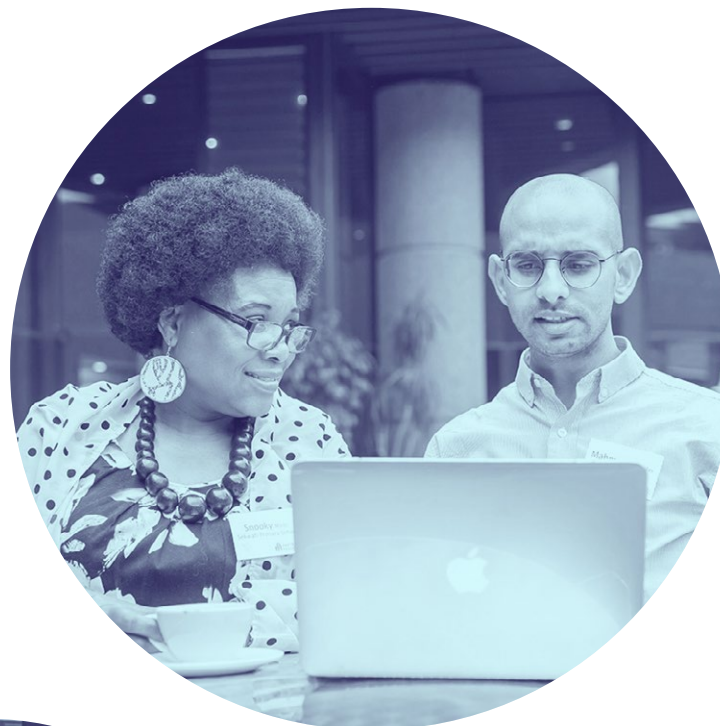
Other public sectors

Municipal leaders across South Africa are tasked with delivering services under extraordinary pressure: Limited resources, skills shortages, high vacancy rates, complex regulations and public scrutiny.

Despite commitment and expertise, many leaders find themselves:

- Stretched thin and operating in isolation
- Expected to deliver results without sufficient support
- Working in systems that make innovation difficult

The Leaders for Municipality programme has been designed to change this reality, not through theory or compliance training, but through practical, relational, action-based leadership development that enables an effective public-private partnership and helps municipal leaders do their work better. Built on our experience with Leaders for Education and tested in partnership with the City of Cape Town, we are currently in conversation with two municipalities for programme implementation in 2027.



Our Impact

Leaders for Education JANUARY 2025 - FEBRUARY 2026

School Principal Demographics



52.8 Average age (years)
67% Lead Primary schools
43% Schools are Quintile 3

52% are female
48% are male
95% are Black
5% are White

Business Leader Demographics



58.0 Average age (years)
52% are female
48% are male

79% are Black
21% are White

Cumulative reach 2011-2026



Cumulative
partnerships
2,257



Teachers
reached
51,769



Learners
reached
1,740,315

Free State

New Partnerships: **28**
Teachers Reached: **771**
Learners Reached: **22,552**

Gauteng

New Partnerships: **37**
Teachers Reached: **1,254**
Learners Reached: **39,936**

Limpopo

New Partnerships: **18**
Teachers Reached: **439**
Learners Reached: **16,802**

Mpumalanga

New Partnerships: **30**
Teachers Reached: **648**
Learners Reached: **22,694**

KwaZulu Natal

New Partnerships: **10**
Teachers Reached: **299**
Learners Reached: **10,950**

Western Cape

New Partnerships: **18**
Teachers Reached: **479**
Learners Reached: **16,002**

Eastern Cape

New Partnerships: **36**
Teachers Reached: **742**
Learners Reached: **25,268**

Our Impact

Leaders for Education

Completion Rates of the Programme



Principals



Business Leaders

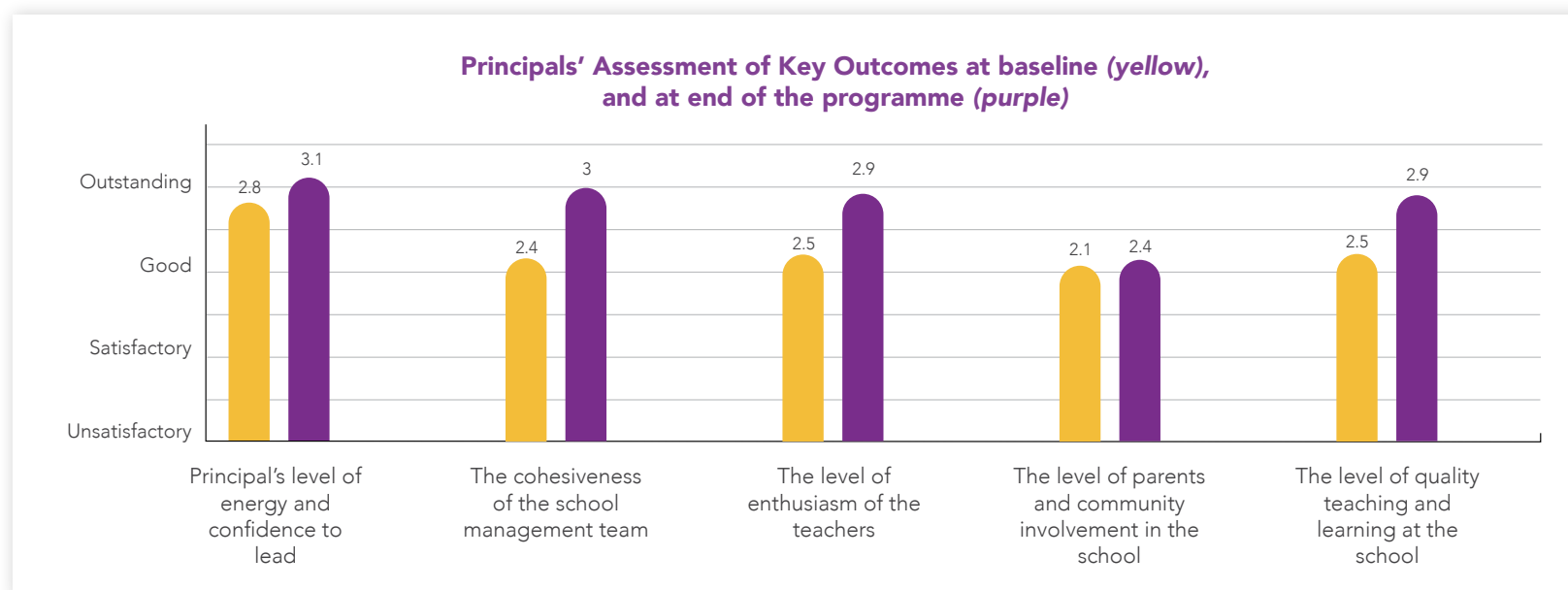
Outcomes of the Leaders for Education programme for principals and business leaders

Principals and business leaders identified six areas of improvement in their leadership approach.



Key changes in the schools due to the Leaders for Education programme

Feedback from the principals shows that schools are making meaningful progress toward becoming more collaborative and higher-performing schools.



The Leaders for Education transformation: Elevating school excellence

The graph above shows that the programme has contributed to holistic transformation across leadership, school culture, teaching quality, community engagement, and learner outcomes. Principals are more confident and now lead with greater clarity and intentionality, applying stronger planning and communication skills to create inclusive, results-driven environments.

This shift has fostered more motivated educators, leading to an improved school culture in which teacher enthusiasm and collaboration support ownership of the school's vision and goals. Teaching quality has improved

with educators offering extra classes and prioritising Maths and Science.

Enhanced communication strategies and digital platforms have strengthened parental engagement in the school and attendance at parent-teacher meetings. Learners, in turn, show improved discipline, pride, and participation in school and extramural activities.

The findings show how leadership development cascades into improvements across the entire school ecosystem.

School principals and business leaders delivered the following school improvement initiatives as part of the action-learning component of the Leaders for Education programme.

Education & Learning

Academic programmes, STEM initiatives, and learner development to raise educational outcomes.

Infrastructure & Renovation

Physical improvements and facility upgrades to enhance the teaching and learning environment.

Donations & Resources

Donated equipment and materials that support learning, operations, and community needs.

Leadership & Strategy

Staff development, school branding, and governance initiatives to strengthen institutional leadership.

Environment

Greening, recycling, and feeding initiatives that promote sustainability and learner wellbeing

Wellbeing & Support

Health, safety, and community outreach programmes that support the whole learner.

Events & Media

Celebrations, public engagement, and media activities that showcase school achievements.

Our Impact

Leaders for Education

Voices from the principals on the key shifts in their schools

Leadership Development

“Through the programme, I’ve experienced significant personal growth, developing greater self-awareness and confidence. I’ve refined my leadership skills, learned to navigate complex challenges and cultivated meaningful relationships. This journey has been transformative and empowering. Interacting with leaders from the private sector broadened my perspective on leadership, allowing me to appreciate diverse approaches and insights.”

– **PRINCIPAL SAMANTHA SAYANNA, OPEN AIR SCHOOL, DURBAN**

“By ensuring that I am a convenor, I listen more for understanding, talk less so as to connect with people. I work in small groups for each individual to feel important, connected, engaged and give out inputs that will benefit the school.”

– **PRINCIPAL MANYAKA ELIZABETH FIKILE, NONG PRIMARY SCHOOL, TSHWANE**

Learner Outcomes

“Most learners [are] voluntarily partaking in sports. Learners’ performance increased when compared to past years. The rate of absenteeism decreased and now parents [are] forwarding reasons for the absenteeism of their kids.”

– **PRINCIPAL SIMON MAFATLI NKUNA, KAPUTLA NKOANA PRIMARY SCHOOL, POLOKWANE**

“We managed to obtain position three in [the] National Excellence Education Awards for being the most performing Full Service School and the most improving Full Service School in all the nine aspects... Late coming of learners was about 20% in 2023, so since last year to date it has dropped to 11%. Absenteeism has also dropped.”

– **PRINCIPAL ANNAH SELEKA, MMERA FULL SERVICE PRIMARY SCHOOL, LEPHALALE**

Our Impact

Leaders for Education

Voices from the principals on the key shifts in their schools

Staff Relations

"No competitions amongst each other but embrace each other's strengths and take lead accordingly. We all work together. Teachers are free to assist SMT. Solutions to existing challenges are mostly coming from teachers and SGB parents."

– PRINCIPAL YOLSWA JAFTA, TYHOLORA PRIMARY SCHOOL, EDEN CENTRAL KAROO

"SMT working as a team and encourage those who are discouraged. They now do interesting activities with the learners."

– PRINCIPAL ALETTA NOMTHANAZO TSEKEDI, KARABELO PRIMARY SCHOOL, BLOEMFONTEIN

Quality Teaching & Learning

"Teaching quality improves as staff embrace recognition and innovative lesson approaches, boosting learner engagement, particularly in Maths and Social Sciences."

– PRINCIPAL JESBRIE KLAASSENS, OVERBERG

"We regard ourselves as a school of choice due to higher enrolment compared to our counterparts"

– PRINCIPAL ZAMANI HLELA, PHINDELA PRIMARY, DURBAN

Parent / Community Involvement

"Skilled SGB members [are] offering their services to improve physical infrastructure... Community Police Forum (CPF) provides protection during school events."

- PRINCIPAL ZAMANI HLELA, PHINDELA PRIMARY SCHOOL, DURBAN

"Parents [are] cleaning classes daily and rotating quarterly. [They are] Doing gardening and planting vegetables and assisting the NSNP [National School Nutrition Programme]... [Parents are] Donating clothes to learners who are poor. Assisting in checking learners who are bunking classes and bringing them to school."

- PRINCIPAL KETLAMORENG PETE MATSHEKA, DITHOLWANA PRIMARY SCHOOL, BLOEMFONTEIN



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Voices from the Business Leaders

Leadership Development

"This has been a truly transformative experience. I walk away with a renewed sense of responsibility, not just to lead within my organization, but to lead for the greater good. I am a better human now than when I started the programme, thank you."

- BUSINESS LEADER MAKHOSI MODISE, (STANDARD BANK, HEAD API MARKETPLACE)

"The rich experiences and collaborations that were formed have contributed to the improvements and problem-solving skills that are making a difference in the schools."

- BUSINESS LEADER JONAS MASHELE, (SPAR SOUTH RAND DC, FINANCIAL ACCOUNT)

"In the community, you find diverse views - from neoliberal to ultra-conservative. With the help of the programme, my view of understanding even the diverse and ultra- conservative views is much more accommodative and [I] sympathize with others with ease... [I] Am much more open to criticism, and accepting of others' views, even when not in agreement."

- BUSINESS LEADER RAMORAKE MATHIBE (INDEPENDENT BUSINESS OWNER, DIRECTOR)

"Through the Leaders for Education programme, I have come to realise that I have some 'blind spots' I was unaware of when it comes to leadership. The programme has taught me the importance of really trying to get to know and understand and form a deeper connection with the people you are 'leading'. It has re-defined the way I would have previously engaged with people."

- BUSINESS LEADER URSULA DE HAAS, (INDEPENDENT BUSINESS OWNER, ARCHITECT)

"There has been many leadership courses attended even the ones focusing on self. But never one where the platform is provided to practice and give your contribution by working with another leader. And the willingness to trust the process and apply the experience to see the outcomes starting to play out on the work done."

- BUSINESS LEADER NEO THEBE (OILTANKING MOGS, ENGINEERING LEAD)



Our Impact

School Management Team Leadership Programme (SMTP)

Demographic Details



43.8 Average age (years)
73% Lead High schools
35% Schools are Quintile 4
66% are female
34% are male
99% are Black
1% are White



Action learning initiatives implemented by the SMT members during the programme

Academic Support & Performance

After-school programmes, study camps, and online Maths and Science tools to improve learner results.

School Culture & Learner Development

Motivational sessions, mentoring, Indabas, and awareness campaigns to build positive values and behaviour.

Feeding Scheme & Welfare

Nutrition programmes that support learner health, attendance, and concentration.

Infrastructure & Environment

Renovations and print-rich classrooms to create a better teaching and learning environment.

Educator Development

ICT training, mentoring, team-building, and performance monitoring to enhance staff capacity.

Extracurricular & Community

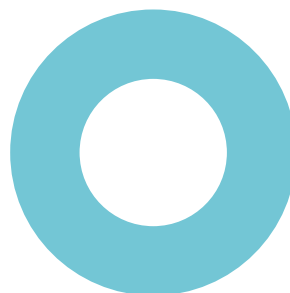
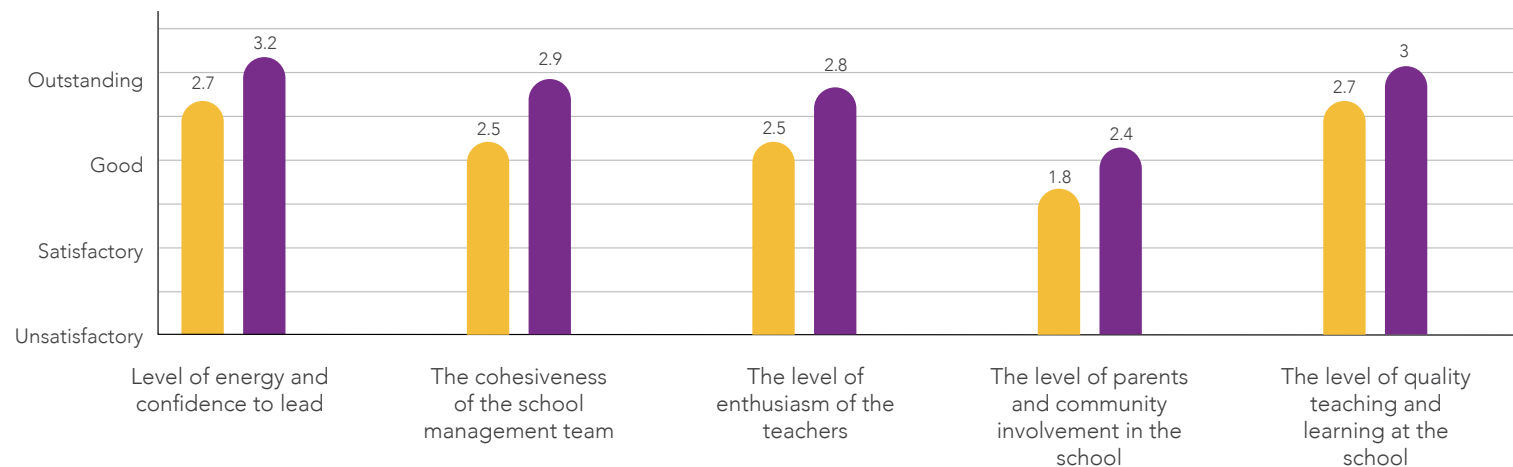
Sports, competitions, career exhibitions, and community projects for holistic development.

Our Impact

School Management Team Leadership Programme (SMTP)

Outcomes of the SMT Leadership Programme

SMT assessment of the key outcomes at baseline (yellow) and end of the programme (purple)



Our Impact

School Management Team Leadership Programme (SMTP)

Outcomes of the SMT Leadership Programme

Findings show improvement across the five areas from baseline to the end of the programme.

The graph illustrates improvement across all five key outcomes over the 12-month period, confirming that the programme had a positive impact on school leadership and performance. These improvements show

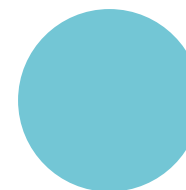
- **SMTs evolve from managers to collaborators:**
Leaders now prioritise listening, self-awareness, and “thinking spaces,” leading to more assertive and initiative-driven teams.
- **Better leadership drives learner academic improvement:**
Improved school discipline and inviting classroom environments have led to increased learner participation and higher academic performance
- **Strategic monitoring reduces absenteeism and late coming:**
New systems, such as gate duty and result tracking, have significantly decreased late-coming and improved student neatness.
- **Parents transition from observers to active partners:**
Enhanced communication via WhatsApp and open-door policies has increased parental volunteering in maintenance, coaching, and tutoring.
- **Professional trust strengthens District relationships:**
SMT members are now more confident engaging with District officials, viewing their feedback as developmental opportunities rather than criticism.

Completion rate
(98% of the SMTs completed the programme)



Our Impact

Leaders for Literacy: Pinetown



Partners:

Citizen Leader Lab and Khanyisa Inanda Seminary Community Projects (KICP)

Sponsor:

FEM Education Foundation

Target:

Ten public primary schools in the Pinetown District, KwaZulu-Natal



Foundational Literacy Project – Powered by Collaborative Leadership

Teacher development including:

- Workshops on literacy and numeracy teaching strategies, classroom practices and socio-emotional learning.
- In-class coaching
- Classroom support with education assistants enabling the embedment of new practices

School leadership development including:

- School principal leadership development and support to implement the four DBE pillars for literacy transformation*
- SMT leadership development for the Deputy Principal and Foundation Phase HOD

Successes of the programme

- **Teacher confidence:** 88% of teachers reported confidence in applying foundational literacy strategies, with classroom observations confirming structured daily literacy routines are now standard practice.
- **Classroom environment:** KICP's "dressed for success" initiative, with colourful displays and informative materials, positively impacted learning.
- **Systemic change:** District Teacher Professional Divisions requested workshops for non-participating schools to access Foundational Literacy and Numeracy training
- **Parental engagement:** Parents are actively involved in literacy initiatives such as reading clubs, supporting children's learning at home and school.
- **Teacher agency:** Teachers showed resourcefulness beyond programme requirements, creating new school libraries from available resources.
- **Shared literacy culture:** Schools are developing a collective literacy identity, with principals collaborating voluntarily to address shared challenges.
- **Sustainable reform:** These outcomes signal a shift in the human systems that determine whether educational reforms endure or fade.

The programme success speaks to greater ownership and sustainability of the changes and supports our Leaders for Literacy change theory, namely that:

IF school leaders are capacitated to lead adaptive change and foster a collaborative learning culture,

THEN - backed by supportive management structures — teaching quality will improve, foundational learning outcomes will increase, and schools will become hubs of sustained community upliftment



Our Impact

Leaders for Literacy: Pinetown

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School Principal Feedback on Changes within the School

Voices of the Principals

"I have become a better and confident leader as a result of having SMT in the programme. I now strive to always think above the line and not below the line... The learners go to the library during break time to read books. The school also participated in reading programmes in the circuit. We also have partnership with local library where learners visit to be educated on different aspects."

"Reading periods from Tuesday to Thursday @ 07:30-08:00 have a good progress. Usage of School Library Reading periods, formation of reading clubs had a positive impact."

"All learners have access to reading books and they are exposed to class reading corners."

"In 2025 I was able to implement "Reading periods from Tuesday to Thursday @ 07:30-08:00 have a good progress. Having a prize giving day where local high school principals were invited. Leading reading programme. Every morning I visit classrooms to monitor."



School Leadership Forum (SLF)

Citizen Leader Lab's School Leadership Forum (SLF) strengthens leadership capacity in under-resourced schools while fostering collaboration, trust, and mutual learning.

Complementing the Leaders for Education programme, it provides ongoing learning opportunities that enable school leaders to deepen their leadership practice beyond the formal programme. In partnership with organisations such as the Instructional Leadership Institute, Young Game Changers, Columba Leadership, UNISA's Department of Human Resources, the Gauteng Department of Education, and a range of respected education leaders, authors, coaches and experienced school principals, the SLF delivers focused learning experiences that combine expert insights, peer learning, reflection, and practical application.

Through thematic forums and specialised block sessions, participants are equipped with evidence-informed strategies and practical tools to strengthen instructional leadership, improve school culture, support educator wellbeing, and drive sustainable school improvement.

Reach Achieved by the SLF Sessions – Principals and Educators from Alumni and non-alumni schools

Principals and educators from alumni schools participated in the SLF session, while the SLF also drew interest from educators and principals beyond the programme who were eager to engage with the topics presented.

February – November 2025, with the support of Woolworths MyDifference, Citizen Leader Lab Presented:

SLF Sessions

5 Virtual

Attendance: 458



Educators reached
9,475



Learners reached
303,200

8 In-person sessions

Attendance: 623



Educators reached
7,350



Learners reached
235,200

2 Focused Blocks: Instructional Leadership & Mathematical

Attendance: 117



Educators reached
1,700



Learners reached
54,400

Outcomes from SLF Sessions

The outcomes of the SLF align with its intention to support alumni schools on their improvement journeys. Reported outcomes include strengthened leadership practices, reduced educator stress, strengthened school culture, and new teaching strategies, especially in Mathematical Reasoning. In addition, learners' confidence improved, and they are willing to participate in school activities with a reading culture developing in lower grades. Collectively, these findings demonstrate the SLF's contribution to leadership improvement and a culture of continuous innovation.

Our Alumni: Where Leadership Goes Next

What happens after our formal programmes end?

Across the country, Citizen Leader Lab alumni are answering that question in how they lead each day. From Welkom to Hammanskraal, Pietermaritzburg to iLembe, their leadership continues to evolve. It is less about theory, more about practice; characterised by partnership, refined by reflection and anchored in purpose and forged through impact sustainability.

Possibility in practice

Rose Nkhasi | Business Leader, Welkom

For some, the shift begins with a simple reorientation. Nkhasi captured her learning in three commitments: To convene with intention, to remain simple and to actively pursue possibility. These principles now anchor how she plans, leads and shows up, demonstrating that leadership doesn't need to be complex to be effective.

"Be a convener. Remain simple. See possibilities and go towards them."

Compliance to ecosystem leadership

Sylvia Pole | Principal, Primrose Hill Primary School, Johannesburg

For school leaders, transformation is both personal and systemic. Pole describes moving beyond compliance-driven leadership towards a more dynamic, ecosystem-based approach. Her school is no longer viewed in isolation, but as part of a broader network shaped by relationships, shared vision and strategic intent.

"Leadership is no longer about control. It is about creating the conditions for others to contribute."

Through her partnership with business leader, Mona Naidoo, Pole strengthened her approach to strategy, sustainability and innovation. Together, they continue to redefine leadership, blending education and business perspectives.

Relying on relationships

Sue Singh | Principal, Northdale Primary School, Pietermaritzburg

For Sue Singh, the programme's impact was carried through connection. Beginning her journey during COVID-19, she found strength in the relationships built through the programme. These connections helped her deepen communication, strengthen collaboration between school and home and lead her school community with greater cohesion and purpose.

"The learner, school and home now work as an interwoven team."

Outcomes from SLF Sessions

Leadership that listens

Matsobane Mosena | Principal, Rapelego Primary School, Hammanskraal

For others, the transformation lies in how leadership is shared.

Mosena reflects on a shift away from individual decision-making towards inclusive leadership. By listening intentionally and consistently, he has reduced conflict, strengthened trust and built a culture where solutions are co-created and owned by all.

"I used to think I had to come up with all the solutions myself," he says. "No longer! Leadership is no longer just one person's decisions."

Confidence, courage and change

Lebudi Johnny | Principal, Kgetseiyatsie Secondary School, Hammanskraal
Emmanuel Dlamini | Principal, Deda Primary School, iLembe District

Across the network, school principals are finding their stride. Lebudi Johnny describes a shift in how he leads, gaining accountability and the confidence to make tough decisions.

"The programme gave me the confidence to lead decisively in a complex school environment," he reflected.

The experience equipped him to guide Departmental Heads and educators toward measurable academic goals with greater effectiveness.

Emmanuel Dlamini experienced a profound personal transformation, moving from low self-confidence to purposeful leadership. He realised he

was not alone. Many school principals face similar challenges, and through collaboration and shared learning, he built resilience and self-assurance. This inner growth has translated into tangible improvements at Deda Primary, including upgraded infrastructure and a growing vision for digital, future-ready learning.

Dlamini said: "I used to try solving all challenges alone, but through collaboration with peers and mentors, my confidence has grown drastically and so has my school."

The leadership current

Through these voices, a common thread emerges.

Citizen Leader Lab alumni are not static recipients of a past experience. They are active leaders continuing to adapt and apply what they have learned in practical contexts with practical stakes.

They are:

- Convening relevant conversations
- Building partnerships that endure
- Leading with insight, conscience and humanity
- Creating schools that are not only functional, but excel

This is the ongoing work of leadership. And this is what it means to be part of the Citizen Leader Lab alumni network: Not the end of a journey, but the continuation of one: Born of learning, sustained by acting and eventually becoming.

The Leadership Chain Reaction

How one principal's transformation ignited a ripple of leadership across schools in KwaZulu-Natal.

Back in 2017, Nhlanhla Mbele, then school principal of Groutville High in KwaDukuza, KwaZulu-Natal, joined the Partners for Possibility (now Leaders for Education) programme. What began as a professional development opportunity transformed how the entire school understood and practised leadership.

Among those under his leadership at the time was a teacher named Nduduzo Ngcobo, who observed Mbele's evolution firsthand. Years later, now a school principal himself, Ngcobo reflects on how Mbele's growth shaped the kind of leader he has become.

"Mr Mbele moved from just delegating work to developing people. He would delegate not to offload, but to capacitate us as leaders."

- NDUDUZO NGCOBO, SCHOOL PRINCIPAL, STANGER HEIGHTS PRIMARY

When Ngcobo first joined the school, he encountered a very different kind of leader. "Mr Mbele was the kind of leader who didn't compromise. It was either his way or the highway." Through his participation in the programme, however, Mbele began to rethink his approach.

One day, Mbele called Ngcobo and a colleague aside: "There's a workshop happening. Go in my place. You might benefit from it." At the time, it felt like merely an errand. Looking back, Ngcobo recognises it as a turning point.

"That one day opened my eyes. We started to see that leadership was no longer the task of one man. It was the collective responsibility of a team."

- NDUDUZO NGCOBO

The shift in Mbele's leadership began to influence every facet of school life. One of his most notable reforms was the introduction of the 'Grade Head System' — a structure that gave teachers more responsibility and accountability.

"A grade head was like a mini principal," Ngcobo explained. "You'd be responsible for 400 or 500 learners. It forced us to lead, not just teach." Teachers, even those new to the profession, began chairing meetings and taking initiative in ways that would have been unthinkable before.

Over time, Groutville became an incubator for leadership. More than ten colleagues who worked under Mbele have since gone on to lead their own schools, including Simphiwe Gumede, now principal of Groutville itself.



Colleagues now in leadership



Years of impact



Schools transformed

Principal Mbele's leadership impact is reflected in the way his influence has grown over time. His leadership has helped others step into leadership roles, strengthened schools and created change that continues beyond his own direct involvement.

The Leadership Chain Reaction

Conscious Leadership

To Ngcobo, leadership is inseparable from life itself. "I grew up in a one-room mud house," he shared. "Every time it rained, we'd get soaked inside. The only way I could escape that environment was through education."

Now, as the school principal of Stanger Heights Primary, he sees himself in the learners who arrive each day carrying the weight of similar struggles. "Some of them come from homes where there's hunger, where there's no one to push them. If I can be a better leader, they can benefit and maybe escape poverty too."

So when the Leaders for Education programme reached his district — a revitalised version built on the foundation of Partners for Possibility — he joined without hesitation.

"When the school principal grows, everyone benefits. The learners, the educators, the community — they all feel the impact."

- NDUDUZO NGCOBO

Leadership as a Shared Practice

As Ngcobo settles into his own Leaders for Education journey, he is reminded that leadership is not a solitary pursuit. It flourishes in community and diversity. "In the past, school principals were mostly older men, and it was hard for women to get these positions. Now I see young, passionate teams who are already working in ways that benefit society. They don't just complain, they act."

He tells a story that illustrates this proactivity: "At our school, we built a guard house using small donations. A fellow school principal asked me how we did it, and he started the same project at his school. That's how we work. We don't wait for things to happen; we make them happen."

This spirit of collaboration lies at the heart of Leaders for Education, where business leaders and school principals work side by side — proving that the skills that grow businesses can also grow schools. "Sometimes we just focus on education," Ngcobo admitted. "We don't think outside the box. Having a partner from a different sector helps us learn how things are done elsewhere."

Sustaining The Change

Despite his ambitions, Ngcobo remains grounded in a philosophy of sustainability. "I want to learn how to better manage what we have," he said. "If resources come in, that's a bonus. But the goal is to learn to run the school efficiently, even without extra funding."

From a single awakening to a network of leaders finding their voice, Mbele and Ngcobo's story reminds us that leadership rests not in systems, but in people.

Leadership begins not with power, but with purpose.

Our Programmes



LEADERS for EDUCATION addresses the critical need for contextual school leadership development while leveraging cross-sectoral partnerships to create sustainable change, transforming school functionality in under-served communities to create environments conducive to teaching and learning and contributing to broader systemic improvement in public education. The programme pairs public school principals with private sector business leaders in a year-long, immersive leadership development partnership and equips principals to develop innovative solutions to their unique challenges, motivate teachers, and lead stakeholders toward a common vision. Business leaders gain profound insights into the challenges faced by low-income communities while developing their own executive leadership skills.



This programme is designed around peer-to-peer partnerships and supports school leader succession pipeline development, facilitating the management team's transition from self-management to managing others while accelerating change activities and the implementation of education improvement projects and cascading leadership development to include more educator voices in decision making and solution co-creation.

Multi-year collaboration projects

The **MULTI-YEAR COLLABORATIONS** with subject expert partner organisations is premised on the belief that subject-specific improvements are most effective when they are school-based, community-rooted, and leadership-led. Citizen Leader Lab capacitates school leaders to lead adaptive change and foster a collaborative learning culture while the partner organisation provides practical, subject-specific strategies that improve classroom practice and learner outcomes. Together, school principals and teachers create classrooms where learners are engaged and parents are part of ensuring improvements can be achieved and sustained.



SCHOOL for COMMUNITY strengthens Leaders for Education alumni principals' ability to engage with and mobilise multi-stakeholder communities and work towards placing the school at the centre of community – a focal point for positive engagements and initiatives that will enhance the overall success of the school. Principals benefit from ongoing coaching and convene with other schools in professional communities of practice - especially with regard to a shared school or community challenge that impacts school functionality and teaching and learning.

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The **ALUMNI NETWORK** supports school principals in implementing their school improvement plans. Through easy-to-use technology platforms, we enable access to resources, expertise and offers that assist school principals in realising their vision for their school. Included in the solution is a community engagement platform that allows principals to support each other by sharing real-life learnings and practices.



The **SCHOOL LEADERSHIP FORUM** is dedicated to advancing the professional growth of principals, school management teams and school governing bodies by equipping them with theoretical knowledge and practical skills that address leadership challenges. The forum hosts presentations and panel discussions by experts on a wide range of education and leadership-related topics. These sessions are conducted both in-person and online, ensuring accessibility and flexibility.



The two-day **COMMUNITY BUILDING** workshop draws inspiration from the pioneering work of Peter Block, renowned globally for his work on empowerment, citizenship, leadership and community change processes. Designed for active citizens who want to contribute positively to our collective future, it creates opportunities for South Africans to learn powerful ways of connecting, bridging boundaries and discovering their power to create #TheFutureWeWant – rather than relying on others to take action.



LEADERS for MUNICIPALITY employs similar transformational leadership methodologies as Leaders for Education – including a cross-sectoral partnership with a business leaders. Its purpose is to capacitate and support municipal leaders to strengthen personal and team leadership performance, encourage enhanced community engagement to and pave the way for improved service delivery for all citizens. Prior to each programme launch, Citizen Leader Lab conducts a structured needs assessment with the selected metro to create understanding of the existing organisational development landscape and priorities within the specific municipality and their pain-points and needs.

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National Development Plan 2030

Citizen Leader Lab's mission and purpose are in strong alignment with the National Development Plan, which focuses on six key priorities to reduce poverty and inequality. Our work prioritises strengthening school leadership and creating community ownership through focused, inter-sectoral approaches. Our programmes address the complexity of educational leadership by mobilising active citizens and building collaborative partnerships across government, business and civil society.

UN Global Compact

Citizen Leader Lab is a proud supporter of the United Nations Global Compact and its Ten Principles relating to Human Rights, Labour, Environment and Anti-corruption. Our leadership development work, which involves mobilising active citizens from the business sector to support public structures, speaks directly to the Compact as a framework for business to address global challenges such as poverty, inequality and inadequate education.

Our work in education and local municipalities supports five of the UN Sustainability Goals:

Goal 4 – Quality Education:

School principals are supported to become change agents in their schools and communities and, together with their business partners, drive initiatives to improve the environment for learning.

Goal 10 – Reduced Inequalities:

Education is the ultimate leveller and is key to reducing inequality. Our work in schools addresses a root cause of inequality in South Africa, namely an underperforming public education system, which limits the potential and opportunities of too many children.

Goal 17 – Partnerships for the Goals:

Our development programmes for school and municipal leaders facilitate cross-sectoral partnerships, which leverage diverse expertise and resources and promote innovation.

An Approach to Change

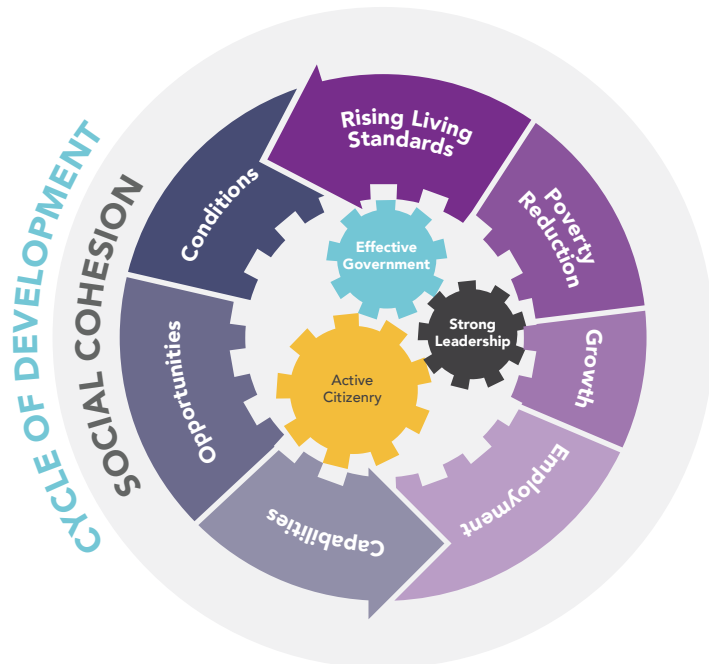


Figure 1: Extracted from the National Development Plan 2030

Partnerships and Collaboration

Goal 6 - Clean Water and Sanitation:

Effectively run municipalities mean that more citizens will receive access to this basic human right.

Goal 16 – Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions:

No country can be successful without effective local governments delivering basic services. Strong local governments mean more prosperous communities.

National Association of Social Change Entities in South Africa (NASCEE)

As a founder member of NASCEE, we strongly support collaboration in the education sector as key to driving sustainable improvement in education. Our CEO, Komala Pillay, is currently serving as Deputy Chairperson on the NASCEE Board, which supports our aspiration to increase collaboration within the education ecosystem.

Collaboration

As Citizen Leader Lab, we have always embraced collaboration as key to accelerating the creation of a just public education system. School Leadership Forum has been our main collaboration vehicle as we’ve worked with various partners from business, NGOs and academia to bring knowledge and expertise to our alumni school principals and their schools.

In recent times we have developed a model for wider collaboration to support our alumni schools in leveraging the strong foundations laid by leadership.

Our first multi-year collaboration programmes launched in 2025 in partnership with Khanyisa Inanda Seminary Community Projects (KICP) and the Osiziwe Science Centre. We are currently developing similar approaches with other partners to support schools with improved literacy, STEM and youth employability outcomes.

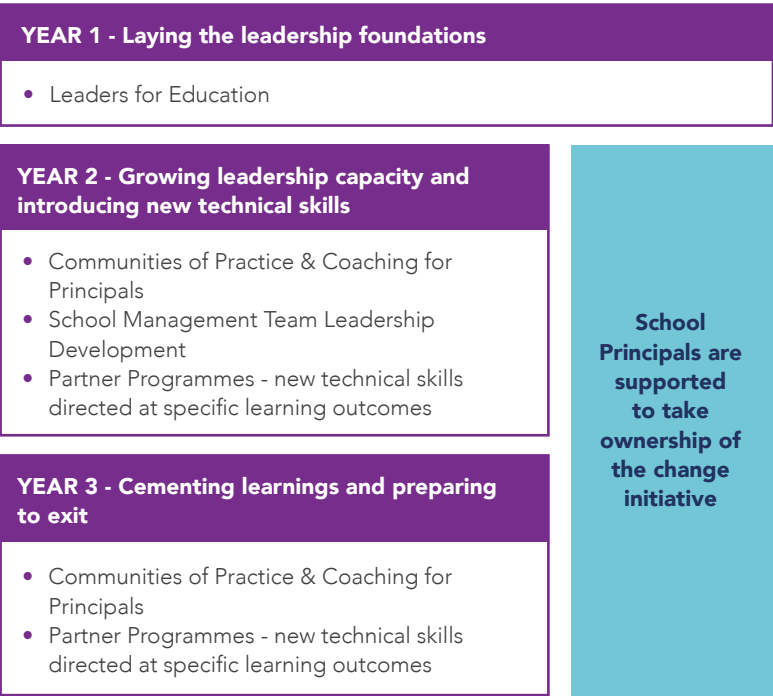


Figure 2: Citizen Leader Lab model for multi-year deep collaboration

Treasurer's Report

Financial overview and strategic sustainability

As we reflect on a journey of 15 years and present the annual report for the 2025/2026 financial year, I am pleased to share a set of results that demonstrate both growth and a disciplined commitment to our mission. Our transition to the Leaders for Education, Leaders for Municipality, and Leaders for Literacy frameworks is supported by a solid financial foundation that ensures we remain a sustainable partner for change in South Africa.

Audit integrity and governance

The organisation has once again achieved an unqualified audit opinion for the 2026 financial year. This reflects the high standard of financial oversight and transparency that we maintain, providing our donors and partners with the assurance that their contributions are managed with the utmost integrity and care.

Financial performance highlights

Our financial position has strengthened significantly over the past year:

- We recorded total revenue of R27.99 million, a notable increase from R24.66 million in the previous year.
- The year concluded with a net surplus of R 1.19 million, which has been reinvested into our reserves to bolster future projects.
- Total equity has grown to R 4.88 million, ensuring we have the necessary "runway" to launch the Leaders for Municipality pilot in 2027.

Impact and value for investment

The financial health of Citizen Leader Lab is directly linked to the social impact we deliver. Since 2010, our work has reached over 1.9 million learners through the empowerment of over 2,280 school principals. With a 98% completion rate for principals, the efficiency of our programmatic spend remains industry-leading.

As we move beyond the 15-year milestone, our focus shifts toward deepening our impact within the public sector. The financial results of this year provide the stability required to align our work even more closely with the National Development Plan 2030 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

We thank our long-term supporters and new partners who have made these results possible. Together, we are building "islands of coherence" that will sustain South Africa for the next 15 years and beyond.



Lerato Phelane CA(SA)

Treasurer

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Citizen Leader Lab Financials - Annual Report 2025/26

	2026	2025
	ZAR	ZAR
ASSETS		
NON-CURRENT ASSETS		
Property, plant & equipment	522,242	728,749
Investment Property	1,363,617	1,363,617
	1,885,859	2,092,366
CURRENT ASSETS		
Inventories	73,188	85,368
Trade and Other receivables	3,149,090	2,263,933
Cash and cash equivalents	5,294,587	6,334,468
	8,516,865	8,683,769
TOTAL ASSETS	10,402,724	10,776,135
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
EQUITY		
Citizen Leader Lab Future Fund	2,502,300	1,935,500
Accumulated Surplus	2,379,089	1,750,610
	4,881,389	3,686,110
LIABILITIES		
Current Liabilities		
Trade and other Payables	5,521,335	7,090,025
Total Liabilities	5,521,335	7,090,025
TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES	10,402,724	10,776,135

	2026	2025
	ZAR	ZAR
COMPREHENSIVE INCOME		
Revenue	27,988,846	24,660,270
Other Income	280,379	514,889
Operating Expenses	(-27,619,971)	(-24,424,884)
OPERATING SURPLUS / (DEFICIT)	649,254	750,275
Investment Revenue	546,025	651,068
SURPLUS (DEFICIT) FOR THE YEAR	1,195,279	1,401,343



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Top 10 Funders for 25-26

Our work is made possible through the generous support of a committed group of partners.

- FEM Education Foundation NPC
- Gottlieb Naef Foundation
- Exxaro Resources
- Trevor Noah Foundation
- Rompco
- Standard Bank South Africa
- Mediclinic (Pty) Ltd
- Woolworths
- Deloitte
- Spar South Rand

Long-term funders

Our greatest impact is made possible through sustained, long-term partnerships.

- Advantage Management Consulting
- FEM Education Foundation NPC
- Gottlieb Naef Foundation
- Mediclinic (Pty) Ltd
- Mimecast
- Mix Telematics
- Multotec
- South African Muslim Charitable Trust (SAMCT)
- Spar South Rand
- Sphere Holdings
- Standard Bank South Africa
- Swiss Re
- Woolworths



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