

A HUB OF INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING: GRAVITY CBC AND COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTRE, NAIROBI, KENYA



Salome Olesi Terah is a Deputy Director, Adult and Continuing Education and is in charge of Adult Learning and Education (ALE) programmes in Nairobi County. She has an MEd in Planning Management and Administration with a focus on entrepreneurship. Salome has been an ardent ALE practitioner for over 20 years and was responsible for having held the first ALE conference in Kenya (Kajiado chapter) in 2016, following CONFINTEA VI (Brazil, 2009). She is a dedicated community mobiliser and passionate advocate for lifelong learning, and has many years' experience working in Kajiado (Maasai communities), Uasin Gishu, Kisumu, Migori, and Nairobi Counties. Her work includes organising a Learners' Week in Nairobi in 2022; spearheading the first baseline survey to establish Community Learning Centres in the city; and initiating language classes at the International Youth Fellowship (IYF), which have since expanded into the IYF Free Weekend Academy, enrolling over 20,000 adult and youth learners since 2023.

Introduction

This article focuses on the Gravity CBC and Community Learning Centre in Nairobi, Kenya. It is a centre of intergenerational and second-chance learning - bringing children, youth and adults together - preserving Indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage, and at the same time equipping learners with the skills and competencies needed to navigate modern socio-economic challenges. This space of inclusivity and lifelong learning describes itself as a centre that 'provides a holistic education that goes beyond traditional classroom learning'. It is a good example of how a community learning centre can complement the formal education system. This article highlights some of the adult learning happening at the centre. It begins with a brief background about how and why the centre was formed; then focuses on the important adult educational work happening at the centre and, importantly, the ways it contributes to learners/beneficiaries making a life and a living.

Contextual background

Since 1985 the education system in Kenya was the 8-4-4 system (eight years of primary schooling, four years at the secondary level, and a minimum of four years of university education). In 2017 the competency-based curriculum (CBC)¹ was introduced to restructure the school system. The Kenyan CBC was designed with the objective that at the end of each learning cycle every learner will be competent in seven core competency areas: communication and collaboration; critical thinking and problem-solving; imagination and creativity; citizenship; learning to learn; self-efficacy; and digital

literacy. It was meant as a shift away from rote learning and memorisation. With the introduction of CBC, the teaching methods also changed and became more learner-centred and participatory. The role of the teacher changed from 'expert' to facilitator.

Gravity - beginnings

When CBC was implemented in Kenya it faced several challenges, including limited resources; facilities required for such things as practicals; and inadequate preparedness of both educators and parents. These challenges were further intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted learning and exposed gaps in the education system, especially for adults and out-of-school youth. The centre started as a community initiative amongst Kamakis² estate members during lockdown when the founder, Duncan Arimi³,



began growing vegetables in gunny bags, old tyres and plastic containers to feed his family and tenants who lived on the plot. This small effort provided food, generated income, and supported community members in need during lockdown. From this, the initiative expanded to include play equipment for children, helping to keep the local community engaged and safe. After travel restrictions were

lifted, Mr Arimi marketed the space to educational institutions, initially highlighting the sports facilities. Visiting schools were more interested in the kitchen gardens and learning about the CBC system. This interest inspired Mr Arimi to study CBC, identify its challenges, and develop various models, programmes, and studios and it became a resource centre supporting schools and the broader community. Over a few years, the centre has evolved into a dynamic hub for adult education, youth engagement, and community development and as a place for school learners to engage in experiential learning, for example hands-on learning on the educational farm.



Learnings on and from the farm include such things as safe agricultural practices; food production; environmental sustainability and climate action.

Empowered, transformed, sustainable - beyond the traditional classroom

Gravity grew out of a time of crisis and grounded itself in the REFLECT approach, which stands for 'Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques' (developed by ActionAid). REFLECT is a fusion of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's theory and the practice of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). From those beginnings the centre demonstrated and continues to show how community

members can identify local issues and problems, come together to discuss them, and work towards solving them. Gravity's vision is 'an empowered, transformed, and sustainable society' and it works towards this in various ways.

Three beneficiaries share their experiences at Gravity

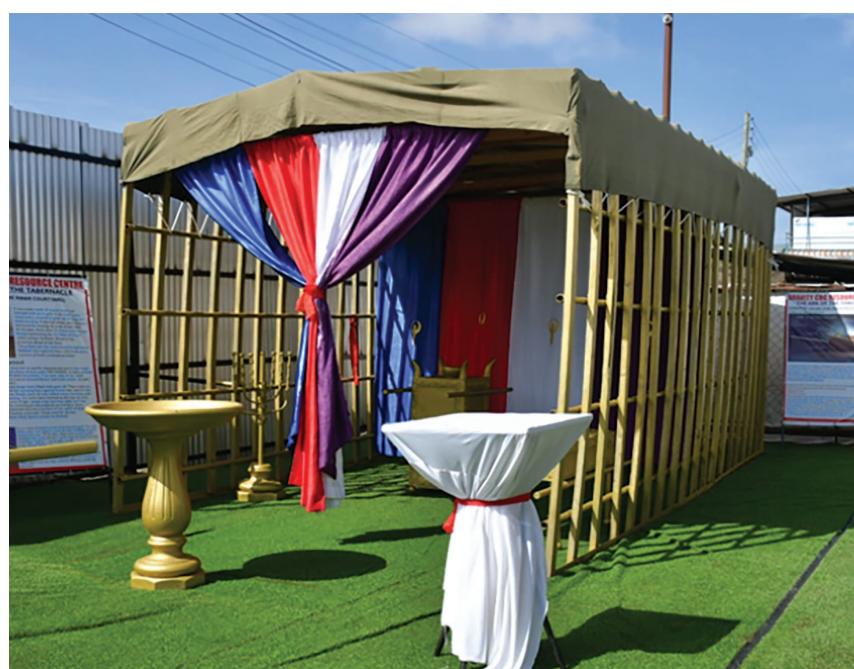


'My name is Ruth Eshiwani. I am a parent to two children in Grades 3 and 6 and I am an adult educator. I got to know about Gravity Community Learning Centre from a women's group meeting. I

visited Gravity to learn how I could help my Grade 6 son choose learning areas and how I could help my children handle their assignments. When I visited Gravity I learned more than what I expected. I learned about CBE but, most importantly, I learned about kitchen gardening and food security. I also learned about animal husbandry using my small urban space and I have started to practise this. I am a church leader and have had interaction at the Ark of Covenant section with our church members - this has helped me understand how to live peacefully with other religious groups. Gravity has also helped our women's group members get training on financial management and our group's savings have started growing. I have learned so much at Gravity. I would encourage each and every one of you as parents to visit this centre'.



Here community members learn about diverse beliefs, various religions, and cultures.





'My name is Janet Lwoyelo. I am an adult education instructor and a community mobiliser in Westlands, Nairobi, Kenya. The competency-based curriculum in our country calls for parental engagement. Some of my learners had a problem when they were asked to engage with their children's educational decisions. To help them understand CBE, our Director advised a visit to Gravity Community Learning Centre where parents/learners were informed about how to support their children's learning through parental guidance and involvement.'

The parents then also got involved in Indigenous knowledge sharing activities. In addition to this they learned about kitchen gardens, learning new knowledge and skills that have improved their livelihoods. Since this visit, people from the ACE (Adult and Continuing Education) Centre frequently visit Gravity to learn various skills, such as pottery; weaving; production of learning resources made from locally available materials; and literacy. Some of the parents even got temporary jobs at Gravity. Gravity Community Learning Centre is the place to be for learning and improvement of livelihoods! It demonstrates how a community learning centre can provide support for education at all levels'.



Gravity plays a part in the local economic development of the area as some community members have permanent jobs at the centre and others have casual jobs.



'My name is Morgan Marcelino aka Moji. I am 21 years old and an out-of-school youth. I left school in Form One because of a lack of school fees. I have been on the streets of Nairobi for six years. I learnt about Gravity from my friends who went to look for a job there in order to feed themselves. When I visited Gravity I realised I can go back to school and study through continuing education. I started learning how to plant vegetables and make liquid fertiliser through vermiculture⁴. I have now started planting vegetables and will enrol myself to sit for national examinations⁵ in the coming year. I will keep going to Gravity to learn other skills like pottery, so that I can make flower pots and sell them to make some money. I also encourage my street friends to go to Gravity, join adult education classes and learn skills that will change their lives'.



In addition to offering youth and adults practical skills training in various vocational fields such as carpentry, plumbing, electrical work, and mechanical engineering, the Centre also has a Digital Studio.

The Cultural Section is a vibrant space where all generations come together to share and document their cultural heritage. Here, adult learners engage in the innovative 'Talk-a-Book'

concept where elders narrate folk tales, songs and traditional practices, while youth transcribe and compile them into books, crediting the elders as authors. This space also preserves cultural artifacts and shares traditional and modern practices. One can find elders teaching traditional skills like basketry; making musical instruments; using medicinal herbs; and promoting traditional nutrition practices.



Conclusion

At Gravity, learning takes place at all levels in a non-discriminatory space, in which every person has the opportunity to engage in interactive educational experiences in which critical thinking, creativity, and hands-on learning are prioritised. It serves as a good example of what is possible for other community learning centres in Kenya and beyond.

Endnotes

- 1 In Kenya, competency-based education (CBE) has replaced CBC. CBC was primarily focused on the curriculum itself, whereas CBE encompasses a wider educational system.
- 2 Kamakisi is located about 23 kilometres from Nairobi's Central Business District and is a lively and fast-growing area along the Eastern Bypass. Known for its vibrant roadside eateries - especially popular for nyama choma (grilled meat) - and modern hangouts, it has become a favourite stop for both locals and travellers.
- 3 From humble beginnings as a teacher, Mr Arimi (present CEO of Gravity) has positively impacted countless lives through his deep commitment to lifelong learning as a powerful tool for social transformation.
- 4 Vermiculture is the cultivation of earthworms for the purpose of composting organic waste, a process also known as vermicomposting.
- 5 Kenya Certificate of Secondary Examination - entrance qualification to higher education.