

The Zizi

# MIZI

Special Edition: Zizi 5 Years On | December 2022



Inside the  
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Issue



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## LOOKING BACK:

# Five years on...

An old saying claims that, “The beginning of wisdom is to call things by their right names.” If we had had our way, Zizi Afrique would have had a slightly different name. Our chosen name was Mzizi Afrika. Mzizi Afrika communicated our mission and our vision for the continent. But the name was already taken. Yet this was our name. We therefore changed the spelling and retained our name; Zizi Afrique.

The seed for Zizi Afrique germinated during the Uwezo assessment of literacy and numeracy that was conducted with regular tempo from 2009 to 2015. Year in, year out, the evidence remained constant. Of every 10 children assessed, only three children could read a Grade 2-level story.

We were restless. We knew we did not just want to stop at evidence generation and communication. We wanted to engineer more lasting change. That change had to be rooted in the formative years of a child’s life to allow the firming of a strong foundation. All this is captured in the Zizi logo, that uses the metaphor of the tree, with strong roots and multiple books in the form of purple leaves. Lint green is used as a symbol of life, living, and thriving.

Zizi Afrique Foundation was finally registered in 2018, three years after the application was made. It had the advantage of being received and nurtured by its two sister organizations who preceded it – ziziAfrique Limited and the PAL Network.

So far, Zizi Afrique Foundation has blossomed. It has remained true to its original purpose of strengthening the foundation, not just in literacy and numeracy, but also in values, or what people call the “power skills.” It has remained true to seeking out the most needy and supporting them to claim their space in society. Zizi Afrique has adopted a collaborative spirit; intentionally seeking out individuals and organizations with a kindred spirit to work together.

The young staff in Zizi are growing too, not just as professionals but as purpose driven individuals who know they are the change their communities and country desire. I laud the staff, who have ceded part of their salaries on a monthly basis to raise funds for the Tenda Wema (Do Good) project that is fully supported and sponsored by Zizi Afrique staff and friends. The staff have exhibited citizen agency, and can rightfully be called donors! This giving from within is an important gesture which together with the generous support from friends and funders has allowed Zizi Afrique Foundation to remain true to its mission and vision. Zizi Afrique is truly a founder’s pride.

**Dr. Sara Ruto,**  
Founder and Board Member

## Zizi Afrique in 2017



Funder





WYD Needs Assessment exercise, Embu



After the immersion exercise, Kitui



A delegation from Zimbabwe visiting the office to share and learn about whole youth development

“Sara at 50” celebrations on the office compound, Westlands



WYD Needs Assessment exercise, Kilgoris



WYD Needs Assessment exercise, Narok



St. Columba's VTC alumni event, Kitui

“Sara at 50” celebrations on the office compound, Westlands



# 2017 New Talent

# 2017



Spings Akumah



Ezekiel Sikutwa



Agnes Furo



Eli Osango



Faith Mukiria



John Mugo



Walter Odondi



Sara Ruto



# A Strong Start

From April 2015, we operated under ziziAfrique, a company limited. Under the leadership of the founding Director, Dr. Sara Ruto, the company conducted a few large consultancies in the years 2015–2017, mainly focusing on girls’ empowerment and mentorship. The registration status notwithstanding, we received the first big grant support from Porticus in August 2017, to start off the Whole Youth Development program. We received a second grant from a private foundation in June 2018 to establish the Foundational Literacy and Numeracy work. The formal registration of Zizi Afrique Foundation was received on August 15<sup>th</sup> 2018.

So, what is the foundation’s founding year?

Each of the three years is the correct answer. However, we treat 2017 as the founding year of the Foundation. When the registration status came, the two grants were simply migrated, but the work that had started continued uninterrupted. Thus, Zizi Afrique Foundation turned five in August 2022 – completely unnoticed! Who would compete for attention with the general elections anyway?

A lot has changed since we began. For instance, our annual income has grown by 235 percent, and the number of staff members has grown from five in December 2017 to 25 in December 2022. In addition, our office is now in the third location since 2017. There is a lot to celebrate, especially now that the family is big enough to handle a big party in a big room.

What we celebrate most however, is the impact we have

achieved. We celebrate the over 45 TVET institutions and the 150 primary schools we have partnered with. We celebrate the over 60,000 children we have reached directly through our various interventions. We celebrate the over 5,000 youth that have accessed better training and the 1,000 youth from extreme adversity that have completed training despite having been written off. We celebrate the community of more than 3,000 partners with whom we have made and pursue impact, and with whom we share our growth. These are teachers, trainers, teacher trainees, civil society organizations and members of the various networks.

The words from Renhui’s poem, “Let us celebrate one another,” captures my thoughts aptly:

look into my eyes...

go deeper

you will see

the rise of a young tree

the breath of a baby

and the strength of an elephant...

Truly, the young tree has risen. We celebrate this growth in December of 2022, as we hope to impact millions of children in Sub-Saharan Africa, to acquire the competences they so badly need to learn and thrive.

**Dr. John Mugo** (2017 to date).

## Zizi:Our Second Home

For many years people referred to us as the “Zizi Twins.” We joined Zizi Afrique on the same date, from the same organization, and our birthdays are one month apart. Like many twins, we have had instances of mistaken identity, with our documents being exchanged.

For two years, we had been part of the statistics – unemployed graduates. Then we met John Mugo, an exemplary leader, and our lives changed. There are three things we will never forget about our recruitment and the first days at Zizi – being asked to submit videos on self before the interview, the Executive Director pretending to be a support staff to observe how we respond to him, and being taken for immersion in rural Kitui to stay with youth at their homes.

Since then, a lot has happened. We celebrate Zizi at five, as we also celebrate 5 years at Zizi. Reflecting about our work and life, we can say that five things have made Zizi our home:

Great leadership. In John, we have experienced a kind, critical, and hardworking leader; a patient, consistent, and strategic leader; and an empathetic, selfless, and visionary leader. It is unusual to find a boss who opens his life to his employees in such generous way, and extends grace when mistakes are made.

Working with passion. All the staff at Zizi are passionate about the work we do; for the youth and the children.

Welfare. We are there for each other. We celebrate each other when we win and mourn together when we grieve. The organization has invested in the wellbeing of its members, from organizing wellness sessions to giving out medical cards.

Teamwork. We recognize the fact that we are as

strongest as our strongest link and as weak as our weakest link. We work together to bring out the best in each other.

Mentorship and learning. Zizi has not only given us the space to grow and thrive, but has also opened us up to proper guidance. The Executive Director himself drove us to register with the Sacco. We have benefited from learning and mentorship in ways no words can tell.

Thank you, Zizi. We are who we are because of you. You lit our candles: therefore, we intend to light others’ candles. As they say, “Whoever much is given, much is expected.”

**Faith Mukiria and Walter Odondi (2017 to date)**





## Remarkable Abode

Since Inception, Zizi shines bright,  
My journey has been a beam of light,  
Thanks for being my guiding light,  
Thanks for strengthening my might,  
Thanks for encouraging me to pursue this light,  
Thanks for pulling me out of my plight,  
Thanks for never keeping all children and youth out of sight,  
Thanks for teaching us to do what's right,  
Our obligations to you are infinite.

Thanks for pushing the boundaries,  
In every task we have undertaken,

Thanks for giving us the chance,  
Thanks for doing the little things—these do matter!

I am loyal,  
Because you are special—I hold you close to my heart,  
I am obedient,  
Because you are efficient,  
I am dependable,  
Because you are remarkable.

I am glad to see you grow, keep beaming, keep winning,  
keep doing!

*Spings Akumah (2015–2021)*

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## Equipped for the 21st Century

Wow, has it really been 5 years already?

I remember my first days at the office like it was yesterday. I came in a skinny young man (not that I am old anyway) who was excited and armed to face the challenges of adulthood. I could not wait to make every coin through blood, sweat, and tears. After all, I had accumulated enough knowledge in school for the job market. Little did I know that my scope was very limited; the knowledge I had was only theoretical and had little relevance in the job market.

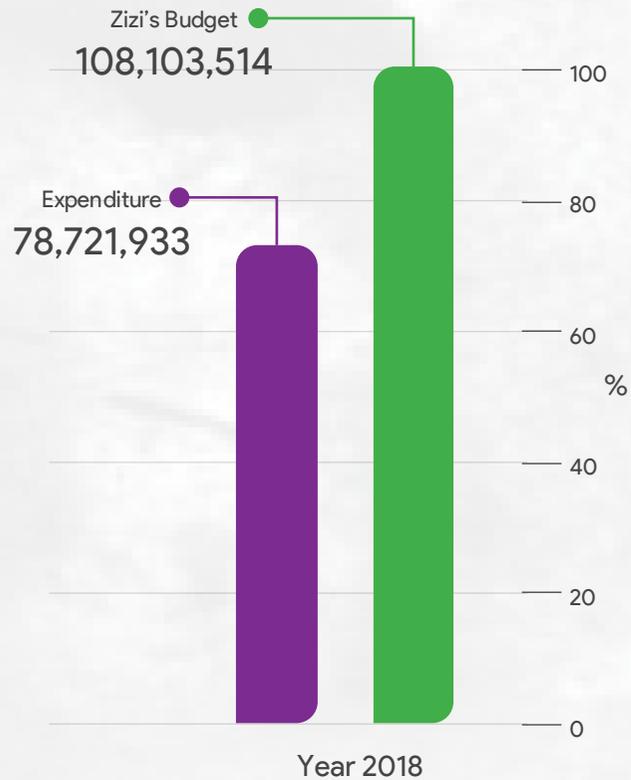
Fortunately, I got mentorship from an experienced leadership that taught me the practicalities of finance. Moreover, I was nurtured and given room to consistently improve on myself and in my work. As a result, I have sharpened and gained practical skills that I continue to apply. Zizi is a real champion in the development of competences relevant in the job market and in the 21st-century world.

Yours truly,

The “not-so-skinny-anymore” young man,

*Eli Osango (2017 to date)*

# Zizi Afrique in 2018



After a learning session with KICD on a new web portal, Westlands (March 9th)



Celebrating John's birthday, 15th April



Ujana team

## Funders





Bidding farewell to the PAL fellows, Westlands (18th May)

After a learning session



Setting off to the villages during immersion, Kericho (24th September)



## Finding My Challenge

**M**y coming to Zizi was in pursuit of a new challenge.

From 2012, I had walked into classrooms innumerable times, engaging teachers on their instructional practices in literacy and numeracy and on how these practices could be strengthened to improve learning outcomes. At Zizi, though the focus of the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) was similar, the scope was much bigger – three counties – providing me a newer challenge in management.

The past four years at Zizi Afrique have been filled with pleasant surprises and achievements. On my fourth anniversary, I choose to highlight inspiration and growth. Inspiration. Zizi has taught me how rewarding it is to do what I like and believe in. As fast paced and diverse as it is, every minute counts and everyone is evaluated on the basis of, “How have you impacted the children/youth?” I draw this inspiration from my peers and seniors. I am awed by their zeal as they relentlessly work towards reaching the children and youth furthest behind. There are glimpses of quiet moments when things are slower, but the energy and enthusiasm never fizzle out. With each passing day, I am inspired to do more; for the children and youth in this country to become much more than they are today.

Growth. I sought to hone my management skills, and yes, I got that and much more at ZAF. In only four years, I have risen from a manager to a senior manager and finally to a director position. You know why this is deep for me? Because just when I am about to get into my comfort zone, I am introduced to newer challenges

and frontiers in our work. I am the kind that wishes to change the “reporting template every other month,” because routine doesn’t always work for me. But these new challenges keep me going. Not only have I grown in leadership, but I have also grown as a person – appreciating myself and others, even when things seem slower. I have also had the privilege of being mentored by the best minds – Dr. Sara Ruto and Dr. John Mugo – and have cherished the connections and trust built beyond work relationships. I am connected to youthful dreamers as colleagues, each doing their best to transform someone’s life. Working in ZAF has been a worthwhile experience. It has been more of a journey of self-discovery for me, than just a job.

**Virginia Ngindiru** (2018 to date)

# 2018 New Talent



Joyce Kinyanjui



Virginia Ngindiru



Lucy Maina



Amany Kuchio



Eunice Kilonzi



Francis Njuguna



Beria Wawira



Elin Wesanga



Olivia Susan

## My Journey in Words...

I offer my sincerest gratitude to Zizi for recruiting me for a new position in an inaugural Procurement Department. This was a dream come true for a young girl from a “marginalized community.” I was naïve, timid, and easily affected by suggestions to improve on my work. This was the year I built a robust procurement unit in a space that was new to me. I made many mistakes. I doubted what I could do which sometimes drove me to tears. Fast forward to today, and I have adapted to the new change. I have grown both in my technical and soft skills. The culture of the organization is admirable. I have been allowed to learn and thrive on the role. Zizi unraveled my inner talents and expanded my school of thought. I developed a passion for mentoring the youth in the process, which was supported by the organization’s leadership. In addition, while at Zizi, I met my husband John; a God fearing, youthful, and hilarious man. Talk about growth holistically! The joy of my colleagues at my wedding was priceless. I have become aware of my purpose, which has shaped my career path. Talk about realization at 30! My journey is now different: it is focused on excellence, learning, growth and fun as opposed to perfection.

**Beria Wawira** (2018 to date)

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## Only a Poem Captures My Feelings

December 2022 marks my four and a half years at Zizi Afrique Foundation. Over the period, I have met and learnt from people of different skillsets and strengths. My experience can best be summarized by a poem by Karle Wilson Baker:

TO-DAY I have grown taller from walking with the trees,  
The seven sister-poplars who go softly in a line;  
And I think my heart is whiter for its parley with a star  
That trembled out at nightfall and hung above the pine.

The call-note of a redbird from the cedars in the dusk

Woke his happy mate within me to an answer free and fine;  
And a sudden angel beckoned from a column of blue smoke—  
Lord, who am I that they should stoop—these holy folk  
of thine?

**Francis Njuguna** (2018 to date)





One of the Ujana team meetings

## Learning to Fish at Zizi Afrique

**W**orking at Zizi Afrique was both a challenging and fulfilling experience. It catapulted me into the TVET space which has been like stumbling upon hidden treasure; from the potential it holds for our young people and future generations to the endless opportunities for learning and growth. To begin with, I was unsure of myself coming into my role, thus the probation period was a steep learning curve for me. However, the support and collaboration offered by the team was excellent. The things I loved the most about Zizi include:

The conducive working environment. We were recognized as human beings with flaws, faults and unproductive/stuck days while at the same time given the push to find a way to get past our flaws and produce the much-needed results.

The progressive learning culture encompassed in the

weekly learning sessions for staff, with a vast scope for learning. My highlight was the monthly book club, for which the organization purchased three copies of each book we read, to ensure accessibility for staff.

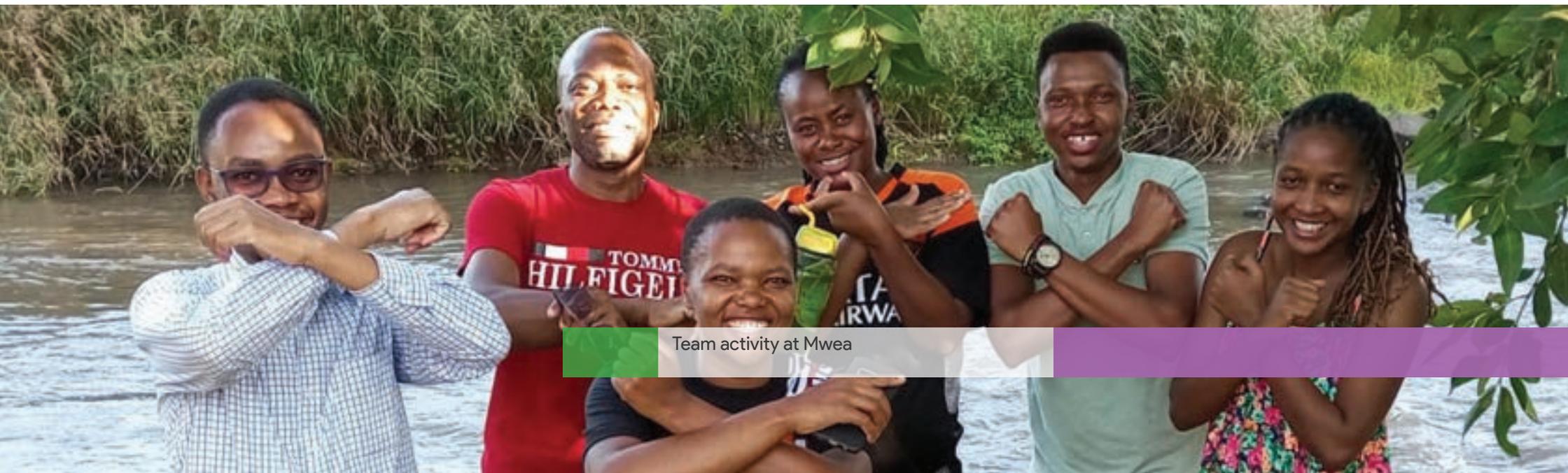
The sense of family/belonging. Often in professional circles, this is seen as a red flag. The management team at Zizi, however, managed to strike this balance perfectly by creating a safe space to interact at a personal level without blurring the professional boundaries.

The leadership. The management team was full of professionals who are not only great in their fields of specialization but also passionate about bridging the gap between research, policy and practice. Their focus on collaborating with like-minded individuals and organizations, learning from and applying the best practices, and diving into areas that we most would shy away from due to their complexity was unmatched.

They were the literal definition of trailblazers.

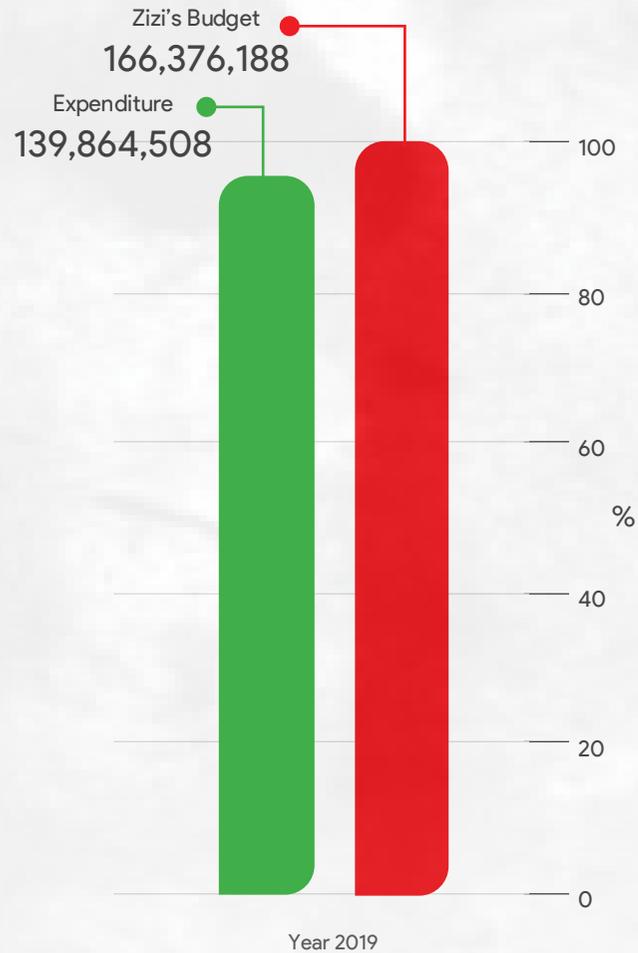
It is commonly said, “Don’t give them fish, instead teach them how to fish.” This was my greatest lesson while I worked with this team. I achieved many things, learnt more and grew exponentially. The experience and exposure I got while there helped me to tap into areas of potential for me, that until then had been hidden in a very deep, dark corner of my psyche. The road to achieving this potential has been long and winding, with numerous potholes, massive speed bumps and a number of dead ends, but I forge forward with the exceptional life and work lessons I learnt there as my fishing tackle.

**Amanya Kuchio** (2018–2019)



Team activity at Mwea

# Zizi Afrique in 2019



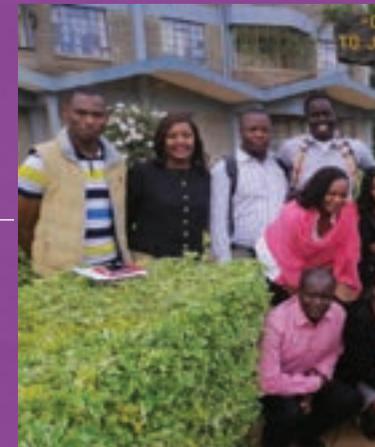
## Funders



Friendly football match against AHK



Staff Fitness session



Learning session at St. Therese





Ujana team after a meeting at Amani Gardens



VTC, Karen



End year party

## The Joy from reading

Today I celebrate an icon of change. At only 5 years old, Zizi has changed the lives of children in Kenya from the furthest behind counties of Turkana, Tana River, and Bungoma, through the Accelerated Learning Program. Seeing a child in Turkana who could not read before the intervention, now able to read is incredibly fulfilling. We take pride in our Foundational Literacy and Numeracy unit while recognizing our efforts to ensure that parents are collaborators in the learning of their children both at home and in school.

At 5 years, we celebrate how Zizi as a family nurtures. Zizi takes internships seriously. It provides the right environment for interns to grow their skills and develop new ones. Interns at Zizi will always find someone to hold their hand and walk the journey with them, while allowing them to immerse themselves in what Zizi does. By doing this, Zizi interns have had an edge in the job market. For this I say, “Heko Zizi!”

**Irene Chepng’etich** (2019 to date)

## Interning at Zizi Afrique

I joined Zizi Afrique in 2019 as an intern. I was very excited to start a new chapter doing what I loved, which was providing Admin support to the different programs. What I loved most about working with the organization was its vision to create a world where every child and youth is learning and thriving. A world where children are well equipped with the foundational skills for learning and youth well equipped for life and work.

Being part of an organization that values education as a tool to empower the next generation was and still is very fulfilling. I enjoyed being part of a team that performed studies and evaluations of learning to produce data that were used to create awareness on the learning crises across the country and engage key stakeholders in addressing some of these challenges. This engagement has led to strategic partnerships with like-minded people.

The most impressive partnership I had the privilege of being part of was the Safaricom Foundation Scholarships. It shaped my view of education being necessary for success. I got to experience first hand the excitement in the youth who qualified for the

scholarship, knowing that they had a chance to be a light for their families and bring about transformation. It was a truly humbling moment.

I was also on a steep learning curve, working under good leadership and management until the last day of 2020. I appreciated that the management team created actionable goals for their teams. It was also very helpful to receive written instructions from my manager and clear communication on deadlines, goals and expectations, which helped in accomplishing more tasks. I however found that I needed to adjust to attending more meetings than I was accustomed to, as having meetings after meetings was truly “not my thing.” I adjusted soon enough to the dynamics of the organization.

Overall, working at Zizi is an experience I would not trade for the world. Thank you, Zizi, for playing a critical role in both my life and career. The exposure was truly impactful.

**Linda Otieno** (2019–2020).



Ujana360 team bonding session at Baobab

# 2019 New Talent

# 2019



Liz Sisenda



Denis Mugo

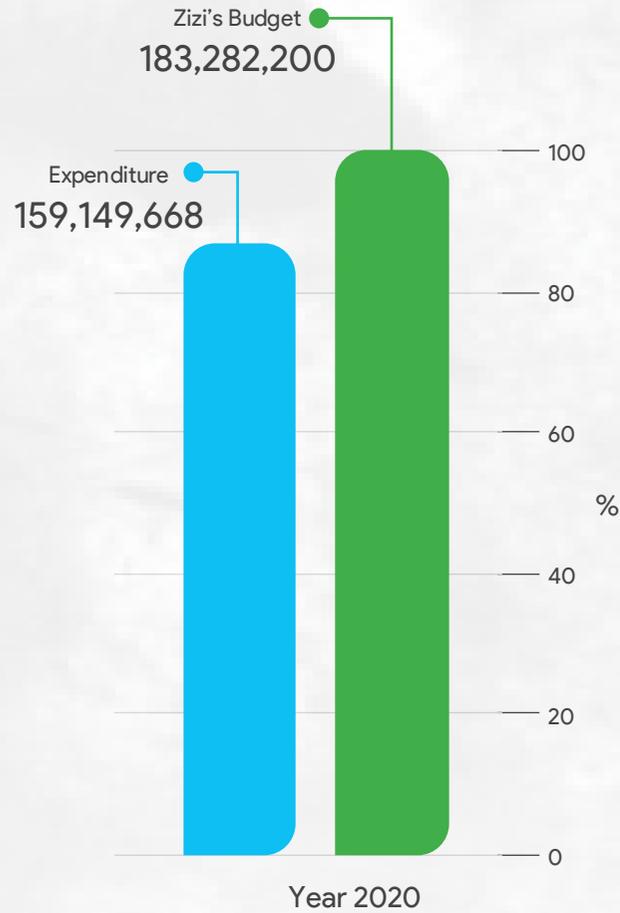


Irene Chepngetich



Linda Otieno

# Zizi Afrique in 2020



During a colleague's wedding



Enroute to the welfare Annual General Meeting



Welfare AGM, Olkaria



Online Staff Meeting

## Funders





Welfare AGM, Olkaria

## Finding My purpose

I found my purpose at Zizi Afrique.

At first, it was a risk both for my employer and me, this being my first job outside the teaching profession and having little knowledge on program management.

Allow me to single out my first two meetings at Zizi Afrique. For the first meeting, we visited the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB) and my team, led by Dr. John Mugo, articulated issues facing Vocational Training Centers and how youth from marginalized communities continue to suffer. This conversation remains very close to my heart, it is my guiding star. I was encouraged that we still have people who use their voice to speak on behalf of those at the bottom of the pyramid and this gave me so much comfort and hope. It affirmed to me that I had made the right decision to work in Zizi, and I needed this affirmation.

My second meeting was a breakfast discussion at the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, on issues facing secondary school education. One thing that was mentioned was the need to make all secondary schools day schools, in preparation for CBC junior secondary.

This was a very futuristic discussion that was bold and probably not very politically relevant. I later spent a lot of time reflecting on the discussion and even went ahead to write an article on why all secondary schools should be day schools.

If someone had listened to us three years ago, we probably would have had a smoother transition into junior secondary.

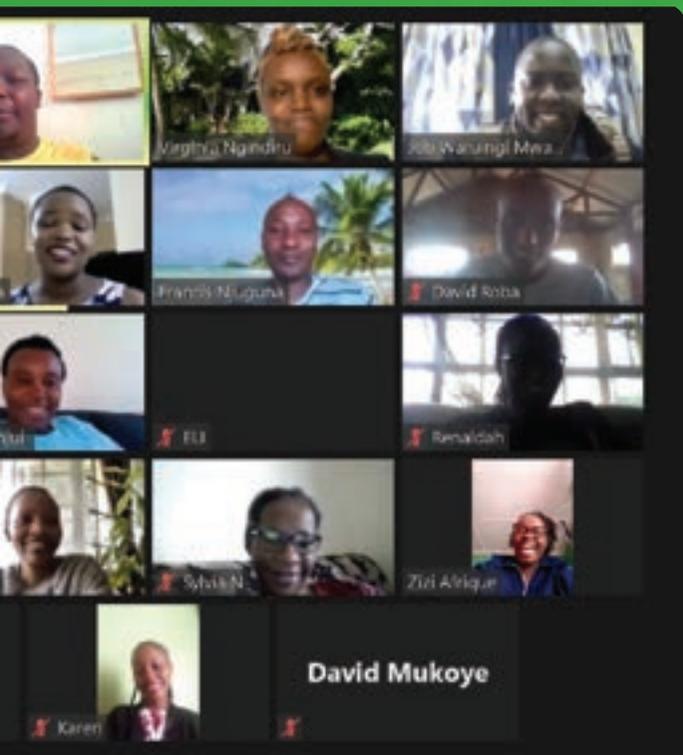
I am still applying the lessons from these two meetings in my everyday work:

Those at the bottom of the pyramid need to be heard through our work.

Policies must be adaptive and must be developed with the future in mind.

You will be listened to but not heard; still, keep going.

**Dr. Purity Ngina (2020 to date)**



## Unlearning and Learning at Zizi

“Hi RM! Could you kindly join a brief meeting at 7:30 a.m.? Sorry for the short notice.”

“Yes, sure,” was my response. That was 7:20 a.m., therefore the “short notice” was really a case of no notice! I attended the virtual meeting which took about 2 hours at the end of which I was asked to chair another meeting which went on for another 4 hours with a lunch break and a few health breaks in between. Suffice to say, the day went “just like that.” Too bad for the carefully planned out calendar I had prepared the evening before, a habit I had developed many years before. When such calls became more frequent as informed by the ever-changing, fast-paced, high-level situations, two of the biggest lessons I have learnt in the past two years and three months are: to be extremely open-minded; and, oh yes, to add tones of flexibility to my breathing system!

Zizi has been for me a fertile ground for unlearning and learning, especially for learning to construct the ship while it is sailing. The first time I was asked to sign my contract with DocuSign, I quickly said yes, even though I had never done it before. A few moments later when I appended my perfectly designed signature to my contract, I knew I had just started a journey of a higher level of interacting with ICT. I would have a few more experiences with online approvals and “break away sessions” during online meetings and I officially was fully immersed into the deep end of online life. Zizi has no place for analogue methods of doing things. If the internet were to be renamed, it would be “Zizi.” I believe that it is at Zizi where no stone has been left

untaken when it comes to embracing technology and the wonders of the internet. I, therefore, was not surprised when the Executive Director announced that in the following few years, the organization would go paperless. Before I joined Zizi, I used to joke, though a bit seriously, that I had “IT phobia.” About three months in the organization, it was cured. Completely.

In the course of the two years, I have worked with a very youthful team for the program aptly named Whole Youth Development. The team has been a source of energy and many learnings. Joining as an amateur in matters TVET, the deep-end induction in the form of enrolling the first cohort of over 1000 youth from marginalized backgrounds into TVETs put me face-to-face with the reality of both the opportunities and challenges of TVET in Kenya. The Safaricom Foundation Scholarship Program was going to change the lives of about 1030 youth by giving them TVET scholarships. I learnt that majority of the youth who join the lowest level of TVET, the Vocational Training Centers, are from very poor backgrounds. The most cruel irony of all, however, was that they are the ones who do not get any government support – no TVET subsidies and no HELB either! Although I had worked with the youth most of my life, this information hit me like a thunder-bolt. As a result, every opportunity the WYD program gets, we shout from the rooftops the message that all youth in TVETs need government support. Long live Zizi for prioritizing the furthest behind youth.

**Renaldah Mjomba** (2020 to date)



# 2020 New Talent



Faith Sergon



Karen Arisa



James Mburu



Sylvia Njaaga



Andrew Wambua



David Roba



Agatha Kimani



David Alelah



David Were



Purity Ngina



Job Mwangi



Wangari Njuguna

# Scattered by COVID-19

We were in Naivasha on Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> of March 2020. Teambuilding activity to welcome the new staff members. Deep in the hot waters of Olkaria, we heard someone shout – Covid is confirmed in Kenya! We ran out of water, not believing what we heard. The drive back to Nairobi was sombre. The President addressed the nation and promised to communicate. On Monday 16<sup>th</sup> March, we met and decided to close the office, indefinitely. That evening, the President announced the lock down. This was the last time we saw each other. The full migration to effective online work took around a month – securing and learning all the technologies that we needed.

COVID, you came to scatter us,  
COVID, you came to threaten us,  
COVID, you came to weaken us,  
COVID, you came to wipe us out.

Lockdown, partial lockdown,  
Mutahi Kagwi – if you continue to behave normally...  
Mercy Mwangangi, Kenyans preferred,  
Uhuru extended curfew, COVID became norm.

Each day we woke up, to face the screen,  
Please mute, please unmute, calls everywhere  
Someone connecting from bed, all videos off

Signing documents, all zoomed out!

Solar-powered radios, SMS, tablets and mats,  
Desperate to get children learn from home,  
KawaidaMpya, we looked for parents,  
Zizi Afrique adapting, to make impact online.

COVID, you came to teach us,  
COVID, you came to empower us,  
COVID, you came to connect us,  
COVID, you changed us forever.

**John Mugo**

## The Teamwork at Zizi

**A**s 2022 draws to a close, I want to take the opportunity to look back on a year that turned out much better than anyone could have imagined. While it was certainly challenging in some ways, we faced the challenges as a team. I have seen tremendous growth as a person working with great colleagues. For a long time, I did not know about the connection between assessment and learning and between confidence and growth. Oh yes! This perfectly defines my journey as an assessment officer in the organization.

This year we have had extraordinary learning experiences. We have also celebrated significant achievements. As a team, we managed to conduct a national assessment of its kind. Our networks and platforms passed the test, and we proved to be both robust and extremely flexible in our operations.

As we reflect on the visions and missions for the new year, I would like to leave you with the following words of wisdom from a wise man who went before us.

**“Difficulties increase the nearer we approach the goal.” – Johann Wolfgang.**

As this year concludes, may our teamwork continue to grow. I wish you a happy and a prosperous New Year 2023.

**David Alelah** (2020 to date)

## My Wish for Zizi

This is my third year working at Zizi Afrique Foundation in the finance department. Zizi Afrique has offered me an all-round opportunity for career growth as an accountant. At ZAF, everyone is given a chance to practice their profession without limitations, consequently becoming change agents in their fields. I have grown in leaps and bounds in the short 3 years at Zizi. I oversee internal and external audits, the preparation of management reports for internal use, all compliances and tax issues, formulation and operationalization of budgets either for internal use or for donor funding, and the implementation of partner management including conducting due diligence and capacity training on our implementing partners, risk management, training of our internal staff, just to mention a few.

In the period I have been here, ZAF has experienced tremendous growth. Revenue has grown steadily, the number of staff has almost doubled, the number of programs being implemented has grown and our implementing partners have grown exponentially. Though I work in finance, ZAF has given me an opportunity to participate in program activities and I can handle a program if assigned that role. I see ZAF growing, in the next 2 years to a medium-level organization whose impact spans far and wide.

Long live Zizi Afrique Foundation.

**David Were** (2020 to date)

## Learning to Love What I Do

No one could have prepared me adequately for the Zizi experience. My transition from the corporate sector, where my strength was in deciphering marketing statistics and brand management, to presenting stories of impact on the children and youth more so those left behind was amazing. After joining the NGO sector, I had to learn, unlearn, and relearn. A month after joining, the ALP team decided to send me to Tana River to monitor their program. I was ecstatic, but what the team had failed to mention, was that I would have to travel through the infamous Boni Forest to get to some of our partner schools. I still remember my fear vividly when the motorbike guy explained where we were and what would happen if things went wrong. I however managed to visit the schools and saw the desperate need for our interventions. This reaffirmed my commitment on what we do at Zizi. Indeed, if we do not reach these children and youth, who will?

The ALiVE process has also been incredible to be a part of. Seeing this ground-breaking project come to fruition, has made me more aware of the power of teamwork and of the reality of what could be accomplished when we prioritize the needs of African children and teenagers. Zizi has the most talented and youthful workforce that is always ready to support. Each person understands and loves what they do. Being here has made me realize that indeed there are people who genuinely care for and love what they do. The future of the next generation is glorious.

**Job Mwangi** (2020 to date)

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## Long Live Zizi!

Cheers to the organization that gave me my first professional experience. I joined Zizi in February 2020 as an intern and the green me could not understand why everyone kept their eyes stuck on their computers all day long. Now that I have more experience, I understand. Working at Zizi for 2 years as a program assistant has made me realize my potential and talents. I call Zizi a “Learning Academy.” Xero and Approvalmax were initially a nightmare for me; I will not even talk about the time I thought putting email subjects was unnecessary. The growth experienced at Zizi is something I am very proud of and grateful for and a paragraph is inadequate to capture this experience succinctly.

In summary, I am just delighted to be part of Zizi and to be part of the change that comes with it. To more years of excellence and depth of insight. Happy 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary!

**Karen Arisa** (2020 to date)

# No Dull Moment

I consider myself blessed to be a staff member of Zizi. I joined Zizi at a time when the world had stood still and when there were numerous uncertainties. However, Zizi was growing and expanding. I love being a Zizian because of 3 things:

1. There is great leadership. Dr. Mugo steers the organization with grace and wisdom;
2. Operations in Zizi are transparent. Every coin we receive is fully accounted for; and
3. The staff at Zizi are quite youthful such that even as we work hard, we have several light moments. At Zizi, there is never a dull moment.

By **Wangari Njuguna** (2020 to date)

# Shifting Perception

Since I joined Zizi, my perception of communication has shifted greatly. In my role, I have been able to interact and engage with various organizations, not only in Kenya but also within East Africa, all with a common goal; to reach all children through education. I continue to be inspired that through collaboration, different stakeholders are able to accelerate this vision and together we can shift how education is perceived. I look forward to innovatively communicating these great milestones in education and I am excited to be learning more about the education interventions we will be pushing for in East Africa.

**Margaret Gathigi** (2022)



Online Staff Meeting

# Happy 5<sup>th</sup> Birthday Zizi Afrique

Approximately 3 years now  
Since I joined Zizi Afrique  
Energetic and fresh from college  
Full of expectations and excitement  
Indeed ready, to explore my dream.

Interning with the Accelerated Learning Program  
Being inducted on admin and program aspects  
Networking both nationally and internationally  
Meeting new friends  
Yes! I was enthusiastic to learn.

Fascinated to explore my all-time hobby  
Of touring new places like Turkana  
Exploring the learning levels and needs  
All efforts to promote acquisition of literacy skills  
Grateful for the adventure and opportunities.

Transitioning to Program Assistant  
Watching my dream come true  
Living curiosity, your core value  
Moving out of my comfort zone  
Wow! Zizi you are a learning hub.

Transitioning to a Program Officer  
Daring myself to keep pushing hard  
To live the vision of the organization  
Of ensuring all our children are learning  
I am grateful for your kindness.

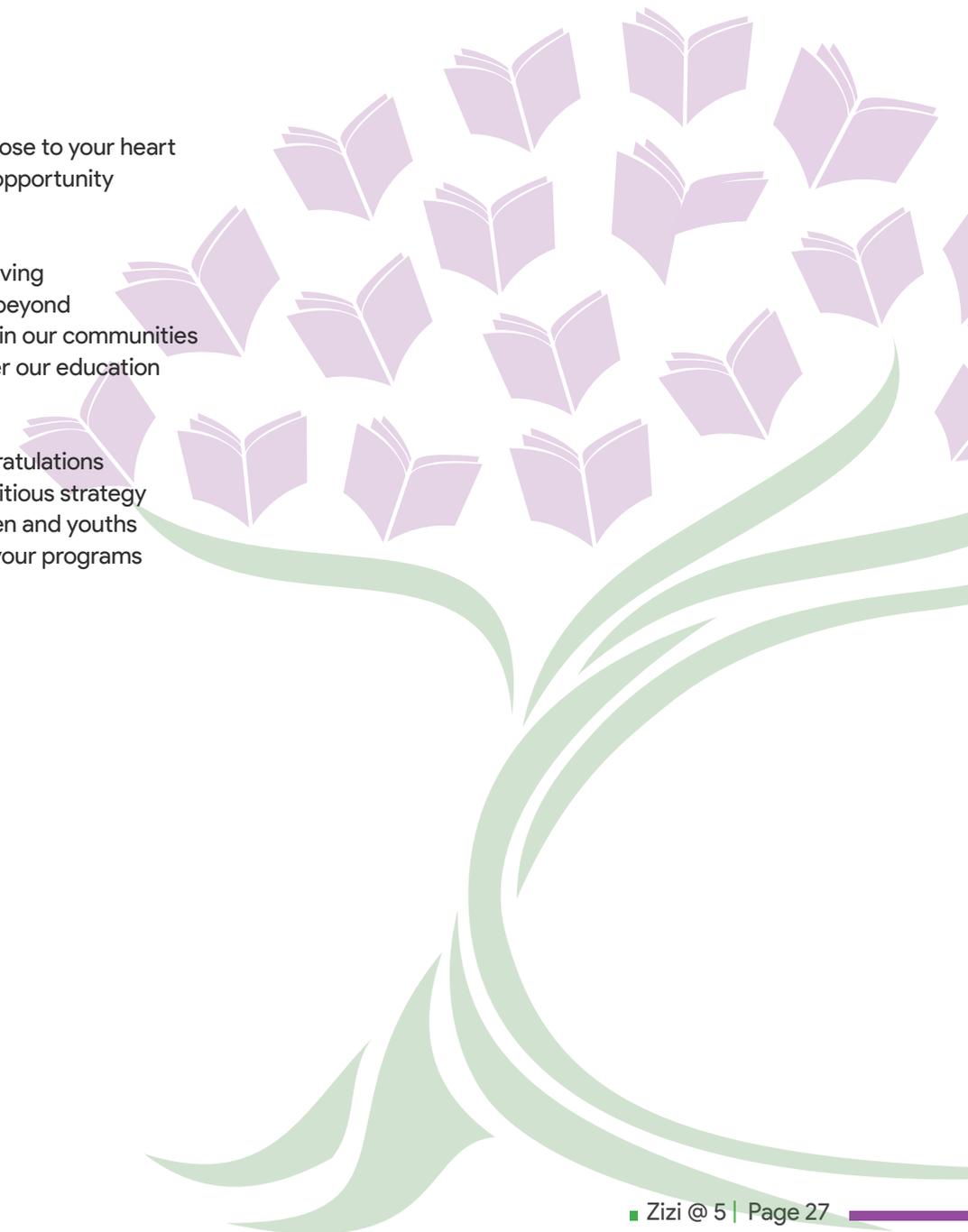
Enough cannot be said in one poem  
Maybe someday I'll journal an article  
Maybe someday I'll write a book

Thank you for having children close to your heart  
And offering youths a learning opportunity

Indeed, you are thriving and thriving  
Grow your wings to Africa and beyond  
You yearn to make a difference in our communities  
Developing innovations to better our education  
How kind of you Zizi Afrique!

I can't end without saying congratulations  
In 2021, you launched your ambitious strategy  
Aiming to reach 5 million children and youths  
Now you have almost doubled your programs  
Hurray on your 5<sup>th</sup> birthday!

**James Mburu** (2020 to date)



## Just The Open Mind I Needed

I landed at Zizi Afrique by chance. This seems to be a common occurrence in my life. Since I joined Zizi Afrique to coordinate the Regional Education Learning Initiative (RELI), I have gained a new sense of professionalism and a clearer view of what it means to be in the professional world. When I accepted my current position, I did not have the most specific goals and I think that was good because I came in with an open mind. It would come to prove to be my greatest opportunity for growth yet.

I have met colleagues who inspire me immensely, some of whom I know will remain friends for a lifetime. My

current position has allowed me to grow personally, but it has also helped me gain new skills I never even knew I needed. The highlight of my work experience so far has been receiving mentorship from one of the greatest minds I have ever known. This mentorship has transformed my life completely. I look forward to growing together and impacting the lives of the many children who have been left behind to ensure they have access to quality education and an opportunity at a better future.

Margaret Wawira (2021 to date)

## Living My Dream

Back in my early 20s, I dreamt big. I dreamt of joining a totally new environment from my profession, to move from teaching to the NGO world! Yes, this to me was big. One day, while I was busy looking for a piece of land to lease for farming, an opportunity to volunteer in coordinating the Education Evidence for Action (EE4A) conference struck. I did not know what to expect, who I was going to meet, what language I was going to use, or how I was going to cope with the new environment. One thing I had with me though, was my determination to learn and grow. I remember being asked, what would you wish to achieve by the end of this conference? I just said, "To learn and grow." Indeed, I learnt pretty quickly – the systems, policies, interacting with ZAF staff, and knowing how things were done. Indeed, this was my highlight in 2021.

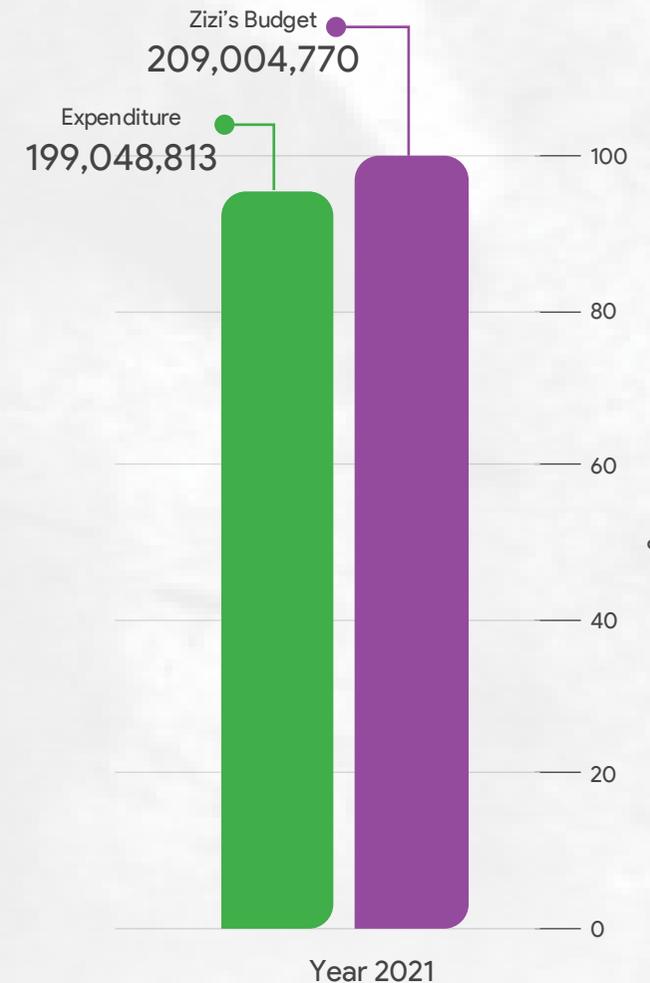
As the saying goes, "Keep knocking and the doors will

open." This, for sure, was fulfilled for me. Joining Zizi Afrique was a dream come true. I have gained courage, met the best leadership team that lifted my esteem, not forgetting very supportive colleagues with whom I love working. I enjoy what I am doing, knowing that from this, the best will unfold. I know I have just begun this journey of learning, growing, and of unfolding my potential and skills, but I know that the pieces along the way will be important for my career and for my well-being.

I could tell many stories, but one day, I will write a book. A book that will be read by children and youth regarding this interesting journey. God bless Zizi Afrique Foundation! God bless its founders and the team at large!

Winrose Bett (2021 to date)

## Zizi Afrique in 2021



### Funders





After mass in the Catholic church during immersion at Kipsing, Isiolo County



Attending the 9th RVTI International conference, Eldoret



Narok VTC skills day



During the strategy launch, Nairobi

A colleague's house warming party, Nairobi



Board Retreat, Voi



# 2021 New Talent

# 2021



Rachel Kawira



Edwin Kimwei



Alice Wambui



Thomas Odeny



Lincoln Kagiri



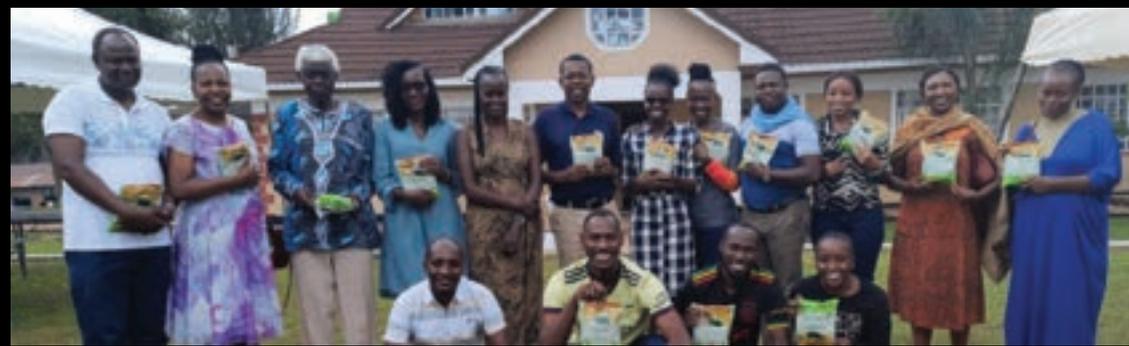
Nancy Isere



Margaret Wawira



Winrose Bett



## Grown in All Ways

Everyone has been nervous about something in the course of their lives. Nervousness is apparently more common for people when they start something new; whether it's a new job, or a new school or when they step out of their comfort zones. I got this sort of feeling when I moved to Zizi Afrique Foundation, approximately ten months ago. I was nervous because I had to make new friends and acquaintances, and because I had to learn the organization's method of doing things and adjust to them. Thankfully, I met an amazing team that helped me settle into my role easily and quickly. I have learnt a lot in my new job as the Human Resource and Administration Officer: I have grown in all ways. I love the fact that Zizi Afrique is paperless, I cannot remember ever printing anything since I joined the organization. All the processes are online, and this makes work efficient. All in all, I am more than thankful for this opportunity.

Esther Olwith (2022)

## Witnessing Evidence Use

Joining Zizi Afrique Foundation was exciting. My dream has always been to expand my knowledge in research, and to use this to influence education policy. At Zizi Afrique, I am a witness for the importance of evidence in impacting the lives of children and youth. Evidence-based interventions not only cost less, but are also more effective and impactful. This I have learnt through my engagement in the "Greening of TVETs" project. We endeavor to create opportunities for 1,500 women and young people (together at least 60% women) in Kajiado, Kakamega and Makueni counties to acquire technical and economic-production skills, and also life skills. I know now, that achieving social impact is not a straight path. Challenges emerge every day, and we keep learning and adapting. This journey is my new joy, at Zizi Afrique.

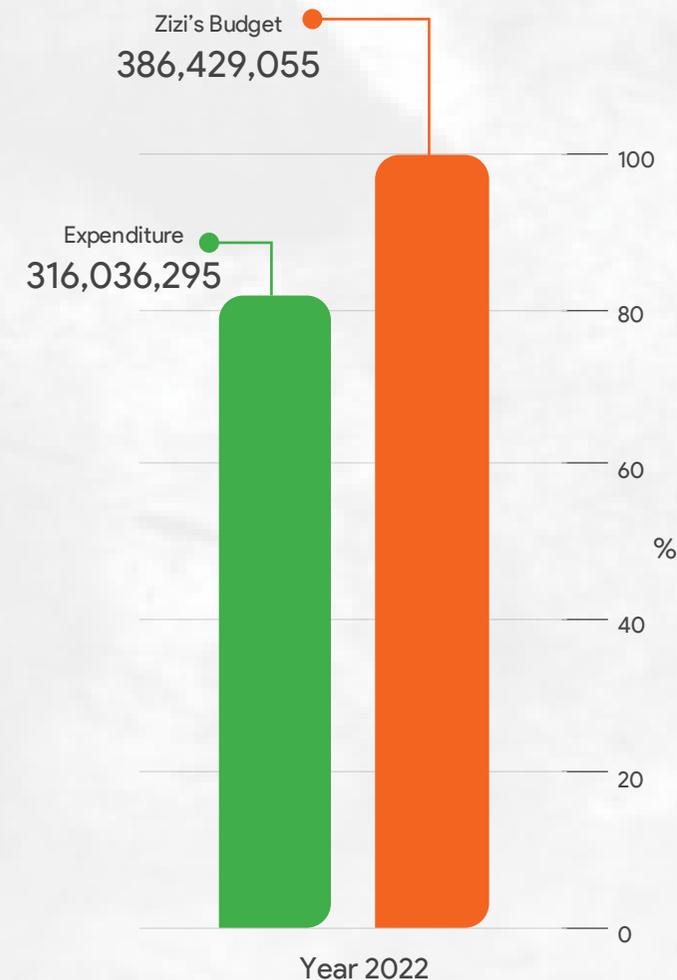
Enock Imani

## I am Grateful

To this day, I refer to February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2022 as my most stimulating day. This is the day I joined Zizi Afrique. I was very enthusiastic about the new opportunity - meeting new people, learning and building my skills. Thinking back on the first week, I found the first day of the new job daunting. However, from the moment I stepped foot in Zizi's offices, my fears dissipated. My orientation was seamless. I even had the chance to meet the Executive Director for coffee at a neighboring café. I immediately felt at home from the warm reception. The past 9 months have been very rewarding. I have had an opportunity to work in different programs. I have honed my skills in ensuring that the implementation of our programs is evidence-based. This intentionality goes a long way in ensuring that we create impact to those we serve through our work. I now feel confident to know that I am part of a winning team, working hard to live the Zizi mission. Perhaps one time, we shall live in "a world where all children and youth learn and thrive."

Dephine Otieno

## Zizi Afrique in 2022



### Funders





The Sara Ruto Cup football match



FLN Team having dinner with former CAS Education after the training of tutors in Egoji TTC, Meru County



Conquering Mt. Kenya with inspirational People as part of the #strivechallenge for Education

The 10th RVTTI conference, Eldoret

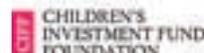
Giftng a colleague during her wedding



Farewell party for attachees and interns



End year reflection meeting, Fred's Ranch



# 2022 New Talent



Lydia Chege



Betty King'ori



Charity Kavemba



Kevin Makao



Beth Gathoni



Caitlin Mboya



Paul Buellesbach



Esther Olwith



Dephine Otieno



Maurice Mutisya



Margaret Gathigi



Gloria Muthoni



Ann Cheptoo



Nuney Ahmed



Enock Imani



Florida Ndumba



Joy Makena



Sylvia Mutama



Alissa Ofula



Michelle Maithya

# The Zizi of 2070

One time, we heard that our board brainstormed around the Zizi Vision 2070. When one comes around, they should find a 50-year-old institution making impact on the African continent. This sounded too futuristic, then we forgot about it. Coming to think of it, three things might matter most to this vision : how we generate and use data, how we invest in agile systems, and how we all feel about, and buy into this vision.



Dr. Kahaki Kimani  
Board Chairperson



Dr. John Mugo  
Board Secretary



Prof. Daniel Sifuna  
Board Member



Purity Karabai Mbabu  
Board Member



Benjamin Odhiambo Ondego  
Board Member



Michael Nzule  
Board Member



Dr. Sara Ruto  
Board Member

## Data – Our Currency

ZAF is five years old. Her vision of a world where all children and youth learn and thrive is well underpinned. This is supported by three pillars - evidence, advocacy and innovation. What matters most to realizing this vision is how we generate and use data. Robust evidence exerts influence on how researchers inform policy and practice. ZAF has and continues to strengthen data systems, adopt technology in prompt data generation, test innovations and learn from them, and enhance skills for knowledge management. Moving into the future, three things will count:

**Data translation:** Strengthening the synthesis and reduction of data to tell the story of what works, how and why. Embedding data translation into practice, and getting evidence to speak in a simple way to non-researchers, everywhere.

**Evidence use:** Putting into utility the generated evidence. Using evidence to expand promising approaches, in Kenya and beyond.

**Coalition-building:** Using evidence to harness the power of collaboration to amplify Africa's voice in education – working together for Africa's children. Moving beyond ourselves to include in the movement teachers, parents, local leaders and the youth. Using trust and evidence as fuel for big impact.

A child learns how to walk, a step at a time. ZAF continues to make steps towards making data and evidence work. This is our shared dream and our call to action, as we face the future with courage.



Executive Director being appreciated at the KEPSHA conference

# Together Into the Future

**A**t Zizi Afrique, we believe that our vision can only be achieved through collaboration and partnership with others. In our 2021–2025 strategy, we plan to reach 5 million children and youth, including 1 million who are furthest left behind. The question is, how do we achieve this in an effective, equitable and sustainable manner? The answer lies in three things:

**Mutual benefit:** In my tenure as the Finance Manager, I have learnt that partnerships can only be sustained if there is mutual benefit for both parties. We continue to pursue this symbiotic relationship by carrying out comprehensive due diligence on potential partners, leveraging on the strength of our partners while supporting them to improve on the areas they are lacking.

**Accountability:** Zizi Afrique’s operations unit is anchored on three critical pillars: people, systems, and processes. Zizi Afrique takes keenness in ensuring the right people are hired, developed and motivated. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with partners clarifies roles, responsibilities, deliverables, timelines, financial implications, and accountability.

**Shared growth:** Zizi Afrique supports partners by training them on the tasks at hand, providing sufficient financial resources, and through capacity building. We, however, allow our partners room for conversations around the MoUs and come to a mutual understanding before proceeding.

The table below demonstrates the growth of our partners in the year 2022. After

successfully completing the Assessment of Life Skills and Values in East Africa (ALiVE) in 20 counties in Kenya, we conducted a one-month virtual training with 16 partners on financial management, procurement, administration and project management; supported the partners to upgrade operational policies; and engaged IT experts to build organizational visibility on the web and social media.

Together with our partners, we brave the future. As our partners grow, so do we.

Partners' Capacity Status Report: Zizi Afrique's local partners implementing Alive program				
Ref	Assessment Area	Due diligence report in March 2022	After Capacity building in December 2022	% positive deviation
1	% of partners with an organization website	10%	90%	80%
2	% of partners with finance policy	30%	100%	70%
3	% of partners with annual financial statements	30%	to verify end of 2022	N/A
4	% of partners with procurement policy	15%	80%	65%
5	% of partners with a safeguarding policy	5%	40%	35%
6	% of partners with a basic working finance system in place	40%	100%	60%
7	% of partners with a facebook page	50%	100%	50%
8	% of partners with a proper twitter page	20%	80%	60%
9	% of partners with LinkedIn account	10%	80%	70%
10	% of partners with a Instagram account	10%	75%	65%

**Ezekiel Sikutwa**



Celebrating a colleague's wedding

## Drinking What We Preach - The Board Award 2022

Since the year 2020, we have been learning how to assess life skills and values. In October 2021, we launched our Strategy 2025 that bore the values of Ubuntu, Respect, Accountability, Curiosity and Safety. In April 2022, we used a contextualized tool to assess, inter alia, the value of respect among 17,000 adolescents in 20 counties in Kenya. The finding? Only six percent of our adolescents express high respect for others.

At that moment we asked ourselves – we have successfully assessed others, but, are we living the value of respect at Zizi Afrique?

In September 2022, with support from the LEGO Foundation, we invited Dalberg to assess us. From the staff rating, 38 percent of the Zizi staff think we have good adherence to the value of respect in our work,

none of them thinks we are excellent at it. Indeed, respect was rated lowest among the core values, confirming the adolescent assessment, that we may be dealing with a difficult thing here in our context.

Given these findings, the Board made the decision to award one staff member who epitomizes the value of respect in the organization. Staff members were asked to vote for the person, based on a short description, quote:

“Every person deserves respect. At our office, we give and receive respect in a variety of ways. These include appreciating people for who they are without judging them, being sensitive and empathetic to the feelings of others, and embracing in a warm way people who are different from us, and those that mostly hold world views and opinions that differ from ours. This is what

makes life livable, and our time together at the office pleasant. They extend this respect to our partners, genuinely paying attention to their needs, and valuing what our partners and beneficiaries bring on the table”. At the end of the year, we celebrated one of us: Renaldah Mjomba. She garnered 33 percent of the votes. From the staff comments, Renaldah epitomizes the value of Respect at Zizi Afrique: listens without judging, cares and provides solutions, treats people equally, she can be trusted, she keeps secrets, she apologizes humbly when on the wrong, she does not gossip, she is polite, calm, courteous and understanding. She is just a respectful and kind human being.



Congratulations Renaldah on receiving the board award 2022.

*“Every person deserves respect.  
At our office, we give and receive  
respect in a variety of ways.”*



During the Sara Ruto Cup



A tour to the Inspire library in Nyeri County



The Executive Director meeting student volunteers

End year reflection meeting, Fred's Ranch



Half Year Retreat, Roussel House





Farewell party for attachees and interns





Team building activity at Ngong Hills





Zizi Impact – December 2022 Edition

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