“The past three days have been a wonderful time of inspiration, learning and laughing with so many warm-hearted brilliant individuals. Everyone was willing to share their experiences and I gained invaluable feedback on my main challenges from GSF members operating all over the world from Sao Paolo to Mumbai to Brooklyn. There is so much more to share, learn and build together. Every experience counts and the diversity of this forum is a unique asset for a bigger impact.” – GSF 2019 Delegate

GSF Delegates at the conference

Summary

The Global Schools Forum (GSF) Annual Meeting, now in its fourth year, took place from 15 - 17 May 2019 in Nairobi, Kenya – for the first time in a country where GSF has members. As one of the cornerstones of GSF, the Annual Meeting is part of our commitment to connect and provide support to great school operators and intermediary organisations from around the world.

We convened a group of 100 exceptional delegates, including school operators, representatives from intermediary organisations, investors, funders and other key stakeholders from 26 countries across Africa, Latin America and South Asia, all committed to creating opportunities and access to quality education for every child. The focus of the Annual Meeting was to connect, strengthen our relationships with one another, broker new partnerships, engage in collaborative problem solving and further build our global community through the lens of storytelling.
Unlike previous years, the agenda included an evening event welcoming the wider Kenyan education community, including local service providers, hosted in partnership with Metis Fund and Segal Family Foundation. The purpose of the evening was to highlight and network with the vibrant community of education entrepreneurs and social innovators in Nairobi. We had 10 local service providers showcase their work ranging from creating vibrant alumni networks to building purpose-built, environmentally friendly and affordable schools. This evening included a student performance by students from Makini Schools, Scholé and a keynote speech by Sara Ruto from the PAL network. Delegates left the evening feeling energized, having made new connections and engaged with a wider community of partners doing mission-aligned work.

Nairobi is also home to five GSF members: Bridge International Academies, Dignitas, Kidogo, Nova Pioneer and Scholé. 70 percent of our delegates attended school visits with the above members and saw incredible teaching and learning, vibrant school cultures and engaged communities. We heard that starting the conference with school visits grounded conversations and provided an enriched experience to the whole conference.

GSF Delegates at the Kidogo school visit and at the Bridge International Academies school visit

Session Highlights

James Kassaga from Teach for Uganda... provided the keynote address on the opening day and told his inspiring and unimaginable story of how education transformed his trajectory in life. Raised by his grandmother, Kassaga could not afford a high school education despite finishing top of his district. A trip to the capital and his grit and perseverance to complete his education changed everything. Kassaga advocated for collective leadership and action from those in the room as he said it would not be possible for him to be on that stage if it were not for actors like them. “The aim of education is not mere knowledge, it is action.”**
Accelerating Change Using the Power of Storytelling by Ameen Haque from Storywallahs...
...followed the keynote. This session emphasized the importance of storytelling in all parts of your organisation: “If you are in the change making business, you are also in the storytelling business”. Ameen reminded us that people remember stories, not facts and statistics. Good stories are the truth, well told. Some crucial messages were around the vital importance of connecting with the audience; showing, not telling; and asking good questions.

School Leadership Innovations from the field...
...facilitated by Brian Sims from 1World. This interactive session showcased how five GSF members are using new innovations and initiatives to develop school leaders in their organisations ranging from using data dashboards to quality management frameworks. Participants had the opportunity to engage in smaller groups with the five presenters to understand more about their innovations.

Maximizing Social Impact with Evidence led by Doug Johnson and Penny Davis from ID Insight...
...was a quick primer that provided guidance to practitioners on how to build decision-focused monitoring systems and design a purposeful data and evidence strategy. From crafting a theory of change to determining the appropriate metrics and asking the right questions to develop a strong evidence strategy, the session was hands-on and operationally relevant.

Lunch and Learn session led by Benjamin Piper from RTI International
Benjamin shared findings from his recent multi-country research on teacher professional development with an emphasis on teacher change, not teacher training. One key takeaway for delegates was to reduce the amount of new content in each teacher training to build in sufficient time for modelling and practice so any content is grounded in practice.**

“Thank you so much for a wonderful few days at GSF. Having come back for the third time, I definitely feel like I get more out of the meeting each time. Not only is the quality of the meeting improving (from a very high starting point!) but also the depth of relationships with other operators and knowledge of their operating models gets stronger which means it’s much easier to learn and to mine each other for advice!” – GSF Member

Makini Schools, Scholé student performance
Funding for Education: When and How to Get it... facilitated by Jamie Martin from Injini. Given Jamie’s experience fundraising for Injini and supporting early stage education technology entrepreneurs with their fundraising, this session unpacked the complex education funding space including who to go to, at what stage and how to pitch. Delegates found the presentation “engaging, informative and actionable for all despite the complex content and diverse needs in the group.”

Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) to Improve Learning Facilitated by Winny Cherotich from PAL Network, Virginia Ngindiru from ZiziAfrique and Edward Munyaneza from Building Tomorrow. They gave an overview of the TaRL approach, evidence and implementation options. Delegates then became students and participated in activity-based, fun and engaging TaRL numeracy and literacy lessons. Delegates felt the session was “very interactive, informative and gave us the real experience of a TaRL lesson.”

Let’s Discuss Quality for Single-Proprietor Schools... facilitated by Peter Colenso, an independent consultant. This conversation highlighted the different approaches organisations are taking to assess quality, but also to build greater commitment among their schools to improve learning outcomes. Delegates loved the fishbowl format and thought the conversation “encouraged everyone to contribute and participate.”

Challenge Carousel: Building a Culture of Collaboration Eight GSF members outlined a specific challenge they are facing and harnessing the knowledge and expertise in the room, worked with a group of their peers to collaboratively problem solve. The challenges ranged from organisational models to financial sustainability to maintaining quality in hard to reach rural schools. The presenters felt they got great value out of brainstorming with such a diverse group of stakeholders, some of whom were themselves facing similar challenges. The other operators in the room also found great value in hearing from their peers.

Equity and Inclusion: Focussing on the Poorest & Most Marginalised Children facilitated by Vandana Goyal This important discussion between four operators clearly recognized that although many are already working on issues of equity and inclusion, there is more to be done by everyone in the room in this area. The conversation ranged from educating funders on higher per child cost for inclusivity to the lack of students with disabilities or high needs who pass through primary school. This session was a great start to more conversations and collaborations on this important issue in the future.
**Watch two of our speakers here:** [https://www.pscp.tv/GSF_talks](https://www.pscp.tv/GSF_talks)

### 3 Big Ideas

Throughout the meeting, our delegates reflected on the similarity of the challenges they were all facing, despite operating in different contexts and countries. There is a clear opportunity to harness GSF member expertise in our network and share innovations, tools and resources so we are not all replicating them in isolation. One delegate commented, “this is your challenge, but equally it is my challenge. I have learned so much from my fellow operators in this room.” There is a more efficient way to leverage each other’s work and expertise that GSF plans to explore.

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**Conversations with Government:**

Sustainability, System-Wide Impact and Scale...

...facilitated by Sam Freedman, Faith Rose and Hannah-May Wilson from the Education Partnerships Group, this session delved into different models for partnering with government. They started with an overview on motivations for partnership and conditions needed for a successful government partnership. Delegates thought the session was “very thought-provoking, well organised and loved the breakout groups that focussed on specific topics.”

**ECD: A Framework for Non-State Engagement**

facilitated by Amanda Devercelli from the World Bank

This session focussed on early childhood development (ECD), starting with an overview of the non-state sector and the critical nature of this work. The dynamic discussion that followed featured four operators working in ECD across Africa, Bangladesh and India. Delegates thought the “speakers were brilliant and gave us such good, practical ideas.”
Storytelling = The Truth, Well Told

“If the lion doesn’t tell its story, the hunter will.” Given the theme of storytelling, there was a common thread through the conference on the need for organisations to sharpen their storytelling capabilities in order to demonstrate their impact more effectively. Our delegates are doing phenomenal work led by passionate and dedicated teams but many are not telling their stories in a way that connects with their intended audience. The conference inspired us and several delegates to rethink how to bring our stories to life and embed them in our practices.

Demystifying the funding landscape

The single biggest challenge for members continues to be funding. Delegates repeatedly expressed a lack of clarity around which funders and/or investors to approach, how to approach them and at what stage. The constraints around funding to the education sector as a whole, and the non-state sector specifically, is something GSF intends to influence through our advocacy work going forwards.

GSF delegates at the Nova Pioneer school visit and at the Dignitas school visit

“GSF did a marvelous job bringing together an unparalleled room of inspiring individuals and organizations to facilitate learning and collaboration. I think there’s a wonderful organic emotional support that emerges from the meetings as well, which is quite unique.” – GSF 2019 Delegate

2 Thoughtful Takeaways for GSF

“There is so much potential in this room—the role of the private sector can be significant. There is much more in this room that unites us rather than divides us,” reflects one delegate at the meeting. What makes GSF unique is the diverse group of individuals in the room, playing various roles with various approaches, but all working towards a common goal: for all children have access to a quality education. “We’re all weaving this tapestry and it is incumbent that we each play our part in making it beautiful” one delegate comments on the potential for delegates to create system level change together. We are humbled by the passion and drive of the leaders in our GSF network and will continue to provide a safe space for different perspectives to engage constructively and not competitively with each other.
Diversity of voices and experiences
As a team, we have been reflecting on feedback we heard while in Nairobi and taking this learning to improve the GSF experience. One big takeaway for us for next year’s Annual Meeting is to focus on streaming and differentiation in all aspects of the conference, recognizing the diverse needs of the GSF community. We want to focus on tailoring our sessions for the different audiences attending and going deeper into topics rather than wider.

How did we do?
With 70 percent of our delegates completing the meeting evaluation form, feedback on the Annual Meeting reiterated its value and usefulness.

The GSF Annual Meeting was very useful for me...
97% AGREE

I was able to learn from other organisations working in the non-state education sector at the Annual Meeting...

57% STRONGLY AGREE
39% AGREE

NPS Score: 65
Excellent

Our breakdown:
Annexes

1. Agenda
2. List of Delegates