Case Study

Duara Education

GLOBAL SCHOOLS FORUM

Teachers as Thriving School Owners: Building a School Entrepreneur–Hub model in Kenya

Impact at Scale Labs: Foundational Literacy & Numeracy

2026

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Through the Impact at Scale Labs - Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN), Global Schools Forum supports seven grantee organisations across India and Sub-Saharan Africa for testing, iterating, and generating evidence towards scaling their FLN programmes in low-middle income contexts. Read more about the Labs, our grantees and their innovations here

Overview

This Case Study is co-developed by Duara Education and Global Schools Forum, as a part of the Impact at Scale Labs: Foundational Literacy and Numeracy. The practices, insights and recommendations shared here are grounded in the implementation realities and reflect the lived experiences of organisations working to improve foundational learning outcomes.

These approaches were designed and delivered in specific contexts. Applying them elsewhere will mean adapting to different programme, systemic and delivery realities. We share them as a guiding point for that adaptation. We encourage you to explore these practices and consider how they might inform your own work.

Let's continue the conversation:
If you are exploring how to adapt any of these practices, whether within your organisation, your fund or a wider education system, we would love to learn more about your programmes, the challenges you are navigating and the opportunities for impact you see ahead.

To discuss adaptation or implementation, or to connect directly with the organisations that implemented and refined these practices, please reach out to

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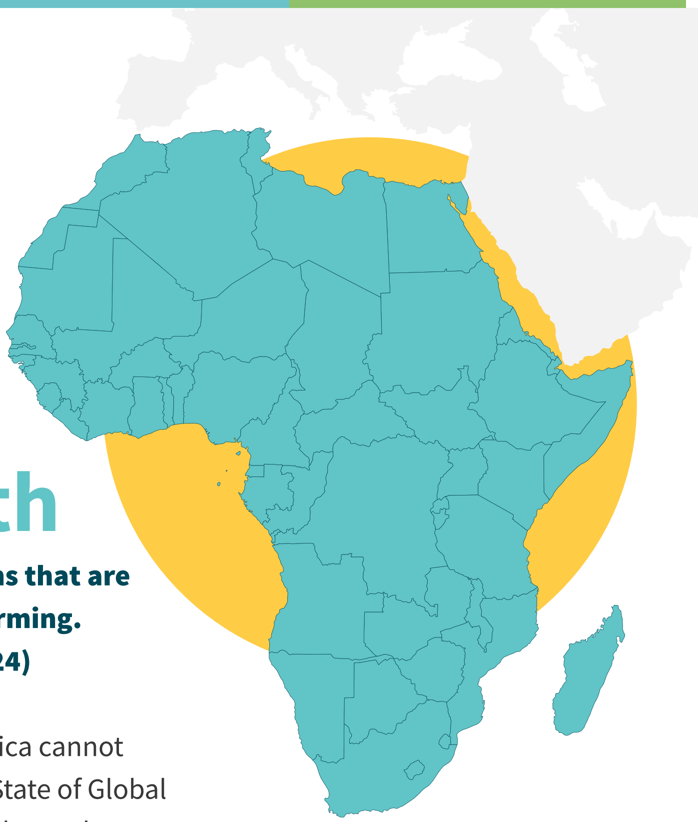
01. Introduction



Across sub-Saharan Africa,

over 125 million children and youth

are out of school, and those enrolled sit in systems that are overstretched, under-resourced, and underperforming. (UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report 2024)

An estimated 9 in 10 ten-year-olds in Sub-Saharan Africa cannot read and understand a simple text (World Bank, The State of Global Learning Poverty, 2022). Public systems struggle with large class sizes, resource shortages, and limited capacity for holistic, child-centred education.

Low-cost private schools are growing rapidly in Kenya, where non-state schools serve roughly 1 in 5 primary learners nationally, with the share rising past 60% in low-income urban areas such as Nairobi's informal settlements (APHRC; UNESCO/Kenya MoE). But these schools often prioritise scale over quality and lack strong models for community engagement or sustainability.

At the same time, passionate, capable female teachers dream of starting their own schools but lack the resources, training, systems, or capital to do so. A teacher in Kenya earning KES 8,000–20,000 per month at a low-cost private school cannot accumulate the capital needed to launch a school independently, nor access other sources of funding in the market.

The market options available today leave teachers and families underserved. Control-heavy models can hold standards in place but limit agency – the teacher stays an employee rather than becoming an entrepreneur in their own right. Debt-based models put financial risk on the very people with the least capacity to absorb it - accessible only to those with collateral or savings, and have interest rates that make them unworkable.

Core problem being addressed:

How can we make quality education accessible to families in low-income communities – by supporting local women to bring their dream of running a school to life as confident, autonomous owners, while upholding high quality and mission-aligned values?

About this Case Study:

The case study unpacks how Duara Education is developing a trust-based Teacher-to-School Entrepreneur-model in Kenya, and the lessons emerging from early implementation. The case study focuses on design decisions, implementation experiences and operational realities on how the model is implemented through teachers and parental-community collective support to enable greater access to quality schooling and learning for children.

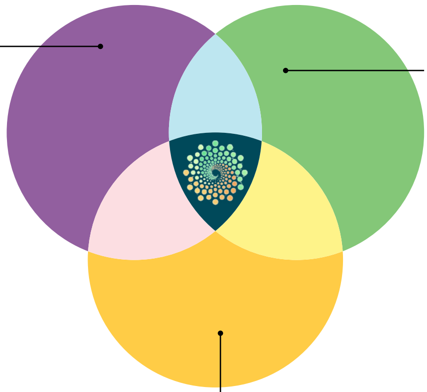
02.
The Solution

Duara Education operates community-based microschools serving children aged 3-8 years in low to lower-middle-income neighbourhoods across Nairobi, Kiambu and Kajiado counties. Currently, Duara operates 11 microschools led by School Entrepreneurs who provide holistic, child-centred education combining Montessori principles with Kenya's Competency-Based Curriculum. Schools prioritise hands-on learning and maintaining small class sizes.

A proven path from passion to thriving microschool

With Duara, teachers do not walk alone.

Duara identifies and equips female teachers through



1 **Incubator**
(the Launchpad)

Two-month intensive Training, step-by-step coaching and seed capital - from 0 to Launch

2 **Seedling**
(the Operating System)

Unique holistic curriculum, full stack operational systems & tech tools, compliance, backend admin & partnerships - All you need to operate and grow your school

3 **Collective**
(the Sisterhood)

Peer-to-Peer mentoring, best practice, innovation, coaching and wellbeing support - A Sisterhood of School Entrepreneurs

Duara deploys an integrated model to equip local School Entrepreneurs with skills, tools, capital, and support to launch and operate their school sustainably through ongoing guidance from Duara's central team or the Hub.

The main stages of the journey include:

1. Selecting and growing School Entrepreneurs through a **staged journey** of increasing capability and responsibility.

2. **Ensuring quality** through the Duara Way without requiring centralised control.

3. **Funding schools through project investment** rather than personal debt, so the School Entrepreneur never carries the financial risk.

4. **Recovering capital** from the school's own surplus and recycling it to launch the next generation.

5. Creating **an ownership pathway-** legal, financial, and operational, so the School Entrepreneur becomes not just a school leader, but a school owner.

Principles that guide the design

Trust over control
Duara enables and encourages the School Entrepreneur as a capable leader making decisions about their school, supported with tools, coaching, and templates.

Agency over dependence
The main focus is on how the School Entrepreneur is developing - building capability, confidence and agency, with necessary support and accountability as key elements to the partnership.

Autonomy within alignment
The School Entrepreneur has genuine decision-making power within a shared set of values and standards. There is structured autonomy, with the boundaries named up front.

Mutual accountability
The Hub is accountable to the School Entrepreneur for coaching, resources, and timely support, not just the other way around. The expectations are aligned and explicitly documented in form of a charter.

Local adaptation as a feature
Each school is rooted in its community and that shapes how the School Entrepreneur runs the school. The Duara Way provides the quality floor - non-negotiables that every school upholds. Local autonomy builds relevance and ownership, and the Collective creates horizontal accountability between peers that central oversight alone could never replicate.

A dual generational approach
Empowering women educators to become leaders and school owners, while simultaneously transforming learning environments for children. Children experience holistic, child-centred education. Women gain dignified income, leadership capability, and a long-term ownership pathway. Both outcomes are inseparable and mutually reinforcing.

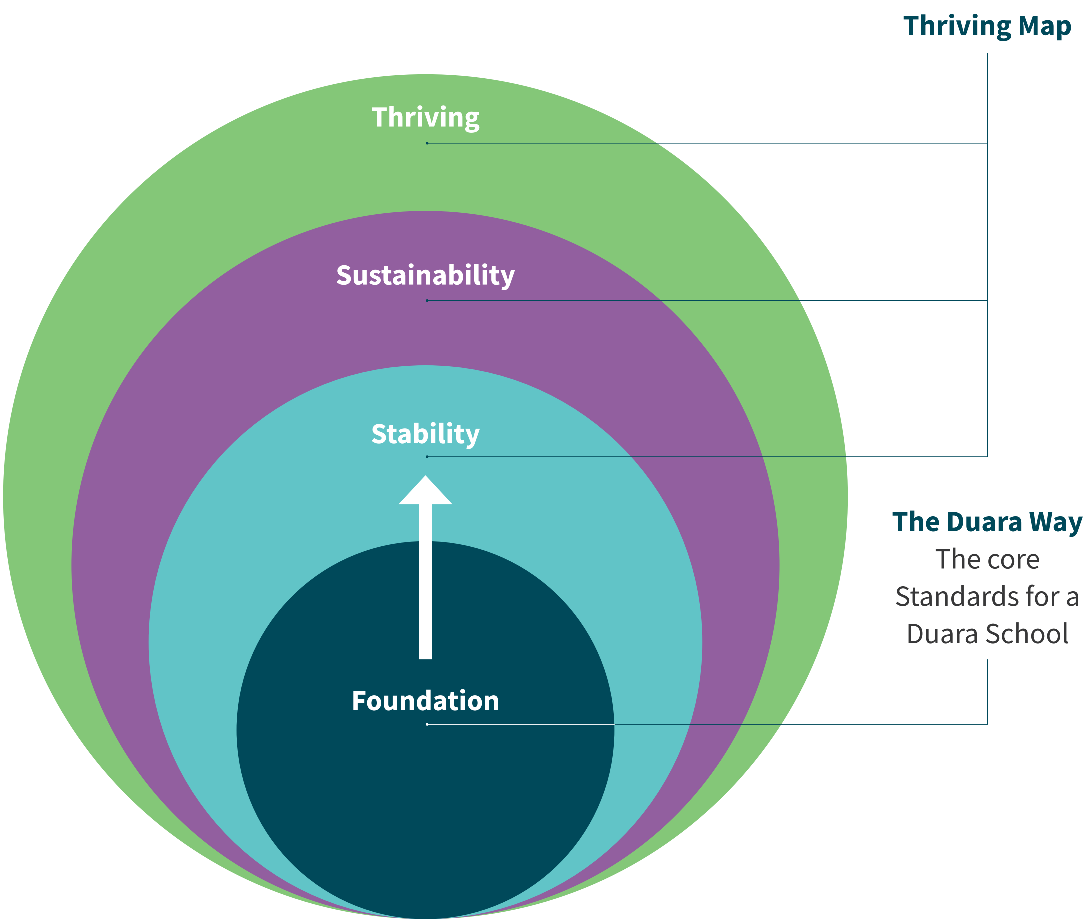
03.

Quality and the Duara Way

The Duara Way provides a quality assurance framework that defines core standards every school must uphold. It forms the foundation from which each school grows and delivers on the vision of high-quality, holistic education. The Thriving Map builds outward from this foundation, guiding each school's journey through **Stability - Sustainability - and ultimately Thriving.** Together, the Duara Way and Thriving Map form one integrated system: **shared standards at the core, and a growth pathway that deepens practice and impact over time.**

The Duara Way and Thriving Map:

core standards as the foundation, with a growth journey for every school.



Schools are assessed across six key dimensions: learning and classroom quality, operational systems, health and safety, community engagement, financial sustainability, and leadership and culture. Quality is tracked through self-assessment tools, real-time data dashboards, coaching visits, and peer learning across the Collective.

What Hub sets, what School Entrepreneur adapts

Hub Sets (Non-Negotiables)	SE Adapts (Locally Owned)
Identity and Mission • Vision and foundational values • Brand identity and visual standards	**School and Team Culture** • School culture and values expression • Daily operations and school routines • Staffing decisions and team culture
Learning Standards • Learning outcomes, pedagogical approach and principles (in alignment with local curriculum)	**Learning in Practice** • How learning looks and feels in the classroom • Co-curricular experiences and community integration • Local adaptation of curriculum elements and projects; use of local materials and resources
Quality and Safety • Child safeguarding policies and procedures • Quality assurance (the Duara Way) • Health, safety, and hygiene standards • Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)	**Parent and Community engagement** and communication
Data and Governance • Financial governance and reporting • Data Collection, Transparency and Analysis	**Local Context** Fee structure adapted to local income levels • Localised purchase decisions

By 2032

Duara aspires to grow the network to over 10,000 schools

with the model adapted across multiple countries, driving community empowerment at a regional and increasingly global scale.

04.

School Entrepreneur's Journey

Right from selection, at each stage, the School Entrepreneur receives specific support to reach key milestones, gain greater ownership, and take on new responsibilities.

The selection process is intentional and rigorous. Duara looks for those with:

1. Deep-rooted passion and openness to child-centred learning.
2. Entrepreneurial potential and willingness to take initiative.
3. Strong community ties and commitment to serving families.
4. Alignment with Duara's values around holistic education and women's empowerment.

In 2025, 420 teachers applied in ten weeks of recruiting, of whom 12 were selected for the Incubator across two cohorts.

The table below maps the School Entrepreneur journey across five stages: from the Incubator through to Thriving. Each stage has a financial milestone (Pre Launch, Post Launch, Pre-Profitable, Profitable, Once Capital Recovered) that shows how progression is tied to the school's financial health, not just time. The third column shows how Hub support shifts, and ownership grows at each stage:

Stage 0

The Incubator – Nursery
(~2 months)

Pre-Launch

Key Elements

- Training, personalised coaching and access to seed capital support to launch a school
- Playbooks, guides, checklists, and school launch frameworks
- Builds community with fellow School Entrepreneurs and mentors

Key Milestones:

Complete Incubator	Secure School Space	Recruit first Families	Hire Educare Assistant

Hub Support & Ownership

- Full training, coaching, playbooks, and frameworks
- Seed capital for renovation and launch
- School Entrepreneur is an Independent Contractor (Fellow)
- No ownership yet

Stage 1

Seed Stage – Foundation
(Months 0–6)

Post Launch

Key Elements

- As the school opens, Duara supports with resources, coaches, and mentorship from experienced School Entrepreneurs
- Responsible for: daily operations, enrolment growth, classroom quality, school safety, community trust
- Duara funds operational losses through milestone-based project investment

Key Milestones:

Grow to 25 learners	Establish daily routines and rhythms	Report healthy metrics across the Duara Way

Hub Support & Ownership

- Project investment covers operational losses
- Stipend tied to revenue growth
- Full Duara support (tools, platform, coaching, systems)
- Continued Independent Contractor
- No ownership yet

Stage 2

Sapling Stage – Stability
(Months 7–18)

Pre-Profitable

Key Elements

- Grows team by hiring assistant teachers
- Engages parents and community more actively
- Manages school budget and customises learning routines
- Deeper training in finance, compliance, and culture

Key Milestones:

Grow to 50+ learners	Reach financial sustainability (~40+ learners)

Hub Support & Ownership

- Stipend grows with revenue and learner numbers
- Ongoing project investment for operational losses
- Continued full support from Duara
- Continued Licensed Operator
- Growing agency in decision-making, customisation, responsibility

Stage 3

Blossoming – Sustainability
(Months 18–24)

Profitable

Key Elements

- Leads a strong school culture aligned with Duara
- Innovates and shares best practices across the Collective
- Co-leads training or peer learning circles
- Represents cluster in governance conversations
- Mentors new School Entrepreneurs

Key Milestones:

Sustain 60–80 learners	Consistent surplus	Enable capital recovery	Mentor 3+ new School Entrepreneurs

Hub Support & Ownership

- Stipend grows with revenue
- School begins recovering initial investment from its surplus
- Duara creates a School SPV
- School Entrepreneur begins equity vesting based on performance
- Continued full support from Duara

Stage 4

Thriving
(Year 2+)

Once Capital Recovered

Key Elements

- Strong health across all dimensions (across multiple schools)
- Mentors multiple new School Entrepreneurs
- Contributes to Collective-wide innovation
- Serves within local ecosystem (governance, policy, MoE)
- Earns shares in the Duara Collective

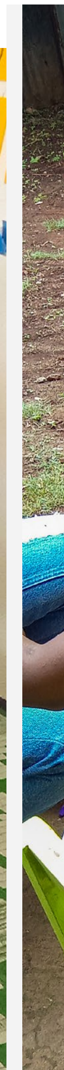
Key Milestones:

Full financial sustainability	Original investment fully recovered from school's surplus

Hub Support & Ownership

- Stipend transitions to owner's profit share
- Profit sharing from the Duara Collective
- Access to further growth capital
- School pays Duara contribution fee (tiered % of revenue)
- School Entrepreneur receives equity in School SPV — legal and financial ownership
- Continues to license Duara's IP (curriculum, systems, quality standards)

> Thanks to Duara, I am no longer just someone here in Gathiga. I am now a Community Leader.
>
> **— Flora, Duara School Entrepreneur**



05.

The Charter and the Legal Layer

The Mutual Commitment Charter is the formal expression of the Hub–SE relationship — the place where the School Entrepreneur journey, the coaching commitment, the ownership pathway, and shared expectations are all made explicit and agreed. This is co-created with School Entrepreneurs based on real experience, feedback, and trust.

Key components included in the Charter

- Shared purpose, values, and the "why" both sides are signing up to.
- Stage-by-stage expectations and decision rights on what each side does and decides at each phase, and how authority shifts as the School Entrepreneur grows.
- The ownership pathway and the triggers for each transition named up front
- A graduated, support-first accountability process on what happens when things go wrong, and at what point peer or formal review kicks in.
- The financial arrangements — how capital flows, how it is recovered, and how licensing or contribution fees work.

Key checks before adopting the charter

A charter of this kind, however, only works where some underlying conditions hold. Several of these are easy to take for granted in Kenya but are not universal — worth checking before adopting this approach in another context:

Property market

In Kenya, schools can launch in former residential homes, community centres, or churches, with rent paid monthly. In contexts that require one or more years of rent paid up front (e.g. Ghana, parts of Nigeria), the project investment quantum — and the regenerative recovery math — both change materially.

Digital payments infrastructure

Ubiquitous mobile money makes tuition collection, stipend disbursement, and milestone-based capital tranches operationally straightforward. In cash-dominant economies, the financial rhythm of the model would need to be redesigned.

A teacher labour market with an aspiration gap

The model presupposes a real population of trained, capable teachers earning low wages in a low-fee private sector, with no realistic path to ownership through existing financial channels. That gap is what the model fills; without it, the value proposition shifts.

A culture of pooled financial commitment

Kenya's chama tradition means peer accountability, rotating contributions, and collective financial discipline are culturally familiar. The Collective concept lands on ground that is already prepared. In contexts without that, building horizontal accountability between School Entrepreneurs is heavier lifting.

A shared working language

English-medium curriculum, materials, coaching, and Hub-wide training make centralisation manageable. In contexts with strong vernacular instruction expectations or contested language politics, the materials and support infrastructure become significantly more complex to build and maintain.

06.

Sustainability Model: How Value Flows

Regenerative project investment

Duara does not offer loans, instead school financing is structured as a **project investment**. Capital is raised from value-aligned funders and deployed as milestone-based investments to set up new schools. The School Entrepreneur does not owe this capital personally into the school.

Each school requires approximately $7,000–8,000 in total investment, covering setup costs (~$1,000) and operational losses during the growth phase (~$6,000), released in milestone-based tranches as the school hits enrolment and quality targets. Schools reach breakeven at around 40–50 learners, typically within 18–24 months.

Once profitable, the school itself begins to recover the initial investment from its own surplus (not from the School Entrepreneur's personal income). This recovery includes a modest cost of capital (8–10%). The recovered capital is then **recycled to launch the next generation of schools**. This is the regenerative engine: each school's success becomes the seed for someone else's start.

Why this matters

Through Duara, urban School Entrepreneurs start earning KES 30,000 per month (already two to three times a typical low-cost private school salary) with earnings growing as their school's revenue grows, and an ownership pathway on top.

The only barrier to entry is the School Entrepreneur's own ability to put in the work, the hours, and the passion. There is no savings requirement, no collateral, no credit history needed- just commitment and alignment with Duara's values.

Compare this with the alternatives available to a teacher in Kenya today:

Dimension	Duara model	SACCOs (Savings and Credit Cooperatives)	Chamas (informal savings and investment groups common across Kenya)	MFIs, Commercial banks
Access Requirement	Commitment + values alignment; no savings, collateral, or credit history needed	4–6 months membership and savings history before any loan; can only borrow 3–5x savings	Group membership; rotating contributions; access depends on turn in the cycle	Typically only available to schools with 3+ years operating history; not available to startup teachers
Form of capital	Project investment into the school (not personal debt to the SE)	Personal loan to the teacher	Personal loan from the group pot	Personal or business loan, secured against collateral
Capital realistically available	Full ~$7–8K (≈KES 800K–1M) needed to launch.	~3–5x savings; in practice ~KES 50K (~$385) for most teachers. A teacher would need to accumulate ~KES 300,000 in savings to access the capital to launch a school — impossible on a salary of KES 15,000–20,000 per month.	~KES 12K (~$92) per round, assuming 12 members contributing KES 1,000. Max ~KES 50K (~$385) from MFI-backed chamas.	Effectively unavailable to teachers starting from scratch.
Cost of capital	8–10% per year, recovered from the school's surplus (not the School Entrepreneur personally)	12–18% per year	Up to 20% per year	~40% per year (where available)
Personal liability/who bears the risk	risk sits with the school; School Entrepreneur does not carry personal financial liability	Full personal liability on the teacher	Full personal liability on the teacher, plus group/social pressure	Full personal liability, secured against collateral
Pathway to ownership / sustainability	Built-in pathway to school ownership via equity vesting in the school SPV	No structural ownership pathway — debt repayment only	No structural ownership pathway — debt repayment only	No structural ownership pathway — debt repayment only

Shared services and economies of scale

The Hub provides centralised services such as curriculum, technology platform, coaching, accounting, legal and compliance, supplier partnerships, and quality assurance for reducing cost and complexity for individual schools. As more schools join, cost per school drops through bulk procurement, shared training, and platform efficiencies. AI-powered tools handle marketing, enrolment workflows, and payment integration, while coaching tools enable personalised, data-driven support at scale.

How the Hub sustains itself

Schools pay a licensing fee to the Hub which is a tiered percentage of revenue for continued access to the platform, curriculum, coaching, tools, and community. This ensures alignment: Duara's sustainability grows with each school's success.

07. Early Results and Key Learnings

Impactful

11 School Entrepreneurs

30 jobs created

100% women-led

120+ learners enrolled

+72% mastery gains (Duara internal baseline–endline assessment, PP1 & PP2)

Replicable

6 school launches in January 2026 alone

<2 weeks new school setup

420 teacher applications in 10 weeks

82 Parent NPS

Sustainable

<$20 direct cost/learner/month

$7–8K from zero to profitable

40-50 learners to breakeven

4.75/5 School Entrepreneur satisfaction

Key learnings

Teacher transformation is real: educators from diverse backgrounds have shifted to child-centred, holistic practice by building their own school around a different philosophy of learning. The combination of ownership, community, and coaching creates conditions for deep professional growth. **The Collective is emerging as a powerful force.** The peer network provides mutual support, accountability, and shared learning that central oversight alone could never replicate. School Entrepreneurs learn faster from each other than from the Hub alone. The Collective creates belonging and shared identity — a community of practice that sustains motivation through difficult moments.

> I could not do it alone – and would not want to. Duara's curriculum, systems, tools and support throughout the Incubator, Seedling and Collective are essential to my success."
>
> **— Didi, Duara School Entrepreneur**

Key challenges being navigated

Three challenges have surfaced in early implementation that shape how the model is evolving —

The business management gap
School Entrepreneurs come in as passionate teachers, not as people with business backgrounds. As schools launch, they are absorbed in running them. We are building practical business and financial training into the Incubator stage, so School Entrepreneurs enter the launch phase with foundations in place rather than picking it up under pressure later.

Assessing value alignment and readiness for ownership

While selecting for passion and child-centred values is critical, assessing whether someone is ready for the demands of ownership is harder, Hence, a process of continuous assessment through the Incubator itself — observing candidates as they engage with the work, the Collective, and the realities of school launch — so the final go/no-go decision sits at the end of the Incubator, with much more lived data behind it.

Sizing and pacing capital release

Working out exactly how much capital each new school context needs — and how to time the launch to optimise for enrolment growth (the key revenue driver) — has been an active challenge across early cohorts. The milestone-based tranche structure works in principle, but calibrating the size and timing of each tranche requires regular review and adjustment.

Recommendations For practitioners exploring similar models

For organisations attempting a Hub–school-entrepreneur or similar trust-based model in their own context, a few things have stood out from our experience so far:

Start with the Charter, not the legal documents.

The relational layer, i.e., values, expectations, decision rights, accountability is what makes the legal layer work. Co-create it with School Entrepreneurs; let it be a living document.

Size capital to local breakeven economics, not to a pre-set target.

The $7–8K per school works in the Kenya context; in another it could be half, or twice. Ground the number in your own setup costs, learner economics, and how long it takes a school to reach surplus.

Design for the Collective from day one.

Peer support, peer accountability, and shared identity are doing real work in this model. Plan them deliberately through structured circles, mentorship pairings, and shared rituals.

Secure patient, values-aligned capital before recruiting your first cohort.

The regenerative engine only works if the first generation of schools is fully funded through surplus. Recruiting School Entrepreneurs before that funding is in place is a promise the model can't keep.

Meet Some of Duara's Proud School Entrepreneurs

Teacher Nyambura
- Duara School Ruiru

Teacher Gladys
- Duara School Kamirithu

Teacher Winnie
- Duara School Kitengela

Teacher Josephine
- Duara School Lang'ata

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