



Newsletter No. 3 - March 2026

By Dina Sodjadan - Digital learning for high-quality education

By Yao Sodjadan - Strengthening Entrepreneurship in Education Center

An assignment from Comundo

Challenges and peaceful moments



Dear friends and readers,

In our last newsletter, we mainly told you about our work with Comundo and our assignments. By now, our arrival in Kenya is no longer a “just arrived” moment—and that changes the perspective. After the initial phase of organizing everything and simply finding our footing, the questions that remain are the ones that last longer: What truly works? What takes energy? And what gives us a sense of calm, even though everyday life often runs differently from what we are used to?

The photo shows us near Malindi at the “Hell’s Kitchen” crater.

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Comundo sends co-workers to Kenya, Namibia, Zambia, Nicaragua, Colombia, Bolivia and Peru.

Your donation makes these missions possible. You can find information on how to donate on the last page.





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House hunting – from chaos to an oasis

While we were still in Germany, we had a clear picture in mind: a small house, space for the kids to play, maybe a bit of a garden—a place where we could truly arrive and feel at home. So once we arrived in Kisumu, we were fully motivated: contacting agencies, meeting brokers, planning viewings. But despite having clear ideas about price, size, and location, there was hardly anything that really fit for us as a family.

Instead, we were shown many houses or flats—just rarely what we were actually looking for: overpriced run-down places, huge houses far beyond our budget, or small apartments without any real security concept or a place to play outside.



Emmanuel at the pool, next to our apartment

Once, we even found ourselves standing on a property where monkeys suddenly appeared and tried to steal our snacks. It sounds funny—but above all it was exhausting. The days were hot, the kids were tired, and much of it felt chaotic and unprofessional. When some agencies even started asking for money just to allow us to view a place, our patience was pretty much at its end.

On top of that came the issue of safety. Following our employers guidelines on security, we had to focus on the safest—and at the same time most expensive—neighborhood in Kisumu. Rents there are sometimes comparable to German prices, which drastically reduced the number of options.

After two frustrating weeks, we made a decision we had originally wanted to avoid: moving into an apartment in a “gated community.” What was meant as a temporary solution quickly turned out to be a relief. Fully furnished, a well-equipped kitchen, security structures, a pool, a gym—and a generator for power outages. Since our moving boxes from Germany were still on their way, having bed linen, towels, laundry service, and weekly cleaning was honestly worth it. What started as an “emergency solution” became a small oasis.

Our dream of a house finally faded when a seemingly promising option fell through. An older house was supposed to be renovated for us—agreed verbally, but unfortunately not put in writing. Trusting the arrangement, we even bought some furniture from the owner. Two weeks before the planned move-in date, we visited again and realized: nothing had happened. No renovation, no progress—and suddenly we were told that certain work would not be done at all. At the same time, we were expected to pay two months’ rent “because that’s what the contract says.” Since we had a bad feeling about the situation, we promptly canceled the arrangement.



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School – between expectations and gut feeling

Thinking about school in Kenya was already a big topic while we were still in Germany. We agreed: **no pressure** –neither for us nor for Emmanuel. However, shortly after arriving in Kisumu, conversations with colleagues made us realize that it is considered unusual to keep a child at home, even if it is "just in the beginning". So we did what you might call "jumping in at the deep end" and enrolled Emmanuel in a small international school. Without any English skills, overwhelmed by the new environment, and faced with a school routine that immediately required reading, writing, and math, he quickly reached his limits. Everything was in English. For a child who had just arrived, it was simply too much.



Emmanuel's first day of school in September 2025.

We knew that he could grow through the experience. But we could also see that this start at school wasn't really sustainable for anyone. After weeks that brought more tears than progress, we changed course. We took Manu out of school for the time being—with the goal of giving him time: to arrive, to find a daily rhythm, to learn English at his own pace, without constantly having to "function."

In September, we tried again: a newly opened, small school right next to Ujima (Dina's partner organization) –a manageable setting, with around ten children at the beginning. A completely different start. And what happened? Emmanuel blossomed.

Today he speaks English fluently and loves discovering new things. Repetition, on the other hand... let's say he finds it unnecessary. "I already know that," is one of his standard phrases. The teachers are equally surprised and amused: as long as something is new, he wants to understand it. When it gets boring, he would rather go and play.

"I don't waste time on things that even a baby knows." - Emmanuel



On the way to work/school with our driver Evans.



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A brief trip to the Kenyan coast

In July, a work trip came up—at least for Yao. Together with the Comundo country director, he visited several vocational schools and organizations in Malindi and Kilifi. For us, it quickly became clear: if we were already traveling to the coast, we would combine work with a few days of vacation. While Yao had his meetings, our schedule looked quite different: **pool time, sand, and a few mental breaks by the sea.**



View of the Indian Ocean.

Background: Vocational training in Kilifi County

In regions like Malindi and Kilifi, many young people face the challenge of gaining stable access to employment. At the same time, youth make up around 60% of the population in the region, representing great potential for innovation and economic development. Many young people are creative and entrepreneurial, but they often lack practical skills, networks, or access to resources to turn their ideas into reality.

This is why **Comundo promotes collaboration with vocational training centers.** These centers can play a crucial role: they provide hands-on technical and entrepreneurial skills, build self-confidence, and facilitate entry into employment or self-employment. In this way, they help transform existing talent into tangible economic opportunities.



Yao visiting Roka VTC in Kilifi (at the coast).



Ice cream as a reward after a long day of work ;-) 🍦



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Highlights from Dina's assignment

After a few months of getting to know the team, I am now fully settled into the daily work routine at Ujima.

As mentioned before, **an initial "getting-an-impression-phase" is particularly important at Comundo.** I

summarized my observations and personal insights from this period in a presentation for my colleagues. By consciously observing structures and processes, I was able to align my own work more clearly.

Through that, it quickly became apparent that Ujima is not yet ready to implement digital products directly and from where they currently stand. Considering the available resources—especially the skills of my colleagues—I initially focused on understanding what was truly needed and where I could provide meaningful support.

Together, we discussed how to attract more trainees to Ujima while simultaneously strengthening the trainers' competencies. At times, my focus also shifted to other topics. Smaller organizations like Ujima are constantly grappling with limited financial resources. Mid-last year, the mood was somewhat subdued because it was unclear how long the existing budget would last. I therefore got involved in this area as well, contributing to funding applications. Fortunately, one grant opportunity proved to be promising. We now have the financial means to continue and implement a new project, which I will cover in more detail in the next newsletter.

Additionally, I have been engaging intensively with other Comundo colleagues on the topic of "innovative pedagogy" to further sharpen the focus and impact of my work.

Highlights from Yao's assignment

After visiting several vocational training centers in July, a longer phase of tinkering and reflection began. Each of Comundo's partner organizations faces its own challenges, but there are also many commonalities.

In particular, within the **CoVEx program** (Centers for Vocational Expertise), I am specifically working to support organizations in their professional development. As a consultant for (small) businesses and entrepreneurship, it is especially important to me to **integrate entrepreneurship more strongly into vocational college curricula.**

In many places, self-employment is still viewed negatively: it is often seen as a sign that someone could not find a place in the formal labor market and therefore has to resort to self-employment. But self-employment does not have to be negative—on the contrary: despite many challenges, it also offers opportunities and advantages in the labor market.

It is therefore important to understand why self-employment is often perceived negatively and how this perception can be changed. To explore this more deeply, I conducted several interviews and thoroughly investigated the topic. The findings were multifaceted, but one key point was the fear of taking new steps—such as fear of loss or failure.

With the right strategies, these fears can be addressed and risks can be mitigated. These are precisely the strategies I have reflected on and documented together with colleagues. What emerged from this work and how these approaches have been received in the various centers will be shared in the next newsletter.



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A visit to the 3000 Friends Farm

The 3000 Friends Farm in Nairobi, run by the Yarumal Missionaries, is an educational and demonstration center offering hands-on training in ecological farming, sustainable agriculture, and animal husbandry—especially for women and youth from Samburu and Turkana communities.

The farm, located on Rimpa Road, also serves as a peaceful retreat for city residents, school classes, and volunteers who want to reconnect with nature and learn environmentally friendly practices. Through its demonstration gardens, educational programs on animal husbandry, and community-oriented approach, the farm promotes food security, strengthens rural areas, and fosters cultural connection, thus creating an important bridge between urban and rural development.

Our dear colleague Emma supports the 3000 Friends Farm as head of training and expert in ecological farming.



Emma is showing us different plants.

And, what do we miss about Germany?

- **Dina:** Cheese. Friends and family—especially when you realize how much you miss the “in-between moments,” not just the big events.
- **Manu:** Kindergarten/friends—and a few specific toys (“Where’s my skateboard???”)
- **Yao:** Amazon (🤖), friends—and **West** African food (because in Germany, Afro shops offer much more than what’s partially available here).

The good news is that we’ll be in Germany in April, which will help ease our homesickness a bit.

See you soon, the Sodjadans



Love for the Kenyan beach.



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Together for a fairer world

Comundo is the leading Swiss organization for development cooperation through the exchange of people. We currently have nearly one hundred active co-workers working in seven countries in the Global South. Every day, they collaborate closely with colleagues from local partner organizations to find innovative and sustainable solutions to combat injustice and inequality. We use three main tools to create lasting change: the exchange of co-workers, the funding of projects, and the promotion of networking.

At Comundo, we believe that each of us has a responsibility to act against injustice and inequality. Choosing to engage with us is a concrete way to contribute. Together, we can foster long-term change toward a fairer world. We are convinced that change is possible through an exchange between North and South based on mutual respect and trust.

Our mission is to promote networking, exchange, and cooperation among people and organizations from different continents, cultures, and religions. Our vision is guided by the belief that a world in which all people live together in equality, dignity, and peace is possible. In this way, we contribute to achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda.

Comundo

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