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WED, 06 JAN 2016

Posted on Thursday, 23 October 2014 13:34

# Education: Private solutions for public gaps

By Gemma Ware

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LEARNING BY NUMBERS: THE LOW-COST SCHOOLS DEPEND ON A LARGE PUPIL BASE. PHOTO@BRIDGE INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIES

## Chains of low-cost private schools are springing up from Kenya to South Africa.

The average customer earns \$1.60 per day, spends \$16.97 a month on rent and is likely to be self-employed.

It may sound like analysis from a consumer goods company, but these stats come from Bridge International Academies, a quickly expanding for-profit company that runs 359 primary schools in Kenya teaching 100,000 children.

It approaches teaching like a business problem and is managed by centralised teams in charge of curriculum development and lesson planning.

**We promise them their kids will learn x, y, z.**

All Bridge teachers have tablet computers and can download lesson plans. Many have not been teachers before.

Bridge's schools charge an average of only \$6.35 per pupil per year.

Marie Leznicki, vice-president for marketing at Bridge, says its pupils are performing 35% higher in reading and 19% higher in maths than their peers in government schools.

"Parents are in complete control. We promise them their kids will learn x, y, z. They will pull out their kids and stop paying if we don't do that," says Leznicki.

Bridge is owned by US firm New Globe Schools, which is setting up subsidiaries in Uganda, Nigeria and India.

One of its funders is the Pearson Affordable Learning Fund (PALF), a \$15m fund set up to invest in innovative companies in Africa.

Alongside Bridge, low-cost Ghanaian chain Omega has 40 schools, and SPARK, a South African company, has set up a chain of schools based on a 'blended learning' approach – using technology alongside face-to-face teaching.

It aims to have 60 schools within a decade. Scale will be the key to their success.

Bridge's Leznicki says the company has yet to make a profit in Kenya.

"Our profit margins on each child are very, very tiny. It's only through having literally half a million kids that it starts to make sense." ●

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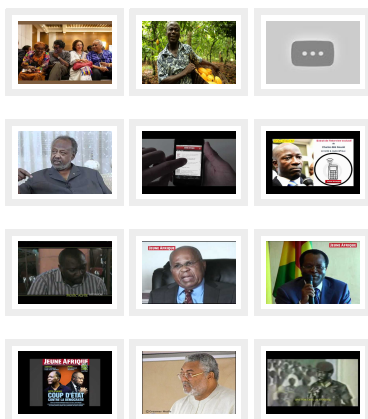


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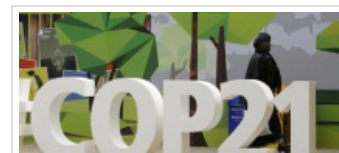
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