



# Strategic Plan

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2024-2025

# Message From Leadership



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*“Societal barriers to inequality are complex and intertwined. Yet books and education helped me bridge those divides with guidance from a caring young mentor. I believe that when young people are equipped with the tools, environment and freedom to shape their growth, they can truly thrive, dream boldly and lift themselves, their families and communities out of poverty.”*

The formulation of this strategic plan highlights the support, relentless effort, and immense dedication of the Board members, Volunteers, and Strategic partners of Custodians of African Literature Initiative (COAL). Their collective passion, intellect, and commitment have been instrumental in turning this strategic vision into a tangible reality. They have meticulously documented their shared visions, ensuring clarity and purpose for all team members in our journey towards creating lasting, sustainable change for Africa's youth. Since COAL's inception in 2014, we have remained resolute in our vision of an Africa where every child and youth has access to quality education and essential skills without hindrance.

## **Our Commitment**

In today's challenging world, the path to meaningful change demands the commitment of dedicated individuals and organizations. We are committed to our mission of empowering children and youth, particularly those in low-income communities, through the tools of literacy and creativity. We aim to bridge the education inequality gaps that persistently plague our society.

With a deep-rooted commitment to fostering literacy, civic education, cultural exchanges, creative writing, and gender equality, COAL is committed to nurturing the next generation of African leaders, understanding that it begins with a strong foundation rooted in quality education. We believe that literacy skills, particularly the ability to read and write, are fundamental pillars for success. Through literature, we cultivate critical thinking and leadership skills in youth.

## **Our Achievements and Future Aspirations**

Since our formal establishment in 2017, COAL's impact has been profound. We have orchestrated over 20 bespoke literary events, reaching more than 5,000 youths. This achievement underscores the transformative power of literature and the essence of community engagement. While our current strategic framework spans two years, we envisage future plans to encompass five-year intervals.

Our strategic roadmap for 2024-2025 emanates from a desire to evolve our organizational systems, emphasizing institutionalization and systematic growth. This dual-pronged approach - institutional and programmatic - seeks to preserve institutional knowledge, solidify the COAL identity among our team, and strategically expand our impact beyond geographic confines. On the programmatic front, we aim to bolster our alternative education portfolio, forge market pathways for creatives, and offer our expertise in research and Monitoring and Evaluation to development collaborators.

## **Our Distinctive Approach**

What differentiates COAL is our intersectional approach. We recognize that societal barriers to inequality are complex and interconnected, by empowering young people to take charge of their education and literary growth, we nurture their potential as active agents of social change. As we embark on this ambitious journey, I invite you to join hands with us. Together, with unity and shared dedication, we can truly harness the potential of our youth, propelling Africa towards unparalleled growth and prosperity.

**Patience Finye Oyekeye**  
Executive Director





## Vision

**A thriving Africa where every child and youth has unfettered access to quality education and essential skills to lead impactful and fulfilling lives.**

## Mission

**To bridge inequality gaps through alternative education and the amplification of youth voice and agency in Africa.**

## Our values



### INTERSECTIONALITY

We believe that empowering youth across intersections nurtures change



### DIVERSITY

Our strength lies in diverse perspectives and we believe diversity nurtures growth



### ACCOUNTABILITY

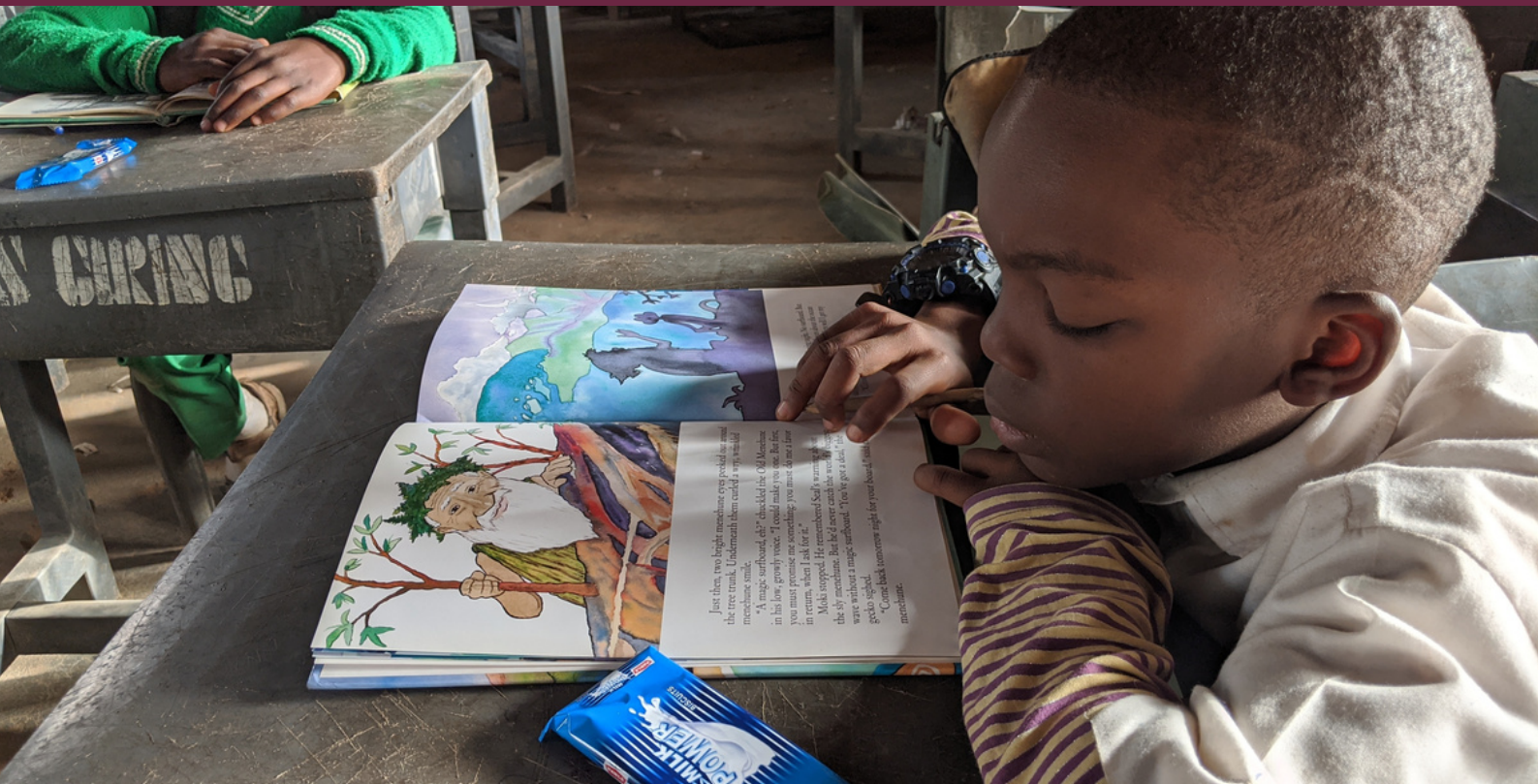
We believe accountability builds strong relationships internally and externally.



### FUN

We embrace resourcefulness and unconventional solutions to overcome challenges and ensure we have fun while at it.

# Background



An estimated 244 million children aged between 6 and 18 are still out of school around the world (UNESCO,2022). In Africa, children are five times less likely to learn the basics than children elsewhere. One in five primary school-age children on the continent is still out of school; a quarter will never complete primary education (UNESCO,2022). In Nigeria, there are 18.5 million out-of-school children, of which 60% are girls (UNICEF, 2022). The number of out-of-school children is generally high across the country, however, the northern states of Yobe, Taraba, Zamfara, Sokoto and Plateau are the hotspots of out-of-school children in the country (Adeleke and Alabede, 2022).

About 70 million Nigerian citizens cannot read and write and lack basic skills for modern living. (NMEC,2018). Illiteracy costs the global economy more than USD \$1 trillion dollars each year due to the fact that at least one in five people worldwide struggle with illiteracy (World Literacy Foundation, 2022). In 2020, the overall literacy rate of Sub-Saharan Africa stood at 66%. Especially in regions with low literacy, it is women who are left out of this elementary part of education first. While in 2020, 90% of the world's men over the age of 15 could read, this was only the case for 87% of women. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the gap was even larger at 72% of males and only 59% of females (WEF,2022).

In Nigeria, this has resulted in poor living conditions for these groups despite the efforts of governments, development partners and corporate bodies.

The wide gap of inequality has snowballed into a myriad of cultural and structural challenges. Their socio-economic development and that of the country has been negatively affected. Across Africa, specifically Nigeria, the plight of these young people and children in low-income communities remains a deeply concerning issue.

Furthermore, a significant portion of youth and children grapple with the harsh reality of poverty and limited access to quality education. Statistics reveal that around 40% of Nigerians live below the poverty line, and unemployment rates hover around 33%. These figures paint a stark picture, with youths from marginalized communities being the most affected. For these young individuals, uneducated and living in precarious conditions, the challenges are further compounded by the widespread insecurity that plagues the nation. The interplay of these factors creates a cycle of vulnerability, limiting their opportunities for personal and socio-economic growth.

COAL has undertaken a mission to address these pressing issues. Our unique approach hinges on the belief that books and a strong community of support has the propensity of supporting youth to lead successful lives. Our focus is squarely on empowering young people and children in low-income communities both rural and urban, offering them a lifeline of hope and opportunity. COAL is breaking this into time chunks to be achieved via our strategic plan.



# THE STRATEGIC PLAN (2024-2025)

Over the next 2 years (2024-2025), we will focus on strengthening internal systems, expanding programs for greater impact, diversifying funding streams, and improving workplace culture. To deliver on our strategic vision, our first priority is building organizational resilience by implementing robust policies, adding strategic hires, developing our volunteer program, and upgrading systems. This capacity building will enable unhindered growth.

Our core focus area continues to be high-quality youth programs centered on alternative education and literary development. We will expand offerings while emphasizing innovation, accountability, diversity, and community voice. Additionally, we aim to realize long-term sustainability by diversifying our funding sources beyond traditional channels. Through earned income projects, social ventures, and responsible reserves, we will mitigate reliance on fluctuating external funds.

Finally, we will invest in our team through professional development, enhanced communication, formal wellness programs, and celebrating creativity. This will support the passion and collaboration needed to expand our community impact. With these four pillars—infrastructure, programs, funding, and culture—we will deliver a bold vision and empower youth to reach their full potential.





# Pillar 1

## Institutional Strengthening

### Focus Areas

To deliver on our strategic vision, we will first focus on building organizational resilience across key areas including financial health, staff capacity, technology and systems, governance, facilities and operations, and strategic partnerships. Efforts to diversify funding, invest in staff development, upgrade outdated platforms, refine policies and governance, enhance our working environment, and expand collaborative networks will strengthen institutional capacity and enable unhindered growth. With robust infrastructure as our foundation, we will equip our team to stay concentrated on driving mission-aligned impact through our programming and maintaining agility to address emergent needs in our community. Institutional strengthening will provide a stable bedrock for actualization of current initiatives and responsible future expansion.

### Goal

By mid-2025, implement comprehensive policy infrastructure, streamline decision-making processes, and build corporate governance systems in ethics to exemplify global best practices



# How we will do this

- **Onboarding Board Members:** Constituting a board of professionals with expertise in education, nonprofit management, creative writing, and finance to diversify thought leadership on our Board by Q2 2024.
- **Talent Retention:** Adding key full-time staff capacity in program management, monitoring and evaluation, bookstore and social media management, supplemented by over 20 trained volunteers by mid-2024 to elevate operations.
- **Volunteer Program:** Developing a structured volunteer program model providing hands-on learning opportunities for local youth interested in literacy, creative arts and community leadership skill-building.
- **Knowledge Management:** Improve knowledge management by establishing a centralized digital platform for organized knowledge storage, fostering collaboration through real-time communication tools and communities of practice, conducting training sessions to enhance employee awareness, leveraging technology like Artificial Intelligence (AI) and other digital platforms for automation, implementing clear policies with assigned roles, and defining performance metrics for continuous improvement.

This expansion will infuse new ideas from advisors with decades of experience while engaging emerging talent to unlock the potential of young minds. It will enable us to sustain excellence across core initiatives and pilot innovative projects that further our mission. We will measure progress through milestone benchmarks as we grow.

## Success Measures



Onboard 5 new Board members by mid-2024.



Zero vacant positions across critical roles by the start of Q3 2024.



Double number of active partnerships with community organizations by end of 2024



Develop a volunteer program and onboard at least 10 volunteers by December 2025.



Digital infrastructure in place for improved knowledge management.



## Pillar 2 Program Impact

### Focus Areas

Delivering and expanding high-quality programs focused on alternative education and youth development stands at the core of our organization's mission. Over this strategic phase, we will achieve this by focusing efforts on driving forward-thinking innovation in expanding our program portfolios, and program models that advance equity and inclusion in access and design. We aim to bolster our impact evaluation frameworks; maintain operational agility to respond to emerging needs; and centring participant voice at all levels.

Our goal is to scale impact while keeping quality and community responsiveness high across all programs. With innovation, equity, accountability and stakeholder engagement, we will deliver new levels of impact among target groups causing a ripple effect outward to drive systemic change locally and nationally. Our goal is for program alumni to become the next generation of empowered leaders.

Goal

# 75%

Increase in positive shift across 6 measures of youth empowerment and leadership skills between pre and post-program surveys by 2025.





# Success Measures

## How we will do this

- **Diversifying Program Offerings:** We will broaden our initiatives by incorporating three pivotal strategic portfolios—education, economic empowerment, and research and development. This expansion aims to address a spectrum of needs and contribute comprehensively to positive societal change.
- **Evidence-Based Practices:** We are committed to substantiating our work through a robust foundation of evidence and learning. By bolstering our monitoring, evaluation, research, and learning efforts across all projects and programs, we ensure a data-driven approach. This commitment reinforces the effectiveness and impact of our endeavors, allowing for continuous improvement and adaptation.
- **Holistic Impact:** Emphasizing a holistic approach, we strive to amalgamate diverse elements—education, economic empowerment, and research and development—to create a synergistic effect. This integrative strategy positions us to make a more profound and sustainable impact on the communities we serve.
- **Iterative Improvement:** Through continuous monitoring and evaluation, we engage in an iterative process of improvement. This involves learning from experiences, adjusting strategies based on evidence, and fine-tuning our approaches to maximize positive outcomes. This commitment to adaptability ensures the relevance and efficacy of our programs over time.

**75%** of target participants demonstrating improved confidence in leadership abilities

**75%** of target participants report stronger communication and self-confidence skills

**75%** of target participants exhibiting higher resilience and self-efficacy

**75%** of target participants achieved improved literacy to match their academic class in formal schooling

**75%** of young people engaged in community social responsibility activities

**75%** of creatives attesting to increased market access across value chains with support from COAL's interventions.

**5%** Achieve a 5% participation of persons with special needs according to the Washington Group of Questions (WGQ)



## Pillar 3

# Operational Growth

### Focus Areas

Recognizing that organization-wide culture and seamless operations set the stage for programmatic success, we will devote focused efforts to optimizing internal workflows, enhancing communication channels and information transparency, expanding professional development opportunities, formally integrating wellness and self-care practices, reinforcing our diversity, equity and inclusion commitments in policies and procedures, and actively celebrating creativity and innovation across all levels of the organization.

By investing in our team's growth, inclusion, health and purpose, we will galvanize the passion, collaboration and resilience needed to tackle ever-expanding community goals, while avoiding burnout through balanced workloads and capacity strengthening. Our aim is to lead by example, providing staff with the same enriching, supportive environment we seek to build for our program participants.

*Goal*

# 40%

Improve employee retention by having no more than a 40% voluntary turnover rate per year by 2025.



# How we will do this

- Create professional development plans for all staff that address key capability gaps through seminars, courses, conferences, etc.
- Institute policies for flexible work arrangements, self-care days, and boundaries around after-hours work.
- Survey staff quarterly on engagement and workplace culture with standardized tools. Analyze trends and create action plans to address areas needing improvement.
- Formalize diversity, equity and inclusion policies and procedures around hiring, compensation, promotion, professional development, etc.
- Review policies and manuals every 2 years to keep current. Assess the need for additional policies.
- Standardize the onboarding program for new hires and provide onboarding "buddies" as peer mentors.

## 5

New organizational policies revised or developed

## 80%

80% of employees reporting high job satisfaction by the next strategic plan cycle in 2025

## 70%

70% of staff reporting positive scores on key workplace culture criteria

## 100%

100% of staff will participate in a minimum of 4 professional development sessions per year focused on elevating skills in key capability areas by 2025



## Pillar 4

# Organizational Sustainability

### Focus Areas

Achieving long-term organizational sustainability and agility will be crucial to effectively resource our mission's critical work. Key priorities include providing value through services that fund our development priorities. Diversifying funding streams beyond traditional sources to access new revenue channels; scaling earned income from fee-based services and social ventures; building fundraising teams' capacity through technologies and training; promoting transparency and impact communication with supporters; responsibly accumulating reserves; and instituting sustainability planning through cash flow projections. With these measures, we will realize fiscal resilience and flexibility, greater independence from fluctuating external funding dynamics, and capacity to fuel both responsible maintenance of existing programs as well as innovative growth into new initiatives. Our ultimate aim is to realize a balance wherein financial stewardship enables bold vision rather than restricting it.

Goal

# 30%

By 2025, strengthen funding mechanisms so that 30% of total revenue comes from non-traditional sources such as earned income through social ventures.



# How we will do this

- Cultivate a business model aligned with a non-profit social enterprise approach, ensuring sustainability at its core.
- Expand our funding stream by securing resources from diverse and sustainable channels, encompassing grants, as well as restricted and unrestricted funding to bolster program interventions in both immediate and long-term perspectives.
- A pivotal goal involves generating substantial fee-based and earned income through educational, research and corporate governance consulting services, with the aim of fully financing at least one flagship community program by the year 2025.
- Simultaneously, broaden the reach of African Literature by expanding operations of the COAL literature store, making African literary works more widely accessible in the market. This comprehensive strategy aims to fortify financial resilience while advancing the organization's mission and impact.

## Success Measures

5

5 new consultancy partnerships entered

30%

The total amount of funding secured for consultancy projects implemented by COAL amounting to 30% of income

99%

99% of partners reporting positive scores on consultancy deliverables

5

5 new Grants secured to support COAL's work

20%

Percentage growth in revenue from diversified streams year-over-year.

# CALL TO ACTION



JOIN US!

## JOIN

Embrace your role as a crucial part of the solution. Your involvement matters. Explore opportunities to become an integral member of our community striving for social change.

YOU'RE INVITED

## VOLUNTEER

Actively contribute to literacy and creative development by joining our volunteer program. Join the movement through [this link](#).



## PARTNER

We thrive when working alongside partners who share our vision of a thriving community of unfettered access to opportunities. Extend invitations for collaborations, coalitions, and partnerships. Together, let's create a community where youth have the opportunities and resources to thrive.



## DONATE



Support us in achieving our ambitious goals and addressing the pressing needs of our region. Invest in disrupting illiteracy by committing to building a more equitable future as we embark on our next century of impact. [Become a partner, donate to our cause by clicking here](#)

## ADVOCACY



Join us in advocating for policy changes aligned with our mission. Participate in the policy campaigns we lead and amplify, or invite us to support and collaborate on your campaigns.

## ACCOUNTABILITY



Be a critical voice in ensuring our effectiveness and efficiency while consistently centering equity. Provide feedback on what is working, suggest areas for improvement, and help us continually evolve in our pursuit of impactful goals. Your insights are invaluable to our journey.





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