

NASCEE ROUND UP

02/10/2026

WELCOME TO THE NASCEE ROUND UP

This week, we're reflecting on the conversations shaping South Africa's education sector, from the growing role of AI in education to the partnerships and collaboration needed to turn shared challenges into meaningful action.

In this edition, we take a closer look at Lefa AI and what its work means for education in South Africa, while also looking ahead to our upcoming Fundraising PLC Masterclass on what it really takes to build effective partnerships.

We also spotlight efforts to strengthen ECD collaboration in the Eastern Cape and share upcoming events, opportunities and ways for NASCEE members and partners to stay connected.

Thank you for being part of the conversation.

Community Notice Board

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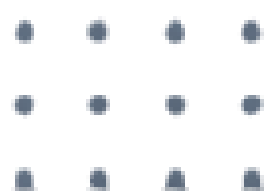
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Lefa AI: Making Sense of AI in South African Schools, Together

AI is already part of South African education.

In the 2024 Teaching and Learning International Survey, 48% of lower secondary teachers in South Africa said they had used AI in their work, compared with 36% across the OECD (OECD, 2025). Learners are using it too, for homework, finding answers and, sometimes, simply for company.

But guidance and support have not yet caught up. A 2026 FEDSAS survey of educators in the Eastern Cape found that only 4% of school staff said their school had an AI policy.

The question is therefore no longer whether AI belongs in education. It is already here. The question is how we respond.

What is Lefa AI?

Lefa AI is a 10 month national process convened by **Human Studios** to help South Africa make sense of AI's impact on education and shape a response that is informed, collaborative and grounded in our local context.

JET Education Services and **NASCEE** are strategic partners, with funding from the **DG Murray Trust** and **UNICEF South Africa**, alongside a wider group of learning partners.

Lefa AI does not set out to argue for or against AI. Instead, it asks where AI could strengthen education, where risks are emerging, and what guardrails are needed to ensure its use is fair, safe, equitable and relevant to South Africa.

Why "Lefa"?

Lefa is a Sesotho and Setswana word meaning heritage, legacy or something of value passed between generations.

The name reflects the project's belief that as we encounter new technologies, we need to draw on the local knowledge and lived realities of South Africans. Global best practice has an important role to play, but it must be shaped by what communities here already know.

Lefa AI asks how new technologies can honour our local assets and build forward from them.

How the work unfolds:

Lefa AI is taking place across four phases.

The work began by mapping the questions South African education most needs answered about AI. This was followed by a period of "listening to the system", drawing on research, expert interviews and surveys with people working in schools every day.

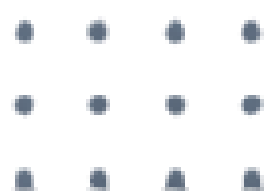
This work explored nine themes, including policy and school governance, digital infrastructure, assessment, foundational learning, African languages, the role of educators and digital citizenship.

The third phase brought people into the conversation through a national webinar series. The final phase will involve three invite only expert roundtables in November to consider what comes next.

The research into African languages highlights why local context matters. Indigenous South African languages have far less of the data used to train AI systems, while their complex word structures and everyday code switching create additional challenges.

There is promising local work, including an open dataset of isiXhosa child speech designed to support early grade reading assessment. But tools designed primarily for English speaking classrooms cannot simply be transferred into South African language contexts.





Feeding into national work

While Lefa AI is an independent process, its research and insights will be shared with the **Department of Basic Education** to support the department's work on guidelines and support for AI in schools.

Minister of Basic Education Siviwe Gwarube has welcomed Lefa AI as a valuable contribution to South Africa's developing response, noting the importance of research, lived realities in schools and the perspectives of people closest to the education system.

The conversations so far

At its heart, Lefa AI is about making sense of AI together. Through three national webinars, hundreds of people from across the country have joined researchers, practitioners and education leaders to explore what AI could mean for teaching and learning.

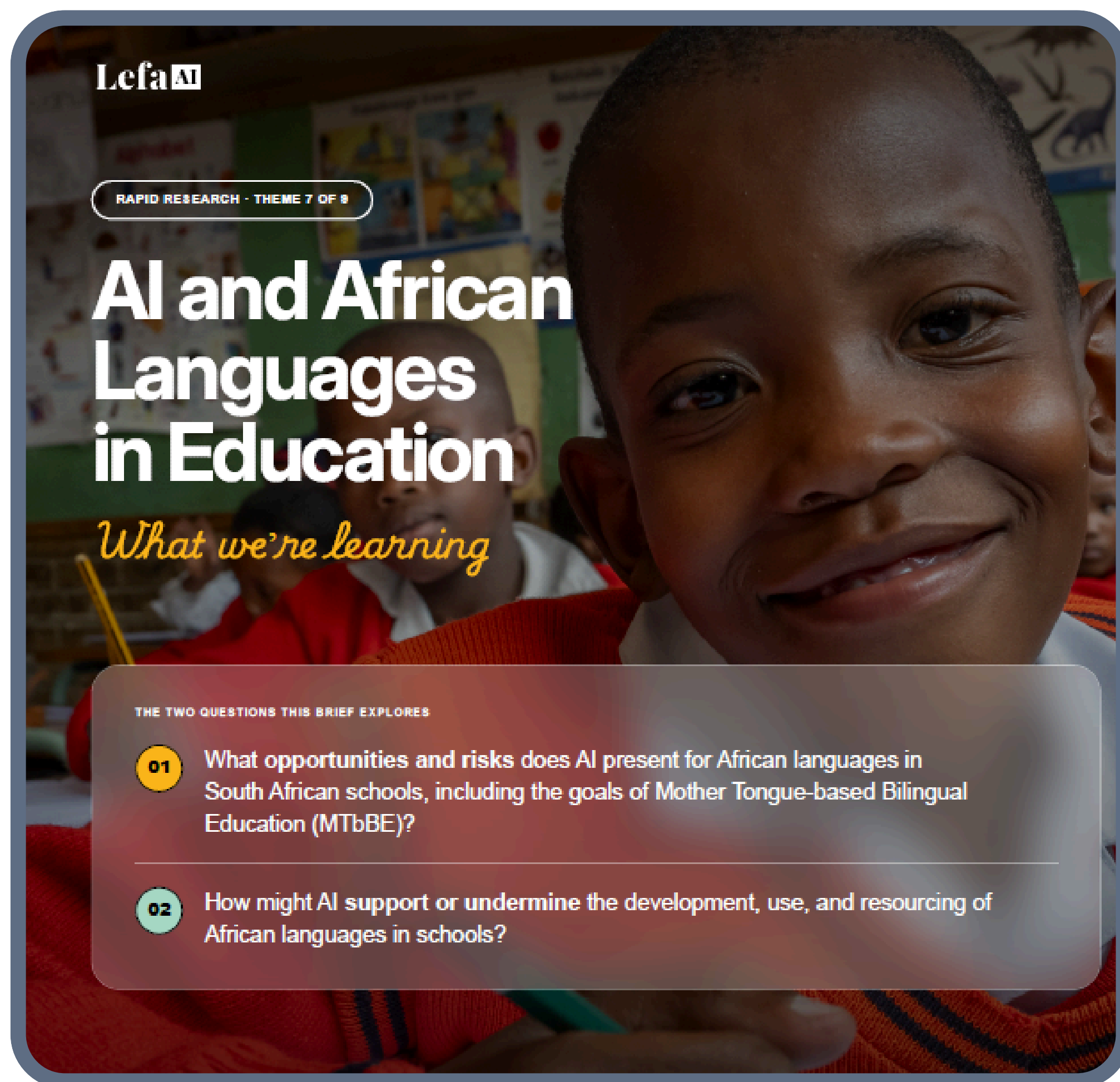
Alongside these conversations, five fireside chats with NASCEE have created space for more personal and open discussions. Participants have explored the potential of AI to save time and reach more learners, while also raising concerns about children's safety, data and whether AI could widen inequalities that already exist across our schools.

Nobody has all the answers yet. That is part of the point. AI is moving faster than traditional policy processes can. South Africa needs ways to keep learning, making sense of what is changing and adapting as we go, while longer term policy takes shape.

The conversation is already underway. Lefa AI is helping South Africa have it together.

Find out more

Research briefs and session summaries are being shared as they are finalised. Follow the work and find out what is coming next at lefaai.humanstudios.org.



AI is moving into education quickly, but speed cannot come at the expense of responding to it in a way that serves our local context.

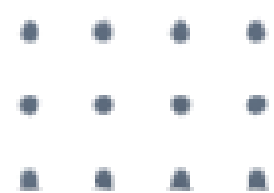
Shirley Eadie, Director of Human Studios



I welcome Lefa AI as a valuable complementary process that can assist the sector to make sense of the implications of artificial intelligence as they emerge, and to ensure that future policy and guidance are informed by research, lived realities in schools, and the perspectives of those closest to the system.

Minister of Basic Education: Siviwe Gwarube





What It Really Takes to Collaborate: Lessons from the Field

Great partnerships don't happen by accident. They are built on trust, clear roles and intentional groundwork.

As part of NASCEE's Fundraising PLC Masterclass, we're bringing members together for an honest conversation about what it really takes to build and sustain effective partnerships.

Janine McEvoy (Breadline Africa), Bev Da Costa (ORT SA CAPE), and Kayang Gagiano (The Reach Trust/Finding Thabo) will share their lived experiences of collaborating on a real project, from planning and resourcing to managing funder relationships, implementing training and tracking milestones.

The conversation will go beyond what worked, exploring the challenges they encountered, the lessons they learned and the unexpected outcomes that came from working together.

The session will be facilitated by Kristen Thompson and will offer practical insights into:

- Structuring effective partnerships
- Managing partner and funder relationships
- Identifying collaboration enablers and challenges early
- Building partnerships that become genuine advocates for your work

Wednesday, 14 October | 09:30–11:30 | Zoom

Whether you are considering a new partnership or strengthening an existing one, this Fundraising PLC Masterclass offers a practical, honest look at what makes collaboration work.



Janine McEvoy

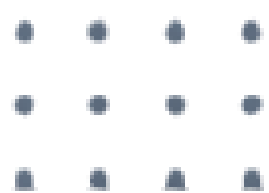


Kayang Gagiano



Bev Da Costa





Strengthening ECD collaboration in the Eastern Cape

Across the Eastern Cape, organisations are doing valuable work with young children, ECD practitioners, parents and communities. But many are working within their own networks, programmes and geographies, with too few opportunities to come together around the bigger provincial picture.

The **Eastern Cape ECD Regional Hub** is seeking to change this by creating a shared platform for stronger coordination and collaboration across the province. Initiated by Khululeka, Siyakholwa Development Foundation and SmartStart, the Hub is a mechanism through which civil society organisations can work more purposefully together, strengthen relationships with government and make better use of the expertise and resources already available across the province.

For that to work, the sector also needs a better understanding of who is already active across the province. This is where **NED Connect** comes in. There are currently **61 organisations supporting ECD in the Eastern Cape** profiled on the platform, but we know the real network is much larger.

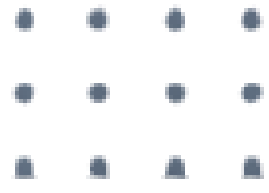
On **15 October in East London**, government and civil society will come together at the **Eastern Cape ECD Strategic Partnerships Convening** for a partnership engagement focused on practical ways to strengthen ECD collaboration in the Eastern Cape. The session is intended to move beyond conversation towards clearer shared priorities, stronger relationships and practical opportunities for joint action.

Ahead of this engagement, we are calling on **every organisation supporting ECD in the Eastern Cape** to make sure its work is visible on NED Connect. If you are not yet on the platform, [click here to add your organisation](#). If you already have a profile, take a few minutes to update your current projects, locations and areas of support.

A fuller picture of the organisations working across the province will give the Hub - and the wider ECD sector - a much stronger foundation for the conversations and partnerships that come next.

If you are an organisation with an active footprint in the Eastern Cape and working directly in ECD, and would like to find out more about the Eastern Cape ECD Strategic Partnerships Convening on 15 October, please contact Mary from Khululeka at mary@khululeka.org.za or [click here to register to attend](#).





Community Notice Board

Upcoming NASCEE Events

AI in South African Basic Education Series - Lefa AI

with Human Studios

Episode 4

15 October 2026

Fundraising PLC Masterclass

What It Really Takes to Collaborate: Lessons from the Field

Members Only

14 October 2026

Upcoming Partner Events

Eastern Cape ECD Regional Hub

Eastern Cape ECD Strategic Partnerships Convening

[Click here to register](#)

15 October 2026

Injini EdTech Week 2026

Focus Rooms, Johannesburg

[Click here to register](#)

12-13 October 2026

Opportunities

The Instructional Leadership Institute – The Future Fund

A nationwide campaign inviting South Africans to contribute R10 per month to support the development of future school leaders. This initiative helps equip emerging leaders with instructional skills to improve teaching and learning across schools.

[Click here for more information](#)

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