Future of Work Initiative

Global STEAM & Leadership Challenges 2026

February 25th to April 30th 2026

Description

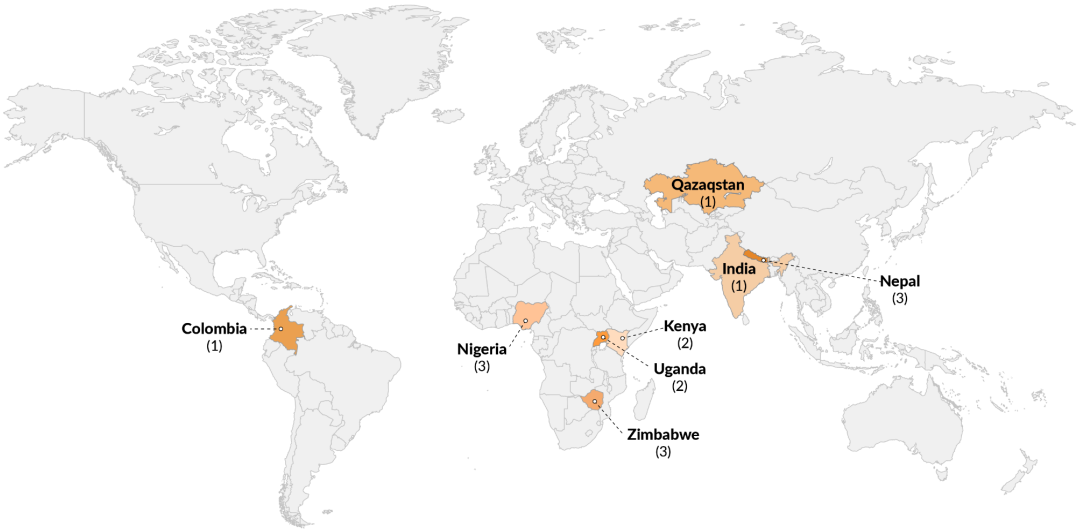
STEAM education creates opportunities for students to develop the knowledge, skills, mindsets, and leadership needed to contribute to thriving communities and a sustainable future. When learning is connected to meaningful opportunities for inquiry, innovation, and action, students strengthen critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving while deepening their understanding of the world around them.

To support educators in making this possible, the Global STEAM & Leadership Challenges brought together educators from across the Teach For All network to explore how community-connected STEAM learning can cultivate student leadership. Throughout the experience, educators partnered with students and local communities to identify opportunities for growth and innovation within their local contexts and design projects that connected learning to meaningful action. Through this work, students strengthened their sense of agency, developed leadership capabilities, and contributed to initiatives that matter to their communities.

Participants designed and implemented STEAM projects in partnership with students and local communities. These projects generated valuable insights into how community-connected STEAM learning can strengthen student leadership, creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving. The resulting case studies contribute to the network's collective learning and showcase diverse approaches from across contexts. A curated selection is featured in the Future of Work section of the Learning and Insights Hub and on Teach For All's space within Harvard University's LabXchange platform.

Participants

Out of 42 applications received, 16 educators were selected to participate (8 women and 8 men), and 10 completed the learning experience. Participants represented eight countries, reflecting a range of educational and community contexts.



Key Insights

- **Real-World Context Turns Learning into Action.** When STEAM learning is connected to real challenges in students' environments, it becomes a driver for meaningful action rather than abstract understanding. Across contexts, students moved from working with ideas in isolation to applying them in response to local needs, designing and building solutions rooted in their realities. This shift enabled students to strengthen critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving while engaging more deeply with learning.
- **Local Context Shapes More Meaningful Learning.** Engaging with challenges within their own communities helped students connect learning to place and lived experience. In Nepal, students designed firefighting robots inspired by dense urban environments and the need to protect historical buildings and cultural heritage. In Colombia, students focused on local water contamination and the protection of the Jiba crab, an endangered species central to the coastal ecosystem. Across contexts, students developed a stronger connection to their communities and a clearer understanding of how STEAM learning can respond to local priorities.
- **Project-Based Learning Strengthens Leadership Skills.** Working through collaborative, hands-on projects supported students in developing broader leadership capabilities alongside technical learning. Students strengthened teamwork, communication, decision-making, and self-awareness through the process of designing and implementing solutions. This experience also built confidence and a sense of agency, helping students see themselves as capable contributors to their communities and strengthening their ability to engage with complex challenges.