

CONCEPT NOTE

Education Evidence for Action (EE4A) Conference

Main theme: Evidence-based curriculum reforms for transformative education

5th—6th December 2017 in Nyeri, Kenya

INTRODUCTION

In Kenya, education has predominantly been the government's responsibility, being the key provider of resources and infrastructure that aid educational activities across the country. However, despite the decades of investment, the government's vision of ensuring quality education is accessible to all still faces many constraints. Over the years, the government has had a rich history of seeking public views and research evidence to inform policy reform. Currently, the government is implementing the National Education Sector Plan (NESP) that carries with it various program investments. Key among these is the curriculum reform that is now at an advanced stage.

At the same time, Kenya ranks among the top knowledge producers in Africa in terms of production of education evidence. Many of the running studies are building evidence on learning resources and environments, potential effect of interventions to improve learning outcomes, strategies for teacher motivation, support and accountability, as well as effect of various governance and leadership models. Yet, most of the evidence is produced by Universities, research institutions and civil society. The efforts to collate the mass of evidence and target these to inform policy and practice change has been insufficient, while many studies either lack the robustness or proactive strategy to link education evidence to policy and action.

BACKGROUND

In June 2015, a group of researchers and policymakers sat together and acknowledged that through working together, we could make faster progress. They theorized that when researchers involve policymakers and teachers in identification and prioritization of knowledge gaps - the body of education evidence grows in both rigour and trust, and the coalition of research partners gives birth to a solid community of evidence, a data revolution for education.

Since its inception in August 2015, Education Evidence for Action (EE4A) has been engaged in collaborative activities among actors in the education sector aimed at linking evidence to practice through partnership and sharing of resources, exchanging knowledge and ideas for research, policy and practice.

The core team driving the EE4A agenda consists of the Ministry of Education (MoE), Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), Research Triangle International (RTI), Women Educational Researchers of Kenya (WERK), Twaweza East Africa, Africa Population Health Research Center (APHRC), Kenyatta University and the Innovation for Poverty Action (IPA).

Overall, EE4A seeks to, inter alia:

- a) Establish a mechanism for sourcing of education evidence with potential to inform policy and action.
- b) Sustain the mechanism for sharing policy-relevant research evidence with selected users in the Kenyan education sector;
- c) Continuously nurture a culture of evidence-based decision making;
- d) Inspire and shape ongoing and future research to target specific policy-relevant knowledge gaps.

EDUCATION EVIDENCE FOR ACTION (EE4A) CONFERENCE

As part of the strategy to achieve the forum's goals and objectives, a major conference is held every two years, with a policy roundtable meeting held in the year between. New evidence is presented for uptake by policymakers and implementers, while knowledge gaps are identified for uptake by researchers. The inaugural conference was held in December 2-3, 2015 in Nakuru, attended by around 100 stakeholders.

Some of the conclusions drawn from the 2015 EE4A conference include:

- a) Need to ensure adequate staffing, fair teacher distribution and increasing teacher support and monitoring;
- b) Need to introduce a structured and relaxed registration process for APBET institutions and a capitation system that targets the learner and not the school;
- c) Need to standardize teaching including provision of relevant materials everywhere; and competent teachers in pedagogy in basic skills (how to) and content;
- d) Need to introduce a form of formative assessment of life skills including school health programming; and
- e) Need to adopt a comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach to dealing with inequalities affecting education.

A series of policy roundtables on Day 2 distilled key evidence and linked this to the policies in Early Childhood, Alternative basic education, inclusive education, teacher distribution and incentives, and the capitation model for greater equity. Some of the proposed policies have been picked up, while others are under review.

The second EE4A conference is now scheduled for 5th -6th December 2017 in Nyeri.

CONFERENCE STRUCTURE AND GOALS

To meet its objectives, EE4A undertakes *to promote faster progress and greater impact* through partnerships and sharing of resources, knowledge, and ideas for research, policy and practice.

Theory of Change

Researchers involve policymakers and practitioners in identification and prioritization of knowledge gaps. The body of education evidence grows in both rigor and trust, and the coalition of research partners gives birth to a solid community of evidence, a data revolution for education. Policymakers participate in shaping the research agenda, and demand and consume evidence that informs policy and practice decisions. Teachers participate in shaping the research agenda, and demand and consume evidence that improves classroom practice. Rolling each other, the three wheels of evidence, policy and practice deliver inclusive, equitable and quality education and lifelong learning for Kenya's development by year 2030.

Objectively, the 2017 EE4A conference aims to;

1. Initiate and sustain dialogue among researchers, policymakers, and implementers;
2. Provide a platform that enables sharing of knowledge and results of high-quality research from various practitioners, researchers, and academics working in the education field in Kenya;
3. Initiate discussions aimed at promoting evidence-based solutions and adoption of practices that target transformative education in Kenya;
4. Provide input towards the creation of an 'evidence gap map' that would provide insight into making evidence-based policy decisions in the education sector.

Sessions will include presentations, panels, and roundtable discussions.

CALL FOR PAPERS.

A call for papers will provide an opportunity to review an array of research being carried out across the country and identify studies to present at the conference. These papers will be reviewed by a selected panel of EE4A members who will select high quality studies and evidence from implementation designs for dissemination during the conference.

This conference is focused on the results of our Kenyan education system, raising questions to the extent to which the various sub-systems are producing the human capabilities needed now in the 21st century. The theme has at its heart three core questions:

1. To what extent is our education designed to generate the human capabilities that Kenya needs today? To what extent is the current curriculum reform process addressing perceived deficiencies of the current system? What (if any) concerns persist?
2. What are the education quality issues in generating the desired human capabilities, and how can they be resolved to realize SDG 4 (to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all)?
3. In the current education system, where are the weakest links (ECD, primary, secondary, tertiary, APBET etc.), who are the most underserved populations, and what strategies show the greatest promise for them?

The conference will focus on the following themes:

1. Education for what?

There is urgent need to redefine the purpose of our education. Modern living demands a questioning mind, a deep thinker with inherent capacity to participate in transforming our world. While the curricula are designed to produce a person who conforms to the values and ideals of the society and a learner entrenched in 'routinization', today's complex world yearns for the freeing of the human mind to solve its ever-mutating problems. Kenya's education system is producing graduates who can only remember and reproduce what others have thought, while teachers and parents have united in suppressing (rather than propping up) the questioning minds of our young people.

Thus the output of our education is graduates who possess neither the skills/attitudes to facilitate access to the job market, nor the ability, creativity and resilience demanded for self-employment. Yet the very conception of those who come through the education system as a product is problematic. A product connotes an output of optimum value. Beyond its delivery, its value diminishes. This runs counter to the notion of lifelong learning envisaged in SDG 4. In this notion, and in manufacturing parlance if we may borrow their terminology, those who come through the education system should be more of work in progress rather than finished products. Therefore, education should inculcate in the learners the culture of learning and develop in them capacity to continuously learn. Aside from this instrumentalist notion of education, education has utilitarian value. There is liberating value in knowing, even when the specific knowledge may not be readily deployable to earn income or to save oneself from mortal danger. The challenge of our time therefore, is to figure out how to organize our education system and all the associated components, to deliver these for all learners.

2. Quality of learning

They say the quality of an output is a function of the quality of inputs. While there is no doubt that all stakeholders in education in the country would like to see better quality education being provided to our children, we have a challenge in conceptualizing quality education and ensuring supply of high quality inputs. This requires that we define properly the goals of our education so that benchmarks are drawn for quality evaluation. Against the benchmarks, we then set the minimum quality standards of the inputs.

However, these inputs are not homogenous. Some are static such as infrastructure, while most others are dynamic. The quality of the teachers for instance depends on their preparation prior to deployment, on-the-job training, incentives, personal attributes that include attitude, school management, etc. The quality of the learners is affected by the home environment, parental involvement, intrinsic motivation, etc. For these dynamic factors, their quality is transient and consistent effort must be made to keep it high and rising. Herein lies our challenge: to figure out how to ensure that schools are well facilitated and populated with the right teachers with the right

incentive set to get the best out of them, and also ensure that all children are in school with right incentives and opportunities to achieve their learning needs.

3. Equity

Education is a right enshrined in the Kenyan constitution and holds a key to quality life not only for children in Kenya but globally. Addressing inequities in education will not only empower and give children the opportunity to achieve their full potential but also contribute to sustained economic development of Kenya. Education therefore is a social good that must be provided in an equitable manner. According to UNICEF equity means that “all children have an opportunity to survive, develop and reach their full potential, without discrimination, bias or favoritism”.

The free primary education policy enacted in 2003 increased access to school. However, the challenge of quality and equitable education remains across the different levels of education. There are disparities in access to quality education and government initiated programs across board; with disadvantaged groups continuing to lag behind. Moreover, in the urban setting, the poor are excluded from public schooling and are less likely to transit to secondary schools. In order to move towards equity in education, there is therefore the need for policies that allow to target resources and initiatives in an equitable manner. This thematic area will focus on sharing recent research evidence on initiatives promoting equity in education - on both access and quality education - to inform policymakers and for decision making.

4. Inclusion in education

Inclusive Education as defined in the MoE-National Special Needs Education Policy Framework: is an approach in which learners with disabilities and special needs, regardless of age and disability, are provided with appropriate education within regular schools.

Despite the many benefits of inclusive education, there is lack of inclusive policies and interventions that ensure access to education among vulnerable learners, including those with special needs. The United Nations’ fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) states that, by the year 2030, the world ought to “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”. SDG-4 entails commitments with students’ diversity, quality learning and education along the life course. In addition, it requires aligning school education with other policy areas such as early childhood care and education, special education needs, vocational education and training, curriculum and teachers’ capacity.

To achieve this ambitious goal, the EE4A conference will undertake to facilitate sharing of recent evidence in the Kenyan education sector for uptake by policymakers and implementers in its broad network of stakeholders in the inclusive education field.

PARTICIPANTS

Conference participants will be drawn from a diversity of stakeholders across Kenya who are involved in research, evaluation and implementation sector.

This includes the following:

- Representatives from relevant government ministries and County governments
- Private sector organizations/companies
- Research Organizations (National and International)
- Development agencies and donor community
- Representatives from tertiary learning institutions and universities
- Civil society
- Development think tanks