

## Concept Note

### Education Evidence for Action (EE4A) Conference

**Main theme: Evidence-based education reforms for sustainable national transformation.**

**27<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> November 2019, Machakos, Kenya**

#### INTRODUCTION

In Kenya, provision of education has predominantly been the government's responsibility, being the key supplier of resources and infrastructure that aid educational activities across the country. This is set to continue given that basic education is a right guaranteed under the country's constitution [1]. The government has lived up to the challenge and continued to invest resources in this mission that is in line with the country's own vision 2030[2][3] as well as the SDGs agenda to which Kenya has committed. However, despite decades of investment and numerous policy changes, the government's vision of ensuring access to quality education by all still faces many constraints. This raises the question of how well informed the policies are and whether there are gaps between policies and practice that need to be narrowed to realize the government's noble mission. Yet the government, through the Ministry of Education (MoE), has a rich history of seeking public views and research evidence to inform policy reforms and Kenya ranks among the top knowledge producers in Africa in terms of production of education evidence.

While MoE and its semi-autonomous government agencies (SAGAs) often conduct studies to inform education policies, there are many running and completed studies that 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 outside of government. Indeed, most of the evidence on education in Kenya is produced by universities, research institutions and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). The efforts to collate the mass of evidence and target these to inform policy and practice change has been pretty insufficient, which raises the question of the value of the evidence if it is not used as aptly posed by Shulock [4].

This is what informed the formation of Education Evidence for Action (EE4A) - a coalition of CSOs, Academia and Government through the Ministry of Education (MoE) in 2015. EE4A has since developed into a viable policy engagement platform in the education sector in Kenya. Initially it was a partnership of 8 institutions: Twaweza East Africa, Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA), MoE, Kenyatta University, Women Educational Researchers of Kenya (WERK), African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC), RTI International and the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD). This number has recently increased by two new member organizations – Evidence Action and World University Service of Canada (WUSC) Kenya.

EE4A has successfully organized two biennial policy conferences in 2015 (Nakuru) and 2017 (Nyeri) and is currently planning the third in the series for 2019 as a proactive strategy to link education evidence to policy and action. One criticism against EE4A, however, is that while it is able to collate policy-relevant research, inadequate co-creation and co-adoption of such research evidence could be undermining its absorption into policy-making. In light of this, we propose changes in the format of the 2019 conference with a view to improving the contribution of the evidence collated to policy and practice changes in the sector. These changes include alteration of the conference planning process as well as the structure of the

conference. While in the past we planned the conference and invited the Ministry's top leadership to participate, we seek to involve the top leadership from the onset this time round to ensure a shared vision of what the conference scheduled for December 2019 should deliver. To this end, we seek a meeting with CS Education and the top Ministry officials to do the following:

1. Agree on specific evidence knowledge gaps that this year's conference needs to fill;
2. Agree on the government institutions to be commissioned to provide thematic papers for the conference; and
3. Set stage for collaboration with MoE and supporting the progress of its programs through sharing and interpreting existing rigorous evidence with practical solutions and relevant policy recommendations.

In terms of the structure, unlike in the past where all papers have been sourced through the conference call for abstracts, this year there will be two sets of papers. The first set will be those sourced from all generators of policy-relevant research evidence through the public call for papers. The second set will consist of 5-6 papers, whose authors will be specifically commissioned depending on the broad theme and sub-themes of the conference. These authors, representing agreed upon institutions/organizations, will produce papers that will anchor the discussions in the sub-themes and presented to the plenary.

## **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 policy makers and teachers 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. When policy makers participate in shaping the research agenda and become consumers of evidence in informing policy and practice decisions – policies gain faster traction and impact becomes more probable. When teachers participate in shaping the research agenda and become consumers of evidence in improving classroom practice – children will learn, and we will all achieve our objectives. Rolling each other, the three wheels of evidence, policy and practice will deliver the inclusive, equitable and quality education and opportunities for lifelong learning for Kenya's development by the year 2030.

Overall, EE4A seeks to, inter alia:

- a) Establish a mechanism for sourcing of education evidence with potential to inform policy and action
- b) Sustain a mechanism for sharing policy-relevant research evidence with selected users in the Kenyan education sector;
- c) Continually nurture a culture of evidence-based decision making; and
- d) Inspire and shape ongoing and future research to target specific policy 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 round table meeting held in the year between. New evidence is presented for uptake

by policy makers and implementers, while knowledge gaps are identified for uptake by researchers. The inaugural conference was held on December 2-3, 2015 in Nakuru, attended by around 100 stakeholders. Among the conclusions drawn from the 2015 EE4A conference was the 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 took place on 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> December 2017 in Nyeri. This conference was attended by 109 stakeholders out of which 36 were government officials. It resulted into production of two policy briefs: one on teacher distribution and the other on quality of education. These briefs are ready and a round table with policy-makers is planned ahead of their public sharing. The third conference is planned in Machakos.

## **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 policy makers 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. Policy makers 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.

Objectively, the 2019 EE4A conference aims to:

1. Provide a platform that enables sharing of knowledge and policy-relevant results of high-quality research from MoE, TSC and various practitioners, researchers and academics working in the education field in Kenya;
2. Initiate discussions aimed at promoting evidence-based solutions and adoption of practices that target transformative education in Kenya; and
3. Provide input towards the creation of an 'evidence gap map' that would help shape the future research agenda in the education sector.

Sessions will include: Plenary and breakout presentation sessions, panel and roundtable discussions.

## **CALL FOR PAPERS**

The call for papers is divided into two parts: an open call to be sent out to all generators of education policy-relevant research evidence; and a restricted call that will be sent out to selected institutions/authors for papers on specific sub-themes. The open 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 and selected experts who will select high

quality studies and evidence from implementation designs for dissemination during the conference. The restricted call will comprise of 5 – 6 commissioned papers, whose authors will be selected purposively based on the need of the evidence in their possession. These papers will be reviewed by EE4A Core team as they are developed.

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

1. Are all our children learning?
2. What is the potential of the new curriculum, as envisaged, to remedy the gaps in learning outcomes?
3. What opportunities exist for continued enrichment of the curriculum implementation process to realize its full potential?

**The conference will focus on the following sub-themes:**

**1. 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. Inequity in education poses several threats to the country: it skews allocation of economic opportunities in favor of the privileged (most of the time not necessarily talented), which hurts innovation and limits the country's economic prospects; it also guarantees inter-generational transmission of poverty besides reproducing itself in other spheres of social and economic life of the society; and thus it threatens social cohesion and political stability, upon which sustainable development depends. Education therefore is a social good that has to 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". 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 despite the government's 100 percent transition policy. Yet there is no entity within the sector with a specific mandate to address this topical issue that threatens to undermine all efforts and investment put in the education of children in the country. In order to move towards equity in education, there is therefore the need for policies that allow targeting resources and initiatives in an equitable manner. This thematic area will focus on sharing recent research evidence on the existing equity gaps and initiatives promoting equity in education in both access and quality education, and lessons learnt so far to inform decision-making.

**2. Quality of learning outcomes**

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 philosophy and 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. But 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 has to be made to keep it high and rising. As the implementation of the competency-based curriculum takes the Centre stage in the broad spectrum of education reforms, it is important to keep focus on what it is that this society needs from education and keep evaluating the reforms qualitatively against this national need. Herein lies our challenge - to figure out how to ensure that schools are well facilitated and populated with the right teachers with the right incentives 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. Is higher education in Kenya in crisis? Fact-finding and meaning-making**

For decades, researchers outside of the university have kept their eyes off the goings on in the higher education sector, while those within the university have been careful not to be too self-critical for a variety of reasons. While this lack of focus on higher education persists, there have been rising public sentiments, generally supported by anecdotal evidence and only very limited publicly available rigorous research evidence, of diminishing quality of university education in the country. Given the importance of university education in socio-economic and political transformation of societies, it is important to turn the spotlight back onto this critical sub-sector. Indeed, in Kenya, higher education is supposed to literally sieve those aspiring to political leadership to ensure the country has the best at the top – one requires a university degree to run for the offices of Governor and President. But for university education to help raise the bar in leadership of the various critical sectors, from political to economic and even social and religious, the University must stand tall among other institutions as the beacon of intellectual primacy. This is our call – to assess the management structures and models, as well as resources, leadership and governance of universities in the country against the expectations on its role in this society.

### **4. Where are the disruptive Innovations in education?**

Societies world over are constantly in search of renewal. Some encounter renewal through painful crises that lead to great setbacks before they are able to surge forward. But others undergo renewal through inventions and innovations that insidiously disrupt the old order and usher in new order. Disruptive innovation is a term coined by Clayton Christensen to describe a new idea whose implementation brings a new order in the sector/marketplace. Kenya, like every other nation, is in constant need for renewal in all its spheres of life. This is what has for the last one decade powered the push for reforming the education sector to position it as an engine for national renewal through innovation. At the heart of educational reforms is the desire to reorient the delivery of education services as well as the contents of formal education away from its current form. For this to happen, education needs to experience innovative disruption. Indeed, there are many actors in Kenya working to positively disrupt the education system and position it as the engine of disruptive innovation in the country. We seek evidence of those disruptive

innovations in education in Kenya and beyond. We also pose the question on how disruptive the recent education reforms in Kenya are and are they the kind of disruptions that we need?

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

## **PARTICIPANTS**

Conference participants will be drawn from a diverse field of stakeholders across Kenya who are involved in policy-making, research, evaluation and policy implementation in the education sector.

These include the following:

- a. Representatives from relevant government ministries' and County governments;
- b. Private Sector organizations/companies;  
Research Organizations (National and International);
- c. Representatives of education practitioners (teachers at all levels);
- d. Development agencies and donor community;
- e. Academics;
- f. Civil society; and
- g. Development think tanks.

---

[1] Republic of Kenya (2010), The Constitution of Kenya, 2010, government printer, Nairobi.

[2] Republic of Kenya (2007), Kenya vision 2030: a globally competitive and prosperous Kenya, government printer, Nairobi.

[3] Republic of Kenya (2019), Economic survey 2019, government printer, Nairobi.

[4] Shulock, N. (1999), The paradox of policy analysis: If it is not used, why do we produce so much of it? *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 18(2): 226–244.