

Employing Research & Innovation for Evidence-Based Education Sector Policies and Practices

Workshop Report

Dates: April 28th, May 5th, and May 12th 2022

Time: 2 hours per session, 3:00 – 5:00 p.m. East Africa Time (GMT+3)

Venue: Zoom link <https://rb.gv/kx9g9s>

Organizers: UNESCO International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (IICBA) in coordination with UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO) and the African Union Commission (AUC).

Participants; 80 participants took part in the workshops of whom 73 (33 males, 40 females) were from 17 of the 18 KIX Africa Hub countries. 7 participants represented KIX Africa 19 Hub, UNESCO-IICBA and IDRC.

Country teams represented; Ethiopia, Eritrea, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe

Summary

The Global Partnership for Education's (GPE's) Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX) Africa 19 Hub aims to improve policies and practice that will strengthen national education systems within GPE country partners to accelerate progress towards Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 for quality, equitable education for all and expedite the implementation of the African Union (AU)'s Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA).¹ Evidence about how to scale up innovations that improve learning outcomes is key to unlocking rapid and sustainable change towards meeting SDG 4 & CESA 2016- 2025.

Context

There is little available context-specific evidence about what makes or does not make education interventions work whether innovative or not and neither is there evidence about the costs of implementing innovations particularly in SSA. When evidence is available, dissemination and the capacity to use that evidence is often weak, especially among key education stakeholders in the region.

According to the Thematic Priorities in GPE Member States within the KIX Africa 19 Hub Region Summary Report Vol 1 (Aug 2020)², there are six thematic areas of need by country

¹ <http://www.iicba.unesco.org/kix>

² <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374116>

partners. These are (i) strengthening learning assessment systems, (ii) improving teaching and learning, (iii) strengthening early childhood care and education, (iv) achieving gender equality in and through education, (v) leaving no one behind, and (vi) meeting the data challenge in education.

The KIX Africa 19 Hub is expected to provide a timely opportunity to catalyze the provision of quality education through facilitating evidence-based developments in policy and practice, fostering equitable partnerships and through identifying and contextualizing evidence in education agendas unique to the region. One way in which the KIX Africa 19 Hub aims to promote evidence-based development is through promoting the use of research in sub-Saharan Africa.

The KIX Africa 19 Hub has undertaken a number of assessments to examine the prevailing capacity strengthening and research needs within the hub. In October 2020, KIX Africa 19 Hub undertook a rapid assessment to appraise the possible research gaps which are adaptable for relevant research and innovative best practices to be benchmarked among the member states. In February 2022, the hub undertook another assessment (pulse survey) to appraise countries interest in research and topics of interest. The list below highlights topics of interest identified in October 2020 as well as February 2022:

1. Opportunities and challenges of using technology in the teaching and learning process
2. Good practices on teacher capacity development to use formative assessment in classrooms.
3. Good practice in developing national learning assessment systems.
4. Good practices in improving access to quality education for girls and children with special education needs (children with disabilities, children in conflict zones and refugee camps)
5. Application of national, regional and international learning assessment data in school reforms.
6. Education planning and projection techniques.

1| Introduction

Three virtual workshop sessions focused on the following topics: (1) Role of research in policymaking: prospects and challenges; (2) The process of converting research findings into policy; and (3) Developing clear road maps to address research needs in individual countries. For all the three workshops there were introductory remarks on the project objectives and workshop expectations by the KIX secretariat team including: Yvonne Mboya, Project Research Consultant; Dr. Victoria Kisaakye, UNESCO-IICBA, and Joy Nafungo of IDRC. Zamzam Dayib of UNICEF/ESARO led the plenary discussions and the question-and-answer sessions as well as the recapping sessions on the previous workshop deliberations. Gabriel Mekbib, Knowledge Management Consultant for KIX Africa 19 Hub provided support related to the management of online discussions and the short break-out sessions. Dr. Kilemi Mwiria was the lead facilitator for all the three workshops. active in the field of education,

3. GPEKIX Africa 19 rapid assessment of member ministries' institutional capacity building needs, October 2020, UNESCO IICBA

and independent education consultants. The other 7 participants represented KIX Africa 19 Hub, UNESCO-IICBA and IDRC.

2 | Workshop 1: Research and Education Decision-Making

YouTube link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X9JHiu70dV4> [Recording]

This was the most attended workshop with a total of forty-eight participants. Following brief introductory remarks by Yvonne Mboya (research consultant, UNESCO IICBA), and Ms. Joy Nafungo (Senior education officer, IDRC). Dr. Kilemi Mwiria shared two presentations on the role of research in policy making, and a [case study on the use of research to inform harmonization of secondary school fees in Kenya](#).

2.1 Role of Research in Policymaking: Prospects and Challenges

This presentation covered the following topics, among others:

- a) The meaning of research in education
- b) Role of research in education decision-making
- c) Sources of educational data
- d) Why research is critical for education policymaking
- e) Role of educational research in impacting on decision-making at the school, district, region, and national levels
- f) Challenges in the way of the use of research for playmaking

This topic generated substantial interest, and the ensuing discussions were quite engaging. The most common discussion point was on the obstacles in the way of the utilization of research for policymaking. The most common of these relate to;

- A disconnect between the producers of knowledge and its consumers, namely the policymakers;
- The limited implementation capacity of many government departments;
- Limited understanding of the role of research for policymaking by those in positions of authority and the general public;
- Bureaucratic red tape and disinterest in implementing policy recommendations because of the political nature of education decision-making;
- Scarce budget allocation for both the conduct of reach and implementation of education policies that are recommended by researchers;
- The dominance of donors in the sponsoring of the research projects as well as in their dissemination; and
- The fact that education researchers do not push hard enough to be taken seriously by government.

To address these changes, participants noted that:

- a) Researchers must be more organized and persistent if they are to effectively impact policymaking;
- b) Governments need to allocate more money for the conduct of research and for strengthening of research capacity;
- c) There is need to demystify research as a costly undertaking because much can be done with little resources;

- d) Stability of key personnel within the key government research departments is necessary to promote continuity because policy implementation is a long-term process; and,
- e) There is need for more dialogue between researchers and relevant government officers.

2.2 Case Study on the harmonization of school fees in Kenya

This case study was particularly relevant for this KIX project for three main reasons. First, it was a response to the challenge of unregulated school fees which left very large percentage poor youths out of secondary education, and which contradicted government commitment to quality basic education for all. Second, the research involved all key stakeholders in secondary education. Third, the research findings were among the few known to have been implemented, which has made access to secondary education for all a reality. The main topics covered by this presentation were:

- a) Why government commissioned this research project
- b) Who took part in the research project
- c) The methodology used (one which was very inclusive)
- d) Research findings on why secondary education was so expensive
- e) Recommendations related to how to reduce cost by paying attention to efficiency gains/cost-cutting measures, parental involvement, and improved school management, among other measures
- f) The huge positive impact of the findings for enhanced access for the majority poor

Because unregulated school fees is a problem in most of the KIX participating countries (according to workshop participants), this presentation generated a lot of interest. A representative from Lesotho noted her country's similarities to Kenya. Other participants appreciated that implementation of the resultant findings had a lot to do with the fact that it was a government project which involved all the key players from the very initial stages. From this experience, we learn that stakeholder ownership of the total research process from design, data collection and analysis and subsequent findings is an important prerequisite for the success of any policy innovation.

3 | Workshop 2: The Process of Converting Research Findings into Policy

YouTube link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tdo18r3Rz2Q> [Recording]

This workshop was a revelation to many participants who mostly implement policy and rarely get involved in formulating policies. Before getting to the main presentation of the day, Zamzam Dayib took participants through the main discussion points from the first workshop on the role of research in policy formulation. Yvonne Mboya then led a discussion on other approaches to strengthening the role of evidence in policy making. Dr. Kilemi Mwiria's presentation on how to convert research into policy highlighted the following key issues, among others:

- The need to be clear about the intended policy target before conducting the intended research
- Assurance about the quality and credibility of the research data to be used
- The feasibility of the intended reform from the point of view of available human and physical resources and contextual obstacles such as the politics of education and other vested interests

- Key stages in the process and requirements for effective policy formulation based on available data
- Key steps and requirements for effective policy implementation as they relate to the policy design, stakeholder involvement and in ensuring a favourable implementation environment

Many of the points raised in plenary related to the difficulties of getting to use research for policymaking because of the political nature of education decision-making; the habit of duplication of research efforts; the fact that many research reports remain unutilized years after the data was available for use; and, due to the often-uncomfortable relationship between university researchers and policy makers.

4 | Workshop 3: Developing Road Maps to Address National Research Needs

YouTube link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hSYs47n6pAw> [Recording]

Zamzam Dayib took participants through the main discussion of the previous workshop, especially on some of the more contentious issues raised by participants. This was followed by Yvonne Mboya's presentation on the alternative sources of data used for policy formulation. Lola Kaniki, a Senior Education officer at the Zambian Ministry of Education presented on research recently completed by the Ministry to provide policymakers with evidence to inform planning and policy implementation in response to teaching and learning amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. [See the presentation [here](#)]. Dr. Kilemi Mwiria then took participants through an exercise in identifying research needs and actions that can inform policy, based on the set of questions listed in the box below.

1. Identify the most important (non-budget) obstacle in the way of access to quality basic education in your country
2. Does your ministry have data to support formulation of relevant policies to address this challenge?
3. If yes, please indicate the data that is available.
4. If not, indicate the kind of research project that would best address the challenge.
5. Does your ministry have the capacity (human and financial) to conduct the identified project effectively?
6. If not, how do you propose to address this capacity challenge?
7. Even after you have the relevant data, what implementation challenges do you anticipate? How would propose to overcome them?
8. If the identified research project is to be implemented, please suggest a timeline, the key actions from the identification of the need to the dissemination of research findings and their adaptation for policy development.

Participants who spoke provided good examples of policies that have been derived from the recommendations of research as well as on who the respective sponsors of the research projects were. Not surprisingly, much of the research cited was sponsored by external donors, especially the World Bank, a pointer to the limited local ownership of these research works. One lesson from this session and Yvonne's presentation was that for both, more time was needed for participants to be able to respond to the issues raised in a more informed manner,

while answers to some of the questions required seeking authorization from the participant's superiors before they could share with the wider public.

5 | Workshop Evaluations

Participants were asked to share their views on both the conduct and content of the workshops for the benefit of future workshops.

5.1 Participants' Feedback on Workshops 1 & 2

When asked to evaluate lessons learned from the workshop for their present and future professional growth, this is what participants had to say.

Knowledge takeaways	Knowledge Application	Specific Actions	Expectations for future workshops
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research is important for decision-making • Need for stakeholder collaboration • Challenges of using evidence for policy making • Free secondary education must be competitive to be acceptable • Free secondary education is possible with efficient use of resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will share with colleagues in my department • Will apply at work • Will use data to support my decisions • Will upgrade my research skills • Must involve key stakeholders • Avail research data in a common platform/reference point to be shared by practitioners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve collaboration through meetings • Lobby and advocate for appropriate research • Ensure you have evidence before making decisions • Hold one to one meeting with policy makers, politicians, and researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More time for engagement • Expand this programme for wider reach • Need to be exposed to more knowledge on research and policy making • Need to widen the scope beyond the KIX Africa 19 Hub countries • More discussions on the use of evidence • Need for longer and blended meetings • More discussion on the barriers to the use of data • Need to expand range of experts

5.2 Feedback on Workshop 3

Asked what they learned from workshop 3, the participants responded as follows:

Take Aways from Workshop 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally broadened my worldview on the key role of research in policy formulation and the factors impacting on quality education • Leaned a great deal from the experiences of other African countries • Better equipped to apply research findings for policy formulation • There are many similarities in the challenges of using research to inform policy across GPE member countries • We have not explored enough on the non-monetary solutions to our educational policy challenges, the solutions not always money

- There is much value in promoting collaboration to solve common problems as well as in sharing available information
- We must insist on basing new policies on research findings

6 | Recommendations for Future Research Training and Mentorship

The key lessons learned from the experience of facilitating the workshops include:

1. There is need for more planning time for future workshops.
2. If time and resources allow, there should be a national selection panel comprising of representatives of key stakeholders to ensure representativeness and expertise of participants.
3. Diversity should also apply to facilitators. Having more than one facilitator brings a different perspective and reduces boredom on the part of participants.
4. There needs to be a way of ensuring some form of continuity on the part of the selected/volunteering participants for a more effective training delivery and project impact. A good number of those who enrolled for the first workshop were unavailable for subsequent ones.
5. One way of ensuring continuity is incorporating in the project some form of incentives such as certificates of participation, support to participants to publish a research paper and to participate at a conference, and a follow-up research grant to support the putting in practice of skills learned.
6. There is need to encourage collaboration between policy makers, civil society organizations and researchers, it is important to strive to ensure the right balance of the various stakeholders in the country teams that are identified to take part in the hub trainings.
7. Given the challenges of stable and affordable internet in most parts of the KIX member countries, there is likely to be more success if the chosen training method combines physical meetings with online sessions.
8. One way of ensuring that what is learned is to put to practice is to have follow-up session in the form of a physical meetings. During such a meeting, participants can agree on the necessary follow-up actions including the possibility of having a research component in the new programme for them to practice what they will have learned.

7 | Annexes

Annex 1: Workshop 1: Role of Research in Policymaking

<i>Time</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Facilitator</i>
3:00 – 3:10	Logging on and start of the session; UNESCO video (Education systems innovation)	Gabriel Mekbib, Knowledge Management Consultant, KIX Africa 19 Hub, UNESCO IICBA

	Introductions Workshop objectives/agenda	Yvonne Mboya, Research Consultant, KIX Africa 19 Hub, UNESCO IICBA
	Opening Remarks from UNESCO IICBA Remarks from GPE-IDRC	Dr. Victoria Kisaakye Joy Nafungo
3:10 – 3:30	Presentation: The importance of research in policymaking: prospects & challenges	Dr. Kilemi Mwiria
3:30 -3:45	Plenary discussions on the presentation and Q&A	Zamzam Dayib, UNICEF ESARO
3:45 - 4:05	Country/countries' case study/studies on use of research for policymaking followed by Q&A.	Dr. Kilemi Mwiria Project Consultant, Kimkam Consultants
4:00 - 4:20	Comments on the case study/studies and evidence on the same from participating countries	Yvonne Mboya, Research Consultant, KIX Africa 19 Hub, UNESCO IICBA
4:20 - 4:45	Plenary – Participants share views on how best to strengthen the role of data/evidence in policymaking	Dr. Kilemi Mwiria, Project Consultant, Kimkam Consultants
4:45 – 5:00	Survey to gauge participants' takeaway lessons, planned next steps, close of workshop	Gabriel Mekbib, Knowledge Management Consultant, KIX Africa 19 Hub, UNESCO IICBA

Annex 2: Workshop 2: *The Process of Converting Research Findings into Policy*

<i>Time</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Facilitator</i>
3:00 – 3:05	Logging on and start of the session; welcoming music	Demere Bezawit, Data Mangement Officer, KIX Africa 19 Hub, UNESCO IICBA
3:05 -3:10	Welcome to participants Reminder of the objectives of the workshop Daily agenda	Gabriel Mekbib, Knowledge Management Consultant, KIX Africa 19 Hub, UNESCO IICBA
3:10 – 3:20	Participants recap the previous workshop (Questions from previous session)	Zamzam Dayib, KIX Project Contractor, UNICEF ESARO
3:20 -3:45	Plenary: Exploring other approaches to strengthen the role of evidence in policy making	Yvonne Mboya, Research Consultant, KIX Africa 19 Hub, UNESCO IICBA
3:45 -4:15	Presentation; The Process of Converting Research Findings into Policy	Dr. Kilemi Mwiria Project Consultant, Kimkam Consultants
4:15 - 4:05	Plenary; Q & A and plenary discussions following the presentation	Zamzam Dayib, KIX Project Contractor, UNICEF ESARO

4:05 - 4:50	Countries Identify the available research data/evidence and knowledge gaps in their individual countries. (Break out session)	Dr. Kilemi Mwiria, Project Consultant, Kimkam Consultants
4:50 – 5:00	Plenary; Presentation from the discussions	Hundessa Sileshi Tafesse. M&E Project Officer, UNESCO IICBA

Annex 3: Workshop 3: *Developing clear road maps to address research needs in individual countries.*

<i>Time</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Facilitator</i>
3:00 – 3:05	Logging on and start of the session; welcoming music	Demere Bezawit, Data mangement Officer, KIX Africa 19 Hub, UNESCO IICBA
3:05 -3:10	Welcome to participants · Daily agenda	Gabriel Mekbib, Knowledge Management Consultant, KIX Africa 19 Hub, UNESCO IICBA
3:10 – 3:20	Participants recap the previous workshops	Zamzam Dayib, KIX Project Contractor, UNICEF ESARO
3:20 -3:50	Plenary; presentation by	Yvonne Mboya, Research Consultant, KIX Africa 19 Hub, UNESCO IICBA
3:50 - 4:00	Plenary; Q & A and plenary discussions following the presentation	Gabriel Mekbib, Knowledge Management Consultant, KIX Africa 19 Hub, UNESCO IICBA
4:00 - 4:50	Countries developing clear road maps to address research needs in their specific countries.	Dr. Kilemi Mwiria, Project Consultant, Kimkam Consultants
4:50 – 5:00	Plenary: Countries opting into a community of practice to further the research agenda. Survey to gauge participants’ takeaway lessons, planned next steps, close of workshop	Hundessa Sileshi Tafesse. M&E Project Officer, UNESCO IICBA