

# **2ND EAC REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON EDUCATION**

## **CONCEPT NOTE (DRAFT)**

### **THEME: TRANSFORMING EDUCATION IN EAST AFRICA: FROM COMMITMENTS TO IMPACT, FOSTERING RESILIENCE AND FUTURE -READY SYSTEMS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

**DATE: 25<sup>th</sup> - 28<sup>th</sup> August 2026**

**NAIROBI, KENYA**

#### **1. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE**

The EAC recognises education as a critical driver of socio-economic transformation, regional integration, and sustainable development. Consequently, the Partner States have made strong commitments and efforts to develop and strengthen their education systems through various national and regional initiatives, including the harmonisation processes undertaken at the regional level. They have also continued to align their education systems with relevant regional and global frameworks, including EAC Vision 2050, CESA 2026-35, African Union Agenda 2063, and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). As a result, the EAC Partner States have recorded significant progress in education in several areas and sectors.

After the successful 1st Edition of the East African Community (EAC) Regional Conference on Education that was held in August 2024 at the EAC Headquarters in Arusha, Tanzania, the Community is preparing to hold the 2nd Edition of the Conference from 24th-28th August 2026 in Nairobi, Kenya. The Conference has its genesis in the 15th meeting of the EAC Sectoral Council on Education, Science and Technology, Culture and Sports (SCESTCS) that approved the establishment of an EAC Regional Forum on Education. This was based on the commitments that the EAC Partner States have made in Articles 102 and 103 of the EAC Treaty to cooperate in education and training and in science and technology. The Forum aims to bring together key stakeholders, actors, and partners in the education sector to exchange experiences and develop strategies and frameworks for addressing the challenges facing the education sector of the region.

However, the achievements are offset by persisting inequities in access, especially in early childhood education and among rural and communities with special needs. The quality of primary education remains a concern, with large class sizes, inadequate learning materials, and a shortage of qualified teachers limiting learning outcomes. At the secondary and tertiary levels, the region continues to face major structural and access-related challenges. Transition rates between primary, secondary, and higher education remain weak, contributing to high dropout rates and a shortage of skilled graduates entering the labor market. Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) systems are

underdeveloped, with limited industry linkage and insufficient capacity to absorb the growing youth population as articulated in the 7th Development Strategy 2026- 31

Amidst these challenges are the emerging and ongoing disruptions—such as pandemics, climate change, conflict, technological shifts, and evolving labour market demands—that have highlighted both vulnerabilities and opportunities within education systems. These challenges have made some sub-sectors and domains of the region’s education systems to be stuck, without much progress being made, thus the need for new transformations, enhanced commitment and building more resilience, better learning outcomes and impact. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic, inclusive, and forward-looking approaches that strengthens foundational learning, empowers the youth with relevant skills, builds resilient systems, strengthens research and knowledge generation and mobilizes partnerships and champions for sustained impact. The 2nd EAC Education Conference will provide a strategic regional platform for stock taking, dialogue, learning, and action to accelerate education transformation across the region’s Partner States.

The Conference comes at a time when the region must move beyond commitments on paper to measurable, system-wide impact. Through collective action and regional cooperation, education can serve as a powerful catalyst for sustainable development and shared prosperity in East Africa. This 2nd Conference will follow up on some of the key resolutions from the 1st Conference and report on progress made in some of the areas. It will bring together even more stakeholders for urgent actions to address and make meaningful change and transformations in the region's education sector.

## **2. CONFERENCE OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES**

The 2nd EAC Regional Education Conference builds on the achievements of the 1st Conference held in August 2024 at the EAC Headquarters in Arusha, Tanzania, while also exploring ways to address perennial and emerging challenges, and seizing opportunities.

### **Objectives**

The 2nd Conference will pursue the following objectives:

1. Review progress made by EAC Partner States in implementing education commitments at national and regional levels following the first Conference.
2. Identify systemic gaps and implementation challenges affecting implementation, progress and developments in education in the EAC.
3. Promote early and foundational learning, and other levels of education as a basis for lifelong learning based on strong leadership.
4. Strengthen resilience and adaptability of education systems in the face of increasing crises and shocks (environmental, political, social and economic) based on quality data and evidence.
5. Advance future-ready skills development, with particular focus on youth agency and sustained transitions to the world of work.

6. Strengthen research, knowledge generation, and innovations relevant to the growing and emerging needs of society.
7. Strengthen partnerships and collaborations to accelerate research, capacity development, innovation, accountability, and scale.
8. Advancing the East African Common Higher Education (EACHEA) and Research Area: Harmonisation, Innovation and Partnerships for Inclusive Regional Transformation.
9. Reaffirm and galvanize support from state and non-state actors, as well as accelerate action towards the desired learning outcomes in East Africa.

### Expected Outcomes

By strengthening alignment, mobilizing partnerships, reinforcing accountability, and prioritizing measurable outcomes, the conference will lay the foundation for transforming education systems across the East African Community to ensure that regional commitments translate into concrete actions and real impact for learners and communities at the partner states level, and align with continental and global commitments. The expected outcomes from the conference include:

- Strengthened regional consensus and understanding of priority actions for transforming education systems.
- Appreciation of progress made and existing challenges and opportunities as well as a shared regional understanding of priority actions for transforming education systems.
- Practical policy recommendations and implementation actions aligned with EAC frameworks.
- Strengthened regional and cross-sector partnerships.
- A conference communiqué or roadmap outlining agreed commitments and next steps– in terms of flagship initiatives for implementation within agreed timelines.
- Strengthened data systems to track progress on access, equity, quality, and learning outcomes.
- Documentation and dissemination of best practices and scalable innovations.
- Functional and credible EACHEA to enhance improved quality and relevance of higher education to foster skilled, mobile and employable graduates.
- Enhanced partnerships among governments, academia, TVET institutions, industry and development partners.
- Increased commitment to inclusive and equitable education for vulnerable groups.
- Proposed frameworks for sustainable financing and governance reforms in education systems and identification of flagship regional initiatives and resource mobilisation strategies.

### 3. THEME AND SUB-THEMES

The theme of the Conference is: ***Transforming Education in Africa: From Commitments to Impact, Fostering Resilience and Future-ready Systems for Sustainable Development.***

#### Sub Themes

##### Sub-Theme 1: Strengthening Early and Foundational Learning

Investing in early and foundational learning is one of the most cost-effective strategies for improving education quality, equity, and resilience. The session aims to explore the actions needed to ensure that every child in East Africa acquires the foundational skills and competencies to thrive and contribute to sustainable development. Early and foundational learning is the bedrock of lifelong learning, human capital development, and sustainable socio-economic transformation. Although significant progress has been made in expanding access at this level, persistent challenges remain in learning outcomes, equity, quality, and system coherence, particularly in foundational literacy, numeracy, and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL).

Evidence from across the region shows that many learners complete the early grades (1-3) without acquiring essential foundational skills, limiting their ability to progress successfully through the education system. These challenges are compounded by disparities affecting children in marginalized communities, including rural populations, refugees, children with disabilities, and those affected by poverty and crises. Strengthening early and foundational learning requires coordinated regional action, policy coherence, sustainable financing, and investment in teacher professional development and support, curriculum reforms, reliable assessment systems, and family and community engagement. This conference provides a timely platform for EAC Partner States and stakeholders to reflect on progress since the commitments from the first conference and to explore practical ways to move from commitments to impact by prioritizing strong learning foundations as a regional development imperative, building on achievements, and leveraging emerging opportunities.

This track will also focus on current innovations in enhancing foundational literacy and numeracy across East Africa and explore at scale programs that are sustainable and state-led.

##### Sub-Theme 2: Enhancing teacher capacity and professional development

Enhancing teacher capacity and professional development is fundamental to transforming the education systems of the EAC Partner States. It is also important in advancing quality, equity, and innovation in education and ensuring improved learning outcomes for all learners. This is due to the central role of teachers in improving learning outcomes and achieving equitable, quality education and the overall success of the education systems. In recent years, the EAC Partner States have made strides in expanding access to education, implemented curricula, digital learning reforms, and inclusive education policies leading to

demands on teachers at a time when the national education systems are facing persistent teacher challenges—including teacher shortages, teacher quality, uneven distribution of teachers in different regions, limited Continuous Professional Development (CPD), inadequate mentorship systems, high attrition rates and resource constraints, all of which undermine the effectiveness of the teaching workforce.

This sub-theme provides a platform for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders to examine the perennial and emerging challenges in teacher capacities and professional development in the EAC and propose strategies and ways of addressing them. The session will also share best practices that could enhance the building of a competent, adaptable, and motivated teaching workforce for the EAC region. It would further explore opportunities for mutual recognition of teaching qualifications and cross-border collaboration within the EAC.

### **Sub-Theme 3: Promoting inclusive education for vulnerable groups**

Promoting inclusive education for vulnerable groups is essential for achieving sustainable development, social cohesion, and economic transformation in the East African Community. Through this, the EAC can build resilient education systems that serve all learners—particularly those most at risk of exclusion. The sub-theme aims to foster dialogue, share evidence-based practices, and strengthen national and regional efforts aimed at ensuring that no learner is left behind. The session will highlight some of the contemporary developments and efforts being made towards implementation of inclusive education including policy innovations and approaches and the role of the various actors and stakeholders in enhancing inclusive, equitable, and quality education for vulnerable groups. It will further showcase some best practices, successful models and interventions that improve access, participation, and learning outcomes for vulnerable learners. The session will also explore the role of assistive technologies, digital learning platforms, and flexible delivery models in reaching marginalized learners.

### **Sub-Theme 4: Leveraging EdTech, Digitalization and innovation**

Digital transformation is rapidly reshaping education systems worldwide, redefining how knowledge is accessed, delivered, and assessed. Some of the EAC Countries have made progress in expanding internet connectivity, mobile penetration, and innovation ecosystems which present a unique opportunity to reimagine learning. However, persistent challenges such as digital divides, infrastructure gaps, limited digital literacy, and inequitable access to devices continue to constrain inclusive progress. This sub-theme explores how digital transformation can drive equitable, resilient, and future-ready education systems in East Africa, aligned with regional development frameworks such as the East African Community and continental priorities under the African Union. It will explore how emerging digital trends (AI, e-learning platforms, blended learning, EdTech ecosystems) are shaping education in the EAC Partner States. The session will share best practices, policies, and innovations to promote innovative and inclusive digital learning. It will also explore the opportunities that these developments portend for research and innovations including in higher education. By fostering dialogue, innovation, and collaboration, this sub-theme will contribute to shaping

a digitally empowered and an inclusive future of learning in East Africa that is enabled by EdTech.

### **Sub-Theme 5: Boosting TVET, skills development and youth agency in the world of work**

Strengthening Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is critical to empowering youth to be active agents in shaping their career pathways, entrepreneurship, and participation in decent work. Youth constitute the largest and most dynamic segment of the population in the EAC and thus present both a significant opportunity and a critical development challenge. Despite progress in TVET, many youths continue to face barriers to accessing decent work, entrepreneurship opportunities, and meaningful participation in rapidly evolving labor markets.

Structural unemployment, skills mismatches, informality, technological changes, and limited access to finance and mentorship constrain youth transitions from education and training to work. Strengthening youth agency in the world of work requires reimagining TVET and skills development systems to be more responsive, inclusive, and empowering—supporting youth voice, leadership, entrepreneurship, and lifelong learning. This session provides a platform to advance policy dialogue, share innovations, and foster partnerships that place youth at the centre of workforce development in the EAC. It will catalyse regional action to transform TVET and skills systems, ensuring young people are equipped, empowered, and supported to shape their futures, contribute meaningfully to the region's economic transformation and encourage skills mobility in the region to widen the job market.

It will explore several emerging issues such as demand-driven and competency-based TVET systems; flexible learning pathways and recognition of prior learning; digital, green, and transferable skills; apprenticeships, internships, work-based learning; enterprise development, promotion of decent work, opportunities for youths in marginalized environments, and engagement with the private sector. These should lead to practical policy recommendations to enhance youth agency in TVET and employment systems, improved collaboration between education systems and the labour market documentation of innovative practices and scalable models and a harmonised TVET system in EAC.

### **Sub-Theme 6: Education financing, accountability, leadership and governance**

Improving education financing, accountability, governance, and leadership is essential for delivering quality and inclusive education in the EAC. By strengthening fiscal sustainability, transparency, strengthening institutional leadership and effectiveness, the EAC can build resilient education systems capable of meeting the evolving needs of its growing population and advancing regional integration and development. Rapid population growth, expanding secondary and tertiary enrolment, curriculum reforms, and digital transformation initiatives place additional pressure on already constrained education budgets. Developing and strengthening financing models, transparency, and governance frameworks is therefore critical to ensuring value for money, equity, and improved learning outcomes across the EAC region.

This sub-theme will open up a dialogue among policymakers, education leaders, development partners and researchers on innovative and sustainable approaches to financing education, enhancing accountability systems, and strengthening education leadership and governance structures within EAC Partner States. It will explore current leadership and governance structures, expenditure patterns, funding gaps, and efficiency challenges in the education systems of the EAC Partner States, propose innovative mechanisms and strategies.

### **Sub-Theme 7: Data-driven decision-making and evidence-based policies**

Effective policymaking increasingly depends on the availability and use of quality data. Despite progress in strengthening national statistical systems and Education Management Information Systems (EMIS), educational data challenges persist. The countries are grappling with fragmented data systems, inadequate analytical capacity, weak data governance frameworks, and underutilization of research findings in policy design and implementation. Enhancing data-driven decision-making is therefore critical to improving efficiency, transparency, accountability, and development outcomes across the EAC region.

This sub-theme aims to promote dialogue and knowledge exchange on strengthening data ecosystems and institutional capacities to support evidence-based policymaking, planning, implementation, monitoring and impact evaluation of the education systems of the EAC Partner States. The session will also highlight innovations, regional collaboration mechanisms, and best practices that enhance the generation, analysis, and use of data for informed decision-making. It will explore mechanisms to leverage technology, including artificial intelligence, and integrate research findings and real-time data into planning, budgeting, and monitoring processes. It will identify approaches to build analytical skills among policymakers, planners, and technical officers and also discuss frameworks for data protection and strengthen ethical standards and accountability, while at the same time promoting cross-border data sharing and joint research initiatives within the EAC.

### **Sub-Theme 8: Accelerating regional and continental goals through champions and partnerships**

Leveraging multi-stakeholder partnerships and collaborations with various actors, stakeholders and partners is today more important than ever for educational transformations and development. The EAC is committed to advancing regional integration and contributing to broader continental development aspirations, including CESA 2026-35, African Union Agenda 2063 and the global Sustainable Development Goals. Achieving these ambitious targets requires strong political will, strategic leadership, multi-sectoral collaboration, and sustained partnerships across governments, private sector actors, civil society, academia, and development partners. While policies and frameworks are in place, implementation gaps often slow progress. Identifying and empowering “champions” — influential leaders, institutions, and networks that advocate, mobilize resources, and drive

reforms — can accelerate action. Strengthened partnerships at national, regional and continental levels is thus essential for scaling innovations, sharing best practices, and aligning investments with shared priorities.

The session will provide a platform for showcasing successful partnership models and frameworks for effective collaborations between governments, the private sector, civil society, academia, and development partners. Identify strategies for leveraging partnerships to mobilize financial and technical resources. Discuss mechanisms for aligning EAC strategies with continental agendas and fostering cross-border cooperation. Showcase successful partnerships and champion-driven initiatives that can be replicated across Partner States.

### **Sub-Theme 9: Advancing Higher Education as a Catalyst for Regional Integration and Knowledge Economy Transformation**

Higher education is a strategic pillar for advancing regional integration, economic competitiveness, and sustainable development in the East African Community (EAC). As the region transitions toward a knowledge-based and digitally driven economy, universities play a central role in developing future-ready human capital, fostering innovation, and supporting evidence-based policymaking. This role is increasingly shaped by rapid advances in digital technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), which are transforming teaching, learning, research, and institutional management.

This sub-theme aims to provide a platform to critically examine progress, share best practices, and propose actionable strategies for accelerating the advancement of higher education and its contribution to the EAC integration and development agenda. In general, the session will generate evidence-based dialogue and policy-relevant recommendations to advance the development and advancement of higher education. Specifically, the session seeks to: assess progress in the operationalisation of the EAC Common Higher Education area and harmonization of education systems; Promote alignment of education systems with labour market needs; Enhance research and innovation ecosystems by universities to respond to the dynamic needs of diverse stakeholders; Promote higher education data management in higher education for evidence-based decision-making; Leverage rapid advances in digital technologies, including AI and other emerging technologies in teaching, learning, research and institutional management; and, Foster partnerships and collaborations for enhancing the advancement of higher education.

### **Conference Format**

The conference will be held from **25th to 28th August 2026 in Nairobi, Kenya**. Additionally, the conference will be structured to ensure maximum engagement of participants, enabling productive discussions, inspiring innovative thoughts, ideas, encouraging collaboration and action throughout the 4 days:

1- **Pre-conference co-workshops:** Day one (24th August) will commence with deep dives into key thematic areas to be presented by host institutions and select partners. Parallel sessions will run throughout the day.

2- **Keynote speeches:** A Keynote speaker will be identified to cover each subject- theme of the conference and will be delivered at every opening and closing session to provide depth of analysis and greater appreciation and understanding of the issues of the conference.

3- **Plenary and roundtable sessions:** Plenary and roundtable discussions will allow Educationists and practitioners, whether from government or civil society, to share evidence and best practices to enable participants to voice their views and co-create solutions.

4- **Policy dialogue discussions:** Policy dialogues will allow participants to hear from policymakers and stakeholders on relevant actions needed for systemic reforms around the issues discussed.

5- **Exhibitions:** An exhibition will be set up for every participating country to share evidence and best practices to allow cross-country learning and sharing from the various education systems.

6- **Fireside chats and Q&A:** These will be organized occasionally around a hot topic to allow participants to engage and ask questions to the identified presenter.

### **Target Audience/Participants**

The conference will bring together participants from the 8 Partner States of the EAC, staff of the EAC Secretariat and participating EAC institutions as well as select participants from other African countries. The target audience will be high-level officials (Ministers of Education or their Principal Secretaries), policymakers (curriculum officers, ministry officials, parliamentarians), teachers, students, youth representatives, development partners, Civil society organisations, and research/academic institutions.