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CONCEPT NOTE

THE INAUGURAL EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY REGIONAL EDUCATION CONFERENCE COMMEMORATING THE AU YEAR OF EDUCATION



**“Educate an African Fit for the 21st Century:
Collective Action for Quality, Inclusive and Lifelong
Learning in East Africa”**

August 12th to 15th, 2024

Arusha, Tanzania



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Background

Education is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as the Convention on the Rights of the Child as a legal right of every child. Access to quality education contributes not only to an individual's academic, socio-emotional development and well-being, but it is also critical to achieving economic empowerment, poverty reduction, and overall advancement of individuals, families, and society.

Education in Sub-Saharan Africa has seen significant improvement over the past few decades, particularly in enrolment rates contributed by such efforts as Education for All back in the 90s and early 2000s and more recently the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG 4 and the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) 2016-2025). Despite these advancements, an astonishing 98 million¹ children remain out of school, many of whom are from marginalised groups and communities. Additionally, an estimated 90% learning poverty rate² across the continent means that the vast majority of the children who are going to school are not learning. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated inequalities and threatens to negate some of the gains made over the years. As a result, Africa continues to lag behind in achieving targets set in the Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016-2025 (CESA 16-25), Sustainable Development Goal number 4 on education (SDG4), the 2030 global agenda, and the African Union's Agenda 2063. This is coupled with the skills demand, especially 21st century skills, and mismatch with the labour market, necessitating the need to not only focus on foundational skills, but also revisit secondary education with a view to introducing vocational subjects in a deliberate manner, and making the Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET), and Technical and Vocational Secondary Education (TVSD) track an attractive learning and skills pathway.

Education in East Africa

In East Africa, many countries have embarked on efforts to expand access to primary and secondary education with tremendous results. The adopted policies aimed at free basic education with the government bearing most of the cost. As a result, the primary net enrolment rate in Tanzania nearly doubled from 59% in 2000 to 94% in 2011 [1], while in Kenya, almost 1 million children joined primary schools in 2003 [2]. In Uganda, enrolments increased from 3,068,625 pupils in 1996 to 5,303,564 in 1997 when University Primary Education (UPE) was first introduced³. This upward trend in enrolment can be evidenced in the over 30% increase in average adjusted net enrolment rates of girls (% of primary school-aged population) specifically for some East African countries from 2000 to 2018⁴.

While the legal and policy frameworks are good and appear to be successful, there are still pockets of the populations that do not benefit from the right to education. Quality is also a persistent challenge. For example, among all children aged 9-13 years assessed by Uwezo in 2015, 31% in Kenya, 46% in Tanzania, and 70% in Uganda were unable to read a short story in any of the languages assessed⁵. This situation has not changed that much since then. National learning assessments conducted in Kenya and Uganda in 2021 indicate that 40% of Primary Grade 4 learners

¹ UIS 2022 : <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000382577>

² World Bank: The State of Global Learning Poverty: 2022 Update

³ Republic of Uganda (2015). Education statistics -aggregated data. Kampala: Depart of Education, Planning, and Policy Analysis: Ministry of Education Science Technology and Sports (MESTS).

⁴ UIS 2020: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.PRM.TENR.FE?locations=ZG-TZ-UG-RW-KE-BI&name_desc=true&start=2000

⁵ Uwezo (2017): *Are Our Children Learning? Lessons from Uwezo learning assessments from 2011 to 2015*. Dar es Salaam: Twaweza East Africa



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in Kenya⁶ and 29% in Uganda⁷ had attained expected reading levels. Moreover, the more recent Uwezo data shows that those out of school seem to exhibit certain similar characteristics including more likely being a girl, having a disability, coming from a poor household, or living in conflict/emergencies. A nearly 20% (from 89% to 72%) decline in trained teachers in primary education across sub-Saharan Africa could be a significant contributor to the compromise in quality learning. The problem persists even beyond basic education into TVET, TVSD and tertiary education. Despite the increased number of students transitioning to and completing secondary education, few graduate with relevant skills to help them to gain meaningful employment afterwards. Additionally, a meagre 2 to 10% of learners on the continent are currently able to access vocational training in secondary schools⁸. Furthermore, vocational training is also impaired by quality teaching, particularly contributed by low quality of teachers, poor facilities, and overall limited resources.⁹ This ultimately results in the persistent mismatch between training and labour market demands.

At the tertiary level, the Inter-University Council of East Africa (IUCEA) conducted a study on employability readiness for graduates from Universities in East Africa which showed that graduates are half-cooked for the job market. The study established that 51% of graduates in Kenya, 55% and 52% of graduates in Burundi and Rwanda respectively, 61% in Tanzania and 63% in Uganda, lacked relevant skills such as communications, self-awareness, problem-solving, and critical thinking along with technical skills to perform in their respective jobs¹⁰.

To respond to these challenges, East African countries have reformed their curricula from content to competence based. The aim was to get learners to demonstrate skills and behaviours needed to learn, work, and thrive in the 21st century. This move expands the focus of education to other relevant skills such as problem-solving, collaboration, and self-awareness, as well as values such as respect and honesty. However, the achievement of this shift has faced numerous challenges including teacher capacity, parental engagement, system-wide alignment, etc. Moreover, the lack of awareness about the importance of 21st-century skills and the subsequent lack of opportunities to nurture and assess them, means they are less prioritised during teaching and learning. The Assessment of Life Skills and Values in East Africa (ALiVE) report of 2023 established that less than a fifth of the adolescents (13-17 years) in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda could demonstrate full competence in problem-solving, collaboration, self-awareness, and respect¹¹. On a positive note, in the last decade East Africa has witnessed a shift to TVET and TVSD where Kenya and Rwanda have made tremendous strides with a significant portion of learners opting to go directly to the sub-sector (Laterite 2023).¹²

Africa Union's Year of Education

To highlight the centrality of education to Africa's social and economic transformation, the African Union (AU) has dedicated 2024 as the year of Education. This was officially announced on 20th September 2022 by the Chairperson

⁶ Uwezo (2021). *Are all our children learning?* Uwezo 7th learning assessment report. Nairobi: Usawa Agenda.

⁷ Uwezo Uganda (2021) *Are our Children Learning? Illuminating the Covid-19 Learning Losses and Gains in Uganda*. Uwezo National Learning Assessment Report, 2021. Kampala: Uwezo Uganda

⁸ Oketch, M(2014) Education policy, vocational training, and the youth in Sub-Saharan Africa, WIDER Working Paper, No. 2014/069, ISBN 979-92-9230-790-5

⁹ ADEA (2023). Study Report: Preparedness for the vocationalization of Secondary Education in Africa. ADEA Inter-Country Quality Node Secondary Education. June 2023

¹⁰ Nganga, G (2014). **Survey finds most East African graduates 'half-baked'**. *University World News*. www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20140523130246934 [accessed on 08.02.24].

¹¹ ALiVE (2023) Regional Report. [Alive-Report-Long-Version.pdf \(ziziafrique.org\)](http://Alive-Report-Long-Version.pdf(ziziafrique.org))

¹² Laterite. (2023). Unlocking the potential of technology for learning: the EdTech landscape in Rwanda. Kigali, Rwanda. [COVER /SEPARATOR TITLE \(mastercardfdn.org\)](http://COVER/SEPARATOR/TITLE(mastercardfdn.org)) [accessed on 09/04/2024].



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of the AU, HE. President Macky Sall of Senegal (by then). The move was intended to keep the momentum going from the commitments made by African Heads of State and Government to implement the recommendations committed during the Transforming Education Summit taking place in New York, and subsequent Ministerial declarations in high-level forums such as the ADEA 2022 Triennale, the High-Level Policy Dialogue Forum on Foundational Learning in 2023, and the Human Capital Africa (HCA) Roundtable meeting in 2024.

As the youngest continent globally, with 70% of its population below the age of 30, Africa must prioritise and emphasise the importance of education in order to prepare the next generation of youth who are vital for the continent's current and future economic growth, innovation, peace, and security.

By placing this special emphasis on education, AU calls for effort and dedication from governments, civil society, regional organisations, development partners, and private sector actors across the continent to revitalise and transform education in Africa to ensure all children, particularly the most marginalised, are able to acquire relevant quality education and skills fit for the 21st-century demands. The Union envisions achieving this under the theme: **Educate an African fit for the 21st Century - Building resilient education systems for increased access to inclusive, lifelong, quality, and relevant learning in Africa.**

The Inaugural East African Community Regional Education Conference 2024

The East African region has not put in place a regional coalition bringing together government, civil society, and other relevant stakeholders for sharing experiences and marking the progress being made on the education agenda in the region. In recognition of this, the 16th meeting of the EAC Sectoral Council on Education, Science and Technology, Culture and Sports (SCESTCS) held on 4th June 2021 in Dar es Salaam Tanzania directed that a Regional Forum on Education be held bringing together various stakeholders including government representatives, civil society, development partners and other stakeholders. East African governments have made efforts to improve education in their respective countries and across the region, but this still faces various barriers. On the other hand, CSOs and development partners are working to address issues specific to their agendas and areas of interest, with little collaboration across the region. This status quo is no longer sustainable as persisting challenges have reached crisis levels. Against this context, this conference seeks to leverage the AU's rally for transforming education on the continent, to call for collective, decisive, and strategic actions to tackle head-on the education challenges specific to the East African context.

The East African Community (EAC) recognises foundational learning, 21st century skills, TVET /TVSD and Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) as pivotal in the attainment of the development goals and aspirations of the region and in the attainment of the pillars of EAC's integration agenda. In recognition of this, in Article 102 of the EAC Treaty, the Partner States committed to foster cooperation in education and training which has led to several developments. Inter alia, this process has led to the harmonisation strategies for the various education cycles by the Partner States.

The 2024 Year of Education for Africa has inspired the EAC - in partnership with the Regional Education Learning Initiative Africa (RELI-Africa), the People's Action for Learning (PAL) Network, the African Curriculum Association (ACA), and the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) to organise a regional conference/forum and a call to action towards achieving holistic learning for all children in the region. The EAC regional conference is, therefore, a call for joint action and for "restlessness efforts in reflecting on learning as a



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pressing social justice issue in the region”. In view of this, the conference adopts a solutions-oriented approach with a focus on sharing emerging innovations and evidence on what works in our regional context and for even more stronger commitment for the education of all our children.

The theme of the conference is: “**Educate an African fit for the 21st Century: Collective Action for Quality, Inclusive and Life-long Learning in East Africa**”

The conference seeks to achieve five objectives:

- I. To facilitate progressive dialogues on building **resilient education systems** that are equipped to respond to the full diversity of learners' needs and deliver quality education to improve learning outcomes for each child in the EAC.
- II. To facilitate discussions on the **best practices** for implementing evidence-based innovative, feasible, and sustainable solutions for education transformation.
- III. To establish and inaugurate a **regional network and forum** aimed at strengthening multi-sectoral partnerships and engagements for the development of education in the EAC region.
- IV. To enhance clarity on, share responses, and commit to fulfilling the right to education for the **children left furthest behind** in the EAC region.
- V. To come up with concrete actions, including sustainability of this conference in the EAC.

The conference objectives will be realised through the following sub-themes:

- I. **Stronger and Resilient Education Systems:** Regional coordination and collaboration is critical in strengthening education systems within countries and across the region. Education systems need to respond to the diversity of learners' needs to ensure that all systems are equipped to deliver quality education to improve learning outcomes for each child. This sub-theme will further explore how the harmonisation of EAC education systems can be better operationalised through enhanced coordination and collective action by various actors. **This sub-theme will be led by the EAC Secretariat in collaboration and with support from the EU.**
- II. **Effective Implementation of Competency-Based Curricula:** This sub-theme recognises the progress made by countries which have undertaken curricula reforms with a focus on the competency-based curriculum and spur debates to inspire action and implementation at all levels and sub-sectors in the system with special attention to the classroom. Critical to this theme will be the exploration of challenges surrounding teachers and training for implementation of CBC. **This sub-theme will be led by the African Curriculum Association.**
- III. **Strengthening teacher capacity to deliver Foundational Learning and secondary education using EdTech:** Technical conversation on strengthening education resilience at the foundational level by leveraging/ deepening the use of EdTech in learning delivery. This will address a major gap in EdTech uptake by focusing on case studies of EAC countries or initiatives in the EAC region that may have done this well. This sub-theme will also have an aspect of examining how EdTech can be used to enrich secondary education. **This sub-theme will be led by ADEA.**



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- IV. 21st Century Competences for each child:** African Union's Year of Education acknowledges the need to educate for the 21st century. While CBC curricula are focused on this, these competencies are relatively new and present unique complexity. The competencies are referred to differently across the countries, with concepts including core competencies, generic skills, value-based education, life skills, and so on. Under this sub-theme, the conference will explore questions around how we define, deconstruct, and prioritise these competencies for East Africa's context, as well as methods, approaches, and tools that have worked for nurturing and assessing these competencies in the context of East Africa. **This sub-theme will be led by the Action for Life skills and Values in East Africa (ALiVE).**
- V. Data and Accountability for SDG 4.1.1:** This sub-theme will seek to address and explore the persisting learning gaps at the foundational level. It will highlight the gap in evidence collected amongst East African countries as well as across the continent. The sub-theme will address the implications of the lack of data and evidence and seek to propose concrete actions among member countries and other stakeholders to reverse this trend. **This sub-theme will be led by PAL Network.**
- VI. Children Furthest Behind:** With this sub-theme, the conference will aim at demystifying the perceptions of children left behind - what we (think we) know and redefine children furthest behind for the EAC region. The sub-theme will explore limited data on exclusion, legislative frameworks, and promising innovations for reaching the children furthest behind in the region. **This sub-theme will be led by RELI-Africa.**
- VII. Confronting the Language Question:** Language of instruction has been central in debates on education and learning in East Africa over the years. While there is evidence that children learn best in a language they understand and that carries their cultures, most countries have adopted foreign languages as the main language of instruction. The conference will seek to assess progress in language policy and implementation and showcase examples where progressive language policies have yielded to foundational learning. **This sub-theme will be led by the EAC Kiswahili Commission.**
- VIII. Regional Strategies for Youth Employability: Articulating TVSD, Secondary Education, and Innovation:** Exploring modalities of developing coordinated and working regional strategies that articulate the development of technical and vocational skills in secondary education. The emphasis will be on identifying innovative and sustainable solutions to improve youth employability and career choices. This includes discussions on how governments, educational institutions, the private sector, civil society organisations, and development partners can collaborate to support young people's transition from education to employability, considering the economic and environmental realities of the East African region. **This sub-theme will be led by ADEA.**
- IX. Harmonisation of TVET and Development of a Regional TVET Qualifications Framework:** The EAC has prioritised TVET as crucial for the socio-economic development and regional integration of the region thus the need for a coherent, integrated and coordinated regional TVET system. This requires, among other things, the harmonisation of TVET curricular and development of regional qualification frameworks to facilitate mutual recognition of qualifications and strategies to facilitate the development of required skills, quality enhancement, collaborations, and mobility of key actors in the TVET sector including students. The EAC and the partner states have recorded several developments in TVET to enable them benefit from the current youth advantage. This session will discuss the critical role of TVET in regional economic growth, regional integration, employment creation, poverty reduction, strengthening the productive sectors and value addition and also stemming some of the social vices associated with the youth. **This sub-theme will be led by EAC.**



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Conference Description

Conference Format

The conference will be held from **12th to 15th August 2024 at the EAC Headquarters/Arusha International Conference Centre in Arusha, Tanzania**, with the 12th April being a day of a series of parallel pre-conference workshops. Additionally, the conference will be structured to ensure maximum engagement of participants, enabling productive discussions, inspiring innovative thoughts, and ideas, and encouraging collaboration and action throughout the 3 days:

- 1- **Pre-conference workshops:** Day one will commence with deep dives into key thematic areas to be presented by host institutions and selected 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 with the aim 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 technicians 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 for 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 organised 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 East African Community (EAC) as well as select participants from other African and non-African countries that are contributing to education development in the EAC region. The target audience will be policymakers and high-level officials (Ministers or Principal/Permanent Secretaries), senior officials (directors, curriculum officers, ministry officials, parliamentarians), teachers, students, development partners, regional organisations, civil society organisations, and research/academic institutions.

Organisers:

Host Country

The host country for the conference is the United Republic of Tanzania.

Organisers

The African Union Year of Education Inaugural East African Community Regional Education Conference 2024 is organised by the East African Community (EAC), in partnership with the African Curriculum Association (ACA), Regional Education Learning Initiative Africa (RELI-Africa), People's Action for Learning Network (PAL-Network), and Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA). Each organisation/institution brings an important focus and contribution to improving education in the East African region:



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The East African Community (EAC) is a regional inter-governmental organisation comprising the Republics of: Burundi; Kenya, Rwanda; Uganda; the United Republic of Tanzania, the Republic of South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Republic of Somalia. The EAC headquarter is in Arusha, Tanzania. EAC's other organs and institutions are spread across the Partner States. EAC promotes access to quality education, particularly through its efforts to harmonise curricula across all levels of education throughout the 8 member states to enable mobility and increased economic opportunities for children and youth in the region. (www.eac.int). The East African Kiswahili Commission (EAKC), the EAC institution mandated to coordinate the development of Kiswahili for EAC regional integration will coordinate EAC's engagement in this conference in collaboration with the Department of Education and other relevant EAC organs and institutions.

The Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) is a pan-African organisation, a critical voice of education in Africa, and a forum for policy dialogue. It acts as a catalyst for reforms and promising policies and practices through the pooling of ideas, experience, lessons learned, and knowledge. The goal of ADEA is to empower African countries to transform schooling to meaningful learning by leveraging our globally connected partnerships, a well-equipped and skilled Secretariat and country led Inter-Country Quality Nodes. It does this by, among others, convening African policymakers and encouraging exchanges among them and with development partners. (www.adeanet.org).

African Curriculum Association (ACA): ACA is a continentally registered non-governmental association that brings together education and particularly curriculum practitioners, researchers, and other stakeholders involved in the education sector in Africa and beyond to deliberate on issues concerning curriculum innovation in planning, designing, development, implementation, assessment, and evaluation. ACA coordinates the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) curriculum cluster at the African Union. ([Www.acuass.org](http://www.acuass.org))

People's Action for Learning Network (PAL-Network): PAL Network is a south-to-south partnership of 17-member organisations working to promote children's foundational learning across Africa, Asia, and America. The PAL Network brings its expertise in generating evidence on foundational learning through citizen-led assessments and learning innovation programmes aimed at improving learning outcomes (www.palnetwork.org)

The Regional Education Learning Initiative Africa (RELI Africa): RELI Africa is a member-driven and peer learning collaborative network of 60 organisations in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda, working to improve learning outcomes in East Africa- especially for the most disadvantaged children. Among the initiatives of RELI is the Action for Life Skills and Values in East Africa (ALiVE), the collective impact work of 20 member organisations to support system improvement to embed these competencies in curricula, assessments, and teacher training for all children in East Africa (<http://www.reliafrica.org>).

Conference Organisation:

The conference will be organised as follows:

1. **Technical Team** will be led by the conference co-chairs and composed of at least one member from each of the main conference organisers. Included in this leadership team will be the conference technical lead. This team will be the vision carriers and will be responsible for fundraising, decision-making, major approvals, and general leadership. The technical team will be meeting weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly depending on demand. **Co-Chairs:** The chair is the main convener and main co-host. We have two co-chairs: EAC (Dr. James Jowi) and RELI Africa (Dr. Mary Goretti Nakabugo).



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2. **The Regional Organising Committee** will comprise a representative of the EAC partner states and will also include regional team members, and the technical team members represented by the conference Co-Chairs. This committee will meet a few times throughout the planning period to receive updates and provide high-level support to the conference preparations.
3. **The National Planning Committee** will be the conference organisers working on the daily logistical matters of the conference and ensuring they implement and actualise the conference vision. The following have been identified as key members of the National Planning Team:

Secretariat: The Secretariat will be housed under PAL Network and will be responsible for administrative, procurement, and logistical issues including handling and managing the budget for the conference.

Technical Lead: The Technical Lead will be a full-time consultant that will provide leadership for the conference and will be the main liaison between the various conference teams and will convene the organising team.

Event Organiser: An event organiser will be solely responsible for planning for both facilities to allow on-site and virtual (in special cases) participation. A consultant will be sourced once the time arrives.

Sub-Committees: The Technical and Organising Teams will form a few key sub-committees that will be instrumental in ensuring the conference preparations move efficiently. The following sub-committees have been formed: Program Committee; Fundraising Committee; Communications Committee; and Guest Relations Committee.