



THE YEAR OF EDUCATION
Educate an African fit for
the 21st Century.
Building resilient education systems for
increased access to inclusive, lifelong,
quality, and relevant learning in Africa

INAUGURAL EAC REGIONAL EDUCATION CONFERENCE

COMMUNIQUE

15th August 2024

The East African Community and partners engaged in Education in the region joined hands to convene the Inaugural East African Community Regional Education Conference held from 12th -15th August 2024 in Arusha, Tanzania, under the theme **Educate an African Fit for the 21st Century: Collective Action for Quality, Inclusive and Life-long Learning in East Africa.**

CELEBRATING the African Union (AU) Year of Education for Africa 2024 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.”**

RECOGNISING that education is a fundamental human right, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and our collective responsibility to ensure its realization for every citizen in the East African Community region, in line with EAC 6th Development Strategy; African Union Agenda 2063, the Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016-2025 (CESA 16-25), the Sustainable Development Goals, especially goal number 4 in Education (SDG4); and the commitment by the EAC Partner States on education, science and technology and human resource development.

CONCERNED that the East African Community region continues to grapple with myriad educational challenges impacting the various sectors and levels of education. Concerned further that millions¹ of primary and secondary school age children remain out of school; and many struggle to acquire foundational literacy and numeracy by age ten² at a time when the collective investment to education remains substantially below the 20% share of national expenditure committed at the Transforming Education in Africa summit³.

APPRECIATING that these challenges and disparities have been exacerbated by several factors including inadequate funding, weak governance, management and coordination, lack of adequate data for decision making, quality challenges among others. These have disproportionate impact on the education systems and the learners especially the vulnerable groups that include girls, differently-abled persons, and those living in remote, vulnerable and marginalized areas; the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic; climate change; conflicts; and socio-economic pressures that continue to strain our educational systems.

¹ Global Education Monitoring Report, UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2024). Out of school estimates. <https://education-estimates.org/out-of-school/country/>

² World Bank. (2022). The State of Global Learning Poverty: 2022 Update. <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/e52f55322528903b27f1b7e61238e416-0200022022/original/Learning-poverty-report-2022-06-21-final-V7-0-conferenceEdition.pdf>

³ UNICEF. (2024). Education spending in Africa: The impacts of COVID-19 and possible recovery pathways. <https://www.unicef.org/esa/media/13876/file/Education%20Spending%20in%20Africa%20%20The%20impacts%20of%20COVID-19%20and%20possible%20recovery%20pathways.pdf>

RECOGNISING that the EAC Partner States, under Articles 102 and 103 of the EAC Treaty, have committed to cooperate and undertake concerted efforts to foster cooperation in education, science and technology, training, and human capital development, for the benefit of our region. Further recognize the progress and achievements by the EAC in the harmonization of the regions education systems, development of supportive policies and frameworks and establishment of specialized Centres of Excellence, among others;

CELEBRATING the progress that the EAC Partner States and the partners have collectively made in improving access to education, particularly basic education, TVET and tertiary education;

AFFIRMING our support and commitment to various policy documents and declarations of various high-level policy dialogue forums on education, including:

- Article 102 and 102 of the EAC Treaty.
- EACs 6th Development Strategy and Agenda 2050.
- The ADEA 2022 Triennale, held in Mauritius from 19th to 21st October 2022, established the Ministerial Coalition to address critical challenges in African education systems, particularly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and to implement transformative actions on foundational learning across the continent.
- The Ministerial Declaration on Foundational Learning was made at the High-Level Policy Dialogue Forum on Foundational Learning in Lusaka, Zambia in October 2023.
- The African Leader's Call and Commitment to Action on Foundational Learning, launched during the 2024 African Union Mid-Year Summit in Accra, Ghana on 16th July 2024, to prioritize foundational literacy and numeracy as key to achieving Agenda 2063 development goals.

RECOGNISING the urgency and the need to prioritize actions that strengthen and modernize education systems throughout the region through strategic partnerships and collaboration among governments, civil society, and development partners.

RECOGNISING further, the critical importance of producing and using quality data on education and skills to drive evidence-based decision-making;

NOW THEREFORE have this communique as a catalyst and commitment to action, partnerships and joint action address the identified challenges to the education sector of the EAC; to improve, scale up, and sustain the transformation of education in the EAC in the following critical areas requiring our immediate and urgent attention:

1. A resilient education system is defined by the presence of political will, collaborative regional support, enabling policy framework, adequate resources (including funding, human resources, infrastructure, and curriculum), community and private sector engagement, and strengthened political adoption and accountability.
2. Acceleration of progress towards national, regional (EAC) and Africa Union Agenda 2063 goals.
3. An urgent need to prioritize foundational learning and implementation of cost-effective, evidence-based interventions to ensure all children can read with comprehension and do basic mathematics by the age of ten.

4. The shift towards a competency-based curriculum is key to preparing learners to face the challenges and seize the opportunities of the 21st century. Competency-based education prioritizes the development of practical, transferable skills. Assessments in this model should authentically measure students' ability to apply these skills in real-world contexts rather than solely testing their recall of information.
5. A critical gap in the evidence base surrounding foundational learning outcomes and cost-effective practices for enhancing learning. There is an urgent need for robust data to track foundational learning and effectiveness of proven existing pedagogies when applied at scale.
6. Educating every child in their home language, which is fundamental to equity and justice, especially for marginalized students in remote areas. Strong political commitment is essential to effectively address language barriers in education.
7. Barriers to providing quality education to all children, including disabilities, geographic isolation, and crisis contexts. Comprehensive policies are essential to ensure inclusive education for all children.
8. The implementation of education technology (EdTech) solutions in schools, which faces significant challenges, including poor infrastructure, limited ICT equipment, internet connectivity issues, and the lack of digital skills among teachers. There is a need for comprehensive policy and collaborations to scale up EdTech programs, especially in underserved areas and marginalized communities.
9. Africa's burgeoning youth population, poised to be a significant labor force by 2040. To harness this demographic dividend, education systems must prioritize equipping young people with future-ready skills. Public-private partnerships are crucial for developing essential work readiness and digital competencies.
10. Underfunding in education, significantly hindering the effective implementation of educational reforms in East Africa. This financial shortfall impacts critical delivery systems, such as the provision of educational materials, teacher support, and infrastructure.

WE HEREBY COMMIT to join hands on the following actions over the next decade, and report on progress, biennially:

1. Advocate for and support initiatives to increase education financing by EAC Member States to attain the recommended 20% allocation of national expenditure, in alignment with regional and continental commitments. Simultaneously, enhancing accountability mechanisms for education budgets.
2. Strengthen and convene the EAC Regional Education Conference/Forum after every two years as a regional network and platform to facilitate sharing of knowledge, best practices, innovations, and for developing common strategies and action plans to address the education challenges of the EAC region.
3. Prioritize foundational learning, including early childhood education, and ensure all children can learn in a language familiar to them, acquire strong literacy and numeracy skills by the end of grade 3, and are endowed with the life skills and values necessary to fit the 21st century.
4. Investing in our teaching workforce through effective preparation, continuous professional development, as well as recruitment and motivation strategies, leveraging technology to upskill educators' various skills including in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and 21st-century competencies, with a particular

focus on improving pedagogical practices for foundational learning (literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional learning) to benefit all children in our countries.

5. Establish comprehensive mechanisms to promote and implement data management and sharing platforms within governance networks to facilitate evidence-based policy-making and enhanced accountability structures.
6. Strengthen Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and skills development programs. Develop and implement systems to recognize prior learning and foster robust industry partnerships to enhance youth employability and entrepreneurship.

WE collectively affirm our commitment to transforming education in the East African Community, in recognition of the role of education as the cornerstone of regional development, social cohesion, and prosperity. We pledge to work collectively towards universal access to quality, inclusive, transformative and relevant education for all in our region, equipping our people for the evolving global landscape and securing a brighter future for our community of nations. Through this united effort, we aim to build an education system that empowers our children and young people, preparing the East African Community for the opportunities of the 21st century and beyond.

WE, the partners and the East African Community (EAC) commit to:

1. Unite civil society, development partner organizations, and government to enhance constructive peer learning and knowledge sharing to support initiatives in improving educational outcomes.
2. Support the generation, dissemination, and utilization of evidence-based data and research to track progress on foundational learning and support the design of innovative education ideas and effective strategies to improve learning, while ensuring transparent public sharing of schooling and learning outcomes.
3. Promote the right to quality education for all young people with an increased focus on vulnerable groups including girls, differently-abled persons, those living in remote and vulnerable areas, and those out of school.
4. Hold governments accountable and advocate for increased evidence-based policymaking, investment, and reporting on education outcomes to ensure sustainable development and inclusive growth.
5. Support the governments in meeting their actionable commitments to improve learning outcomes.
6. Support and collaborate with the EAC in facilitating and organizing the EAC Regional Education Conference/Forum to be held after every two years rotationally in the EAC Partner States. We shall further submit the reports and recommendations of these convenings to the relevant Sectoral Council of the EAC for further consideration, adoption, and policy guidance.

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