FLEX 2024
REPORT

Africa Foundational Learning Exchange in the Year of Education 2024

Moving Together from Commitments to Impact at Scale – Kigali Convention Centre, Rwanda

Introduction and Overview

Honourable Joseph Nsengimana
Minister of Education, Republic of Rwanda

The Government of Rwanda, led by the Ministry of Education, was privileged to host and organise the Africa Foundational Learning Exchange (FLEX 2024), which took place at the Kigali Convention Centre (KCC) from November 11 – 13, 2024.

The Africa Foundational Learning Exchange (FLEX) is a pan-African platform dedicated to advancing foundational learning by facilitating the exchange of strategies, experiences, and best practices across the continent. The AU declared 2024 the «Year of Education», calling for accelerated efforts to meet the targets of the Continental Education Strategy for Africa and the FLEX has been one of the most important gatherings of education leaders and stakeholders in Africa this year.

The importance of the topic of Foundational Learning was reflected in the high-level participation. Rwanda welcomed 544 in-person delegates, with hundreds more following online. Ministers of Education from the 19 countries and states participated in person: and a further 13 countries sent high level Ministry of Education delegations.

Education Development Partners were also represented, including those agencies who had helped fund and organize FLEX, the World Bank; UNICEF; USAID, ADEA, The Hempel Foundation and New Globe.

The three-day FLEX featured technical sessions, ministerial panels and roundtables, partner leadership discussions, and school visits, which are all documented in this report. Arising from the discussions a five-point declaration of action was developed and read out during the closing ceremony. It includes a commitment to collectively eliminate learning poverty on the continent by 2035.

1. Eradicating Learning Poverty by 2035 through targeted investments and measurable progress.
2. Fully Supporting the Decade of Education initiative to drive long-term reforms.
3. Enhancing Regional Collaboration to share best practices and foster innovation.
4. Scaling Proven Interventions to improve foundational learning outcomes.
5. Establishing Robust Data Systems for accountability and informed decision-making.

The Government of Rwanda was grateful for the opportunity to host and organise such a successful FLEX, which will lead to improved foundational learning outcomes through our collective efforts on the continent. The Minister of Education, Malawi also accepted to host the next FLEX in 2025, which will take stock of progress towards achieving the action points agreed during FLEX 2024.

Acknowledgements

On behalf of the development partners involved in the planning and organization of the 2024 Africa Foundational Learning Exchange (FLEX 2024), including the World Bank, UNICEF, Hempel Foundation, USAID and New Globe, I wish to convey our sincere appreciation to the Government and the people of Rwanda, under the leadership of His Excellency, President Paul Kagame, and through the leadership and staff of the Ministry of Education, for successfully hosting FLEX 2024 from 11th to 13th November in Kigali.

We further extend our appreciation to Rwanda's First Lady, Her Excellency, Mrs Jeannette Kagame, for officially opening the event and providing a keynote address, His Excellency, Mr Hakainde Hichilema, President of Zambia and the Champion of Foundational Learning, all the Ministers, led by the Honourable Minister of Education of Rwanda, Joseph Nsengimana, all heads of country delegations and other senior government officials, and all partner representatives and key foundational learning and general education stakeholders, for their presence as well as policy and technical-level contributions.

To the organizing committee and all those who have worked behind the scenes to ensure the event's success, we salute your gallant efforts that, at times, went beyond expectations. Your teamwork, dedication, and work ethic contributed greatly to the success of this event.

An event such as this one is as good as the quality of capturing the salient points of the presentations and discussions by our rapporteurs, both volunteers and engaged, under the lead and coordination of Dr. Margaret Okore. Through you, we have managed to put together an accurate and informative report that reflects the rich discourse during FLEX 2024 and the outcome as highlighted in the Ministerial Declaration for Action.

We appreciate all those who mounted the exhibitions, for sharing great teaching, learning, and research materials through your booths, and to the print, electronic, and social media for regularly keeping us abreast with the insightful quotes and pronouncements from our presenters, panellists, moderators, discussants, and the audience in Kigali and online. This enabled the world to stay in touch with what is happening in Kigali during FLEX 2024.

Finally, allow me to express my sincere gratitude to the sponsoring partners, specifically individuals in the organising committee from the World Bank, UNICEF, Hempel Foundation, New Globe, ADEA, and Planitswiss – that provided support to the Ministry of Education to organize the conference, and Africa Practice – that supported media engagement. Your collective efforts contributed to the success of FLEX 2024.

Albert Nsengiyumva | Executive Secretary, ADEA

Table of Contents

Acronyms

ADEA	Association for the Development of Education in Africa
AU	African Union
CBC	Competency Based Curriculum
CBO	Community Based Organisations
CESA	Continental Education Strategy for Africa
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
DP	Development Partners
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECE	Early Childhood Education
EMIS	Education Management Information Systems
FLEX	Foundational Learning Exchange
FLN	Foundational Literacy and Numeracy
GEMR	Global Education Monitoring Report
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
LOI	Language of Instruction
RAPID	Reach, Assess, Prioritize, Increase, Develop
SEL	Social and Emotional Learning
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
TaRL	Teaching at the Right Level
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
TLM	Teaching and Learning Materials

Executive Summary

Overview

The Government of Rwanda, through the Ministry of Education, and with the support of the World Bank, Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), UNICEF, USAID, FCDO, Hempel Foundation, New Globe, and UNESCO, organized and hosted the 2024 Africa Foundational Learning Exchange (FLEX 2024) in Kigali from 11th to 13th November 2024 with the theme, "Moving Together from Commitments to Impact at Scale". This event aimed at addressing the recognized need of ensuring a solid foundation for children in the early years of schooling in Africa. It was held against the backdrop of several high-level policy events and the declaration of 2024 as the Year of Education for Africa by the Heads of States and Government at their Summit in Addis Ababa.

More than 20 African Ministers of Education and 12 Heads of Ministerial Delegations from 34 countries in Africa joined the over 500 delegates and online participants at this seminal event.

The First Lady of the Republic of Rwanda, Her Excellency Jeannette Kagame officially opened the meeting as Guest of Honour and provided a keynote address. This followed welcome remarks by the Rwanda Minister of Education, Hon. Joseph Nsengimana, the recorded video message from the President of Zambia, His Excellency Hakainde Hichilema, who is also the Champion of Foundational Learning, remarks from the ADEA Executive Secretary, Albert Nsengiyumva, and the World Bank's Regional Vice President for Eastern and Southern Africa, Victoria Kwakwa.

Twelve impactful sessions on the first day preceded the main event. The sessions showcased promising approaches across several countries including partner initiatives supporting African countries to achieve improved foundational learning. Ministers and senior government officials in attendance provided great insights on what is working amid some challenges. Participants agreed on the key lessons that framed the recommendations from these sessions.

The next two days focussed on plenary discussions, Ministerial roundtables, parallel sessions as well as exhibitions and partner side meetings. The official opening and policy discussions on the second day, informed by evidence from research and studies, helped to frame subsequent discussions in the breakout sessions. During the leadership round table discussion, the Honourable Minister of Education, Rwanda, Joseph Nsengimana, called for a collective commitment to ending learning poverty in Africa by 2035. The closed-door Ministerial discussions provided a special moment of interaction between the policymakers and partners on pertinent issues that included funding and accountability. Rounding off the discussions was the visit to schools by Ministers, heads of delegations, and partners – moving from the "boardroom" discussions to experience the classroom environment.

The event culminated in the following declaration, which provides a roadmap after FLEX 2024, in the form of renewed collective commitments and actions in key areas by the Ministers and heads of delegations present, supported by partners and education stakeholders, to improve foundational learning in Africa.

FLEX 2024 – Declaration for Action: Moving from Commitment to Action in Foundational Learning Across Africa

We, the Ministers of Education from **Angola, Côte d'Ivoire, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Ghana, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Rwanda, São Tomé and Príncipe, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Africa, South Sudan, Tanzania, The Gambia, Uganda, Zambia, Zanzibar** and **Zimbabwe** and Heads of Delegations from **Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Comoros, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, Senegal, Somalia, and Togo,** present at the 2024 Africa Foundational Learning Exchange (FLEX 2024) in Kigali, Rwanda, hereby collectively commit to ending learning poverty in Africa by 2035.

We further reaffirm our commitment to improving foundational learning for every child on the continent, together with the African Union, Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), the World Bank, UNICEF, Hempel Foundation, USAID, and all development partners represented at FLEX 2024.

Foundational learning is the basis for all future learning and economic empowerment. It ensures that our children are equipped with the literacy, numeracy, and social and emotional skills to develop, learn, and contribute to the social and economic development of the continent.

Therefore, it is critical to position foundational learning as a pivotal strategy for long-term prosperity, peace and security across Africa, thereby contributing to universal quality education, a key aspect of the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4.

We acknowledge the commitments that African countries have made through policy reforms, increased budget allocation, and implementation of evidence-based approaches that support foundational learning since the 2023 Human Capital Heads of State Summing in Dar es Salam, the 2023 ADEA High-Level Policy Dialogue Forum on Foundational Learning in Lusaka, the 2023 Foundational Learning Exchange in Sierra Leone and the African Union Mid-Year Summit in Accra, Ghana in July 2024.

The World Bank's estimate of USD21 trillion in global lost productivity if we do not improve learning outcomes compels us to act now. We know that for every year of education we provide a child, we enhance their future earning potential by 8-10 percent and contribute to future global productivity gains of up to USD6.5 trillion.

To build on the progress made thus far and continue the momentum from the FLEX 2024, we commit to undertake the following actions:

1. **Enhance inter-country collaboration on foundational learning.** This will be done by: (a) expanding and strengthening the leadership role of the Africa Foundational Learning Ministerial Coalition to include technical Ministry personnel and developing a clear strategy to engage political leaders; (b) fostering cross-border collaboration, building stronger partnerships, facilitating collaborative research and adapting shared practices to individual country contexts.

2. **Adapt, integrate, and scale evidence-based approaches to improve foundational learning outcomes** including provision of high-quality Early Childhood Education; Structured Pedagogy; Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL); and Learning Through Play. These will be accompanied by investment in school governance and systems, teacher training, mentoring and coaching, adequate teaching and learning materials, and strong country-level monitoring and assessment structures.

3. **Enhance the production and utilisation of quality data, evidence, assessment, and accountability mechanisms.** It is important to: (i) strengthen Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) to leverage evolving technologies such as artificial intelligence, (ii) implement systemic reforms to ensure foundational learning is prioritised at the system level and links to practices at the classroom level, (iii) develop an African common assessment framework to enable countries to implement proficiency standards for monitoring foundational learning outcomes. (iv) improve learning assessment processes at the foundational level to include literacy, numeracy, language, and social and emotional skills; (v) strengthen country, regional, and continental accountability mechanisms using available accountability tools.

4. **Accelerate impact through intentional and efficient spending of country resources on evidence-based approaches** with a focus on scalable and cost-effective interventions.

5. **Increase coordination and integration of partner initiatives in foundational learning at the country level** to eliminate duplication and maximise efficiency in resource utilisation.

We collectively endorse the African Union's call to **declare a decade of education for the continent.** Foundational learning needs to be prioritised and embedded within the continent's development strategy over the long term. To support this, **we confirm that the Africa Foundational Learning Exchange will be held annually**. We will strive to integrate African Heads of State in the dialogue to ensure strong leadership towards improving the salience of foundational learning across Africa.

Made on this 13th day of November 2024 in Kigali, Rwanda.

Official Opening

Her Excellency, The First Lady of Rwanda, Mrs Jeannette Kagame, was the Guest of Honour at FLEX 2024. Her keynote address was preceded by opening remarks from the ADEA Executive Secretary, Mr Albert Nsengiyumva, World Bank's Regional Vice President for Eastern and Southern Africa, Ms Vitoria Kwakwa, and recorded remarks from His Excellency, President Hakainde Hichilema of Zambia who is also the Foundational Learning Champion. The Honourable Minister of Education of Rwanda, Mr. Joseph Nsengimana, then made his welcome remarks and invited the First Lady to make her speech and officially open FLEX 2024. The foundational learning video by UNICEF and the Hempel Foundation on the dreams of African children calling for "less talk and more bold action" and the poem by the three children of Rwanda set the tone by reminding the gathering that all should be focussed on improving the life of the African child through education with a strong foundation. Indeed, the Rwandan children asserted, "We stand confidently before you because someone invested in our learning foundation." The foregoing summarizes what transpired during the official opening, with Ms. Jackline Lumbasi, a media personality – as Master of Ceremony.

Voices from the children

The children kickstarted the ceremony via the powerful foundational learning video articulating their dreams and their need for quality foundational learning. A poem by three children from Rwanda cemented this message where they attributed their confidence to sound foundational learning.

Summary of the Opening Remarks

Albert Nsengiyumva
Executive Secretary,
Association for the Development
of Education in Africa (ADEA)

The Executive Secretary articulated ADEA's role of convening stakeholders for in-depth dialogue on education-related issues, among them foundational learning. He revisited the high-level engagement journey that foundational learning has taken, from the Transforming Education Summit in New York in 2022, ADEA 2022 Triennale in Mauritius and High-Level Policy Dialogue Forum on Foundational Learning in 2023 in Zambia, FLEX 2023 in Sierra Leone, the HCA pre-Summit meeting in Addis Ababa in February 2024 and Presidential Dialogue in Accra in 2024, rounding off with the designation of 2024 as the year of education for Africa by the African Union in which improving foundational learning and STEM education is among the eight key outcome areas of the roadmap. These events have underscored the resolve to focus on strengthening foundation learning in Africa. A key milestone in enhancing knowledge sharing and coordination on the continent was the formation of the Africa Foundational Learning Ministerial Coalition. The Coalition has grown from the original eight Ministers of Education in 2022 to more than 20 in 2024, and more countries are expected to join. Mr. Nsengiyumva concluded by identifying five key tasks moving forward: continuing to prioritize and raise the salience of foundational learning, scaling innovative practices that have demonstrated positive impact, improving partner collaboration and coordination of country-level support, spending intentionally, investing more and measuring better, and leveraging existing leadership voices, such as that of the Champion of Foundational Learning, President Hakainde Hichilema, and communities of practices such as the Africa Foundational Learning Ministerial Coalition to promote greater ownership, accountability and transparency.

Victoria Kwakwa
World Bank's Regional Vice President
for Eastern and Southern Africa

The Regional Vice President confirmed the World Bank's commitment to partner with governments and other development partners to enhance foundational learning. She lamented that 90% of children in Sub-Saharan Africa cannot read properly at age 10 due to education quality gaps, noting that 30% of children in primary school are out of school and, hence, lack basic skills. The Vice President recalled that FLEX 2024 also in Dar es Salam, Tanzania, in 2023 and graced by 18 Heads of State and high-level representatives from 43 African governments. In conclusion, Ms Kwakwa emphasized three important processes: taking stock of what has been achieved in the last 2years on agreed resolutions and the data-driven decisions implemented, reflecting on how to address learning poverty among the 42 million primary school-aged children who are out of school, and building strong collaboration with governments to improve learning outcomes at the foundational level.

Remarks by His Excellency,
President Hakainde Hichilema
of Zambia & The Champion of
Foundational Learning (via Video)

The Zambian President expressed his gratitude to the President of Rwanda, His Excellency Paul Kagame, for hosting FLEX 2024. He also thanked all the Ministers and heads of country delegations present for making time to join the event. He further acknowledged the support from development partners, whose backing has been critical in not only supporting the event but also contributing to some of the initiatives that countries are undertaking to enhance and transform foundational learning in the continent. The President called on participants to ensure, as a basic principle, that every child in Africa has access to quality foundational learning regardless of their background and circumstances. He asserted that embracing foundational learning is the sure way of breaking the cycle of poverty, gaining sustainable development, and building productive and resilient societies.

Quoting from the World Bank's findings, the Foundational Learning Champion observed that addressing learning poverty can unlock USD 6.5 trillion by 2030, and conversely, inaction could result in losses to the tune of USD 17 trillion.

In his concluding remarks, His Excellency President Hichilema underscored the importance of the FLEX gathering as a powerful collective venture to bring about change in foundational learning. He reminded participants that global financial resources are dwindling, further exacerbated by the national reduction in per capita income. Therefore, reflecting on how education will be financed and how the resources can effectively be scaled is imperative.

Welcome Remarks by **the Honourable Minister of Education – Rwanda,**
Joseph Nsengimana

In his welcoming address, the Minister underscored the importance of FLEX 2024, terming it as an opportunity to exchange knowledge, track progress, foster collaborative engagement, and confirm commitment to enhancing foundational learning and addressing learning poverty across Africa. In his welcoming address, the Minister underscored the importance of FLEX 2024, terming it as an opportunity to exchange knowledge, track progress, foster collaborative engagement, and confirm commitment to enhancing foundational learning and addressing learning poverty across Africa. He specifically acknowledged the increased number of Ministers present (from Angola, Côte d'Ivoire, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Ghana, Liberia, Mali, Malawi, São Tomé and Príncipe, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania, The Gambia, Uganda, Zambia, Zanzibar and Zimbabwe), the Heads of Delegations (from Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Comoros, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, Senegal, and Togo), the development partners, (The World Bank Vice President for Eastern and Southern Africa; The UNICEF Regional Director for Eastern and Southern Africa, USAID's Deputy Assistant Administrator and Acting Senior Coordinator for International Basic Education, The Executive Secretary of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), The Hempel Foundation's Executive Director, and New Globe's CEO and Founder), and the diverse profile of delegates, a demonstration of the momentum that foundational learning has attained on the continent, in line with the African Union's declaration of education as the Theme of the Year for 2024.

The Minister then delved into the progress Rwanda has made in prioritizing the health and education of future generations. Besides guaranteeing 9 and 12 years of basic education for all, Rwanda, through substantial investments in prenatal care and early childhood development, has implemented a national school-feeding program that has significantly improved student health, boosted attendance, and reduced dropout rates, ensuring that more children stay in school and continue their education. This, he stated, has been achieved through strong community involvement. Hon Nsengimana concluded his remarks and invited the Guest of Honour, Her Excellency the First Lady of Rwanda, to address the delegates and officially open the event.

Summary of the Official Opening Speech by Her Excellency,
**Mrs Jeannette Kagame,
First Lady of Rwanda**

The First Lady of Rwanda, Her Excellency Mrs Jeannette Kagame reminded the participants, in her official opening speech, of the importance of FLEX in relation to the continental agenda, especially in the 2024 African Union Year of Education. The First Lady brought to the fore the worrying trend of 9 out of 10 children aged 10 years having challenges in reading and comprehension. "What a loud alarm bells this statistic rings!", she remarked, calling on participants to reflect on a society where the majority of children do not develop soft values like kindness, empathy, respect, flexibility, patience, integrity, and teamwork through foundational learning. This, she noted, prevents them from building healthy relationships, navigating social environments, and contributing positively in personal and professional settings.

The First Lady acknowledged the role of parents in childcare and recognised that "we are living in times that are pulling parents in all kinds of directions, away from their core responsibility to raise families." Thus, children are offered up to the education system, and parents seldom engage with educators to create a thread of communication for a sustainable continuity of care between the school setting, home, and the community.

Therefore, this FLEX 2024 gathering, must reflect on three questions: what is to become of the future young African's mind, if devoid of essential knowledge? How can we tap into the expertise of our educators, to make them active stakeholders in the full context within which the child is evolving? How do we put the child at the centre of all interventions during their foundational learning age so that their individual needs are catered for?

In her parting shot before declaring FLEX 2024 officially open, Her Excellency made a clarion call for all participants to pledge to integrate every inspiring insight, and all valuable foresight shared, in efforts to improved foundational learning in the respective African countries.

Lightning talk with
Dr Ben Piper,
Director for Global Education,
Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

This talk preceded the Education Leadership Panel. Dr Piper, in conversation with Adia Umulisa, Research and Policy Advisor at the Ministry of Education, Rwanda, highlighted five things required to improve foundational learning outcomes, namely: political will at all levels,

providing every child with a textbook and workbooks with language-appropriate phonics and reading stories, a lesson plan to assist the teacher to guide the children on the workbooks, high-quality practice-based training, and instructional support that includes giving timely feedback and coaching.

DAY 1

11th November 2024 –
Parallel Sessions and Side Events

Twelve impactful partner-sharing sessions showcased some of the partner initiatives supporting African countries to achieve improved foundational learning. Ministers and senior government officials in attendance provided great insights on what is working amid some challenges. Participants agreed on the key lessons that framed the recommendations from these sessions.

Scaling Foundational Learning: Insights, Approaches, and Perspectives from the Ground

Moderator	Christin Lucille McConnell, Education Chief, UNICEF Ghana
Panellists / Speakers	Anders Holm, Executive Director, Hempel Foundation Madame Ndeye Aby NDAW, Director of Elementary Education, Ministry of Education, Senegal Dr. Eric Nkansah, Director General, Ghana Education Service Kenneth Likando, Principal Education Officer TESS, Ministry of Education, Zambia Steve Blunden, Chief of Party for USAID NextGen in Malawi Emily Woolf - Senior Education Adviser and Team Leader, Education and Gender Equality Division, FCDO Ramya Vivekanandan, Global Partnership for Education
Rapporteurs	Lydia Nakijoba & Barno Mukhamadieva

"For every dollar invested in early education, the returns are significant. It reduces dropout rates, lowers education costs in the long run, and eases the burden on social services."

Hon. Conrad Sackey
Minister of Basic and Secondary Education, Sierra Leone

Assessing whether learning is taking place is crucial to providing quality education. Assessment takes different forms and is under two major categories. First is within the school environment on a continuing basis – when the lesson is progressing or at the end of the lesson, week, school term, or year. The second category is normally after a given number of years and is nationally administered. Countries have developed various tools and expertise over the years to track whether learning is taking place in the classroom, with different levels of success. The efforts notwithstanding, assessment of learning remains a challenge in Africa. The process is complex with grey areas such as the measurement of social and emotional learning (SEL). For example, the 2024 report of the Foundational Learning Action Tracker (FLAT), developed by the Hempel Foundation and UNICEF based on the RAPID (reach, assess, prioritize, increase, develop) Framework shows that, globally,

despite nearly 80% of the countries reporting that learning outcomes and/or benchmarks for foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) are clearly defined in the Grade 1–3 curriculum/ policy nationwide, fewer than half of the countries reported nationwide integration of SEL in the curriculum. For Africa, only 20% of the countries have FLN indicators clearly indicated in the student assessment systems. This demonstrates the challenge and gap in measuring SEL. The session focused on sharing country experiences and identified issues for an effective foundational learning.

Main challenges

- **Language of instruction:** Selection of the right language in a multi-lingual environment is challenging. In some countries it has been a source of conflict.

- **Local capacity:** Finding local capacity to develop learning materials and teachers who can teach in the appropriate language is a daunting task. Thus, countries are forced to engage teachers who may not be well versed in the language.

- **Overcrowding:** Several countries have introduced free primary education, which has resulted in increased learner numbers, outstripping the existing school facilities.

- **Government involvement:** Despite governments embracing foundational learning, they need to enhance their support to address the issues negatively impacting the domain.

Key lessons	Recommendations
• **Co-creation and robust planning:** It is imperative that development partners co-create programmes with governments as co-creation can be a real enabler to ensure alignment of interventions with government priorities, and the financing and robust planning will enhance efficiency. • **Creative financing:** Domestic financing is the backbone for the sustainability of effective interventions (average share of domestic financing for education in African countries is about 75% of the total education expenditure). Planning sustainability from the start is a must; this will require addressing the financial sustainability, costing the plan, and integrating the reform or programme into the domestic budget. • **Enhance the system:** Strengthening the system, particularly the "middle tier" teachers, who have a critical role to play in supporting interventions and providing guidance, is essential. Equally crucial is the need to build these teachers' capacity to utilize the data they collect to improve classroom practice. • **Coordination:** Effective coordination among the various stakeholders, including technical and funding partners, is key to ensuring their contributions are managed well. Two critical government Ministries to involve are the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Finance. • **Political will:** Working for scaling is complex, with many technical and political barriers that need to be understood and addressed. Thus, the process must be fully aligned to the government priorities at both national and local levels.	• Governments, need to improve learning assessment processes using a holistic approach, with partner support. This means going beyond literacy and numeracy and considering issues of language, social and emotional skills, and having effective feedback mechanisms. It will also be important for governments to conduct research on learning assessment processes and improve assessment benchmarks. • Governments should invest in teacher training, provision of appropriate teaching and learning materials and technology, to enhance the learning environment.

BUILD-ing the Bricks for Foundational Learning through Effective Language of Instruction Decision-Making in Africa.

Moderator	Pooja Nakamura, International Education Program Lead, American Institutes for Research (AIR)
Panellists / Speakers	Nic Spaull, Senior Program Officer, Global Education, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Graça Mogole, Deputy Director for Primary Education - Mozambique Ministry of Education and Human Development (MINEDH) Alison Marie Grimsland, Senior Education Specialist/Literacy Specialist - World Bank Adama Coulibaly, Inspecter General, Ministry of National Education and Literacy, Côte d'Ivoire
Rapporteurs	Mary W. Sichangi & Vatsa Singh

> *There is a tipping point for selecting the second language of instruction…we need to leverage L1 to teach L2.*
>
> **Graça Mogole**
> Deputy Director for Primary Education
> Mozambique Ministry of Education
> and Human Development (MINEDH)

The role that language plays in learning cannot be over-emphasized. All learning occurs through language and a significant number of children in Africa (37%) are taught in language(s) they do not understand. This realization by countries has awakened a new impetus in finding the right choice of language balance to enhance learning. This panel explored how education policy and decision makers can strengthen language of instruction decision-making across Africa. The goal is to strengthen the link between country-level Language of Instruction (LOI) policies and providing all students with equal access to achieving foundational learning outcomes.

Five countries – Cote d'Ivoire, Mozambique, Rwanda, Senegal, and South Africa presented success stories working with American Institutes for Research (AIR) to support the development of country LOI roadmaps based on stakeholder engagement and consultations.

One of the working practices shared is **"decoding and reading comprehension skills".** Evidence shows that focussing on these two skills has enabled the building of strong foundational cognitive skills, working memory, attention, and control. It is also noted that in bilingual environments, a new language (L2) can be taught through the first language of instruction (L1). There is a tipping point at which comprehension and decoding skills learned in the first language can be leveraged to teach the second language.

Main challenges

The session highlighted challenges associated with language of instruction, including the following:

1. **Foreign languages:** The blanket adoption of foreign languages that are not well-spoken has resulted in children not learning. All learning occurs through language, and a significant number of children (37%) are taught language(s) they do not understand.
2. **Multilingual setting:** There are often many potential languages that can be used for teaching and learning in multilingual settings. The choice is more political than professional and, in such cases, learning faces resistance.
3. **Language competition:** Tension exists between teaching children through the language in which they feel comfortable and that which leads to socioeconomic mobility. Countries still emphasize the importance of an international language to realize social mobility and national cohesion, sometimes at the cost of learning outcomes.
4. **Time for transition:** In bilingual instruction models, teachers find it challenging to accurately determine the right time to teach reading in a new language to align with learner readiness.
5. **Limited teaching capacity:** It is common not to have adequate numbers of teachers specialized in a particular language. Thus, teachers struggle to teach, and some do so to keep their jobs.
6. **Learning materials:** Inadequate teaching and learning resources in bi-lingual or multi-lingual LOI remain a challenge. It is a fact that multi-lingual material production is expensive.
7. **Teacher support:** There is limited cluster monitoring of practice among professional teachers, largely due to the absence of expertise.

Key lessons	Recommendations
• Learning a new language through a familiar language builds a strong foundation in biliteracy. • Integration of widely spoken languages as LOI promises strong literacy foundations. • Aligning to a new language at the right age facilitates meaningful learner transition.	• **Research data:** There is need for a dedicated and well-resourced unit, with different expertise, to research and drive the process of identifying appropriate LOI based on the context. This unit should determine the balance of when to move from L1 to L2, including the choice of language to adopt, to ensure no child is left behind. • **Teacher training:** Train teachers under the LOI policy models to ensure they impart the correct skills. • **Teacher resources:** Governments need to provide adequate teaching and learning resources aligned to LOI. • **Teacher support:** Establish a directorate to support the implementation of policy and practice of enhancing LOI • **Monitoring systems:** Leverage research data and insights while making the decision on LOI selection (i.e., observational data on languages where children have competencies, languages teachers can speak, languages preferred by the community, etc.). Sometimes, a few languages may cover a large section of the country's population.

All Children Deserve to be in School and Learn:
Taking Stock of Progress to Expand Access and Strengthen the Quality of Education for All

Moderator	Dr. Flora Mutezigaju, Education Specialist, UNICEF, Rwanda
Panellists / Speakers	Dr. Donatilla KANIMBA, Executive Director, Rwanda Union of the Blind, Rwanda. Dr. Evariste KARANGWA, Dean, School of Inclusive and Special Needs Education, University of Rwanda College of Education, Rwanda. Dr. Rachel PHIRI, Principal Secretary for Basic Education, Ministry of Education, Malawi. Mrs. Sekhotseng Adam-MOLAPO, Director - National Curriculum Development Centre, Ministry of Education and Training, Lesotho Ms. Joan MURUNGI, Head of Curriculum Teaching and Learning Resources, Rwanda Basic Education Board.
Rapporteurs	Paul Abok & Solange Umwizerwa

> *"Learning should be organized in such a way that learners with or without disabilities thrive. Technology will play a crucial role in making education more inclusive."*
>
> **Mrs. Joan Murungi**
> Head of Curriculum Teaching and Learning Resources, Rwanda Basic Education Board.

The issue of inclusivity in education is a moving target. While each country has its focus areas, disabilities are a common area that necessitated policy interventions in curriculum development, teacher training, and accessible teaching and learning materials (TLM). The main challenge is limited resources to meet demands for quality education adequately. This session focused on inclusive education for children with disabilities, highlighting efforts to increase access to quality education through policy frameworks, curriculum development, teacher training, and accessible TLM. Examples from Rwanda, Malawi, and Lesotho showcased ongoing initiatives to create inclusive educational systems that accommodate the diverse needs of learners with disabilities, from intellectual to physical impairments.

Achievements/working practices

- Rwanda has successfully implemented a Special Needs and Inclusive Education Policy since 2019, advocating for learners with disabilities and ensuring access to national examinations and secondary education. The country has also developed specialized curricula and is leveraging technology, such as edutainment, to enhance accessibility for children with disabilities.

- Lesotho has incorporated inclusive education into its national curriculum, ensuring teachers are trained to meet the needs of learners with disabilities.

- Malawi, while still developing its inclusive education policy, has an inclusive education strategy and has made strides in aligning national initiatives with global frameworks.

Main challenges

A review of the challenges presented by the three countries largely reflects what is taking place in other African countries. The challenges include the following:

- **Inadequate resources:** Limited availability of accessible learning materials, such as textbooks in Braille and sign language, remains a significant barrier.

- **Teacher shortage:** There is a shortage of trained special needs teachers across all three countries, impacting the quality of education for learners with disabilities.

- **Infrastructure gaps:** Schools, particularly in Malawi, face challenges related to inadequate physical infrastructure and assistive devices for students with disabilities.

- **High teacher turnover:** In Malawi, a lack of incentives for special needs teachers, primarily, has led to a high turnover, particularly at the primary school level.

Key lessons	Recommendations
• **Policy development and implementation:** Policies and curricula, like the Special Needs and Inclusive Education Policy in Rwanda and the inclusive curriculum in Lesotho, demonstrate the importance of a structured approach to inclusive education. • **Advocacy and partnerships:** Effective advocacy and mutual partnerships are essential in driving government action and ensuring access to quality education for children with disabilities. • **Leveraging technology:** Rwanda's use of technology to create accessible learning materials for students with disabilities offers a replicable model for other countries.	As governments allocate more resources for learners with special needs, this should be driven by a human rights approach, which calls for catering to the needs of every child. The following are additional recommendations: • **Strengthening policy implementation:** Governments should fast-track the development and implementation of inclusive education policies, ensuring they guide the development of national education sector plans that are well-aligned with the national blueprints and global commitments like CESA and SDG 4. • **Increase resource investment:** To improve access to education for children with disabilities, governments should allocate more funding for specialized learning materials, assistive devices, and inclusive infrastructure. This includes producing textbooks in accessible formats, such as Braille, and incorporating technologies like sign language and audio books in digital learning tools. • **Enhance teacher training and support:** A stronger focus on training teachers in inclusive education pedagogy is necessary, particularly in special needs education. Training institutions should incorporate inclusive education courses as part of their core curriculum to equip future teachers to handle a broad range of disabilities. • **Advocate for greater community awareness:** Programs should emphasize raising awareness among parents and communities about supporting children with disabilities. Ensuring parents understand their children's needs is key to fostering a supportive learning environment.

• **Teacher training:** Continuous investment in teacher training, including curriculum adjustments for inclusive education, is critical in addressing the learning needs of students with disabilities across all education levels.	• **Promote greater partnerships for inclusive education:** Collaboration with international organizations and NGOs should be strengthened to secure resources and technical assistance for inclusive education programs. • **Expand the use of technology in education:** Governments should prioritize integrating digital learning tools, such as edutainment and adapted online content, to make learning accessible for all children, including those with disabilities.

Closing the Evidence Gap: Scalable and Cost-Effective EdTech in Africa with Focus on Foundational Learning

Moderator	Eliud Chemweno, Lead, EdTech Ecosystems, Mastercard Foundation CITL
Panellists / Speakers	Albert Nsengiyumva, Executive Secretary, ADEA Nissi Madu, Co-Creation Hub Patrick Walugembe, Program Officer, IDRC (Online) Alex Twinomugisha, Senior Education Technology Specialist, World Bank (Online)
Rapporteurs	Henriette Gwizamahoro & Yonah Nyundo

> "Technology should serve a purpose. Let us first ask ourselves, 'What are we trying to solve?'"
>
> **Albert Nsengiyumva,**
> Executive Secretary,
> Association for the Development
> of Education in Africa (ADEA)

Education technology (EdTech) has been put forward as a key contributor to solving learning challenges. It is evident that EdTech has a role to play, as witnessed during the COVID-19 period. However, the diverse social and economic situations on the continent and within countries' urban and rural settings have created a clear demarcation in accessing and using new technology.

Thus, education has not fully leveraged technology equally across the board, making it difficult to fully determine its efficacy. This notwithstanding, the countries' pocket EdTech initiatives are promising enough to forge ahead and scale such initiatives. In this session, countries shared their experience in using technology to enhance efforts on foundational learning. The initiatives include centrally supporting teachers to using digital tools that support structured pedagogy and adaptive learning at the foundational level; embracing system-wide solutions that aid in teaching at the right level, creating a foundation for scalable best practices; integrating AI-driven and learner-centered approaches to personalize learning experiences for children; and laying greater emphasis on collaborative, multi-sectoral approaches involving private sector stakeholders to enable inclusive and sustainable EdTech innovations.

Main challenges

- **Limited infrastructure:** Many EdTech solutions require substantial investment and collaborative support from diverse sectors such as energy and telecommunications. Due to the already overstretched national education budgets, countries cannot have national infrastructure supporting digital skills. Thus, the desire for scalability is hampered.
- **Data, evidence, and decision-making: Persistent gaps in evidence remain, which must be addressed** to demonstrate to policymakers that they can make impactful data-driven decisions in EdTech.
- **Weak policy:** Non-inclusive policies and funding constraints create barriers to widespread EdTech adoption.

Key lessons	Recommendations
- Effective EdTech solutions hinge on digital infrastructure and cost-effectiveness; thus, sustainable partnerships are essential to balance the costs. - The COVID-19 pandemic confirmed and underscored the need for integrated technology solutions to safeguard education and ensure continuity in cases of emergencies. - Demand for EdTech has surged post-pandemic, necessitating market-driven and collaborative models to enhance scalability. - Evidence-based, contextually aligned policies are vital in addressing regional diversity and local learning needs.	- Mobilize and engage partners and local experts/stakeholders in designing policies with scalability in mind, ensuring EdTech is inclusive, adaptive, and aligned with local needs. - Involve local researchers in EdTech initiatives to ensure contextualized evidence that informs scalable solutions. - Focus on empowering teachers as they are central to effective learning – EdTech should support rather than replace human-centered instruction. - Establish multi-sector collaborations with key players like telecommunication, electricity, and internet providers to bridge infrastructure gaps. - Adopt evidence-based decision-making, drawing on robust data and research to guide policy and investment in EdTech. - Encourage early engagements with the private sector to create sustainable business models that attract investment and innovation. - Facilitate EdTech co-creation by fostering ecosystems where developers, education stakeholders, and policymakers collaboratively design impactful solutions.

We Measure What We Value, and We Value What We Measure: Progress in Foundational Learning Assessments Nationally and Internationally

Moderator	Emily Woolf, Senior Education Advisor & Global Policy and Funds Team Lead, FCDO
Panellists / Speakers	Jean Claude Nzeyimana, Director, Examinations Department, Rwanda National Examinations and School Inspection Authority (NESA).
	Stephen Taylor, Director for Research, M&E, Department if Basic Education, South Africa
	Hilaire Hounkpodote, Coordinator, PASEC
	Rebecca Povec Pagel, Global Coalition for Foundational Learning, USAID
	Prof. Yayra Dzakadzie, Director-General, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, Ghana
Discussant	Louis Crouch, Senior Economist, RTI International Development Group
Rapporteurs	Dr Andile Dube & Elysee Tuyishime

> *"Data must guide our actions. You cannot fix what you do not measure. We are utilizing the Education Management Information System to target resources where they are most needed."*
>
> **Madalitso Wirima Kambauwa,** Honourable Minister of Education, Malawi

The phrase, "only what gets measured can be evaluated and addressed," has been used widely and in various ways to underscore the value of quality data and evidence-informed intervention. Foundational learning has only recently become more visible in Africa's education agenda. Therefore, stakeholders must analyze all the facets that make an ideal foundational learning model to guide the data collection for effective decision-making.

This session focused on highlighting the country's efforts in measuring learning assessment. Twelve years ago, at a similar meeting in Kigali, very few countries were assessing learning effectively, calling for the need to measure learning as one of the key recommendations. Presently, the number has increased with governments taking a more central role. There is also greater involvement of civil societies, increased focus on the foundational level, and more emphasis on mother tongue languages. The question is how to use these experiences in other countries to enhance learning and support teachers. The following section summarises a sample of cases shared during the session.

Rwanda enumerated its journey from examination-focused assessment in pre-2000 to increased focus on learning outcomes at the foundational level, in line with CBC, with the first foundational learning assessment done in 2011. The country has moved from paper-based assessment to online assessment using Excel. It later established the Rwanda National Examinations and School Inspection Authority (NESA), which monitors the implementation of norms and standards. The country is developing dashboards to access Comprehensive Assessment Management Information System (CAMIS) data easier. The government is exploring ways of gathering more skill-specific data from subjects beyond Kinyarwanda reading, including English and Mathematics, to determine who needs extra support (students, teachers, and schools) and develop NESA staff capacity to lead the analysis and aspirations.

South Africa has developed benchmarks for all African Languages. The country outlined the rigorous process they undertook to develop benchmarks for all languages, particularly in a complex context. The process required a range of expertise, including linguists and data analysis, and having a technical team that brings everything together. Important to note is the fact that reading benchmarks differ depending on different languages. Each language has a different characteristic. The benchmarking cannot be derived from English, given the language structure. For this reason, the country must address the challenge of measuring foundational learning effectively.

Ghana shared on its National Standardized Test (NST) that aims to ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable, and quality basic and secondary education, leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes. The country tracks progress on the quality of teaching, learning, and good practices in its primary schools. It provides essential data on literacy and numeracy skills among primary learners. Of interest is that Ghana uses the mother tongue as the language of instruction until P3.

PAL Network introduced the two assessment modules, namely, ICAN modules (including numbers and data display, shape, measurement, and pattern) and ICRe modules (including oral language comprehension skills, decoding skills, and reading comprehension skills). These assess basic skills like reading and simple arithmetic in children in their homes, orally and one-on-one, with the support of citizen volunteers. This is done in a way that ensures the safety of the children.

PASEC highlighted its ongoing work of supporting countries in managing their educational systems by conducting national diagnostic evaluations in African francophone countries, Asia, and Lebanon.

Global Coalition for Foundational Learning partner representative provided information about the coalition, which brings together different organizations such as USAID, FCDO, GPE, Melinda Gates, UNICEF, UNESCO, and the World Bank. They are all committed to acting on foundational learning and global measurement of early learning outcomes.

Main challenges	Recommendations
• Some measuring models, such as Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), measure reading comprehension, not foundational skills. • There is a tendency to undervalue things that are hard to measure.	• Governments are encouraged to collaborate with the Global Coalition for Foundational Learning. • There is a need to have clear post-survey and national-level advocacy to ensure that decision-makers take the findings on board.

Empowering Africa's Future: Advancing Foundational Literacy and Numeracy to End Learning Poverty

Moderators	Naila Butt, Senior Education Consultant, UNICEF/African Union Matthew Robert Goldie-Scot, Education Program Consultant, Education Program Consultant, UNICEF Liaison Office to the African Union
Panellists / Speakers	Sophia Ashipala, Head of Education Division, African Union-ESTI Wongani Grace Taulo, Regional Advisor, UNICEF Prof Brahm Fleisch, UNICEF FLN Consultant to SADC Nelson Mbarushimana, Director General, Rwanda Education Board Tendekai Mukoyi, Program Manager, Teaching at the Right Level, Youth Impact Human Capital Africa
Discussants	Hon. Madalitso Wirima Kambauwa, Minister of Education, Malawi Hon. Conrad Sackey, Minister of Basic and Secondary Education, Sierra Leone
Rapporteurs	Hellen Inyega & Santos Akhilele

> *"Let's use this opportunity to make African children a global example of resilience, potential, and achievement."*
>
> **Sophia Ndemutila Ashipala**
> Head of Division,
> African Union-ESTI

Continental-level commitment and campaigns, data-driven and evidence-based interventions, regional and local scaling of effective programs, infrastructure, and resource allocation, and teacher support and training are part of a collective movement across African nations to end learning poverty by improving early-grade literacy and numeracy and preparing future generations for greater social and economic resilience.

This session focused on discussing this movement. Challenges persist, with approximately 89% of African children being unable to read or perform basic mathematical operations by age 10, highlighting a foundational learning crisis that affects long-term economic and social potential across the continent. The foregoing is a summary of the discussions.

- **Continental commitment and campaigns:** The African Union, in collaboration with UNICEF and other stakeholders, launched the «End Learning Poverty for All in Africa» campaign, focused on ensuring foundational skills in literacy and numeracy. The campaign, «Can Read, Can Write, Foundation for Life,» underscores the need for basic skills as critical to lifelong learning and economic potential.

- **Data-driven and evidence-based interventions:** Multiple partners, such as the Global Education Monitoring Report and Youth Impact, presented evidence-based strategies in foundational learning. Countries are using data tools such as Human Capital Africa's Scorecard to track progress, which helps guide policy decisions to strengthen accountability and effectiveness in foundational learning interventions.

- **Regional and local scaling of effective programs:** Programs embracing effective approaches like Structured pedagogy and "Teaching at the Right Level—TaRL» have been effectively adapted in various regions. Countries like Malawi and Sierra Leone are integrating evidence-based interventions tailored to their educational contexts to boost early-grade literacy and numeracy skills.

- **Infrastructure and resource allocation:** To support foundational learning, significant attention is being directed towards infrastructure, including Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) facilities, school feeding programs, and digital tools for education accessibility. For example, Malawi's Building Education Foundations through Innovation and Technology (BIFID) program aims to equip schools with digital resources to promote equity in education.

- **Teacher support and training:** A strong emphasis is on enhancing teacher capacity through continuing professional development and equitable deployment, particularly in underserved areas. Countries prioritize teacher support to address high learner-teacher ratios, ensuring better foundational learning outcomes across all regions.

Main challenges

1. **Resource constraints:** Financial constraints hamper the education sector, particularly for the foundational years. Many African countries face challenges securing sufficient funding for early education, infrastructure, and teacher support. Additionally, rising debt burdens limit the capacity for educational investments, while some international funders are expected to reduce their contributions in the coming years.

2. **Teacher shortages and capacity:** There is an acute shortage of adequately trained teachers, with over 15 million teachers needed across the continent by 2030, compared to 44 million globally. High learner-teacher ratios, especially in rural areas, impede effective learning, as teachers often lack sufficient training in foundational pedagogy.

3. **Misalignment of curricula and assessments:** In several cases, curricula, textbooks, and assessment methods are not aligned with foundational learning goals, especially in Mathematics. This creates instructional coherence gaps, hindering learner comprehension and skill acquisition.

4. **Systemic and structural challenges:** Rapid population growth in Africa places additional pressure on educational systems. Expanding enrolment numbers leads to overcrowded classrooms, inadequate facilities, and stretched resources, making delivering quality education at scalechallenging.

5. **Inequality in access and learning outcomes:** Foundational learning challenges disproportionately impact the most vulnerable populations, including rural communities and low-income families. This inequity is exacerbated by limited access to resources like school meals, WASH facilities, and educational materials, which affects attendance and retention rates.

6. **Inadequate accountability and monitoring:** Robust accountability and tracking mechanisms are needed to monitor progress in foundational learning. Without systematic tracking and peer review, progress toward reducing learning poverty remains slow and inconsistent across regions.

7. **Weak early childhood education (ECE) systems:** The lack of robust early childhood education (ECE) programs leads to children entering primary school unprepared, affecting their ability to keep up with foundational learning. Investments in early childhood are often insufficient despite the critical role ECE plays in preparing children for school.

These challenges highlight systemic issues within the educational frameworks of many African countries, requiring collaborative and strategic solutions in funding, policy alignment, and capacity building.

Key lessons

1. **Prioritizing foundational learning as a non-negotiable:** Foundational learning is essential for success in later educational stages. Adequate primary literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional skills do not compete with other education phases; they are prerequisites to succeeding in higher education. Thus, prioritizing foundational learning is critical to achieving long-term educational and economic outcomes.

2. **Importance of data-driven approaches:** Evidence-based, quality data-driven approaches are crucial for effective interventions. Using tools such as the Human Capital Africa Scorecard, countries can better target resources, measure impact better, and adapt strategies as needed. These data insights support the development of scalable and contextually relevantpolicies and interventions.

3. **Community and stakeholder engagement:** Engaging communities, local leaders, parents, and civil society is vital for sustained progress in foundational learning. In Malawi, for example, November was designated National Education Month, and community-driven events like National Foundational Learning Day exemplify how community involvement can support foundational learning objectives.

4. **Leveraging local solutions and innovations:** Programs embracing and contextualizing approaches like TaRL demonstrate the power of targeting instruction based on students' learning levels rather than age or grade. Locally adapted programs that leverage innovative practices such as digital learning (e.g., Malawi's BIFID program) can effectively bridge learning gaps.

5. **Structured pedagogy and TaRL:** Teaching approaches such as structured pedagogy, and TaRL are proving successful in increasing literacy and numeracy rates and social and emotional skills. By adapting instruction to meet students' current learning abilities, teachers can support individual learner progress better, thereby reducing the latter's risk of falling behind.

6. **Cross-sector collaboration:** Success in foundational learning requires collaboration across sectors. Partnerships with organizations like UNICEF, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), and national governments provide critical support in areas ranging from teacher training to WASH facilities and digital infrastructure. Such cross-sectoral cooperation maximizes impact and resource efficiency.

7. **Investment in teacher capacity and deployment:** Training and deploying teachers effectively, especially to underserved areas, is key to improving foundational learning outcomes. Professional development for teachers and structured support, including incentives for rural placements, can enhance teaching effectiveness in foundational skills.

8. **Adapting to local contexts and economic realities:** Given the financial constraints and diverse economic contexts across African countries, it is essential to pursue resource efficient. These scalable interventions can be sustained with limited budgets. Tailoring solutions to fit local conditions helps ensure they are both practical and effective in the long term.

These lessons emphasize the need for strategic, evidence-based, and community-supported initiatives prioritizing foundational learning as the basis for educational advancement.

Recommendations

Governments need to scale proven, evidence-based programs, such as TaRL, structured pedagogy, and play-based learning, to reach more learners across diverse contexts. These approaches have successfully improved foundational learning and should be integrated into national educational systems for maximum impact. Additional recommendations include the following:

- **Increase investment in teacher training and support:** Prioritize professional development and structured support for teachers, focusing on equipping them with the skills necessary for effective foundational learning instruction. Incentivize deployment to underserved areas to ensure equitable access to quality education.
- **Align policy, curriculum, and assessment for coherence:** Ensure foundational learning goals are fully integrated into policy frameworks, curricula, and assessments. This is essential for achieving consistent, high-quality learning outcomes across all regions and grades.
- **Enhance community and stakeholder engagement:** Strengthen partnerships with communities, parents, local leaders, and civil society to foster a supportive environment for foundational learning. Community involvement can help reinforce the importance of early-grade learning and increase accountability at the local level.
- **Establish robust accountability and monitoring systems:** Develop continent-wide peer review and accountability frameworks to track and assess progress on foundational learning initiatives. Regular monitoring and public reporting will help maintain momentum and ensure that interventions deliver measurable improvements.

Financing & Beyond: Innovative Approaches to Private Sector Engagement in Foundational Learning.

Moderator	Catherine Honeyman, Senior Education Specialist, USAID Rwanda
Panellists / Speakers	Alice Kirezi, Head of Investment and Social Impact, Equity Bank, Rwanda Emeka Oparah, Vice President, Corporate Communications & CSR, Airtel Africa plc Theoneste Gakire, CEO, Kalaos Printing, Rwanda Eric Dusabimana, Chairman, Rwandan Children's Book Organization and Bakame Editions Publisher
Rapporteurs	Henriette Gwizamahoro & Theoneste Niyomushumba

> *"Book sales alone cannot sustain publishers; financial autonomy requires involving multiple partners and investments."*
>
> **Eric Dusabimana**
> (Bakame Editions)

The role of the private sector in education continues to evolve as different forms of partnerships are explored with varying results. However, suspicion and limited appreciation of the modus operandi of the various partners hinder smooth collaboration. This session discussed the roles and strategies of different private sector players in advancing foundational learning in Rwanda.

The speakers, representing diverse organizations, highlighted their contributions and challenges and proposed solutions for strengthening foundational learning.

Equity Bank (Alice Kirezi): Equity Bank operates as a commercial bank and a foundation for social initiatives. It has greatly supported individuals in accessing banking services for the benefit of education. The bank financially supports education, agriculture, and health initiatives, viewing education as a social engine for development. So far, it has offered over 6,000 scholarships to vulnerable primary school children nationwide and provides affordable loans with low interest rates to address specific needs within the education sector.

Printing Association (Theoneste Gakire): The Printing Association produces education-related teaching and learning materials, including books and posters. It collaborates with government institutions and development partners to make resources affordable. The organization views printing educational materials as a noble task, contributing significantly to the education agenda.

Rwanda Children's Book Organization (Eric Dusabimana): The Rwanda Children's Book Organization's mandate is to promote a reading culture within the sector. It believes foundational learning is key to fostering a culture of learning. The organization produces children's books, notably the "Karame" magazine, which has reached numerous public schools with support from organizations like Save the Children and the French Embassy.

Main challenges

- Despite banks offering special facilities, most beneficiaries lack the necessary skills and understanding of the bank's related procedures, such as creating a business plan and the respective budget. Thus, the beneficiaries are not able to take advantage of the facilities.
- **Accreditation:** The school's book accreditation process takes too long, and publishers get discouraged from publishing for learning purposes.
- **Financial autonomy:** Publishers invest heavily in producing high-quality books but often lack adequate financial resources. Secondly, the publishing industry's current sales cannot support a stable business. Unfortunately, they are not financially bankrolled by the government, which hinders their growth.
- **Coordination:** There is no coordinated mechanism for publishers to work harmoniously. The publishers require greater government involvement to bring them together.
- **Lack of skills:** There is insufficient knowledge of printing and packaging learning-related materials.

Key lessons	Recommendations
• **Education as a social responsibility:** Private sector institutions, like Equity Bank, need to view educational support as a social investment. This approach shifts focus from profit to social impact, encouraging flexible financial solutions for educational initiatives. • **Local production of educational materials:** Shifting the production of teaching and learning materials (TLM) to Africa could improve material accessibility, create jobs, and strengthen local economies.	• Improved stakeholder engagement: Governments must facilitate engagement that creates a greater enabling environment for partnerships with the private sector to thrive. This includes reviewing the various aspects of collaboration to ensure a win-win outcome. • **Enhanced collaboration and clear book policies:** A collaborative plan for book procurement would make educational materials more affordable and accessible. • **Development partner involvement:** Partners are called upon to support schools with collateral to enable the schools to access loans. • **Local production of TLM:** Building in-country capacity to produce TLM is important. This would ensure that such materials are context-relevant, producing local jobs and reducing costs.

Teacher Policies for Improved Foundational Learning

Moderator	Ms Saima Malik, Senior Education Specialist, World Bank Group
Panellists / Speakers	Leon Mugenzi, Head of Teacher Development, Management, Career Guidance and Counselling Department, Rwanda Basic Education Board Mariama Chow, Director of Standards and Quality Assurance Directorate and oversees the In-Service Education and Training Unit, Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, The Gambia Anna Nancy Mendy, Director of Early Childhood and Inclusive Education, Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, The Gambia Carlos Vargas, Chief of Section and Head of Secretariat of the International Task Force on teachers for Education 2030
Rapporteurs	Brenda Anjuri & Diane Sengati

> *"Improving foundation learning without improving teacher management cannot work."*
>
> **Mariama Chow**
> Director of Standards and Quality Assurance Directorate, Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, The Gambia

The role of teachers in improving foundational learning cannot be understated. Teacher workforce management remains a moving target for governments. Countries have instituted various initiatives to improve teacher welfare. Despite these, common issues still linger, such as teacher shortages (Sub-Saharan Africa requires 15 million teachers to meet educational demands, with 75% and 90% of the countries facing severe teaching shortages in primary and secondary education, respectively), inability to attract and retain high-quality teachers (teacher attrition exacerbates shortages, doubling globally from 4.62% in 2015 to 9.06% in 2022), welfare/ remuneration, recruitment, deployment, and limited data for effective workforce management.

This session discussed how teacher policies can improve foundational learning outcomes, including those on planning, managing, and incentivizing the teaching workforce. It addressed critical issues such as teacher shortages, attracting, selecting, deploying, and retaining high-quality teachers, and the importance of quality data for effective workforce management.

The World Bank presented its teacher framework. A summary of the framework shows that it is designed to strengthen and support a pipeline of teachers for improved learning. The framework supports better teacher deployment and retention, teacher incentives, and Teacher Management Information systems. The Gambia and Rwanda highlighted the initiatives that are working in their environment. **The Government of Rwanda** provides 300 scholarships for in-service teachers and 50% fee payment for some teachers in the Teacher Training College (TTC). The government has developed a Teacher Management Information System (TMIS), a web-based platform, to support data collection, analysis, and use for the teaching workforce in pre-primary, primary, secondary, and TVET learning and training institutions. Linked to other systems to ensure quality data, TMIS is fully operational and provides information on vacant posts, teacher placement, teacher transfers, teacher maternity leave, and teacher scholarships. **The Gambia,** on its part, has established the teacher hardship allowance to motivate and encourage qualified teachers and female teachers to be posted to the country's most remote areas.

Main challenges

1. **Qualified teacher shortages:** There are insufficient qualified (quantity, quality, and diversity) teachers taking postings in remote areas. Teachers are reluctant to go for postings because of the harsh realities, such as poor housing. Also, female teachers remain under-represented in hardship schools.
2. **Teacher retention:** Teacher attrition rates are highest in early years and near retirement. This frustrates the system, as it cannot retain qualified teaching personnel, further perpetuating the shortages.

Key lessons	Recommendations
• Quality teachers for foundational learning are essential to improve quality education with a strong foundation in terms of learning outcomes. • Where possible, use qualified contract teachers regressively to bridge the gap where there are no teachers to ensure quality foundational learning. • Incentives for teachers enhance their motivation to teach. • Teachers are essential for maintaining education quality, and a shortage of qualified teachers directly hinders foundational learning outcomes.	• Establish a holistic teacher management policy focusing on recruitment, training, deployment, retention, continuing professional development, and motivation. Evidence from the countries' pocket initiatives shows that special allowances and scholarships for further education and professional support, among others, can positively impact teacher performance. • Transform and improve initial teacher education to ensure that teachers acquire the skills for teaching at the foundational level. • Enhance international cooperation to engage different constituencies in collaborative efforts to address teacher shortages and embrace regional and continental teacher mobility frameworks.

Steering the Ship:
Effective School Leadership for Foundational Learning

Moderator	Manos Antoninis, Director, GEM Report
Panellists / Speakers	Andrew Kwizera, Inter School Peer Learning Officer, Rwanda Basic Education Board Chantal Uwiragiye, Technical Director, USAID Schools and Systems (Tunoze Gusoma) project, Rwanda. Chantal Kabanda Dusabe, Technical Lead - African Centre for School Leadership (ACSL), VVOB Jocelyne Cyiza Kirezi, Strategic Education Advisor, M&E and Research, VVOB
Rapporteurs	Tim Newbold & Shariq Akhund

> *Head teachers are the head of the school, but they don't work alone; they rely on learners, teachers, parents, and the broader community to achieve literacy outcomes.»*
>
> **Chantal Uwiragiye**

Research has shown that effective school leadership is essential in achieving enhanced learning outcomes, positioning effective leaders as the cornerstone for successful schools. Various initiatives are in place to respond to this research finding, including the African Centre for School Leadership (ACSL). However, the challenge lies in the operating environment of headteachers, which, in most cases, hinders the implementation of acquired knowledge. This session discussed the critical role that strong school leadership plays in improving foundational learning outcomes. The session opened with a presentation on the findings from the 2024/25 GEM Report on leadership in education. The report underlined the link between good school leadership and enhanced learning outcomes. Rwanda also shared its key experience in this area, including as the ACSL host.

Rwanda has developed a structured, multi-faceted policy framework for school leadership, incorporating school leaders' recruitment, induction, and ongoing training. Establishing a dedicated unit within the Rwanda Basic Education Board supports this framework by focusing on leadership standards and capacity building. Evidence from evaluations carried out among 500 headteachers in their respective schools showed different levels of improvement, starting with the learning scores and the conducive learning environment.

The African Centre for School Leadership (ACSL), coordinated by partners like VVOB, supports Pan-African efforts to professionalize school leadership. It collects and translates best practices into policy and practice briefs and offers technical support to African countries, promoting locally relevant leadership policies and foundational learning strategies.

Main challenges

- **Limited alignment:** Headteachers are often not aligned with their teaching staff on the importance of key issues. For example, in lesson observation, only 30% of head teachers saw lesson observations as very important, compared to 67% of teachers.
- **Selection criteria:** Policymakers face a major challenge in ensuring that people with the right skills and vision are identified, selected, prepared, and supported as leaders.
- **Inadequate preparation:** A global review of school principal preparation and training programmes and courses suggests that barely half focus on key leadership dimensions required for success. Only one-fifth of principal preparation and training programs cover all four dimensions of leadership.
- **Limited coordination:** Leadership frameworks often overlook system-level leaders essential for implementing reforms. Without sufficient support for these leaders, educational reforms can stall and disrupt continuity, especially with high turnover rates in senior positions.

Key lessons	Recommendations
• Headteacher's depth of understanding of instruction in foundational learning directly influences school performance (those in better-performing schools have a stronger background in literacy and numeracy instruction, and the ones that understand the concept of instructional leadership are more motivated to provide pedagogical support and follow-up.) • For schools to thrive, there is a need to enhance teacher quality and instructional practice. • Parental and community engagement is vital: they offer a supportive learning environment outside school and are involved in decision-making and school culture. • Effective school leadership should not be hierarchical but promote shared responsibility. Leaders must distribute tasks to manage workload effectively and focus on instructional improvement rather than purely administrative duties. • More women in leadership can have positive outcomes for education.	• Invest in leadership at the government and community level to implement the desired goals. National plans at the school, system, and political levels need to nurture four essential leadership dimensions setting expectations, focussing on learning, fostering collaboration, and developing people. • Invest in the professionalization and management of school principals. This calls for putting in place (a) selection criteria of headteachers through open, competitive, and inclusive recruitment; (b) a clear strategy to prepare, train and support principals; (c) a mechanism to implement standards and recognize leader achievement in the complete professionalization of headteachers and ensure they are supported. • Promote shared leadership and collaborative school cultures by instituting robust community and parental engagement systems in school decision-making processes.

Engaging Parents and Communities in Foundational Learning

Moderator	Haritz Goya Lujambio, Education Specialist (Quality & Learning), UNICEF WCARO
Panellists / Speakers	Rakotojaona Lalaharontsoa (Tsoa), JICA, Projet d'Appui à la Gestion Participative et Décentralisée de l'École dénommé « TAFITA », Madagascar and Mali Santos Akhilele, Human Capital Africa, Nigeria, Malawi & Uganda Joseph Kaliisa, Building Tomorrow/Hempel Foundation, Uganda Theoneste Niyonzima, USAID Rwanda Senior Education Specialist Dez Byamukama, Chief of Party for the USAID Uburezi Iwacu project
Rapporteurs	Hellen Inyega & Theoneste Niyomushumba

> *"Strong school management, backed by community involvement, transforms learning outcomes and uplifts every child."*
>
> ———————————
>
> **Mr Rakotojaona Lalaharontsoa**
> (Tsoa)

Conventional education is looking back to the centuries-old African tradition, which states that the community's role is to bring up a child. Increasingly, communities are getting involved in improving foundational learning and overall educational outcomes across various African countries. Evidence shows remarkable differences in learners when they receive individual support within the homestead or when community members participate actively in processes within the school environment. The challenge lies in that initiatives are small-scale, time-consuming, and require more financial outlay.

The discussion in this session focused on sharing knowledge, innovation, and experiences on effective community participation and engagement strategies to improve foundational learning and overall educational outcomes across various African countries. The shared approaches include JICA's School Management Committee Approach (Madagascar, Mali, Niger); Human Capital Africa (HCA)'s Community Engagement Approach (Nigeria, Malawi, Uganda); CSO Building Tomorrow's Community Education Volunteer Program (Uganda); and USAID's Uburezi Iwacu Program (Rwanda).

Literacy and numeracy gains

- Programs like JICA's TAFITA project in Madagascar demonstrated measurable improvements in foundational skills. For example, remedial classes and "Teaching at the Right Level" (TaRL) methods increased mastery in subtraction and division, with learner comprehension rates jumping to 98% and 77%, respectively.
- Similar gains were reported by Uganda's «Building Tomorrow» initiative, where one-to-one tutoring by community education volunteers led to improved literacy and numeracy, with a high percentage of students advancing in skills.

Community-led school management and accountability

- Strengthening school management committees was a successful practice across programs. Committees comprise local stakeholders, including parents, community leaders, and educators, allowing for more effective decision-making and oversight.
- USAID's projects also implemented community-based monitoring tools and regular assessments to foster accountability and encourage community members to take active roles in school evaluations and improvement plans.

Innovative social and behavioural change communication

- Programs employed creative methods to engage communities, such as community theatre, radio programs, and SMS campaigns,
- as seen in Rwanda's USAID initiative. This strategy helped disseminate educational messages and advocate for parental involvement, literacy support, and positive behaviours toward education.
- USAID's collaboration with the Arts Centre through theatre performances, for instance, provided an interactive platform that engaged community members in discussions around inclusive education and child development.

Evidence-based approaches and regular assessment

- Evidence-based decision-making was a central theme. Organizations like HCA emphasize the importance of data collection, periodic testing, and assessments to adjust teaching strategies. For instance, periodic baseline assessments allowed educators to adapt teaching materials based on students' evolving needs.
- Regular community meetings and workshops on data interpretation helped maintain transparency, enabling communities to track and understand the progress in educational outcomes and make informed adjustments.

Empowering local volunteers and parental involvement

- Programs like Uganda's Building Tomorrow recruited local graduates as education volunteers who collaborated with community leaders and parents to ensure learner attendance and prevent dropouts.
- Involving parents directly in educational processes was a key practice. Programs used general assemblies and meetings to discuss educational goals, share learner progress, and collectively plan school action steps, empowering parents to support their children's learning journeys actively.

Localized and contextually adapted education solutions

- Local adaptation was a recurring practice. Translating the TaRL method into the Malagasy language in Madagascar and implementing reading programs in Somali and Mozambican languages are examples of tailoring education to meet community linguistic and cultural contexts, thus improving engagement and accessibility.

These achievements and practices underscore the importance of a collaborative, culturally responsive approach to foundational learning, where the community's role is emphasized in planning, implementation, and accountability for better educational outcomes.

Main challenges

The session highlighted several challenges in implementing community-engaged educational initiatives, as follows:

- **Leadership turnover and continuity issues:** Frequent changes in leadership, such as headmasters and school committee members, disrupt program continuity. When new leaders come in, programs often face delays or setbacks, as efforts are needed to reorient them to the project goals and practices. This creates a challenge in maintaining consistent support and momentum.

- **Resource limitations:** Many communities face funding, materials, and human resources constraints. This includes a shortage of teaching and learning materials (TLM) in libraries, teaching aids, and facilities, an inadequate number of community libraries, and insufficient incentives for librarians, which hampers the effectiveness of community-led interventions. Financial challenges also limit the scalability of successful programs across wider regions.

- **Community buy-in and consistent engagement:** Securing and sustaining community buy-in, especially in resource-constrained areas, can be challenging. While community members may initially participate, long-term engagement requires ongoing motivation and support. Involving all stakeholders consistently, particularly in remote areas, demands additional effort and resources.

- **Systemic and bureaucratic hurdles:** The alignment between community initiatives and national education policies is sometimes weak, leading to challenges in scaling or integrating these initiatives within government structures. Discrepancies in vision and expectations between Ministries, local governments, and community organizations create implementation barriers and slow progress.

- **Demonstrating and measuring impact:** Proving the effectiveness of community-led educational models to attract continued support and investment is challenging. Gathering and interpreting data consistently is difficult, especially in under-resourced areas, making it harder to showcase the positive impact of these programs convincingly to policymakers and funders.

- **High dropout rates and learner retention:** Keeping children in school, particularly in rural areas, remains a significant challenge. Programs noted difficulties preventing dropouts due to economic pressures, cultural factors, and limited parental involvement. Ensuring learners stay in school and progress toward their learning goals requires intensive community mobilization and support.

- **Scalability and sustainability:** While community-based approaches have succeeded on a smaller scale, scaling these models to reach larger populations and multiple regions presents logistical and financial challenges. Expanding programs requires adapting to different local contexts, which increases complexity and demands more resources.
- **Time constraints for comprehensive community engagement:** Engaging communities profoundly and regularly is time-intensive, especially in initiatives where community feedback, training, and decision-making are essential. Balancing time spent on community involvement with program implementation goals is a challenge that affects efficiency and project timelines.
- **Parental and community capacity for support:** Limited literacy and educational knowledge among parents and community members affect their ability to effectively support their children's learning. Many parents may lack the skills or understanding needed to engage in educational activities outside school, which can hinder the impact of community-led interventions.

These challenges reflect the complexities of implementing community-driven educational programs in diverse contexts and underscore the need for sustained, adaptable support and collaboration with government structures to achieve long-term impact.

Key lessons

The following are some of the lessons for implementing community-engaged educational initiatives in Africa:

1. **Sustainable community involvement is essential:** Successful projects demonstrate that sustained community participation, from planning to implementation and evaluation, is crucial. Building genuine community partnerships fosters ownership, enhancing long-term commitment to educational initiatives. Engaging parents, local leaders, and volunteers consistently is key to maintaining program momentum and achieving better outcomes.
2. **Localized approaches enhance effectiveness:** Tailoring education solutions to fit local languages, cultural contexts, and community needs significantly improves engagement and relevance. For example, local language instruction and community-driven remedial classes have proven effective in Madagascar. By adapting strategies to each community's unique context, initiatives are more likely to resonate with stakeholders and address specific educational gaps.

3. **Strong school management drives accountability:** Establishing and strengthening school committees that include local stakeholders (parents, teachers, and community leaders) increases accountability and transparency. These committees help monitor progress, manage resources, and ensure educational goals align with community priorities. Regular assessments and feedback loops keep all stakeholders invested in student learning and school improvement.

4. **Leadership stability is vital for consistency:** High turnover in key leadership positions, such as headmasters or school committee members, disrupts program continuity. To mitigate this, providing leadership training and documenting best practices can help incoming leaders understand and carry forward project objectives, even in the face of frequent personnel changes.

5. **Evidence-based decision-making strengthens programs:** Consistently using data to monitor and evaluate progress allows programs to adjust and improve over time. Baseline assessments, periodic testing, and sharing results with the community ensure that interventions are aligned with actual learning needs. Evidence-based approaches, as practiced in initiatives like TaRL, demonstrate clear progress and help communities understand the impact of their efforts.

6. **Multi-stakeholder collaboration increases impact:** Effective partnerships with government entities, NGOs, and international organizations amplify resources and expertise. Programs that work closely with Ministries, like the USAID-supported initiatives, benefit from broader policy alignment and additional support. Collaboration across stakeholders is essential to sustainably scale successful models and address resource gaps.

7. **Continuous engagement builds community resilience:** Involving communities in decision-making and sharing program updates regularly fosters resilience and adaptability. By incorporating feedback from parents and community leaders, initiatives remain relevant to local challenges and can pivot when necessary. This iterative engagement model helps communities feel invested in overcoming educational challenges, even amid broader socio-economic issues.

8. **Social and behavioural change communication is a powerful tool:** Employing creative communication methods, such as theatre and radio programs, raises awareness and shifts attitudes towards education. These strategies promote parental involvement and reinforce positive behaviours and support among broader community members. USAID's use of theatre to deliver educational messages exemplifies how cultural mediums can make educational goals more relatable and impactful.

9. **Empowering local volunteers helps to bridge resource gaps:** Community volunteers, especially trained local graduates, play a critical role in extending educational support in underserved areas. Volunteers help bridge resource and staffing gaps by mobilizing communities, conducting remedial classes, and offering one-on-one tutoring, as seen in Uganda's Building Tomorrow" program. Empowering local volunteers can sustain educational progress even with limited formal resources.

These lessons highlight the importance of local ownership, contextual adaptation, consistent leadership, and strong partnerships in designing and implementing community-based educational programs.

Recommendations

1. **Strengthen localized school management and accountability structures:** School committees drive accountability, encourage active community participation, and help ensure that programs are responsive to local challenges and goals. Governments need, therefore, to establish and support strong, locally managed school committees that include parents, teachers, and community leaders. These committees should be empowered to make decisions, monitor progress, and adapt strategies based on community needs.

2. **Foster multi-stakeholder collaboration for resource optimization and scaling:** Collaborative efforts increase resource availability, promote policy alignment, and allow for the scalable implementation of proven community-based education models, benefiting a larger population. Therefore, it facilitates partnerships between communities, governments, NGOs, and international organizations to leverage resources, align with national policies, and expand successful models to other regions. Governments are urged to increase resources/investment in more community libraries, aiming for at least one per sector and community engagement. Government ownership of community engagement programs is critical for sustainability.

3. **Adopt evidence-based approaches and regular assessments:** Data-driven decision-making enhances program effectiveness, allowing communities to see measurable impacts and make informed adjustments to improve learning outcomes. Implementing continuous assessments, such as baseline and periodic tests, enables schools to evaluate learner progress and adjust teaching methods. Assessment data should be shared openly with communities to foster transparency and engagement.

4. **Enhance community capacity and leadership stability:** Leadership continuity and well-trained community members strengthen the consistency of educational initiatives, reducing disruptions and maintaining momentum despite personnel changes. It is important to provide regular training for local leaders, volunteers, and committee members to build capacity and ensure program leadership continuity. Documenting best practices and creating transition plans for leadership roles is also key in addressing high turnover.

5. **Promote social and behavioural change communication to encourage community engagement:** Effective communication strategies foster a supportive environment for learning by reaching a broader audience and reinforcing community ownership of educational outcomes. Education stakeholders should, therefore, utilize culturally relevant communication tools such as community theatre, radio, and social media to engage and inform community members about educational initiatives, parental involvement, and positive learning behaviours.

The Role of Data in Transforming Foundational Learning Achievements

Moderator	Inyang Umoren, Project Manager, ESDC Project, ADEA
Panellists / Speakers	**Presenters** Manos Antoninis, Director, Global Education Monitoring Report Rudranarayan Sahoo, Education Specialist, Lead Quality and Learning UNICEF ESARO Pei-tseng Jenny Hsieh, Research Director, NFER
	Speakers Mrs. Patrine Banda-Chilala, Assistant Director, Early Childhood Education, Ministry of Education, Zambia Mr. Jean Claude Nzeyimana, Head of the Basic Education and TVET Examination Department, National Examination and School Inspection Authority (NESA), Rwanda Mr. Stephen Owusu, Deputy Director, Ghana Education Service Mr. Samuel Njenga Mwambura, Assistant Director, Education Assessment Resource Centre, National Examination Council (KNEC), Kenya Ms. Pei-tseng Jenny Hsieh, Research Director, National Foundations for Education Research (NFER)
Rapporteurs	Mary W. Sichangi & Paul Abok

> *"To know where one is going, one must know where they are."*
>
> **Shem Bodo**
> ADEA

Whereas data is a critical ingredient in the decision-making process, countries face challenges in producing quality data and using the evidence to inform their interventions in policy, planning, programming, monitoring, and impact evaluation. The session discussed insights on systemic challenges of generating high-quality assessment data to promote decision-making in African countries using reports of ongoing projects and case studies.

The GEM Report raises the fundamental question of why it is difficult to "measure and report foundational learning data, and how to support better use of data." According to **UNICEF ESARO,** "countries need to develop their capacity to generate and use data to improve their educational systems and ensure sustainable progress."

The National **Foundation for Education Research** emphasized that "government ownership and partner collaboration are key to turning commitments into action on foundational learning assessments." Some of the **notable achievements** that have taken place include the following:

- Mapping of learning assessments and partnerships across countries and regions.
- Development of assessments tailored to specific national and regional education needs.
- Synergistic actions between governments and development partners to strengthen learning outcomes.
- Use of comparable tools that allow for benchmarking progress between countries.
- Dissemination of public goods like the MICS (Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys) framework and other best practices.

Main Challenges

- Few countries invest in learning assessments, with many initiatives led by development partners rather than national governments.

- Learning assessments are often project-based and lack uniform technical standards for national implementation.

- Lack of clarity on assessment purposes and processes, leading to fragmented efforts and limited implementation of findings.

- Sustainability challenges due to limited resources and capacity within education systems. It was noted that there is a high attrition rate in the educational system, especially among the teaching fraternity.

- Insecurity and fragile contexts further hinder the consistency of assessments. In some countries, schools are closed for long periods.

- Long timeframes between assessment design and publication (3-4 years) make the data less timely for decision-making.

- Weak complementarity between large-scale assessments and school-based assessments limits the ability to effect systemic change.

Key lessons	Recommendations
• Sharing good practices among countries and regions is crucial for improving learning outcomes. • Adopting both affordable and adaptable assessments to local contexts enhances the tracking of learner progress and can provide better feedback for adjustment of teaching methods. • Alignment is key. Thus, ensuring that assessments are comparable and complementary to existing education initiatives is valuable. • It is important to build local capacity to hold development partners and technical agencies more accountable for skill transfer to national teams, ensuring sustainability. • Applying the entire assessment process, utilizing available instruments for measuring foundational learning, and adopting relevant reporting criteria contributes to better tracking learner progress. • Leveraging technology, such as Kenya's Educational Assessment Research Centre (EARC) platform, facilitates online assessments and real-time teacher feedback.	• Use empirical data to guide assessment decisions, curriculum implementation, and educational development. • Empower teachers with tools, like online platforms and modules, to access real-time feedback and improve learning outcomes. • Promote e-assessments and inclusive adaptations to enhance real-time and quality data-driven decision-making. • Improve assessment benchmarks to ensure assessments meet national and global standards, allowing for effective monitoring of learning outcomes. • Scale successful interventions, like Zambia's Catch-up Program, which has used data-driven approaches to improve literacy, numeracy, and social and emotional learning at the right learning levels.

**Making Sure They Are Ready and Supported:
Delivering High-Quality Teacher Education and Continuing
Professional Development in Foundational Learning**

Moderator	Dr. Suman Sachdeva, Education Specialist and Global Lead on Foundational Learning, UNICEF
Panellists / Speakers	Steven Owusu, Deputy Director General, Ghana Education Service.
	Prof. Yatta Kanu, Chief Education Officer, Ministry of Basic Education and Senior Secondary Education, Sierra Leonne.
	Huruma Elias Mageni, Assistant Director, Teacher Education Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Tanzania.
	Olugbolahan Afowowe, Assistant Director Basic Education Department, Federal Ministry of Education, Nigeria.
	Sharon Haba, Deputy Director, Education Office, USAID Rwanda
	Haritritz Gomba Lujambio, Chief Education Officer, UNICEF WCARO
	Sanet C. Steenkamp, Executive Director, Ministry of Education, Art and Culture, Namibia.
	Matthew Robert Goldie-Scot, Education Program Consultant, UNICEF Liaison Office to the African Union
Rapporteurs	Dominic Muntanga & Henriette Gwizamahoro

> *"Leadership is about influencing others towards a goal, not just the work of school directors. It includes those in leadership positions at the system level—local government, political leaders, civil servants—all contributing to set and achieve educational goals."*
>
> **Manos Antoninis**
> UNESCO

Discussions with teachers new to the profession will always bring to the fore the culture shock they receive in the classroom. This is much more evident with growing technology and family dynamics that have resulted in the teacher not being the sole source of knowledge for the learner. Thus, for learning to take place, teachers must be supported to build the necessary skills to manage a modern child as the buck stops with teachers, and they are the most important factor. We must ensure teachers are brought in and supported to improve learning outcomes. Supporting teachers improves their motivation and leads to improved learning outcomes. This session, recognizing that countries have been making great efforts to enhance the teaching profession, provided an opportunity to share what countries are doing.

With support from development partners, Nigeria has undertaken several initiatives in three states. The country developed a Learning Hub for teachers in response to the COVID-19 pandemic experience when it became evident that some teachers lacked pedagogy and skills and trained teachers in pedagogical skills to improve teaching and learning. It also developed IT centers for learners to build their digital skills. There is ongoing training on structured pedagogical skills, with basic subjects curated on tablets. The teacher development program is also ongoing and supported by partners such as GPE and UNICEF.**Nigeria** has also enhanced the Better Education Service Delivery for All (BESDA) program and scaled it for sustainability. Master trainers are training teachers in hard-to-reach areas.

The current focus of **Sierra Leone is** to improve the pedagogical skills of teachers in numeracy and literacy. The country brings professors and practitioners together to blend theory and practice and share learning. An interesting initiative has seen pre-service lecturers become the Master Trainers of Foundational Teachers as a cost-serving mechanism for sustainability. Trainers train teachers in teacher training colleges, focusing on numeracy and literacy acquisition. While TOT is criticized, a community of practice is introduced to enable teachers to support each other. Research shows that this ongoing support allows for improvement in practice through reflection and observation. The school quality inspectors support the teachers every month.

Tanzania has developed a School-based and Cluster-based Continuing Professional Development (CPD) program. In 2020, the country created a National CPD Framework, describing all stakeholders involved in the process. It also decided to take on outdoor and school-based CPD, which are less expensive. Additionally, it produced guidelines (Needs Assessment Guidelines, Schools and Teacher Continuous Professional Development Guidelines, and School and Cluster Guidelines) and a peer handbook on establishing and managing teacher resource centers.

The country has trained key stakeholders (2 Champion Teachers, the Academic Dean, and a Champion) from the national to school level. It has implemented an online learning management system platform to facilitate the training of teachers. Through MoU with Airtel, all materials access is zero-rated, and all teachers have a tablet from pre-primary to primary. The teachers also engage in CPD once per week for 2 hours. They stay in a learning community in schools, where teachers of the same subjects sit and work together, and if there is a challenge, they forward to the ward level.

In 2019, **Namibia** rolled out a structured pedagogy approach called Jolly Phonics, which started as a project and grew to system level from Grades 1- 3. The Ministry of Education, Art, and Culture has trained all Grade 1-3 teachers with leadership and support from the Government. It conducted a National Needs Impact Assessment to determine how the approach impacts school systems. Countries must not forget to bring back fun and play in school, with teachers being the most significant resources. As gatekeepers, principals are critical as they must support teachers' growth. The Ministry has established a cluster system in mainstream schools across 40 regions, where special teachers work for 2 hours every day.

Ghana revised its education curriculum in 2018, calling for change in teacher education and preparation. Thus, teacher training changed from 3 to 4 years, and the teachers receive a Bachelor of Education degree. A National Standard has been introduced to ensure teachers are licensed. CPD helped to support teachers in attaining the required competencies. Teachers must renew their licenses yearly, and the government is providing $200 annually to support CPD with laptops. The CPD Framework is operational, together with guidelines and manuals on teaching standards, to improve the professional standards of the teachers. The employer tracks learning and awards accreditation and capacity development through a dashboard developed. All processes and contents are on the dashboard. At the end of the year, teachers must have no less than 20 credit points, which translates to no less than eight pieces of training. The community of practice also attracts points and is supported by coaches and mentors.

From the **regional and international perspective, USAID's** experience starts with understanding the science of teaching to read. For instance, decoding is key to reading comprehension, without which there can be no reading. All training support focuses on moving children from 0 to full reading. Important examples include the Tusome Programme in Kenya, which helped 80% to achieve benchmarks; Ghana's Partnership for Learning using local languages, with about 80% of children reading; Rwanda's programme that doubled the number of children with reading fluency; and the programme in Senegal implemented in local languages – at midline, children could read. The common denominator in all these examples is that teachers are trained on reading, focusing on the context of teachers at pre-primary and primary levels; they had to have the proper teaching and learning materials, be trained on formative assessment, and receive structured training in communities of practice and schools. Government ownership and role were important, as well as informing the processes and calendar. Data was available on the progress of children's learning, which allowed teachers to know the progression and stages of children to facilitate support. When teachers were trained on TaRL and got learners to the reading levels, it made a significant difference in learning.

Still, from the regional and international perspective, UNICEF observed that Lesotho presents an essential lesson in getting things right. They started by school leaders looking at assessments and engaging parents and stakeholders thereafter. This resulted in accountability, building trust and ownership at the school level to ensure buy-in, citing the example of the Board of PEAS (https://www.peas.org.uk/) on school improvement and CPD at a local level, run by school leaders. One of the challenges being overcome is the fragmented approach. GPE has also been doing good work on education analysis and compact development. Consistency of approach has contributed to positive outcomes. There is a need to institute impactful curricula and classroom teaching standards reforms.

Main Challenges (and some mitigation measures)

- **Nigeria:** Teacher entry requirements are not always met. Teachers must have a degree and be certified to teach in the classroom. This mechanism regulates people coming in out of a lack of career options. Thus, there is always a shortage. Secondly, there is a high pupil-teacher ratio as crowded classes make it difficult for teachers to implement some of the learned skills. The existing EMIS system is helping to map several education issues; it is hoped that this will give clear direction to the Ministry.

- **Sierra Leone:** Pre-service lecturers are primarily based on theory, excluding practical knowledge; the teachers are thus limited in critical skills. Soft skills like conflict resolution among learners are an issue as this is not part of the curriculum. This was addressed by linking practicing teachers and lecturers.

- **Ghana:** Teacher deployment and retention, especially in deprived areas, is challenging. No scientific strategy has been mooted to post teachers. However, there are financial rewards to encourage people to go to deprived areas for three years and then seek new posting.

- **Tanzania:** CPD is a challenge. Teachers must contribute to their development. It is hoped that an element of CPD funds will be included in subsequent budgets.

- **Namibia:** An impressive 87% qualified teachers. However, sustaining and retaining the teachers is a challenge. Additionally, using the mother tongue as a language of instruction poses a challenge due to limited capacity.

Key lessons	Recommendation
• When the school leadership supports teachers, their delivery becomes effective. • Structured and guided CPD programs and CoPs are essential in making teachers more effective. • High-level government support and follow-up on school leadership allows efficient implementation.	• Governments need to invest in building effective school leadership. Just like CPD that teachers are expected to undertake, this should be the same for the various school leaders.

DAY 2

**12th November 2024 –
Official Opening**

Scaling Foundational Learning: What it Takes and What Works to End the Learning Crisis in Africa.

Ministers and high-level partner representatives discussed in this moderated "Education Leadership Panel" with the First Lady in attendance and framed by the GEM Report's presentation.

Presenter	Manos Antoninis – Director, Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report
Moderators	Pia Britto, Global Director, Education and Adolescent Development, UNICEF Albert Nsengiyumva, Executive Director, ADEA
Panellists / Speakers	Douglas Munsaka Syakalima, Honourable Minister of Education – Zambia Prof. Mariatou Kone, Honourable Minister of National Education and Literacy – Cote d'Ivoire Madalitso Wirima Kambauwa, Honourable Minister of Education - Malawi Joseph Nsengimana, Honourable Minister of Education - Rwanda Dr. Benjamin Piper, Director - Global Education, BMGF and Global CFL Principal Ms. Natasha de Marcken, Deputy Assistant Administrator - USAID and Global CFL Principal. Mr. Luis Benveniste, Director - Education Global Practice, World Bank Global and CFL Principal Ms. Ruth Kagia, High-Level Envoy - GPE and Global CFL Principal
Rapporteurs	Hellen Inyega & Solange Umwizerwa

> *"Partnership is not outsourcing our leadership responsibilities; it's about collaboration and shared accountability."*
>
> ──────────
>
> **Honourable Joseph Nsengimana**
> Minister of Education – Rwanda

The session focused on how evidence-based, scalable, and sustainable solutions turn commitments into transformative actions to address Africa's learning crisis, specifically in Botswana, Cote d'Ivoire, Malawi, and Rwanda. The presentations focused on country-level and development partner experiences to highlight the critical role of quality data, political will, and strategic partnerships in advancing foundational learning outcomes to achieve broader education and development goals. Key highlights focused on what it takes to successfully scale interventions, institutionalize sustainable programs, and ensure all learners gain foundational learning skills across the continent. Emphasis was made on monitoring progress with high-quality data to ensure no learner is left behind. Rounding off this session were the policy commitments from the panelists, some of which were strong and had far-reaching implications.

Specific take-aways

1. **Focus on foundational learning:** The meeting emphasized prioritizing and strengthening foundational learning in African countries. Ministers and stakeholders discussed various approaches to improve early literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional learning, essential for long-term educational success.

2. **Challenges in out-of-school rates:** Many African countries struggle with high numbers of children out of school, especially at the primary level. Rapid demographic growth and limited resources exacerbate the challenge, making it crucial to address out-of-school groups to improve access and learning outcomes.

3. **Need for quality data-driven decisions:** Access to quality data was highlighted as a critical factor for managing educational systems and ensuring accountability. Using quality data at the classroom level could help policymakers and administrators monitor learning progress and adapt strategies based on real-time insights.

4. **Teacher training and motivation:** A recurring theme was the need to adequately train and support teachers, including through continuing professional development (CPD). The Ministers in the panel noted that investment in teacher training, improved working conditions, and practical incentives would make the teaching profession more attractive and effective in delivering quality education.

5. **Scaling through partnerships:** Partnerships between governments, development partners, and local communities are vital for scaling educational programs. Sustainability of these partnerships is key, with emphasis on aligning development partner-initiated projects with national policies and involving local communities to ensure long-term impact.

6. **Leveraging technology for learning:** Technology was identified as a potential game-changer in improving access and educational outcomes. However, concerns were raised about equitable access, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Participants stressed the need for solutions that bridge the digital divide and reach marginalized communities.

7. **Commitment to inclusion:** There was a strong commitment to inclusive education, with discussions on addressing gender disparities, ensuring accessibility for children with disabilities, and incorporating language diversity into educational programs.

8. **Innovative financing for education:** The session discussed alternative financing models, including creative ways to mobilize resources from both the government and the private sector, to support the ambitious goals of foundational learning and access to education.

9. **Prioritizing early childhood education:** Investment in early childhood education was viewed as critical in setting a strong foundation for lifelong learning. Countries like Malawi are implementing programs targeting young children to enhance foundational skills.

10. **Shared vision to eliminate learning poverty:** The meeting noted that Governments leadership is key in aligning partnerships with the national vision and priorities in education, especially at the foundational level. It concluded with a shared commitment among African leaders to eliminate learning poverty by the end of the decade, by investing in foundational skills and ensuring that every child has access to quality education. The optimism for change was reinforced by the commitment to measurable and sustainable progress in education across the continent. These takeaways reflect a shared resolve among participants to address foundational learning challenges in African educational systems through collaborative, data-informed, and inclusive strategies.

Main Challenges

The panel highlighted the following as some of the main challenges countries face in their quest to improve foundational learning:

1. **High rate of out-of-school children:** Despite progress in some areas, many countries still struggle with a high percentage of children out of school. In regions with rapid population growth, such as Sub-Saharan Africa where demographic pressures exacerbate the issue, the rates have shown only slow improvement since 2010.

2. **Teacher shortages and quality:** A critical challenge is the shortage of adequately trained teachers. Many countries reported difficulty in recruiting and retaining qualified teachers, especially in rural areas. Additionally, there were issues with training programs not fully aligning with the needs of foundational learning.

3. **Resource constraints:** Many educational programs lack adequate funding, negatively impacting many aspects, from infrastructure to teachers' salaries. The limited resources also affect the availability of teaching and learning materials, with reports of students sharing textbooks due to shortages.

4. **Equity gaps in learning outcomes:** The discussion underscored significant disparities in learning outcomes, particularly between urban and rural students. Children in rural areas and marginalized communities face additional barriers to quality education, often exacerbated by poverty and limited access to resources.

5. **Data collection and utilization:** While data systems are improving, there are still challenges in collecting and using quality data at scale. Not all countries have robust data management systems to track learning outcomes, making it difficult to inform sound policy development or reform and to tailor interventions effectively.

6. **Systemic inertia and complexity of scaling:** There was a recurring concern that scaling successful pilot programs into national initiatives is complex and often faces systemic inertia. Bureaucratic challenges, lack of streamlined processes, and limited institutional capacity to support large-scale implementations hinder progress.

7. **Digital divide and access to technology:** While digital learning initiatives show promise, unequal access to technology remains a challenge, especially in rural areas. Connectivity issues, lack of digital infrastructure, and language barriers prevent equitable adoption of technology in education.

8. **Late enrolment and high repetition rates:** Some countries reported high rates of late school enrolment and grade repetition, with boys more affected than girls in certain regions. These factors delay progression through the educational system and increase the number of over-age students, impacting overall completion rates.

9. **Dependency on external funding:** Many foundational learning programs rely heavily on partner funding, raising sustainability concerns. The mismatch between partner priorities and national needs can lead to fragmented or short-term interventions that are challenging to integrate into the national education agenda.

10. **Resistance to change and cultural barriers:** Efforts to implement new educational approaches or technologies sometimes encounter cultural resistance. Additionally, linguistic diversity presents challenges in creating inclusive learning materials and curricula that cater to all language groups.

11. **Low teacher salaries and motivation:** Inadequate teacher compensation affects motivation and job satisfaction, contributing to high turnover rates and a lack of long-term commitment to the profession. There were calls for improving teacher pay and working conditions to make teaching a more attractive career.

Key lessons

1. **Invest early in foundational learning:** Investing in early childhood education and foundational skills, especially literacy, numeracy, and social and emotional skills, is critical for lifelong educational success. Countries with sustained early investments reported stronger outcomes, emphasizing that early intervention helps address issues before they escalate.

2. **Prioritize quality data-driven decision-making:** Effective educational systems rely on real-time and quality data to monitor and adjust strategies. Lessons from countries with advanced data systems show that tracking student progress, teacher performance, and program outcomes supports better resource allocation and targeted interventions, making programs more responsive and impactful.

3. **Foster sustainable partnerships:** Long-term success depends on partnerships that align with national policies and build capacity within local systems. Collaborative approaches involving governments, development partners, and communities can bring diverse resources and perspectives but must be designed for sustainability beyond partner funding cycles and must be government-led.

4. **Empower and support teachers:** Teachers are the backbone of educational success. Countries with robust teacher training, fair compensation, and continuous professional development see better learning outcomes. Investing in teacher motivation and addressing high turnover rates through incentives and career support are essential for scaling quality education.

5. **Simplify and streamline programs for scalability:** Complex, resource-intensive pilot programs often struggle to scale effectively. Simplifying program components to focus on core, achievable goals—such as ensuring every classroom has basic resources and well-trained teachers—facilitates broader implementation without overwhelming teachers or administrators.

6. **Embrace community involvement:** Successful education initiatives benefit from active community engagement. Involving local communities in school construction, maintenance, and oversight fosters ownership, accountability, and sustainability, making programs more resilient and attuned to local needs.

7. **Address equity to close learning gaps:** Equity issues, particularly the urban-rural divide, gender disparities, and access for marginalized communities, require targeted solutions. Programmes that tailor interventions to these groups and include inclusive policies, such as school feeding and disability-friendly facilities, can improve access and learning outcomes for all students.

8. **Adapt technology to local contexts:** Digital learning holds promise but should be adapted to local infrastructure and cultural contexts to avoid widening inequalities. Leveraging mobile technology, offline learning platforms, and locally relevant content allows broader access and supports marginalized communities.

9. **Utilize a holistic approach to financing:** Innovative financing mechanisms and diversified funding sources are needed to sustain educational programs. Countries are finding that blending national funding with private and international resources, as well as in-kind contributions from communities, support comprehensive, long-term program scaling.

10. **Build resilience in educational systems:** External crises (e.g., COVID-19, economic downturns) can disrupt education but also offer opportunities to innovate. Countries that have made systems resilient through digital infrastructure, adaptive curricula, and flexible teaching models can better maintain learning continuity in times of disruption.

11. **Encourage iterative learning and flexibility:** Scaling education solutions requires a mindset of continuous learning and adaptation. Countries with successful foundational programs prioritize iteration—assessing outcomes, flexible, and refining approaches based on evidence to improve scalability and effectiveness.

12. **Commit to inclusive policy and planning:** Inclusive education requires deliberate policies that account for gender, language diversity, and children with disabilities. Embedding inclusive education into policy frameworks and curriculum planning ensures that no child is left behind, creating a foundation for universal learning success.

Recommendations

The policymakers made the following recommendations as part of their collective commitment to end learning poverty in Africa by 2035:

1. **Foster sustainable, government-led and locally driven partnerships:** Encourage partnerships between governments, development partners, and local communities that prioritize sustainability through government leadership. Align partner-funded projects with national education policies and empower local communities to take ownership of educational initiatives. Sustainable, community-rooted partnerships increase program longevity and adaptability.

2. **Strengthen teacher training and retention:** Invest in comprehensive teacher training programs that align with foundational learning goals and provide ongoing support. Improve teacher salaries, working conditions, and career advancement opportunities to retain skilled teachers, especially in underserved areas. This approach ensures a stable, motivated, and effective teaching workforce.

3. **Enhance duality data systems for accountability and decision-making:** Build robust data systems to track student progress, teacher performance, and learning outcomes at every level. Use this data to inform policy decisions, allocate resources efficiently, and hold stakeholders accountable. Quality, real-time data will help countries adapt programs to meet specific needs and scale effectively.

4. **Address equity and inclusion:** Implement targeted interventions to bridge learning gaps, focusing on marginalized groups, including girls, rural students, and children with disabilities. Policies that promote inclusive education, such as language diversity, accessible infrastructure, and gender-sensitive approaches, ensure equitable access and support holistic development.

5. **Simplify and scale proven educational models:** Identify and scale foundational learning models that are simple, cost-effective, and manageable for teachers and administrators. Streamlining program components and focusing on core essentials—such as literacy, numeracy, and basic resources—enhances scalability and reduces the implementation burden, maximizing impact across different regions.

Closed-Door High-Level Ministerial Round Table

The morning opening session gave way to the closed-door Ministerial Round Table, in parallel with two other sessions, followed by five other parallel sessions before the close of the day.

Moderators	Albert Nsengiyumva, Executive Secretary, Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) Dr Oby Ezekwesili, Founder & CEO, Human Capital Africa (HCA) Shem Bodo, Senior Programs Officer, ADEA
Rapporteurs	Katie Mullen, Mary Sichangi & Nathalie Aziza

"Foundational learning is priority…Foundational learning must be fixed"

Dr Oby Ezekwesili
Founder & CEO, HCA

This closed-door Ministerial Roundtable brought together 26 African ministers, heads of delegation from 14 African countries, and representatives from 6 development partners (USAID, UNICEF, UNESCO, the World Bank, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Hempel Foundation) to discuss more succinctly issues of foundational learning.

The roundtable took the format of group discussions guided by specific questions that had been identified based on issues pertinent to foundational learning. The moderators facilitated rich, focused discussions on key themes, and gathered direct valuable feedback on how to work together to address the issues identified.

Each Minister, Head of Delegation, and partner got the opportunity to bring unique insights and experiences from their respective constituencies.

The session started by acknowledging the value of the Africa Foundational Learning Ministerial Coalition, which has grown from nine members in 2022 to over 20 Ministers in 2024, committed to championing foundational learning. The Coalition meets on a quarterly basis and has done so for the last two years. Despite the inconsistency in attendance, the virtual community of practice has facilitated discussions and sharing of experiences on achievements and challenges by the Ministers. In the process, they have been able to harmonize critical areas of convergence, set the agenda, and maintain the momentum for improving foundational learning. This is a major milestone for the continent which continues to yearn for coordinated efforts and cross learning. The session encouraged the Ministers to reach out to their counterparts to join them in participating in the Coalition.

The session underscored the importance of political will and local expertise. It was agreed that not much progress can be made if governments, at the highest political level, do not prioritize foundational learning. Thus, there is need to not only mobilize greater high-level political will, but to also expand the current quarterly meetings to include technocrats who are the main implementors. The discussion noted that Ministers need to enhance the visibility of foundational learning and the nexus of a strong foundation to the social and economic wellbeing of a nation. This should be done to a level where the Heads of State and Government participating in the AU summits deem it fit to have a "decade of education", moving from "year of education."

The groups also discussed in detail the issue of assessment. They benefited greatly from Ghana's experience and confirmed the need to build capacity in this area guided by a common framework. It is in this same breath that proposals to standardize the foundational learning curriculum was proposed. Such a move would enable cross learning, common assessment and enhance country achievements as there will be peer support.

Main challenges

The following challenges highlighted by the Ministers, heads of delegations, and partners confirmed the research findings that have been shared on issues of foundational learning:

- Despite the existing efforts to increase the number of trained teachers, all countries and partners in the session raised the issue of limited number of trained teachers that have the knowledge and skill to really ensure that learners at the foundational level are learning.

- Countries such as Ghana have been successful in putting in place and using assessment methods. However, other countries are still grappling with how to effectively assess the learning taking place in their schools. One of the reasons is that foundational learning, especially early childhood development, has not been under the ambit of governments.

- Countries do not have a holistic policy on foundational learning. An effective policy needs to ensure that it covers teacher management, infrastructure, and a curriculum that encompasses literacy, numeracy and social and emotional skills.

- Limited funding to cover all the requirements of an effective foundational learning system are a challenge to most countries.

- Challenges surrounding the partnership between governments and development partners was a point of discussion with a proposal being put forward to develop "the concept of mutual accountability…something of an accountability mechanism for both governments and development partners."

Recommendations

1. **Quarterly Ministerial Engagements:** The quarterly virtual ministerial engagements were confirmed as being important platforms. Thus, to enhance their effectiveness, it is recommended that they be expanded to include technocrats who are directly linked to implementation. This can be actualised if countries appoint senior Ministry officials as technical focal points who would foster consistent collaboration and monitor progress across foundational learning initiatives. The focal points would also be responsible for ensuring increased engagement with political leaders to secure deeper, more sustainable support, and to prioritize foundational learning as a critical national investment.

2. **Harmonized Curriculum and Assessment:** There is need to aim for a unified foundational learning curriculum across countries. This would enhance learning in general, continuity in the event of movement, and improve education quality. A unified system would also enable the implementation of a common assessment framework to evaluate learning progress, allowing for easier benchmarking, peer support and general improvements.

3. **Provision of Teaching and Learning Materials (TLM):** Governments are encouraged to secure teaching and learning materials, such as textbooks, and strive for a one-to-one learner-to-book ratio to allow every learner sufficient interaction with learning materials.

4. **African Expertise and Leadership Development:** There is need to build local technical capacity and leadership in each country, minimizing reliance on international support over time. This need is more pronounced in countries recovering from civil strife, which has disrupted the growth of education.

5. **Knowledge Hub:** It is important that a central information hub is set up, where countries can share updates, challenges, and successes in real time. The information should be contributed by each country. The quarterly engagements of the Africa Foundational Learning Ministerial Coalition should play a central role in providing and disseminating relevant information.

6. **Prioritize Teacher Management:** Effective foundational learning cannot happen without qualified and engaged teachers. Countries are encouraged to develop clear holistic policies that will guide teacher training, deployment, welfare and teaching support. A holistic outlook will go a long way in solving issues related to teacher shortages and absenteeism.

7. **Government-Community Partnerships:** It is important that creative and innovative ways are adopted to engage communities in foundational learning activities. Besides playing a big role in contributing towards the development of infrastructure, communities must participate as the first level where the child starts learning. They need to be enlightened on what is expected of them, to effectively play this role.

8. **Government-Development Partner Collaboration:** Governments and development partners need to have open discussions to share expectations and align development partners efforts closely with government priorities, focusing on essential resources, and facilitate mutual accountability.

9. **National Policy Framework for Foundational Learning:** It is important to have a national policy framework in place that guides foundational learning. The framework should provide a structured approach for implementing and managing foundational learning initiatives.

10. **Centralized Data Management:** Countries should develop a unified, easy to access, cross-educational level data management system, accessible by teachers and policymakers alike, to streamline data-driven decision-making and improve efficiency in the education system.

11. **Resource Mobilization for Foundational Learning:** Governments are encouraged to increase funding for foundational learning by having innovative financing systems that ensure free primary education, have measurable learning outcomes, and robust accountability systems to ensure education funds are used effectively.

Development Partners (DPs)' commitments

The participating DPs at the roundtable recognize their important role in enhancing the effectiveness of foundational learning. In view of this, DPs committed to the following:

1. **Long-Term Partnership Commitment:** Recognising that foundational learning takes long to establish and realise results, the partners expressed a commitment to being "in for the long haul" to support foundational learning as sustained partners.

2. **System Integration over Parallel Structures:** Partners will focus on integrating support within existing educational systems, avoiding the use of separate or parallel mechanisms that might clash with national and/or local systems.

3. **Closing Data Gaps:** Support the closing of data gaps that prevent accurate understanding and interventions in foundational learning. This is in line with the need for quality data collection and utilisation in foundational learning.

4. **Reflective and Adaptive Approach:** Implement a continuous review process for assessing interventions and adjusting based on ongoing data and feedback.

5. **Better Coordination Among Partners:** Enhance coordination among partners to ensure synergy in country support efforts rather than promoting cross-purpose actions.

6. **Connecting Global and Local Levels:** Facilitate a connection between global discussions and local realities, enabling on-the-ground experiences to inform broader policy dialogues.

Mapping Research, Partnerships and Donors to Strengthen Foundational Learning

Moderator	Inyang Umoren, Project Manager, ESDC Project, ADEA
Panellist	Prof. Hellen Inyega, University of Nairobi and Thierno Diallo, ESSA
Rapporteurs	Lydia Nakijoba & Paul Abok

> *"Sustaining and scaling partnerships, developing coherent coordination mechanisms, and diversifying funding sources will ensure lasting impacts on learning outcomes across the continent."*
>
> **Prof. Hellen Inyega**
> University of Nairobi

In the recent past, Africa has been playing catchup in the field of research, especially in foundational learning. It suffices to say that Africa has been slow in conducting research on foundational learning. The session's discussions benefitted from the findings from two major scoping studies. The first was a desk study that reviewed PhD theses, journal articles, books, and reports.

The findings show that Kenya leads in foundational learning research, with 298 studies, while Senegal has the lowest at 115. Generally, Francophone countries have less research than their Anglophone counterparts. Literacy research received twice the attention of numeracy studies and, interestingly, collaborative efforts were mostly forged with international partners, with Kenya being an exception, as most studies were collaboratively undertaken by African researchers.

The second scoping study conducted by **Prof. Hellen Inyega** from the **University of Nairobi-** across 15 African countries aimed to identify entities engaged in foundational learning efforts. It revealed that governments are increasingly partnering with development partners, NGOs, and the private sector, especially tech companies such as Microsoft and Ed-Tech Hub, to enhance digital learning infrastructure and resources.

Overall, the studies show that Africa needs to enhance her local capacity in foundational level research, by overcoming some of the key challenges. Firstly, African researchers do not have sufficient funds to conduct context-based research. Secondly, and rather unfortunate, is the underutilization of Africa-based education research due to barriers to publishing in highly recognized journals despite being of high-quality. The third challenge is the existing weak collaboration among African researchers; the study noted more collaboration between African and western researchers, than among African researchers. The fourth challenge is the general inadequate research capacity in foundational learning, this could be because foundational learning has only started gaining prominence in the last 15 years. Fifth, is the gender disparity among professionals, with males dominating the sector. This means that some areas of interest do not get the priority they require (patriarchal preferences). Lastly is the disconnect between researchers and policymakers resulting in research not being utilized.

Key lessons	Recommendations
• It is critical to ensure that local research is policy-oriented and aligned with national policy structures. Researchers should work closely with policymakers to facilitate research uptake and ensure joint ownership of projects. • Sustained partnerships across sectors, especially between governments, private sector entities, and NGOs, are crucial for improving foundational learning outcomes. These collaborations should aim for long-term mentorship and capacity-building initiatives. • It is essential to diversify funding sources for foundational learning research, including more domestic and public funding. • Strengthening the use of technology for learning and teacher development, along with expanding data-sharing initiatives across regions, can significantly enhance the scope and impact of research on foundational learning programs.	• **Creative financing:** Increase public funding for foundational learning research in African countries, reducing reliance on international funders. Domestic investment will help ensure that research priorities align with local educational needs and that research is consistent and sustained. • **Intra-country collaboration:** Encourage cross-country research and partnerships within Africa to reduce the reliance on international collaborations and to better address the unique challenges facing African educational systems. • **Policy relevance:** Ensure that foundational learning research is policy-relevant from the outset by involving policymakers in the research process. This will bridge the gap between research findings and practical applications in education policies. • **Partnerships:** Co-create research with funders and decision-makers to enhance ownership and improve the uptake of research findings. • **Holistic research:** Expand research to include under-represented areas that are important to the African setting, such as poverty, ethnicity, gender, and disability as these are crucial to understanding and improving foundational learning outcomes.

Data for Instructional Decision-Making: Remedial Learning, Structured Pedagogy, and Teaching at the Right Level

Moderators	Clio Dintilhac, Senior Program Officer, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Armando Ali, CEO, PAL Network
Panellists / Speakers	Nelson Mbarushimana, Director General, Rwanda Basic Education Board Ndeye Aby Ndaw, Directrice, Enseignement élémentaire, Senegal Meiti Inza, Directorate of Studies, Strategies, Planning and Statistics, Côte d'Ivoire Dr. Alemayehu Hailu Gebre, Senior Director of Programs, Luminos Fund Tendekai Mukoyi, Program Manager, Youth Impact) Fidele Hagenimana, Head of Programs, Rising Academy
Rapporteurs	Brenda Anjuri & Josephine Kiyenje

> *"There is evidence on what works to improve foundational learning, including structured pedagogy and targeted instruction"*
>
> ———————————
> **Meiti Inza**
> Directorate of Studies, Strategies, Planning and Statistics, Côte d'Ivoire

Countries in Africa find themselves at different levels in the use of quality data on education to inform their decisions in policy, planning, programming, and monitoring and impact evaluation. This session focused on how different countries are using learning assessment data to inform instructional approaches such as remedial learning, structured pedagogy, and Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL).

Three country case studies were presented to illustrate how data can be used: Rwanda's experience on remedial learning, Côte d'Ivoire on scaling structured pedagogy and TaRL, and Senegal's national bilingual reform that leverages structured pedagogy.

The findings show, for example, that Cote d' Ivoire has successfully used data in formative assessments during initial and in-service teacher training, classroom observations of teacher practices by educational advisors, and assessment of teaching inputs and learning achievement. Additionally, using existing data as feedback, Zambia, collected and analysed data from all students to identify learning challenges, this led to targeted interventions, resulting in improved student performance, from 34% to 50%, over a year. Rwanda's Comprehensive Assessment Management Information System (CAMIS) captures and manages assessment data and recommends holiday remedial learning for students scoring below 40%. The program has registered positive results, with 64% of students achieving the grade-level competence after attending the remedial program. The factors that contributed to the turnaround are teacher preparation, community involvement, and clear scheduling of remedial lessons.

Main challenges

The processes have not been without their challenges, some of which are:

- **Teacher engagement and consistency:** Effective use of data for instructional decision-making requires teachers to regularly engage with data. However, in some countries, there is a lack of teachers and school leaders to manage and utilize this data properly, leading to challenges in data transmission and application.
- **Teacher preparedness:** The implementation of remedial learning programs requires adequate teacher preparation. Despite training, some challenges remain in ensuring that teachers effectively apply remedial strategies in classrooms, particularly in overcrowded settings.
- **Gaps in data collection and usage:** Many countries face challenges in collecting, managing, and using data at the school level. Inadequate systems for collecting data from assessments, monitoring school performance, and involving all stakeholders in the process create obstacles to improving educational outcomes.
- **Sustainability and resources:** Ensuring that data-driven programs, such as remedial learning initiatives, are sustainable poses a challenge. This includes securing adequate funding, ensuring resources like teaching materials are available, and maintaining teacher motivation.

Key lessons	Recommendations
• **Contextualized approaches:** Adapting data-driven models to the local context is crucial. For example, Rwanda's use of remedial education strategies was tailored to address specific challenges such as high repetition rates which leads to overcrowding in classrooms. • **Teacher and community engagement:** In Rwanda and Senegal, teacher training, community involvement, and regular monitoring were key to the success of their remedial programs. For instance, involving local government officials and parents increased the programs' effectiveness and ensured wider community buy-in. • **Data as a decision-making tool:** In Rwanda and Senegal, the use of comprehensive data systems (CAMIS in Rwanda and SFMO in Senegal) helped track progress, monitor implementation, and adjust teaching strategies. This data-driven approach ensured better-targeted support for students.	• **Strengthen teacher capacity:** Continuous professional development and support for teachers, including training in quality data use and remedial teaching strategies, is essential. Teachers should be empowered to analyse and apply quality data for better instructional decisions. Data is key to empowering teachers to be their own evaluators, thus encouraging a culture of assessment and self-assessment. • **Improve data systems for quality:** Countries should invest in robust data systems to collect, analyse, and use data effectively. This includes building platforms for real-time data access and ensuring all stakeholders, from teachers to policymakers, have access to quality data. • **Involve stakeholders in data production and use:** Engage all relevant stakeholders, including school leaders, teachers, and local government officials, in the data collection and analysis process. This promotes a culture of data-driven decision-making and ensures that interventions are well-supported. • **Ensure program sustainability:** Set aside funding and resources to maintain and scale successful data-driven programs. This includes creating clear plans for long-term sustainability, including teacher mentorship and ongoing assessment systems.

• **Continuous monitoring and adjustment:** Regular follow-up, as evidenced in the weekly and monthly monitoring in Côte d'Ivoire, allows for timely adjustment to the curriculum based on student needs, ensuring that learning gaps are addressed.	• **Promote evidence-based practices:** Countries should continue to pilot and evaluate data-driven approaches, ensuring that interventions are contextually appropriate and grounded in evidence. Expanding the use of formative assessments and integrating them into regular teaching practices will further strengthen instructional quality.

Setting Up and Financing a Foundational Learning Policy

Moderator	Dr. Aliou Tall, Education Office Director, USAID Rwanda, co-chair of Rwanda's Foundational Learning Steering Committee
Panellists / Speakers	Hon. Claudette Irere, Minister of State for Education, Rwanda Charm Kalimbika, Director of Early Childhood Education & FL Zambia Focal Person Hon. Conrad Sackey, Minister of Basic and Secondary Education, Sierra Leone
Rapporteur	Diana Sengati

> *"Everything we are doing there is an important partner, the private sector, which has to come onboard"*
>
> **Hon. Claudette Irere**
> Minister of State for Education, Rwanda

The importance of developing and ensuring that education policies are functional cannot be understated. Countries have made strides towards having policies in place that can support FL. Their experience supports the conclusion that the efficacy of policy goes a long way in determining implementation. Thus, policy must be simple, with clear specific goals and costed strategies and/or targets agreed upon by stakeholders. The education policies should also have in-built monitoring and evaluation components. This session benefited from the experience of Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Zambia on how the countries have incorporated foundational learning into their policies, and how foundational learning is being financed.

Rwanda has a foundational learning policy and strategy that has clearly spelt out activities, roles and responsibilities and necessary resources for implementation. Zambia, on the other hand, has established a national literacy and numeracy framework under the national foundational learning principles, that includes reading. In Sierra Leone, Education financing and access was established in 2018, encouraging national free school quality education, which attracted a lot of students back to schools. The government launched curricula reforms in 2020/2021, developing new curricula from pre-primary to senior secondary levels.

Additionally, the government developed policy and legislation, including the 2022-2026 education strategic plan. The main challenge these countries faced is the fact that pre-primary has only recently been considered into the education strategies. That means that learning achievement remains poor as countries try to build capacity. Additionally, the countries experience overcrowding in classrooms, issues of the language of instruction, and limited support for catch-up programs resulting in high numbers of children dropping out due to frustration from poor performance.

Key lesson

Working with partners and stakeholders to develop and implement a foundational learning policy and strategizing its implementation is fundamental to running a successful programme. This process can thereafter mobilise resources from the various actors, including the private sector.

Recommendations

- **Holistic policy:** Governments need to give more attention to policy making by ensuring that the challenges to be addressed by policy are well articulated, inclusive in nature to cover disability, girls and marginalised, and workable solutions found. The policy, by design, should involve key stakeholders including development partners, civil society, and the private sector.

- **Adequate funding:** It is also important that governments allocate sufficient funding for foundational learning activities and seek creative ways of involving partners and private sector players to enhance funding.

- **Language of instruction:** There is need to navigate the issue of language of instruction at foundational level with great precaution, as this may mean that learners learn or not. Children learn better in a language they are familiar with in their early years; thus, governments need to be clear on the appropriate language to use for instruction.

- **Role of the Teacher:** Any policy that aims to improve learning should consider the pivotal position of the teacher. Thus, governments need to invest in a holistic teacher workforce management policy.

Impactful Practices for Better Foundational Learning Outcomes

Moderator	Rudranayaran Sahoo, Regional Lead Quality & Learning, UNICEF
Panellists / Speakers	Manos Antoninis, Director, UNESCO-GEMR Stephen Owusu, Deputy Director General, Ghana Education Service Ms. Sanet Steenkamp, Executive Director, Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, Namibia Hafsatu Hamza, Country Director, TaRL Africa, Nigeria Prof. Brahm Fleisch, UNICEF FLN Consultant to SADC
Rapporteur	Josephine Kiyenje

The session presented impactful practices from across the continent as featured in the Spotlight reports, including bilingual education in Mozambique, textbooks in Malawi, Teaching Mathematics for Understanding in South Africa, remedial education program in Madagascar, institutionalization of assessment in Zambia, and diagnostic testing in Mauritius. Namibia shared its pedagogical approaches including jolly phonics and Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL), and its national assessment, Ghana presented its experience on differentiated learning. A brief on the approach shows that it is based on TaRL, targeting 10,000 primary schools, and champions data-driven learning mechanisms to ensure that the program's implementation at scale follows the proven intervention model. TaRL is also being carried out in Nigeria. From the above, it suffices to state that there is sufficient evidence on what works to improve foundational learning.

Key lesson

A common theme and lesson resonating among the various models is the emphasis on the importance of considering context when designing programs. This assertion is based on the complex nature of scaling that can be elusive. The following are other key enablers in scaling the remedial learning initiatives across the educational systems in Southern Africa:

- **Data:** It is critical to have relevant data to initiate a scientific/project management model that responds to the direct needs of the situation. The model should incorporate clear monitoring and evaluation systems that will consistently ensure that the quality of the program is at the expected level.
- **Mixed model:** Adopt evidence-based approaches, combining what works with why things work. Issues like funding and age group of learners may require modification of approaches.
- **Government role:** It is important that governments play a lead role in the process of scaling. The government system assures better outreach and sustainability.
- **Policy reform:** Once a model has been confirmed, it is essential to align successful interventions with coherent education policy reform. This alignment is critical for budgeting, coordination and sustainability.

Recommendations

- **Structured pedagogy:** It is important to have structured pedagogy and targeted instruction. There is adequate evidence that these initiatives work to improve foundational learning.

- **Targeted teacher training:** Special training for foundational level skills acquisition is imperative. The training should be both at the pre-and in-service levels. In addition, professional support that could be in the form of cluster engagement will go a long way in enhancing teacher performance.

- **Governments as pivots:** Governments are requested to take leadership on issues of foundational learning. It was noted that in some countries, the private sector is more involved. The role of government should be to provide the vision/strategic direction for foundational learning, coupled with ensuring accountability from all actors.

- **Long term approach:** Foundational learning is a long-term initiative; thus, governments need to invest in long-term sustainable system level efforts rather than taking on the project approach.

DAY 3

13th November 2024 –
Parallel Session and School Visitation

The Ministers, heads of delegations and high-level development partners representatives visited schools within Kigali, while the remaining participants joined the parallel sessions. A reflection on the school visits followed in the afternoon before the official closing by the Rwanda Minister of Education. Some of the participants visited the Genocide Memorial in Kigali.

When Things Go Awry: A Fireside Chat on Adaptation and Learning during FLN Implementation

Moderator	Ben Piper, Global Lead for Education, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
Panellists / Speakers	John NTIM FORDJOUR, Deputy Minister of Education, Ghana Eunice Ackwerh, Senior Education Specialist, World Bank Christin, Mc Connell, Chief of Education, UNICEF Ghana Tony DZIDZINYO Kwesi DOGBE, Executive Director, Sabre Education
Rapporteur	Henriette Gwizamahoro

> *"When given an opportunity to learn, children learn best by doing"*
>
> **Christin McConnel**
> Chief of Education-UNICEF Ghana

The importance of planning and having various options in place is a tactic that smart strategists use often. In Africa, the unplanned occurrences in the education environment emanate, most of the time, from environmental disasters, insecurity and political changes in the country. A case in point is the recent COVID-19 pandemic.

This session focused on the adaptive measures put in place when certain aspects of foundational learning are unplanned. The panellists discussed different strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats encountered while implementing foundational learning with a focus on adaptive measures when things go unplanned. Below are some of the smart fall-back measures:

- **Parental engagement:** Parents have been the cornerstone in the implementation of foundation learning programs. They can do this better when given trainings on how best they can support children at home.

- **Building teacher capacity:** Training teachers on foundational learning to gain needed skills to support children in classrooms is key. Different resources can be adapted and refined to meet teachers' needs.

- **Assessments:** Carrying out assessments to measure student learning outcomes countrywide and taking actions based on evidence and at the right level is a valuable adaptive measure.

- **Adoption of play-based learning:** The play-based learning approach can be embedded in the curriculum models.

- **Coaching and mentoring:** This ensures that teachers have the support required, but also firsthand information of what is taking place on the ground, for policy makers to act.

- **Enhanced Access:** Free education in Ghana from Kindergarten to 17 years ensured that no one is left out due to costs.

- **Plan:** Having in place an education sector strategic plan as the main document followed while implementing education related projects is important to ensure uniformity.

Main Challenges

- Inadequate budget to support the foundational learning. Despite governments appreciating the importance of foundational learning, this is yet to reflect in the budget allocations.
- Delays in delivering the curriculum content for foundational learning, meaning that the curriculum remains unstructured.
- Uncoordinated mechanisms among stakeholders, largely because foundational learning has not been well structured, compared to the formal learning system.
- Insufficient skills on the use of digital tools among teachers has not only had an impact in the classroom, but also for policy. This was more pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key lessons	Recommendations
• When good policies and frameworks are in place, and the concerned individuals make good use of them, this yields great impact on learning outcomes at the foundational level. • Free and compulsory education for all contributes to school retention and reduces school dropout. • Teachers being on governments payroll and getting a fair wage, is essential to keep moving when things go awry in the running of education. • Training teachers and having ongoing mentoring and coaching is essential to maintain their moral compass. • Play-based learning approach is an important way of teaching and learning. Teachers, together with children, should make teaching and learning materials from local materials to cut on costs and enhance children's creativity. • When grassroots level beneficiaries (teachers, headteachers, parents) are involved from the beginning of the project, the results are tremendous as there is a sense of ownership. • Significant changes are observed, especially in tracking and keeping records, where digital tools are used.	• **Invest in digital approaches.** Digitalisation is an easy and efficient way to collect, track, disseminate and store data for current and future reference. • **Total shift from teacher centred to learner centred.** This involves high level commitment from the government and other development partners. Adopting approaches such as play-based teaching will go a long way in supporting this process. • **Mentoring and coaching:** There should be continuing mentoring and coaching and the provision of continuing professional development support to teachers to effectively deliver the curriculum. • **Coordination:** There should be clear coordination amongst stakeholders and a defined platform for exchange and learning sessions amongst them. • **Policy strategy:** Policies and frameworks should be reinforced and made publicly available for effective use; keeping things simple and running should be the principle.

From Early Years to Early Grades: Achieving School Readiness through Early Childhood Education

Moderator	Ms. Divya Lata. Early Childhood Education Global Programme Lead, UNICEF
Presenter	Mr. Haogen Yao, Education Specialist, Education Global Programme, UNICEF
Panellists / Speakers	Ms. Grace Milner, Director of Basic Education, Ministry of Education, Malawi Mr. Munyemana Gilbert, Deputy Director General, National Child Development Agency, Rwanda Mr. Evang Assembe. Primary Education Pedagogical Inspector, Ministry of Basic Education, Cameroon. Ms. Melody Ingabire, Youth Advocate, Care and Child Help Organisation, Rwanda. Mohamed Yahiaoui, Central Inspector of National Education, Algeria
Discussant	Ms. Saima Malik, Senior Education Specialist, World Bank Group
Rapporteurs	Hellen Inyega and Andile Dube

"Youth bring to the table enthusiasm, energy, and relatability with the communities"

Melody Ingabire
Youth Advocate,
Care and Help Child Organization,
Rwanda

Being prepared and ready to face what lies ahead is a calming feeling for any person, regardless of their age. Knowing that you are prepared gives one the motivation to look forward to tackling the issues ahead. The same feeling is what a child needs as they embark on their formal schooling journey. A combination of socio-emotional, physical, and cognitive skills is one of the things

children need to have been prepared for school. This session's discussions underscored the urgent need to prioritize early childhood education (ECE) across Africa, with panellists from Rwanda, Malawi, Cameroon, and Algeria sharing progress and challenges. Key themes included the importance of creating robust, harmonized standards for ECE and the vital role of community-based models, especially in underserved areas. Emphasis was placed on multisectoral collaboration involving Ministries of Education, Health, and Gender, alongside private and community actors.

Additionally, youth advocacy and parental engagement were highlighted as transformative for community mobilization and resource support. Finally, calls for increased government and donor funding were made to address gaps in accessibility, teacher training, and inclusion, particularly for children with disabilities, to ensure holistic and equitable ECE. Some of the achievements shared include the foregoing.

- **Community-based ECE models (Cameroon and Rwanda):** Both Cameroon and Rwanda have expanded access to ECE in rural and underserved areas through community-based ECE centres. In Cameroon, a community-driven preschool strategy, supported by UNICEF, has increased preschool coverage from 25% to 40%. Rwanda has also used a variety of community-based ECE settings, including church, work-based, and home-based centres, raising access rates significantly.

- **Comprehensive early learning standards (Rwanda):** Rwanda has established comprehensive early learning and development standards (ELDS) that are harmonized across different ECE settings (school-based, community-based, and home-based). These standards guide developmental milestones and outcomes, supporting quality improvement and consistency in ECE services. Rwanda has also implemented ECD scorecards to track access and quality at local levels.

- **Cost-benefit analysis and financial planning (Malawi):** Malawi's National Planning Commission conducted a cost-benefit analysis demonstrating the high returns of ECE investment, leading to systematic financial planning. Through partnerships, with other Ministries, support from UNICEF and the Global Partnership for Education, Malawi has set a roadmap to expand ECE nationwide. Community involvement and use of locally sourced teaching materials are part of this sustainable, cost-effective approach.

- **Government support and policy integration (Algeria):** Algeria's national education strategy includes ECE as a fundamental component, with commitments to universalize pre-primary education and improve the quality of ECE through teacher training. Despite being non-mandatory, preschool is integrated with primary education policy, and government efforts have led to a 62% pre-school enrolment rate for five-year-olds, with significant investment in expanding school readiness support and reducing enrolment barriers for remote areas.

Main Challenges

- **Insufficient access and infrastructure:** In underserved, rural, and low-income areas, access to ECE remains limited. For instance, in Cameroon, rural regions face a significant preschool service gap, and Rwanda's community-based ECE centres still require substantial infrastructure support to meet the rising demand.

- **Teacher training and capacity:** Countries like Algeria and Rwanda identified shortages of well-trained ECE educators. In many areas, teachers lack specialized training in child-cantered pedagogy, and community-based or volunteer caregivers often receive minimal formal education, impacting the quality of learning experiences.

- **Funding and resource constraints:** Sustained funding for ECE remains a challenge, particularly in Malawi, where budgetary constraints make it difficult to provide adequate teaching materials, expand school facilities, and meet staffing needs. Limited government and partner funding hinders efforts to scale effective, quality ECE systems across the region.

- **Inclusive education and disability support:** In Rwanda and other countries, there is a noted lack of focus on inclusive ECE for children with disabilities. There are few formal processes for diagnosing disabilities early, and limited guidance for educators and parents on supporting children with special needs within ECE settings.

- **Multisectoral collaboration and policy alignment:** Although some countries have begun multisectoral ECE efforts, aligning policies and ensuring consistent collaboration across education, health, gender, and social services ministries remains a complex and ongoing challenge, especially in countries where ECE responsibilities are spread across various Ministries, as seen in Malawi.

- **Parental engagement and community awareness:** Engaging parents on the importance of ECE and providing ongoing support at home remains a challenge. Youth advocates in Rwanda pointed out the need for enhanced parental involvement and home-based education practices to reinforce early learning and developmental outcomes.

Key lessons	Recommendations
• **Community-centric models are effective in expanding access:** Community-based and home-based ECE centres, as demonstrated by Rwanda and Cameroon, provide effective solutions for reaching underserved populations. Collaborating with local organizations, churches, and workplaces can bridge the access gap, particularly in rural areas where formal pre-school infrastructure is limited. • **Harmonized standards enhance ECE quality and consistency:** Rwanda's approach to developing comprehensive and harmonized ELDS across various ECE settings underscore the value of clear, unified guidelines for quality assurance. These standards allow different ECE models (school-based, community-based, and home-based) to offer consistent learning outcomes, which is critical for scaling quality ECE. • **Financial planning and cost-benefit analysis strengthen investment in ECE:** Malawi's use of cost-benefit analysis to advocate for ECE investment demonstrates how economic data can build government and partner support for ECE expansion.	• **Expand community-based and inclusive ECE access:** Invest in scalable community-based and home-based ECE models to reach underserved and rural communities. These models should be adapted for inclusivity, especially for children with disabilities, through early diagnostic support and training for caregivers on inclusive practices. • **Strengthen teacher training and professional development:** Increase investment in training programs for ECE educators, ensuring that teachers in both formal and community-based settings receive specialized training in child-cantered and inclusive pedagogy. This can be supported through partnerships with local institutions and community organizations to provide ongoing professional development • **Secure sustainable funding through strategic financial planning:** Conduct cost-benefit analyses to highlight ECE's high return on investment, as demonstrated by Malawi. This data-driven approach should be used to advocate for increased and sustainable funding from governments and partners, enabling effective and equitable ECE expansion.

Demonstrating high returns on investment, as Malawi did, canencourage sustainable, long-term funding for ECE.

- **Multisectoral collaboration is essential for holistic ECE services:** The need for coordinated efforts across Ministries (e.g., education, health, gender, and social welfare) was evident. Multisectoral collaboration, as seen in Rwanda and Malawi, helps address children's diverse needs, including health, nutrition, and family engagement, thereby fostering a more holistic approach to early childhood development.

- **Youth engagement amplifies community support and awareness:** Youth advocates play a powerful role in mobilizing communities and advocating for ECE. In Rwanda, youth-driven initiatives have helped to raise awareness about ECE's importance, illustrating how involving youth can bolster local support and address community-specific needs in ECE.

- **Implement harmonized standards across ECE settings:** Develop and enforce unified ELDS that apply across all types of ECE settings, including community-based and home-based centres. Harmonized standards help ensure consistent learning outcomes, regardless of the specific model or location of the ECE program.

- **Foster multi-sectoral collaboration and parental engagement:** Encourage coordination across sectors, including education, health, gender, and social services, to support a holistic approach to ECE. Additionally, strengthen parental involvement and community awareness initiatives to enhance the home environment's role in early learning and to promote sustainable community support for ECE initiatives.

Integration of STEM Education in African Education

Moving Together from Commitments to Impact at Scale
Kigali Convention Center, November 11 - 13, 2024

Moderator	Dr. Mary Sichangi, Coordinator, ICQN-MSE, CEMASTEA, Kenya
Panellists / Speakers	Mr. Albert Nsengiyumva, Executive Secretary, ADEA Mrs. Jacinta Akatsa, CEO-CEMASTEA, Kenya Mr. Thembelile Dlamini, CFP, Ministry of Education and Training, Eswatini Mr. Pierre Komenan KADIO, STEM CFP, Ministry of National Education and Literacy, Ivory Coast Abdou I. J. Jammeh, STEM CFP, Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, The Gambia Prof. Yashwantrao Ramma, STEM CFP, Université des Mascareignes, Mauritius
Rapporteur	Paul Abok & Diane Sengati

> *"Digital skills gaps are a major barrier to STEM education. Initiatives like coding camps and virtual laboratories can bridge these gaps."*
>
> **Mrs. Jacinta Akatsa**
> CEO, CEMASTEA (Kenya)

Africa is investing and waiting in anticipation for breakthroughs from its young population that are skilled in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) to address the development challenges that the continent is facing. With the realization that STEM education can unlock the talent among the continent's youthful population, countries have been making efforts to enhance performance in this area and promoting the same among young girls. This session explored the integration of STEM education in African education systems, focusing on primary and secondary levels. It highlighted various approaches, achievements, and challenges in implementing STEM education and play-based learning across different African countries. The session emphasized the importance of policy development, teacher professional development, and the creation of resource-equipped environments for effective STEM education. Represented countries highlighted the following initiatives:

- **Mauritius** successfully implemented **competency-based education** and introduced **Technology Education** in Grades 10 and 11. Notable progress includes the introduction of practical science work at the O-Level by 2025, and **collaboration with NGOs** for marine science projects.
- **Eswatini** adopted a **competency-based curriculum** with play-based methodologies. Science corners and ICT symposiums promote hands-on STEM learning.
- **Kenya** established **STEM model schools**, increased STEM enrolment, and developed various policies including national STEM education policies, a competence based Training Policy, including digital literacy training for teachers; an Education for Sustainable Development Policy; and the policy on ICT in Education.
- **The Gambia** implemented the Progressive Science and Mathematics Initiative and developed the STI Policy. Virtual learning platforms (called LabXchange learning platforms) were developed to allow learners to practice robotics education and inter-school STEM competitions are encouraged. More than 1000 scripted lessons were also digitalized, and remedial classes adopted.
- **Cote d'Ivoire** Launched the **STEM EGENA** initiative to create regional hubs for scientific development and promote STEM education through national policy frameworks. Additionally, the country implemented the PNAPAS programme encouraging play-based learning with STEM integration.

Main Challenges

1. **Resource constraints:** Resource constraints has resulted in lack of or inadequate critical infrastructure such as laboratories, equipment, and materials. This hinders practical STEM learning in many countries, including Kenya, Eswatini, and The Gambia. The situation is worse in rural settings as compared to urban areas.
2. **Teacher shortages:** Most countries, including Cote d'Ivoire and Eswatini, face a shortage of trained STEM teachers, which impacts the quality of STEM education.
3. **Curriculum overload and lack of alignment:** Overloaded curricula with limited time for innovative pedagogies were noted as significant barriers, as seen in Kenya and Cote d'Ivoire.
4. **Cultural and gender barriers:** Despite the efforts that countries have made to promote STEM among girls, societal perceptions that discourage girls from pursuing STEM subjects persist across all the countries in the panel.
5. **Gaps in play-based pedagogy and digital skills:** Majority of teachers do not have the required skills to effectively teach using play-based pedagogy and digital skills.

Key lessons

1. **Policy development:** Developing and implementing STEM education policies is crucial for ensuring coherence and scalability across African countries. Without clear policies, integration of STEM remains inconsistent.

2. **Teacher professional development:** Enhancing continuing training and professional development for teachers is vital to ensure that teachers are equipped with the skills to deliver effective STEM education. Countries like Kenya and The Gambia have made strides in this area.

3. **Resource mobilization:** Countries need to prioritize investment in resources and infrastructure to support hands-on STEM learning, as evidenced by the STEM model schools in Kenya and laboratory initiatives in Mauritius.

4. **Cross-sector partnerships:** Collaboration between governments, NGOs, and private sector partners is key to addressing resource gaps and scaling STEM initiatives, as seen in Mauritius and Eswatini.

5. **Inclusive approaches:** Promoting gender parity and inclusivity in STEM education is essential for long-term success. Programs such as "Girls in STEM" in Kenya provide valuable models for addressing gender disparities in STEM fields.

6. **Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms:** It is fundamental to establish M&E mechanisms not only to track progress but also to get feedback for improvement.

Recommendations

1. **Develop national STEM policies:** Countries are urged to prioritize the development of **comprehensive STEM education policies** to guide the integration of STEM at all education levels.

2. **Strengthen teacher training and capacity building:** Continuing **professional development** is critical to ensure teachers are equipped to teach STEM subjects using innovative, play-based, and hands-on approaches.

3. **Promote gender equity in STEM:** To close the gender gap in STEM participation, programs like **Kenya's** "**Girls in STEM**" **initiative** and mentorship schemes should be scaled across the continent.

4. **Increase funding and resource allocation:** Several countries highlighted the need for **increased investment** in STEM education, particularly for practical science facilities like laboratories and equipment.

5. **Foster cross-sector collaboration:** Collaboration between education institutions, industry, Government, and NGOs is key to aligning STEM education with workforce needs and national development goals. **Eswatini's partnerships** with the private sector, such as ICT symposiums and **Mauritius' Reef Conservation Project,** serve as models for such collaborative efforts.

6. **Digitalization and ICT integration:** Digital tools and platforms, like **The Gambia's Lab Xchange and regional virtual learning initiatives,** should be widely adopted to enhance STEM education delivery, especially in remote areas.

What Does High Impact Teaching Look Like in the Classroom? Demonstration Session on the High Impact Teaching Strategies for Foundational Literacy and Numeracy

Panellists / Speakers	Lydia Namayanja, Literacy Consultant, RTI international, IDG Wendi Ralaingita, Senior Education Advisor, RTI International, IDG
Rapporteur	Nathalie Aziza

> *"Teachers are critical for supporting learning, teachers need to be trained and supported to enhance their pedagogical practices"*
>
> **Hon. Dr. Torerayi Moyo**
> Minister of Primary and Secondary Education, Zimbabwe

This session focused on presenting some resources that RTI developed under the science of teaching grant funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation. The science of teaching grant focuses on a set of high impact teaching strategies that are evidence-based and can be most impactful for student learning. Additionally, RTI has produced leaning resources for supporting teachers to improve their teaching practices.

The objective of the science of teaching grant was to provide data, evidence, and innovation to improve foundational learning in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. The work focussed on compiling and synthesizing evidence about what works, generating new evidence, and disseminating to diverse audiences. During this session, RTI demonstrated a high impact teaching classroom, with participants taking the place of learners. Some of the key features of the lesson were involvement of learners, repletion of concepts using a variety of examples, structured group work, interesting learning materials, and individual attention of each learner by the teacher.

A second demonstration was conducted to show how to use the mini guides for literacy and numeracy to support teachers' professional development. The guides are arranged according to the six domains of learning environment, students' engagement in learning, knowledge progression and connections, assessment informed instruction, instructional approach-numeracy, and instructional approach-literacy. Each domain is linked to a continuum of tiers where tier 1 is basic strategies, tier 2 is developing strategies and tier 3 advanced strategies.

Key lessons

The importance of training teachers and supporting them with the necessary materials to perform the desired tasks is imperative. The emphasis is on ensuring that teachers do not only learn the theory but also have an opportunity to practice what is expected under the watch of a trainer. Critical skills beyond the content knowledge that the teachers need to run a high impact lesson include being creative, good listening, alertness, patience, and classroom management.

Teaching and Learning Materials:
How Do We Strengthen Supply Chain and Market Systems?

Moderator	Catherine Honeyman, Senior Education Specialist, USAID Rwanda
Panellists / Speakers	Issoufi Arbert Bedari TOURE, National Director of Basic Education, Mali Brenda Anjuri, Technical Consultant-Materials Development, RTI Jean Pierre TWIZEYIMANI, Book Supply Chain Technical Expert, Rwanda Aristarick Lymo, Senior Reading Numeracy Specialist, Tanzania Chantal Mutesi Gasana, Market System Facilitation Specialist, Ubuntu Publishers Ltd and Arise Education Yedidya SENZEYI Aimee, Chief of Party, USAID Ibitabo Kuri Twese Rwanda Catherine Uwimana, Book Development Expert and Consultant, Dawn Visuals, Rwanda
Rapporteur	Patrick Kogolla

> *"Community engagement in publishing by promoting private sector partnerships, will strengthen sustainable delivery of teaching and learning materials"*
>
> **Issoufi Arbert Bedari TOURE**
> National Director of Basic Education, Mali

Ensuring that each learner has the right book, in the right language, for the right level, and aligned to the right curriculum, is critical, because the ability to read is the bedrock of all learning. Appropriate teaching resources facilitates the teacher's classroom delivery and makes learning more interesting. To enable this, there is need to strengthen the whole production and supply chain of learning materials. The session discussed the planning, forecasting, budgeting, content development, printing, distribution, effective use in class, and monitoring of use of learning materials. Below are some of the initiatives that have enhanced access to learning materials:

USAID and the Global Book Alliance are supporting the Government of Mali to train Malian publishing houses. The aim is to support the efforts of the Ministry of Education to enhance children's access to high-quality supplementary/complementary reading materials. The target is the school curriculum in the USAID Mali Sira Project intervention area. Various workshops and coaching activities have been undertaken to train stakeholders, including Ministry staff, editors, writers, and illustrators in the design of such works. USAID funded the development, production, printing, and distribution of several graded textbooks published in two languages and distributed to 15 districts. Each child has been supplied with two reading books and two Mathematics books. The Government of Mali used to develop, edit, print and publish the books but has now handed over the mandate to the private sector. The Ministry approves the books before publication. After distribution, parents and the community are sensitized on how they can support the children to effectively use the books for learning. Teachers are also trained on how to effectively use the books for learning. The books, however, remain the property of the Government of Mali.

A similar programme, The Ibitabo Kuri Twese Rwanda, seeks to increase the quality and affordability of books and other reading materials, and improve their accessibility in schools, homes, and communities. Its objectives are to strengthen Government of Rwanda's policy and capacity to forecast, plan, procure, and distribute teaching and learning materials (TLM) and private enterprises' capacity to produce and distribute affordable high-quality textbooks and TLM that are gender sensitive and reflect Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles.

Main Challenges

- Insufficient modern equipment and limited access to spare parts and consumables leading to outsourcing of printing outside the country.
- Limited expertise and skills in printing bulk quality teaching and learning materials (TLM).
- Delays in content submission by clients thus impacting the overall timeline with printers complaining of short timelines for printing bulk TLM.
- The logistics of a printer distributing small batches of books to schools scattered across the country is very tedious (Mali).
- Evaluation criteria that will be used to evaluate the resulting TLM, including physical specifications, such as paper weight, cover, number of pages, etc., often lead to higher TLM costs.
- Issues in publishing ecosystems such as tax burdens makes the process costly, and businesses are not ready to take on the tasks.

Key lessons

An enabling environment that encompasses the holistic process of a functioning book supply chain is critical for the supply of TLM to thrive. This includes having a well-defined curriculum, and favourable policies on procurement; suitable infrastructure and accessibility; favourable loan interests; timely budgeting, planning, and forecasting; and policies and regulations on intellectual property.

Recommendations

- **Creative financing:** There is need to devise creative financing models that will improve access to capital for the various actors.

- **Enhance skills:** Facilitate skills development for the Association of printers through training institutions such as TVETs.

- **Strategic planning:** There is need to plan realistic timelines considering all steps for development, piloting, and official approval processes of TLM. Revise timelines for printing TLM for schools to at least 9-12 months. In addition, it is important to forecast and budget for book printing needs well in advance to enable printers to import what is required ahead of time.

- **Task allocation:** Hire logistics firms to manage book distribution and enhance efficiency. Since printers are currently responsible for deliveries, they have been obliged to invest in vehicles instead of upgrading their printing equipment. Logistics is a specialized profession that requires its own set of skills and expertise.

- **Sustainability:** Plan for sustainability from the beginning, including costs for replenishment, monitoring, and revision.

- **Stakeholder collaboration:** In a rapidly changing publishing landscape, it is essential to adopt a dynamic approach to developing supplementary materials. This approach should integrate local content, and community engagement. By collaborating with authors, illustrators, and the private sector, publishers can create culturally relevant and accessible resources that enhance literacy and promote a lifelong love of reading.

Ministerial Engagement on School Visits

"One agenda for educators should be to encourage politicians to see the importance of foundational learning."

Hon. Ms. Awut Deng Acuil
Minister of General Education and Instruction, South Sudan

The session focused on reflections, including direct quotes, by Ministers, heads of delegations and development partners who visited some schools in Kigali.

Moderator	Jackline Lumbasi, Media Professional based in Rwanda
Rapporteurs	Hellen Inyega & Mary Sichangi

Honourable Dr. Torerayi Moyo
Minister of Primary and Secondary Education, Zimbabwe

"We visited an ECD centre, a primary school, and a high school... We noticed that they have a very effective way of feeding their students. They are given good food... and we want to appreciate and applaud the Government of Rwanda for providing necessities of life, from food, to motivate learners…. What I appreciated most is that the teaching is student-based. It is more of a collaborative learning, where a teacher is equipped to facilitate learning... students in their groups engage each other and come up with effective group discussions."

Mr Adama Coulibaly
Inspector of Education, Ministry of National Education and Literacy, Côte d'Ivoire

"We saw a well-constructed school in a safe and protective environment. We discovered that in Rwanda, there is an integrated system from kindergarten to high school... All of this with television equipment, for a certain number of activities, … Another thing that caught our attention was all the necessary support for an effective and inclusive teaching. We visited the telecom libraries; the telecom computer rooms... This is an excellent example."

Pia Britto
Director, Education and Adolescent Development, UNICEF

"The visit to the Early Childhood Development Centre really amplified or exemplified how the system is built... [there was a] confluence of the early learning, the nutrition, the water sanitation, the child protection... all those elements came together in a very harmonious way. At the highest level of the system is the governance... that the governance of these early childhood centres sits with the local governance of the district is terrific because that is the part where you get the coordination for services to occur.»

Honourable Ms. Awut Deng Acuil
Minister of General Education and Instruction,
Republic of South Sudan

"The teachers have the necessary skills to facilitate the learning in the classroom. The curriculum is well understood, ... The fact that there is a symbolic contribution from the community shows the ownership…. There are efforts to plant trees to create a conducive environment for children and for teachers... with the climate change, I think this is a big added value to our education system in Africa."

Sarafino
from Ministry of Education, South Sudan

"We went to a school called GS Rwanda... The classroom was made with material from locally available materials. And the learners were busy, engaged, learning through those materials... because we know, this is where they learn through seeing, through touching."

Lessons learned

- **Access:** Rwanda's ECD centre emphasized proximity to relocated families and fostered community involvement, providing a comprehensive model of integrating early learning, nutrition, water sanitation, and child protection.

- **Community involvement strengthens education:** Active involvement of local communities and symbolic contributions from parents and families foster a sense of ownership and accountability in the educational process. This partnership between the community and the school strengthens the support system and promotes a sustainable learning environment.

- **Student-centred learning improves engagement:** Shifting from teacher-led to student-centered and collaborative learning approaches enhances engagement and critical thinking. When teachers act as facilitators, students are empowered to take ownership of their learning, which leads to better outcomes and active participation.

- **Environmental education is vital for sustainable development:** Integrating environmental activities such as tree planting within school programs instills early awareness and responsibility for the environment. This approach aligns educational goals with broader societal challenges like climate change, showing the potential of schools as agents of sustainable development.

- **Integrated Early Childhood Development (ECD) systems lead to holistic growth:** ECD centers that combine education with essential services such as nutrition, sanitation, and child protection provide a strong foundation for holistic child development. Such models ensure that young children's physical, emotional, and educational needs are addressed in a coordinated and effective manner.

- **Robust local governance enhances service delivery:** Locally governed ECD centres benefit from better-coordinated services and more responsive governance. When education systems are managed at the district level, there is greater alignment with local needs, which promotes accountability and allows for a more targeted approach to educational challenges.

Rwanda showcased an integrated educational system, from kindergarten through high school, with well-organized, safe, and clean learning environments, equipped with television and other supportive resources for quality education. Governance of Rwanda's ECD centres at the district level enabled seamless service coordination, emphasizing the importance of local governance in educational oversight. Community contributions and environmental education initiatives were appreciated as they fostered collective responsibility and environmental stewardship, seen as vital for addressing climate change.

Recommendations

- **Expand access to ECD programs with community involvement:** Establish more formal Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres, particularly in underserved areas, and involve local communities through small, manageable contributions. This can enhance a sense of ownership and sustain engagement in early learning initiatives.

- **Adopt student-centred learning models in Primary and Secondary Schools:** Implement collaborative, student-centred learning practices at the foundational level, positioning teachers as facilitators rather than sole knowledge bearers. This approach encourages peer learning and enhances learner engagement and critical thinking.

- **Integrate environmental education in school curricula:** Encourage environmental education activities, such as tree planting, in schools to foster early awareness and involvement in sustainability practices. This aligns educational goals with broader environmental responsibilities and builds learner agency in addressing climate issues.

- **Strengthen digital and technological resources in schools:** Provide digital tools, like computers and other educational technologies, to support learning in ECD and primary schools. Ensuring access to technology helps bridge digital divides and prepares learners for a technology-driven world.

- **Enhance governance structures at the local level for ECD centres:** Delegate oversight of ECD centres to local governance entities, such as district councils, to ensure that early education services are well-coordinated, responsive, and meet community needs. This approach can improve service delivery and accountability in foundational learning programs.

Closing Remarks of the Minister of Education Rwanda

In closing, Hon. Joseph Nsengimana thanked and expressed his deep appreciation to all the participants who made the three days a rich gathering where insights and possibilities were shared. The Minister of Education, Rwanda, reminded the participants that the important work extends beyond the sessions as they all leave for their respective countries to lay the foundation of ending learning poverty by the end of the Decade. He concluded by thanking the development partners for their commitment to supporting Africa address her educational challenges, especially at the foundational level. He also acknowledged the work done by all the organizers that enabled a smooth and coordinated exchange. His parting shot was for all to remember what they had heard, seen, and discussed, especially what the children requested, "less talking to more action."

Republic of Rwanda
Ministry of Education