

2022

# TRANSFORMING EDUCATION

THROUGH AFRICAN-LED  
RESEARCH & SOLUTIONS



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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This project would not be possible without the insights and contributions of the local researchers and ecosystem actors who shared their stories and experiences during the “Forum for Education Research in/for/by Africa,” as well as in subsequent interviews. We are grateful for the time, energy and effort they gave throughout the process, as well as for all they do every day to serve our children and communities across the continent.

In particular, we would like to thank the forum attendees, including participants from African Center for Economic Transformation for Africa, African Development Bank, Africa Education Watch, African Institute for Development Policy, Age of Learning, Amplify Girls, African Population & Health Research Centre (APHRC), Association of African Universities, Centre for Mathematics, Science and Technology Education in Africa (CEMASTEIA), Centre for the Studies of Economies of Africa, Dignitas Project, Economic Policy Research Centre, Economic Policy Research Network, Educate!, Education Development Trust, Education in Sub-Saharan Africa, Education Partnership Centre, Education.org, Forum for African Women Educationalists, Funda Wandu, Graduate Institute, Institute for Democratic Governance, Institute of Economic Affairs, Kenyatta University, Makerere University, Partnership for African Social and Governance Research, Poverty Action Lab,

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On behalf of all of us, we look forward to continuing to work with more local researchers, funders and other ecosystem actors to make our shared principles a reality in the field.



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SECTION

# A PUSH FOR PROGRESS IN AFRICAN EDUCATION RESEARCH



**EVIDENCE AND RESEARCH** are essential tools to tackle the most complex educational issues and improve the lives of children and communities. From young children to adult learners, evidence is needed to understand the full breadth of why and how people learn, and what impact learning (or failing to learn) has on life inside and beyond the classroom. Yet, to unleash the power of research across the education sector in Africa, we must advance how we identify, support, engage with and cultivate locally led research.

[Imaginable Futures](#), [Echidna Giving](#), [the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](#) and [Porticus](#) believe in a future in which education stakeholders at all levels can use locally led and locally generated research to solve the challenges facing their systems. To realize this potential, supporting local education research institutions is essential.

Easier said than done. There is a persistent shortage of funding for local researchers, with equally persistent barriers that disproportionately affect many early-career and female researchers in the field. Capacity-strengthening programmes are hard to come by, impeding professional growth for many local researchers. Linkages between education research, policy and practice are yet to be institutionalized. Ecosystem constraints offer few opportunities for collaboration, mutual support and communication. This all results in education research initiatives in Africa – and policy recommendations that flow from them – being largely driven by outsiders often farthest from these contexts.

At the same time, local researchers are best equipped to investigate and conduct quality research. There are a number of 'ingredients' contributing to this. Local researchers intimately understand the local context, knowledge and values, and as such, conduct research grounded in context and responsive to local knowledge gaps. They establish and nurture relationships with local stakeholders at all levels – from the community to the government – that are needed for research to be taken up and used in practice. They are also committed to strengthening the capacity of their own staff. And because local researchers are ultimately accountable to their communities and local governments, they are invested in the answers to the research and seeing it taken up in practice.

Determination to address these challenges, coupled with our deep conviction of the role of locally led research in transforming education systems, is why we collaborated to host a virtual "Forum for Education Research in/for/by Africa" from 26 to 29 April 2022. The gathering brought together over ninety researchers, professors, educators, advocates, organizers and others in the education space from across Africa.

Our objective was to provide a space for local researchers to convene, share ideas, learn from one another and co-design relevant solutions. We collated insights from their lived experiences, using these as foundations by which to observe and understand themes and patterns in the education research ecosystem. By documenting what we learned from the Forum in this report, we hope to contribute actionable and practical insights on the role that funders can play along with the broader research ecosystem in empowering local education researchers on the continent.

The forum asked a series of questions, including:

- What will it take to shift more power to African education researchers?
- What are the gaps and opportunities around communication, translation and use of research, and where is support needed?

“ The forum got people thinking about the value of education research in this region, and why the quality is important. It got people reflecting on how they will be able to surmount some of the challenges that stand in the way. While I think many participants began the sessions believing that the challenges facing education researchers in Africa were intractable, by the end, there were a lot of people seeing the opportunities to surmount those challenges.”

**DR. EMMANUEL  
MANYASA**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
Usawa Agenda





- How can we raise the visibility of ideas and talent from early-career and established African education researchers?
- What role could funders play to build and sustain a regional community of practice of local researchers, institutions and relevant players?

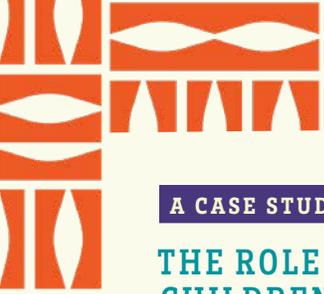
Together, we explored the possibility of establishing a funder collaborative, with the vision to create strong local education research institutions and researchers that are equipped and empowered to conduct quality education research and promote its uptake. As participants made clear, this will require a structural rebalancing of the relationships among funders and researchers, across the entire research 'value chain,' from agenda setting to publishing.

When asked what success looks like for them, researchers surfaced many common themes. In an ideal research ecosystem, research agendas are designed locally. Capacity strengthening programmes are tailored to the identified

needs of local researchers. Capital is flexible, incentivizing a culture of collaboration and learning. Communication strategies are strengthening the linkages between evidence, policy and practice. Organizations are launching more gender-sensitive programmes, approaches and models to encourage female participation.

It is our hope that this report will explore the challenges facing local researchers, shed light on the impact of opportunities in front of us today and galvanize action from a wide array of players to contribute to these visions of success.

This report provides a brief analysis of the insights and recommendations from the forum. This section (Section 1) discusses the forum's purpose; Section 2 details five broad areas identified by attendees as opportunities for change; and Section 3 establishes key principles and a roadmap to a better future.



## A CASE STUDY FROM KENYA

# THE ROLE OF LOCAL RESEARCH IN ADVANCING LEARNING EQUITY FOR CHILDREN POST COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic was indisputably a global health and economic crisis. In the wake of the pandemic, Kenya faced profound educational challenges, further exacerbating the challenges facing the sector. By mid-2021, almost 17 million students in Kenya [hadn't attended school for an average of 13 months](#).

To mitigate the effects of school closure on education, the government nobly sought to accelerate the shift to and spur innovation in digital education to make it possible for learning to continue during the pandemic. The Ministry of Education (MoE) started offering online classes to school learners through radio programmes, TV channels and the Kenya Education Cloud platform. It also partnered with several commercial and not-for-profit players to enable remote learning solutions. After one month of online classes, the MoE proposed to reopen schools by fully moving to the online delivery of teaching services.

However, many questions still lingered on what impact these programmes were having on 1) actually promoting learning; and 2) widening inequalities in access to quality learning in the current circumstances.

To explore these questions, Usawa Agenda launched a national survey to collect and analyze data on the status of remote learning among school-going children across the country. The survey reached over 3,735 households across 42 of the 47 counties. The results unearthed critical insights into understanding the reach, uptake and efficacy of these interventions. These include low and inequitable access to digital learning – showing that almost 4 in 5 children didn't access any digital learning programmes, and neither were most parents even aware of the interventions. In the face of these stark facts, the MoE abandoned the plan to reopen schools online and instead planned for the recovery of lost

time through shortened school terms and school holidays after in-person reopening.

These points of understanding led directly to filling critical knowledge gaps that existed previously. Grounded in local realities, the results provided a benchmarking analysis of the current state of learning and a rigorous assessment of capacity for local infrastructure across the country. They assessed the impact of school closures and explored trends and systemic factors that informed students' access to, engagement with and learning from different digital interventions. They have also informed their knowledge of what it takes to develop equitable learning solutions for all children, as well as provided analytical content on parental and community engagement in children's learning.

Building on these insights, Usawa continues to work with the Government of Kenya to improve equity across the basic education sector (from ECD to secondary) through the provision of evidence<sup>3</sup>, engagement with policy actors and building equity-centered coalitions of education champions. These champions include the Kenya Editors Guild, Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (they sponsor and control over 30 percent of schools in Kenya), parents through a partnership with the National Parents Association, and teachers through partnerships with the main teachers' unions and associations.

All this was only possible thanks to Usawa Agenda's position as a Kenyan organization – they understood the context, were in the country and could move fast even during COVID restrictions, had a finger on the pulse of the situation on the ground, and had deep relationships, credibility and connections with key actors in the ecosystem including policy-makers and decision-makers.

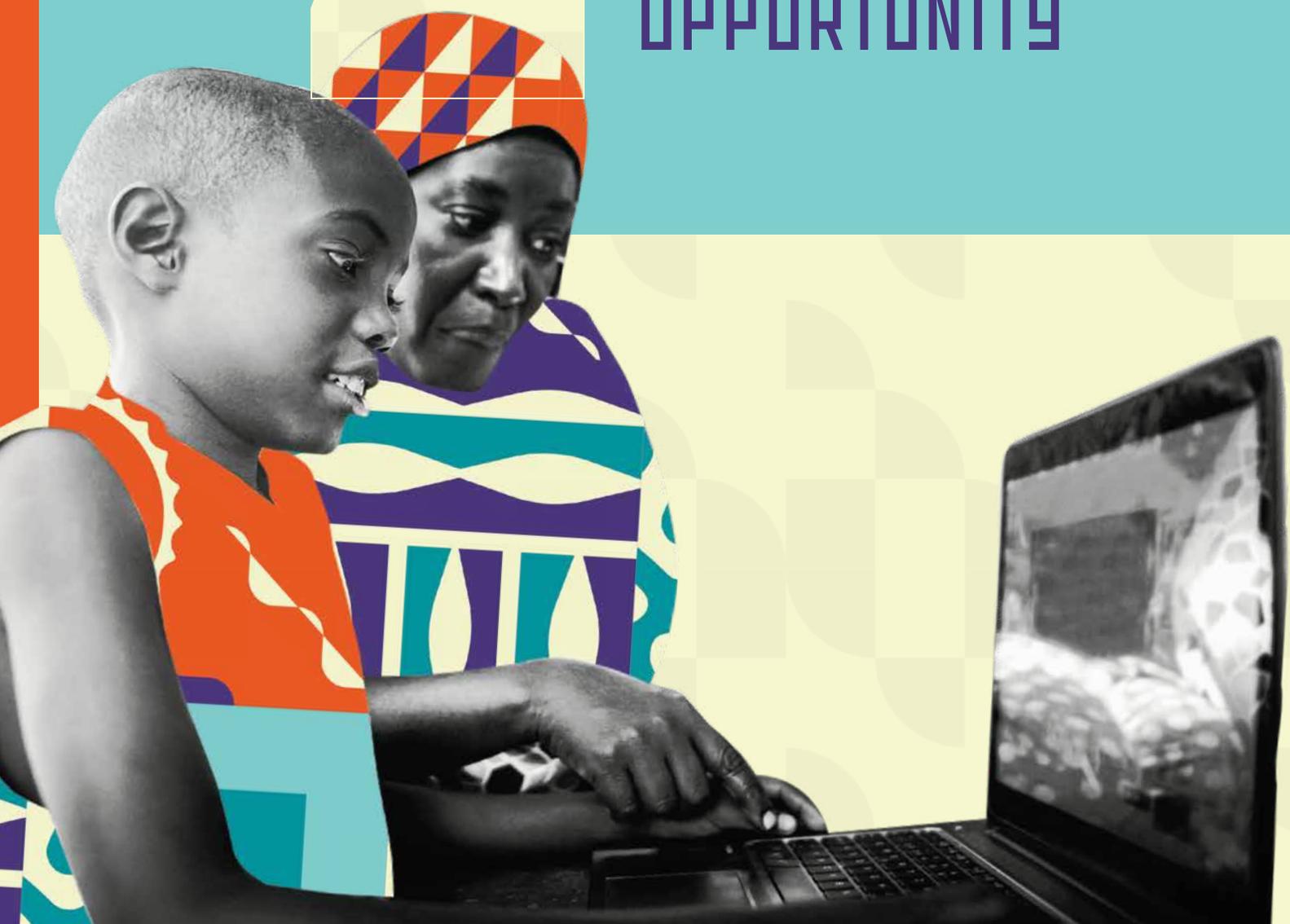
To see the complete survey report, please click [here](#).

**About Usawa Agenda:** Usawa Agenda is a not-for-profit organization registered and working in Kenya. It envisions a world where every child benefits from quality education. Usawa seeks to contribute to this broad vision by promoting just access to quality education for every child in Kenya through systems change. They do this through the generation of evidence and insights, and policy, practice and norms influencing.

SECTION

7

**LEVERS  
FOR CHANGE:  
WHERE  
CHALLENGE  
MEETS  
OPPORTUNITY**



## ACCESSING FUNDS

Access to funding is a critical component for quality education research and a resilient education research ecosystem. Yet, the proportion of local education researchers who are un(der) funded is far higher than that of their counterparts in the Global North. In sub-Saharan Africa, over 80 percent of locally led education research in Africa is considered underfunded.<sup>2</sup>

While there are some national and regional funding commitments toward education researchers, much needs to be done to pool efforts. With low gross domestic expenditure on research and development (R&D) in Africa – standing at only 0.45 percent<sup>3</sup> according to the most recent available figures – we are still far from creating a space for research on a continental level.

In recent years, we have witnessed philanthropic funding playing an important role in the local education research ecosystem; however, donors often issue funding in verticals, earmarked for specific short-term projects and via a variety of intermediaries. Donors also rarely work together in a coordinated manner, perhaps because their strategic and operational priorities differ. In many contexts, several of these factors operate simultaneously. For the local education researcher, this all represents a precarious and convoluted path to mobilize the resources needed to conduct research.

While African education research is on the rise, the persistent lack of funding is contributing to its current weak presence within the global education research agenda. In 2016, research produced in Africa accounted for 3 percent of world research output<sup>4</sup> – a trend that we expect is also reflected in education research.

The Forum attendees highlighted the need to rethink the way international funding can be more supportive of African-led and produced research, as it will enable African education researchers to forge their own pathway to African development and contribute to the wealth of global research. There is a unique opportunity to build pipelines filled with strong local researchers and research organizations representative of the societies and communities that have been historically excluded.

### What ideas, solutions and opportunities did participants come up with?

- **Prioritize funding African** individuals and organizations for research.
- **Explore multiple funding mechanisms to both new and existing African research organizations**, covering long-term core support, capacity support, access to conferences, journals and researcher time for peer review, etc.
- Coordinate or even **harmonize diligence and reporting processes** and procedures among funders supporting the same research organizations.
- Increase the proportion of **research funding that goes directly to local education research organizations**.
- Explore pathways to **co-fund research projects with national governments**.
- **Design flexible funding models** that allow for and incentivize adaptation in response to learning and changes in context.
- Be more intentional in **expanding networks of local researchers**.

“Africa’s education researchers are not felt in the continent not because they are not there but because the funding landscape is not equal.”

**KENYAN RESEARCHER**



## PURSUING RESEARCH AUTONOMOUSLY

Local researchers have a deeply nuanced understanding of the local political priorities and the full political processes from policy design through maintenance, allowing them to influence different macro, mezzo and micro levels of their respective systems. They are able to identify, discuss, prioritize and respond to both immediate needs and long-term systems dynamics affecting the education systems.

Despite good intentions, current funding approaches are yet to give emphasis to the insight, leadership and autonomy of local researchers. African education research priorities, questions and resources remain deeply influenced by, and responsive to, the Global North. Power tends to lie with the donor who determines who is eligible to receive funds, what research areas should be prioritized, what methodologies to be pursued and how success is defined. This results in initiatives, approaches and strategies that are often overlooked by public institutions and policymakers as they seldom align with budget, timeframes and policymaking processes.

In addition, many research projects on local education systems are managed from overseas, and researchers across Africa often feel the effects of North-South power dynamics, spending more time collecting data than writing and analyzing it and without having access to or ownership of the data after completion of the research project – ceding that role to Northern research institutions.

To many African researchers, these inequities are seen as fueling a deep lack of trust in the ability of African research organizations to produce first-rate work. Many times this results in African researchers leaving the continent or giving up research careers altogether. Young researchers, who often have even fewer opportunities to pursue independent research, are especially impacted.

In order to effectively support local research autonomy, we need to reimagine funders' engagement model to be more accessible and supportive, shifting power to local education researchers and research organizations.

### What ideas, solutions and opportunities did participants come up with?

- **Build-in co-creation phases with local education researchers** prior to starting the research process.
- **Encourage a new approach to research partnerships** in which local African researchers have first access and right of use of the data collected by them.
- Encourage senior researchers to **assist in the professional development of early-career researchers** as a new cadre of leaders.
- Support **regional collaboration** of researchers and institutions.
- Embrace flexibility to allow for **learning and course-correction**, if needed.

“ Being ‘hands and feet’ for data collection—I have been there! Collect the data but cannot publish the data!—I have been there! Lack of mentorship—I have been there! Lack of resources to do research—I have been there! Lack of funds—I have been there! Publish or perish—I have been there!”

**ELIZABETH NYIRENGA**  
University of Zambia

“ Relevance of the research matters. We need to have a research agenda in our public institutions informed by issues on the ground. Sadly, researchers publish lots of research that doesn't address local community issues.”

**LATÉ LAWSON**  
Education in  
Sub-Saharan Africa (ESSA)



## STRENGTHENING CAPACITY

Capacity strengthening is a complex and critical endeavour for harnessing the power of local researchers. On the one hand, there is significant progress across public and private institutions, and broad recognition of the critical role capacity-strengthening programmes play in the health of the local education research ecosystem. On the other hand, many funders struggle to understand, facilitate and unlock the right support for local researchers – all while navigating serious questions about what systemic challenges local researchers face, what the local talent landscape looks like and what immediate-to-big picture opportunities exist.

While the past decade has seen a significant increase in funding for capacity strengthening programmes of different approaches, many of these programmes have been designed and led from outside the continent through Global North university programmes and fellowships based at Global North think tanks. They also often do not recognize the existing capacities, skills and expertise of local education researchers in identifying challenges, analyzing systems and conducting quality research.

To address these challenges, many African research organizations are working to increase financing for capacity-strengthening programmes for their researchers. There is a tremendous appetite to grow and replicate these programmes, especially ones geared towards junior and early-career researchers. However, local research organizations are often handicapped by project-based funding<sup>5</sup> that rarely focuses on elevating local research capacity, and as such, limits their abilities to operate and scale these programmes.

This reinforces practices such as research projects being won on the basis of 'star' individual researchers, insufficient budgets for mentoring junior and early career researchers and no incentives to have a diverse research workforce.

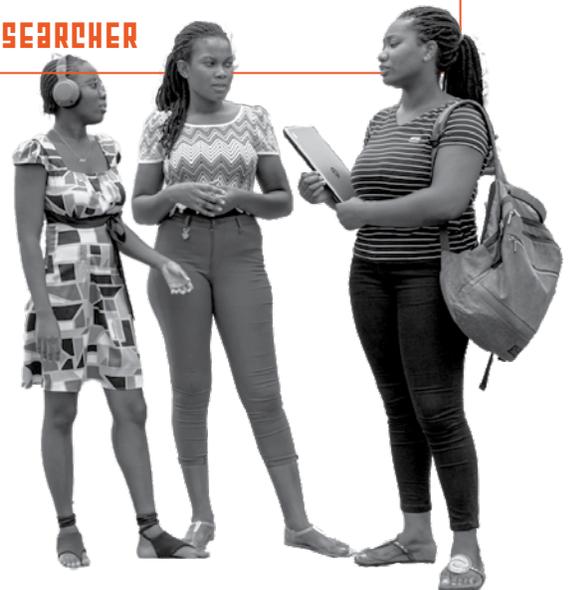
Effective capacity strengthening doesn't indicate a pre-packaged tool or model, but rather requires funders to walk with, listen to and be guided by local researchers. These programmes may potentially have positive ripple effects throughout: individuals may have more viable pathways to grow and develop their skills in a nurturing environment, institutions may be better equipped to build a critical mass of local researchers with the necessary skills to thrive, and ultimately, local systems may see more effective evidence-informed policies and programmes.

### What ideas, solutions and opportunities did participants come up with?

- Start with **defining what capacity-strengthening means** in consultation with and input from local researchers and research organizations to know and build on what already exists.
- Support and fund **multiple forms of learning, mentorship and peer support**.
- Design and support **capacity-strengthening programmes along the continuum of research**, from agenda setting and design through implementation and dissemination.
- Capture **feedback 'midstream'** when longer capacity strengthening programmes are in place.
- Explore expansive approaches to **capacitate a broad range of stakeholders in the education research ecosystem**, including governments, policymakers, academics, research organizations and civil society organizations.

“ We're at the bottom of Maslow's hierarchy needs, working on survival.”

**KENYAN RESEARCHER**



## IMPROVING RESEARCH COMMUNICATION

Research can only create an impact in people's lives if it is targeted, tailored to a specific audience and speaks to the local reality and context. There is a growing consensus in the research ecosystem that more attention and resources are needed to determine how evidence can be better disseminated and put into action, reflecting a shift in focus from evidence generation to uptake.

The challenges of research communication stem from both supply and demand side constraints. On the supply side, communication efforts need to go beyond mere 'dissemination' to include engagement, influencing and co-creation efforts with many different stakeholders. Too often there is a lack of focus, funding and capacity to transform research findings into policy-applicable findings, communicate research in a jargon-free and non-technical language, present research findings in a way that is actionable and provide recommendations that recognize and respond to the often resource-constrained environments of many African countries.

On the demand side, the challenges are manifold: policy-makers may not have the necessary skill sets and knowledge to consume, interpret and apply evidence in practice. The lack of linkages or networks connecting policymakers with the research community limits their ability to understand what research is conducted or appreciate its relevance and usability. Moreover, efforts toward affecting change in the public sector require long time frames, multiple feedback loops through the entire research process and deep relationships with multiple government bodies to earn their trust, all of which make it hard for research organizations operating with limited resources to gain a foothold.

Funders can play a central role in bridging the gap between evidence to uptake, unlocking both supply and demand barriers. Funding strategies could also be more expansive beyond funding research organizations, supporting a more holistic approach to improving the health of the research ecosystem.

### What ideas, solutions and opportunities did participants come up with?

- Recognize that **knowledge generation is not the holy grail**, but rather evidence-informed implementation of programmes, strategies and approach is what ultimately creates impact in young peoples' lives.
- **Earmark a percentage of funding on research communication and dissemination** as technical assistance to grantees.
- **Expand pipeline to include knowledge brokers and communication agencies** to convey and amplify research messages – right from the start of the research process.
- Even for project-based support, **consider plugging a flexible funding component as an 'add-on'** to allow and incentivize iterative testing and experimentation around government engagement and policy design.
- Provide support while **keeping in mind the long-term nature of building deep and trusting partnerships** with government institutions, which often have intangible 'outputs.'
- Lead or facilitate **more partnerships and networks that connect researchers and policymakers**
- Consider **targeted capacity-building programmes for policymakers** with the goal to equip them with the necessary skills to understand and interpret technical evidence.

“ We must de-mystify research through communication campaigns that can be understood by politicians and ordinary people.”

**BARREL GUEYE**  
African Population and Health  
Research Centre (APHRC)



## INCREASING FEMALE RESEARCHERS' PARTICIPATION

Local researchers are becoming indispensable to the continent's prosperity and advancement, but not nearly enough of them are women. In sub-Saharan Africa, between 18 to 31 percent of researchers are female, compared to 49 percent in Southeast Europe and in the Caribbean and 44 percent in Central Asia and Latin America.<sup>6</sup>

Gender equity in any professional field is complex, given the network of factors that influence female participation, agency and ability to access leadership positions – and research is no different. One of the greatest barriers to women taking more research positions is the lack of childcare support at the workplace, which creates a disproportionate household care burden for female researchers. Additionally, project-based funding seldom covers maternity leave, adding to the tradeoffs between balancing family and career for female researchers.

In addition, cumbersome policies and procedures for reporting or investigating sexual harassment make local female researchers more prone to sexual harassment and exploitation from employers and fellow employees. This, coupled with the combination of the lack of targeted mentorship opportunities, networks, role modeling and other relevant support, all put female researchers at a higher risk of not pursuing research careers or leaving the profession much earlier than their male counterparts.

While many funders may be aware of the value of female participation in education research, few have considered an intentional gender lens in their research funding strategies. There is an opportunity for funders – especially those in the increasing community of public and private sectors looking to adapt gender-smart funding approaches – to significantly contribute to a more equitable future for female education researchers.

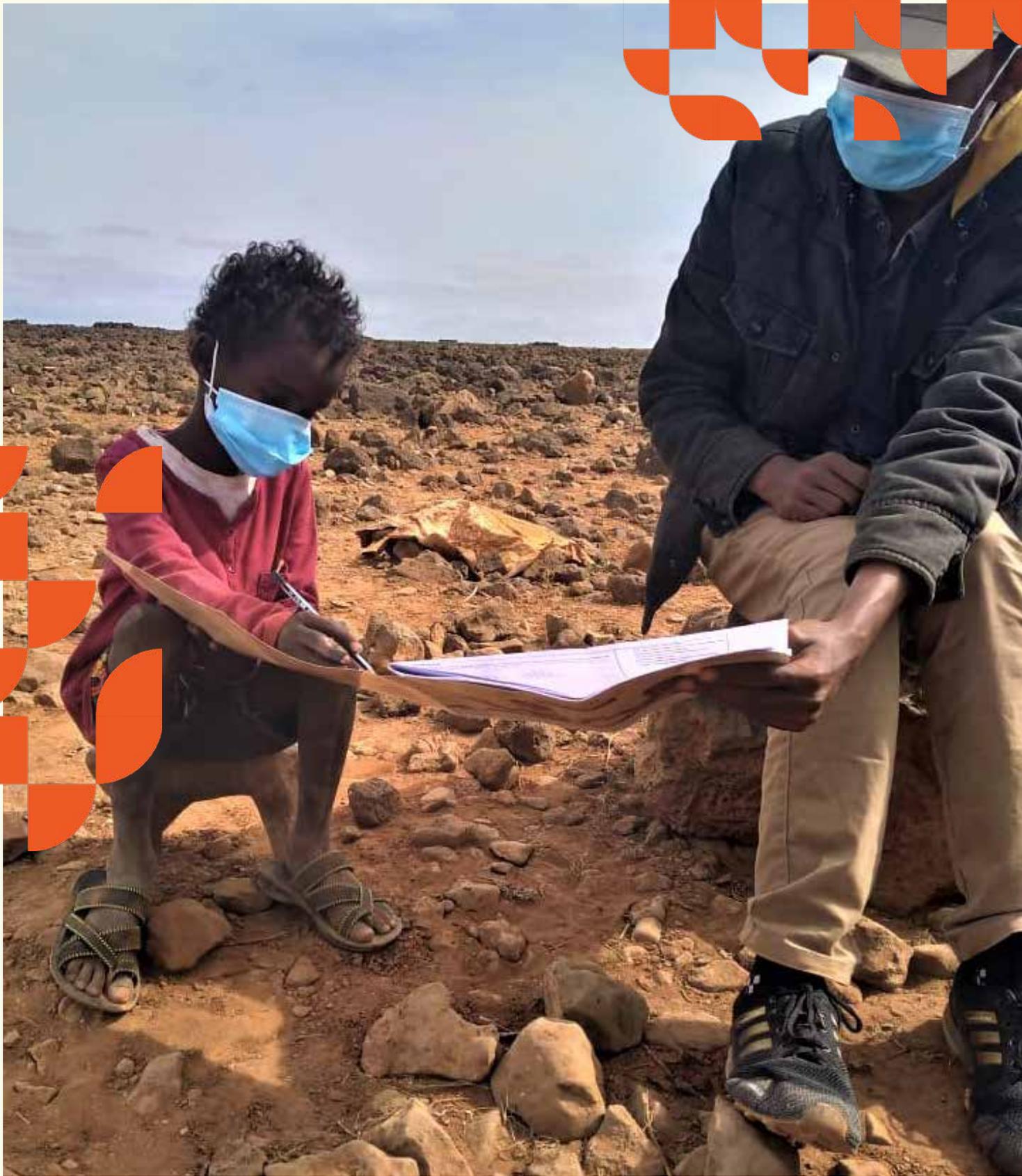
### What ideas, solutions and opportunities did participants come up with?

- **Start upstream and support learning resources** that portray the girl child in female research leadership positions.
  - **Support organization-driven childcare, home-based work and flexible training schedules** to help accommodate the care responsibilities female researchers have.
  - **Build the evidence for, and if positive, champion structured gender-parity approaches**, such as quotas, dedicated gender equality board committees or female-specific training programmes.
  - **Amplify support to female-led research programmes**, collectives, networks or groups.
- **Provide additional support to career-coaching services and pairing schemes for female researchers** to complement research training skills.
  - **Support organization-driven policies on paid maternal leave** among portfolio companies.
  - **Support entry-level career coaching for young female researchers** as they graduate and transition to work and through the first years of their research career.
  - **Identify and showcase existing models, approaches and programmes that are working to increase female participation** in the research ecosystem.

“ Generally, women rarely participate [in research] as it is seen to be a preserve for men. This is seen in all the career choices that most women tend to take. This is slowly changing with girls venturing into male-dominated fields. However, there are not many mentors to support women in pursuing research, rather most end up being sexually harassed and looked down upon by male colleagues.”

**GHANSION FEMALE RESEARCHER**







## A CASE STUDY

### HOW IS APHRC ENSURING FEMALE INCLUSION IN THEIR WORK?

#### Background:

The Consortium for Advanced Research Training in Africa (CARTA) was formed under the leadership of the African Population and Health Research Centre (APHRC) and the University of the Witwatersrand in 2009 in partnership with nine African universities, four African research institutions and select northern universities. The programme aims to support locally led research and research training at African universities. To date, CARTA has supported 245 Ph.D. fellows.

#### How is CARTA contributing to a more equitable and inclusive research environment for female researchers in Africa?

1. **Applies a differential maximum age cut-off for female (45 years old) and male (40 years old) applicants** to the doctorate fellowship programme to respond to the disproportionate effects of childbearing and family care on female researchers.
2. **Provides flexible pathways for registering into the programme for all researchers**, which enables female researchers the option to register for their doctorate studies at their home institutions and benefit from post-doctoral opportunities, including research re-entry grants and split post-doctoral fellowships while spending a substantial amount of time close to or at their home institutions.
3. **Covers the associated childcare cost for female researchers with children under 14 months during residential training**, including the cost of flight, accommodation and feeding for the fellow, child and childminder.
4. **Grants a leave of absence consideration to expectant and lactating female researchers on request** so that they can continue their research on their return.
5. **Upholds an equal pay policy** (stipends and research funds) for all researchers, regardless of background.
6. **Deploys gender-lens KPIs that track, monitor and report** on both application and admissions processes every year, as well as engagement and retention for female researchers to determine the quality and impact of gender-related policies and projects.
7. **Encourages and facilitates opportunities for researchers** to get more exposure in media outlets (interviews, podcasts, radio, etc.). To ensure female researchers do not miss out, they are linked with appropriate support platforms.
8. As a COVID-19 mitigation, **awarded child-care mitigation funds** to fellows affected by the pandemic, the majority of which were women.

SECTION

PRINCIPLES



**D**ELIVERING MEANINGFUL IMPACT requires a coalition of the willing to act in concert at all levels – from funding practices that take a long-term view on building a resilient local research ecosystem, to strategic initiatives that create an enabling environment for collaboration and learning, to more organizational efforts to prioritize inclusion, diversity and equity. Because researchers' needs, policy requirements and broader ecosystem constraints evolve often, such impact will need a mixture of dogged persistence and agile execution.

Over the past few months, we've worked to develop a list of recommendations using the insights we collated from local researchers as a foundational element of our process. Based on these insights, we've identified five broad principles that we hope to inspire more funders to consider in their work and crowd-in additional resources to break historical patterns and achieve transformative impact in the local research ecosystem. The recommendations presented in this section are a first step in this direction.

# 1

## Drive impact by supporting a long-term vision.

This includes, for example:

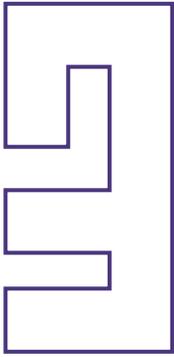
- Contributing to building resilient organizations and systems by supporting a diverse range of organizational development initiatives, approaches and tools tailored to the identified needs of local researchers.
- Continuously expanding and diversifying funders' networks of education researchers to encompass different geographies, organization size, capacity levels, etc.
- Nurturing and developing people, organizations and ideas besides programmes and projects.
- Supporting the development of local education agendas and visions.
- Providing long-term funding and support.
- Supporting local research funders including local foundations and granting councils.

# 2

## Respond to local needs, agendas and initiatives by funding local organizations in ways that support their own missions.

This includes, for example:

- Prioritizing direct support to local education research organizations, including ongoing collaborations or networks between education researchers, practitioners and policymakers.
- Offering multiple support and funding options to match the characteristics and organizational needs of local organizations and contribute to their long-term development.
- Adopting a demand-driven funding approach and aligning funder strategies to locally defined objectives. For example, by involving local experts and practitioners in the design and delivery of funding strategies, including in the governance of individual funders or funding consortia.
- Learning from, building on and collaborating with existing efforts supporting locally led research on the continent.



### **Provide funding across the generation, communication and use of evidence.**

This includes, for example:

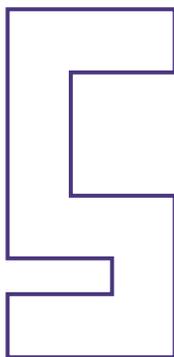
- Supporting the visibility of all African research by using, quoting and championing African research presented in all forms of written and verbal communications including social media, blogs, podcasts, panels, etc.
- Recognizing that credible evidence can take multiple forms and that quality standards should avoid being narrow and restrictive, and supporting a diverse set of approaches and models.
- Recognizing the role of teachers, school leaders, civil society organizations and others in generating and using evidence.
- Supporting the communicating of evidence through diverse and targeted channels and in local languages if necessary.
- Supporting the long-term capacity of local systems to generate, communicate and use evidence, including by encouraging an enabling culture of evidence use and developing relevant and appropriate solutions to promote evidence-informed decision making.
- Developing strategies and portfolios that combine support for research, communication and use both across grantee-partners and within single grantee-partners.
- Supporting ongoing collaborations or networks between researchers, practitioners and decision makers.



### **Deliberately support the inclusion of women, young people, minorities and other disadvantaged groups in education research.**

This includes, for example:

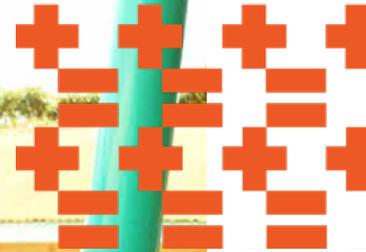
- Considering how, and if, efforts to generate, communicate and use evidence promote diversity, equity and inclusion.
- Tackling systemic and organizational barriers for the active participation of women, young people, minorities and other disadvantaged groups in education research, communication and use.
- Incorporating financial and technical support into funding options to help organizations address barriers to diversity.
- Recognize the need for and take steps toward embedding diversity, equity and inclusion within funders and funding consortia themselves.



### **Promote dynamic learning.**

This includes, for example:

- Monitoring progress towards a long-term vision, looking at how these recommendations are adopted and applied by individual funders and assessing if and what contributions these recommendations are making.
- Building feedback loops with research organizations to inform future strategies and decision-making processes.
- Fostering collaboration by creating spaces for African researchers, practitioners and policymakers for deep listening, shared reflection, learning and co-creation of solutions.
- Holding regular meetings and jointly coordinating the implementation of initiatives.
- Increasing regional mobility for local researchers and facilitating visits to institutions across the continent.
- Carrying out experimentation, data collection and evaluation to foster a culture of learning, growth and innovation.



SECTION

# "IN/FOR/ BY AFRICA" A ROAD MAP TO A BETTER FUTURE



**UNDOUBTEDLY, THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES ABOVE** will require a coalition of and mobilization from many actors including research organizations, funders, governments and advocates. Meanwhile, there is a need to find bold ways of fixing the old path and charting new territories and solutions to reimagine education research funding going forward.

It is now time to support locally led education research – and this has never been more urgent. As the social, economic and learning toll of the COVID-19 crisis continues to unfold, evidence-informed and home-grown solutions are critical to helping local governments and other actors establish sustainable and effective programmes that serve all children and communities.

In truth, it will take time and a spectrum of resources to navigate the complex web of factors that hinder local researchers' ability to thrive. But we see a tremendous opportunity to address the catalytic promise of effective policy and programmatic outcomes by supporting locally led research in Africa. A key objective underlying the forum and the report is to inspire funders to adopt a more intentional strategy for investing in the empowerment of local education researchers and research organizations.

### **This is where you come in.**

Capital is needed, more learning is required and an intentional and authentic commitment to building and supporting a diverse pool of local researchers in the education space is key.

For the local research community: the time is now to seize the opportunity and break ground through bold approaches and audacious solutions that put African education researchers at the forefront – knowing that funders are increasingly committed to act and support.

We remain energized by the work ahead. We also know that we won't start from zero. There are several innovative models and approaches, led by many African organizations, that tackle these systemic and entrenched challenges. New research talent is emerging – and is deeply eager to contribute to the local and global knowledge base on issues that are most relevant to their local education contexts.

Finally, and perhaps most critically, we know we are not alone. We are part of a growing community of local and global funders who are working to shift more power to local researchers, challenge conventional norms long exhibited in the research funding space and ultimately demonstrate new standards at the heart of funders' relationships with local researchers. Together, we can reimagine and support an ecosystem of research institutions that are equipped and empowered to conduct quality education research – in, for and by Africa.



## ENDNOTES

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- 1 The Kenya National Bureau of Statistics has adjudged Usawa Agenda data as meeting the quality threshold to be used as complementary to the nation's official statistics. The data will henceforth be posted on the Bureau's website.
- 2 "Mapping the landscape of education research by scholars based in sub-Saharan Africa Insights from the African Education Research Database" Education in Sub-Saharan Africa (ESSA), 2019
- 3 The World Bank, World Development Indicators (2007). Research and development expenditure (% of GDP) - Sub-Saharan Africa. Retrieved from: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/GB.XPD.RSDV.GD.ZS?end=2007&locations=ZG&start=2007>
- 4 "Rethinking International Funding of African Research", AFD editions, 2020
- 5 Anecdotal evidence from Imaginable Future's network and portfolio shows that almost 95 percent of grant funding received by local education research organizations is restricted
- 6 UNESCO, 2021. "One in three researchers is a woman"

## PHOTO CAPTIONS & CREDITS

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**page 1** Researcher collecting individual data and feedback.

Credit: Usawa Agenda

**page 2** Volunteer assesses a child on shape and color recognition in Kenya.

Credit: Usawa Agenda

**page 6** Researchers carrying out a study.

Credit: African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC)

**page 7** Student at the University of Professional Studies in Accra.

Credit: Education in Sub-Saharan Africa (ESSA)

**page 8** Researcher collecting data in a community.

Credit: Usawa Agenda

**page 9** Student researchers at a university.

Credit: African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC)

**page 10** A primary school child in Kenya is assessed by a volunteer during the Uwezo national assessment.

Credit: Usawa Agenda

**page 15** School children pose for a photo at an education center in Kenya during the ECDE assessment.

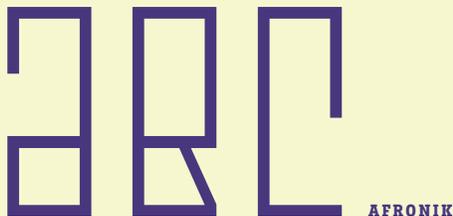
Credit: Usawa Agenda

**Page 17** Students at the University of Professional Studies in Accra.

Credit: Education in Sub-Saharan Africa (ESSA)

## TYPOGRAPHY CREDIT

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