



Ushirika wa Maendeleo ya Elimu Barani Afrika
الرابطة لأجل تطوير التربية في إفريقيا
Association for the Development of Education in Africa
Association pour le développement de l'éducation en Afrique
Associação para o Desenvolvimento da Educação em África

2nd ADEA High-Level Policy Dialogue Forum

“Elevating foundational learning as a pathway to skills development and lifelong learning through digitalization”

Tuesday, 23rd November 2021 | 12:00 PM GMT

Zoom Registration Link: <https://bit.ly/3jQs3Sp>

CONCEPT NOTE



Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA)
African Development Bank Group (AfDB),
Immeuble CCIA Plateau, Avenue Jean-Paul II
01 BP 1387, Abidjan 01, Côte d'Ivoire
Email: adea@afdb.org – Website: www.adeanet.org

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1. Introduction to ADEA's high-level policy dialogue forum

The overall aim of ADEA's high-level policy dialogue forum is to promote knowledge and experience sharing around practical and innovative solutions to address education challenges across Africa. During 2021, ADEA is running a High-Level Policy Dialogue Forum on "Rethinking the role of Skills Development in future work and lifelong learning, in light of digitalization and the 4th Industrial Revolution (4IR)". The Dialogue Forum is composed of three consecutive fora, with each devoted to a specific sub-sector or domain: technical and vocational skills development (TVSD) in July, foundational learning in basic education in November, and higher education in February 2022.

As the premier forum for policy dialogue on education in Africa, ADEA brings together Ministers, Members of Parliament and senior government officials; representatives from the African Union and its Regional Economic Communities; technical and financial partners; international, regional and national civil society organisations; representatives from the private sector, and teacher unions; entrepreneurs, and international and regional experts and members of ADEA's Inter-Country Quality Notes (ICQNs) to contribute to the debates and implementation of the outcomes of the forum. Through the Policy Dialogue Forum, ADEA is fostering continental, regional, and cross-country interactions in support of peer learning and knowledge exchange.

In line with ADEA's mandate, the overall objective of the 2021 High-Level Policy Dialogue Forum is to share knowledge and experience around practical and innovative solutions to address the skills gaps and the critical challenge of reforming the delivery of education in Africa. To be held on 23rd November 2021, the high-level policy dialogue forum on "Elevating foundational learning as a pathway to skills development and lifelong learning through digitalization" will:

1. Share knowledge, experience, good practice, and lessons to inform policies and programmes on foundational learning.
2. Foster partnerships among key stakeholders to advance the design and delivery of policy and strategy in support of foundational learning.
3. Advance practical steps to move from research and studies to implementation of policies, strategies, priorities, and evidence-based practices on foundational learning at country level.

2. Context of foundational learning in Africa

Sub-Saharan Africa faces a learning crisis. According to the World Bank, more than half (53%) of children in low-and middle-income countries are 'learning poor', meaning they cannot read and understand a simple story by the end of primary school. The estimated percentage of learning poor in Sub-Saharan Africa is much higher (87%), though with wide variation across and within countries.¹ The proportion of second-grade students who cannot read a single word of connected text varies widely, from less than 30% in Tanzania to greater

¹ World Bank. (2019). Learning Poverty Brief. Accessed at <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/brief/learning-poverty>

than 80% in Malawi.² A key source of the learning crisis is the lack of early learning opportunities. Only 2 out of every 10 pre-school aged children in low-income countries are enrolled in pre-primary.

African countries face multiple challenges affecting early and foundational education: poverty and malnutrition compromise early childhood development; children are taught in a language they do not speak at home; conflict and instability undermine efforts to build robust education systems, and investments in digital technology to support teacher training and remote learning remain low as evidenced during the COVID-19 pandemic. The youth population continues to grow rapidly, and the enduring COVID-19 crisis exacerbates education inequalities. Children with disabilities, the rural poor, girls, and other marginalized groups - already at a disadvantage - are hardest hit by these inequalities and are left further behind.

While there are multiple challenges to learning, the specific challenges to be addressed during the planned forum include:

- **Too few children complete primary school**, foregoing the foundational skills necessary to support higher levels of learning.
- **A lack of comprehensive early childhood development** opportunities to learn through play, this impacts school readiness and levels of learning resulting in grade repetition and dropout.
- **Many teachers lack the pedagogical and content knowledge, and leadership** necessary to improve foundational skills³ and to support and sustain quality early childhood education.
- **A lack of appropriate learning materials** including educational resources and reading materials in local languages, and resource materials for children with special needs.
- **The absence of robust synthesized and comparative analytics and evidence** to support policy dialogue and decision making around children achieving minimum proficiency in reading and mathematics.
- **The continent still lags far behind in 4IR technologies**, with many countries still digitally under-connected, hence the need to introduce and scale up interventions around digitalization in the early years of teaching and learning.

Sharing knowledge and evidence and enhancing foundational learning must be the priority and key focus to ensure that all children complete primary school with proficiency and the right skills to transition through the education system and into decent work.

² Arias, Omar, David K. Evans, and Indhira Santos. (2019). The Skills Balancing Act in Sub-Saharan Africa: Investing in Skills for Productivity, Inclusivity, and Adaptability. Africa Development Forum series. Washington, DC: World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/31723>

³ Arias, Omar, David K. Evans, and Indhira Santos. (2019). The Skills Balancing Act in Sub-Saharan Africa: Investing in Skills for Productivity, Inclusivity, and Adaptability. Africa Development Forum series. Washington, DC: World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/31723>

3. ADEA's response

ADEA believes that education systems across Africa will build back better by reorienting to focus on foundational skills as early as possible. The COVID-19 crisis has elevated the role of digitalization in addressing equity and inclusion challenges and brought to the fore the necessity of leveraging digital technology to ensure the provision of continuing literacy and numeracy skills. To that end, through investments in early and foundational learning, there is an opportunity to promote the pathway for future work and lifelong learning for many children and youth in Africa. ADEA is working with several strategic partners including the Gates Foundation, UNESCO GEM Report, Norad, USAID, LEGO Foundation and GPE KIX to advance knowledge and evidence that support country efforts to make foundational learning a top priority for policymakers.

- ADEA and UNESCO-GEMR have co-developed an analytical framework on foundational learning which is conceived through a system approach. It acknowledges the complexity of the process to achieve foundational learning, focusing on different education stakeholders, from the ministry to the learner and the community, and on seven factors. These factors are placed within the political economy context in which education system change occurs.
- Within its Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX) initiative, GPE is providing financial support to African countries in addressing the lack of comprehensive scaling of quality early learning practices in early childhood education at national and sub-national levels.
- The Global Book Alliance (GBA) is promoting a culture of reading beyond the school in African countries through digital publishing and using the open-source resources in the Global Digital Library (GDL).
- Norad is also looking at supporting the reuse and integration of open-source technologies and content to enhance access and quality of education in Africa.
- SAP Africa Code Week (ACW) 2021 is spearheading the adoption of coding as part of the school curriculum in African countries, with train-the-trainer virtual sessions to empower teachers with critical digital teaching skills.
- The Gates Foundation is supporting Africa-initiated projects for improving foundational literacy and numeracy. Under the initiative, the Foundation is set to sign a three-year project with ADEA that will bring greater political focus and action on foundational learning, improve the knowledge and capacity of African countries to implement evidence-based approaches on foundational learning, and strengthen the capacity of African countries to set targets and measure progress in this area.
- The World Bank's Accelerator pilot program in 10 African countries aims at addressing the learning poverty for early grade learners.

Through these strategic partnerships, ADEA aims to support progress on foundational learning through its convening power and by sharing research and evidence in its Learning and Knowledge Management Hub.

4. ADEA 2nd High-Level Policy Dialogue Forum structure

The importance of learning has been well demonstrated by research. Moving beyond the *why* to the *how* will require a collective effort and shift towards greater coherence of education systems to deliver learning. This 2nd High-Level Policy Dialogue Forum will bring stakeholders together to discuss and debate emerging evidence from its strategic partnerships. It will facilitate knowledge exchange and create learning opportunities around key factors that can contribute to enhanced learning outcomes.

The forum will be structured around the main theme, “Elevating foundational learning as a pathway to skills development and lifelong learning through digitalization” with sub-themes on (1) evidence in decision making and investments, including through domestic financing, (2) school preparedness and learning readiness, and (3) use of technology – including through the contribution of EdTech providers and innovators to foundational learning – in pedagogy and provision of learning materials. The format will comprise a plenary session and three breakout sessions, each focused on a specific sub-theme. The plenary session will prioritize engagement with high-level officials from African countries, development partners and key education stakeholders through presentations, roundtable panel discussions and audience interactions. Following the plenary session, participants will engage in peer-learning and knowledge exchange through the three breakout sessions that ADEA will convene jointly with its partners. The joint ADEA/UNESCO-GMR Spotlight Series on foundational and basic education completion project will be launched in the main plenary session.

To plan for, and implement, quality early learning and foundational interventions for young children, it is essential that decision makers and development partners know more about what works and what does not, at what costs and under what conditions, including the political economy. The following sub-themes will frame the three breakout sessions on key challenges related to foundational learning. These sessions will be jointly led by ADEA with core partners:

1. **Vision: Using evidence and data to inform decision making and investments on foundational learning.** The policy discussion will review initiatives that support robust analysis and data on foundational learning and learn from countries on how they intend to use evidence and analysis to move systems, policies, and budgets in support of early and foundational learning. It would also explore lessons from successful domestic resource mobilization strategies to finance foundational learning in Africa. (ADEA, DRC, Rwanda, Gates Foundation, UNESCO-GEMR)
2. **Teaching and learning: Early childhood development (ECD) for strengthening school preparedness, readiness to learn, and quality assurance.** Adapting a broader perspective on skills development supported by the science of early childhood development should inform system efforts to improve learning. It is also important to appreciate how children learn, including through play, and how the five domains (physical, social, cognitive, and creative and emotional skills) interact toward learning. Having robust quality assurance systems to monitor and track quality/play-based teaching and learning is also critical in ensuring readiness to learn as well as for future success in and out of school. This is in addition to innovative uses of technology to support skills development for children and contribute to their learning readiness. (ADEA, ICQN on ECD, ECD Measure, Lego Foundation, Morocco, Burkina Faso)
3. **Teacher preparation and management: Leveraging technology in structured pedagogy and coaching and learning materials for improved learning.** Designing effective literacy and numeracy programs which are then implemented to fidelity remains

a challenge. There is value in learning from research-based approaches which have combined structured pedagogy with coaching and enhanced the availability of learning resources, including materials in local languages. The question is how to ensure teachers are supported and prepared to make the best use of technology and effectively deliver the lessons for improved learning. Also, an exploration of existing EdTech solutions that provide access to learning materials. (ADEA, Mastercard Foundation Centre for Innovative Teaching and Learning in ICT, USAID, Norad, Education International, UNESCO-IICBA, Ghana, Senegal)

5. Conclusion

This high-level policy dialogue forum should be considered as an intermediate pathway that all stakeholders can follow together. The forum will enable increased awareness and deepen understanding of the sub-themes. Through ADEA and its network of experts and partners resources will be shared to support countries to translate policy options into tangible and achievable actions that can be implemented, monitored, and then scaled up to further progress on foundational learning.