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Call for Submission

The Inaugural East African Community Regional Education Conference 2024 is inviting submissions for individual papers, panel sessions, workshops, creative sessions, and posters/exhibitions. To maximise participation in the conference, each individual is only a named presenter on either an individual paper or a panel session submission. In case you wish to present in one of the above and a creative session or workshop, you will need to let the organisers know if both of these are accepted for proper scheduling.

Call for submission deadline: 23:59 (EAT time) Friday 24th May 2024

Dates of conference: 12th – 15th August 2024

Location: Arusha, Tanzania

<https://reliafrica.org/EAC-Education-Conference/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/20240411-CALL-for-SUBMISSIONS.pdf>

Theme

Stronger and Resilient Education Systems: Regional coordination and collaboration is critical in strengthening education systems within countries and across the region. Education systems need to respond to the diversity of learners' needs to ensure that all systems are equipped to deliver quality education to improve learning outcomes for each child. This sub-theme will further explore how the harmonisation of EAC education systems can be better operationalised through enhanced coordination and collective action by various actors.

Submissions guidelines and review process Individual Papers Please provide an abstract of up to 500 words along with 3 bullet-point key recommendations for the audience, each limited to a maximum of 100 characters (including spaces). Ensure clarity on how your work relates to the main conference theme and the specific sub-theme you are addressing. Individual papers will be organised by the conference committee into sessions spanning 60-90 minutes. Sessions will typically consist of 3-5 presentations, with each presenter allotted 10-15 minutes for their presentation. Following the presentations, there will be approximately 25-30 minutes designated for discussion within each parallel session.

Unveiling the Foundation Learning Crisis in Somalia: A Dire Educational Challenge

Introduction

Despite that, attaining sustainable development and human rights in the world is anchored on accessing quality learning, and millions of children across the world still need this basic need. Various reports from distinguished organizations such as the African Union, the United Nations(UN), World Bank, UNICEF, and UNESCO stress the importance of addressing the holistic challenges experienced in the global education systems. The recent coronavirus pandemic has worsened the situation, exacerbating the education crisis and broadening equality disparities. These reports, from UNESCO's highlights on Africa's educational challenges to the World Bank's emphasis on foundational learning Particularly on literacy and numeracy. Further, in September 2022 the Transforming Education Summit by the UN has underscored the importance of addressing this issue through actions such as stakeholder involvement, prioritizing education reform, and accelerating efforts toward SDGs. Also on *18th February 2024, Africa union Submit The Year of Education - Educate an African fit for the 21st Century.*

In this Paper, we inform the government of Somalia and its working partners in the education sector on how to solve the issue of early foundational learning in the country before the problem worsens.

Overview of the Research

State of Education in Africa

Africa has the youngest population of any continent, with 3 out of 5 people under 25 and half between 3 and 24 years old. The population is growing rapidly, with projections showing Africa will have 28% of the world's population aged 3-24 by 2030 (UNICEF & African Union, 2021). High adult illiteracy levels in the continent hinder children's schooling, considering that parental support, higher education, and urbanization pressures are essential for improving learning quality and ensuring access to education for disadvantaged children in urban and rural areas. Notably, the continent has made substantial progress in getting children into school over the past two decades, reducing illiteracy by 17% as of 2019 (UNICEF & African Union, 2021). Despite progress, the proportion of out-of-school children remains high, with Eastern Africa representing 34% after West Africa (40%). Exacerbating factors for African illiteracy include low school completion rates, limited access to technical education, and a shortage of qualified teachers that derail the continent's vision to attain sustainable development goals.

Problem Statement

Despite Africa's emphasis on universal access to education over the past decade, over 80% of students in Sub-Saharan countries struggle with low literacy and numeracy skills. As USAID (2022), reports in Somalia, where nearly half of the population is between 10 and 29 years old, there is a pressing need for a strong and coherent system for foundational learning as the country seeks to rebuild and progress. USAID (2022), through the Bar Ama Baro (BAB) report, indicates a concerning illiteracy level among the marginalized children in Somalia, citing possible

improvements through strategic measures. This informs the objective of this policy brief: to inform the government of Somalia and its working partners in the education sector on how to solve the issue of early foundational learning in the country before the problem worsens.

Examination of the Findings

The Bar Ama Baro (BAB) report is a five-year USAID-funded accelerated primary education project in Somalia aimed at providing quality Accelerated Basic Education (ABE) services to marginalized children. The project enrolled approximately 40,440 students in ABE Level 1 and Level 2 in Cohort 1 in 2021/2022, and a comprehensive effectiveness survey was performed to establish whether project objectives were met (USAID, 2022). A study measured student profiles, reading, math, social-emotional learning skills, and ABE teachers' teaching practices and attitudes. The study will compare Cohort 1 students' foundational literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional skills performance and identify differences among states and districts. The results show low reading skills, with an average oral reading fluency of 21 words per minute and an average reading comprehension of 24% correct points. Based on the strong oral tradition within Somali society, it is evident that Somalis excel in listening comprehension scores. This observation suggests that the challenges lie primarily in students' decoding skills rather than information processing. Consequently, it becomes necessary to implement policy interventions to address this issue effectively.

Transforming education indicates that Africa's education system is experiencing quality, equity, and relevance challenges despite having the youngest population in Africa (three out of five people under 25) (UNICEF & African Union 2021). Over 50% of children in developing countries cannot read nor comprehend a basic story at the end of primary school, hindering the effectiveness of attaining SDGs and exacerbating the gap in foundational learning of education (World Bank report 2021). The World Bank report of 2021 sheds light on a disheartening reality: more than half of the children in developing countries are unable to read or comprehend a basic story by the time they reach the end of their primary school years. This alarming statistic not only hampers progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) but also exacerbates the existing educational disparities in foundational learning.

One region particularly affected by this educational crisis is Sub-Saharan Africa, which grapples with a significant number of out-of-school children. Astonishingly, only two out of every three children manage to complete primary school by the age of 15 in this region. Moreover, a mere three out of ten students attain the minimum proficiency level in reading, indicating that just one in every five children achieves this level overall.

Somalia, in particular, stands at the bottom of the educational ladder in this region. Shockingly, only 24% of students in the country have access to schools, further deepening the educational divide. Even for those fortunate enough to attend school, the quality of learning and retention rates remain alarmingly low (ESA,2021, UNESCO, 2022). Somalia is a country in recovery, and it makes sense when studying the stats for it for the alarming but in the last decade the government of Somalia has been honing to gain its mandate on education back.

However, stark reality calls for urgent attention and concerted efforts to bridge the educational gaps in developing countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. It necessitates a comprehensive approach that addresses not only access to education but also focuses on improving the quality of education provided. Without decisive action, the potential of these children will remain untapped, hindering their personal development and impeding progress towards achieving the SDGs. (ESA,2021, UNESCO, 2022)

The pandemic worsened the global education crisis, with developing countries such as Somalia being impacted the most due to income disparities and a high poverty rate of 73% in 2023. This informs the need for policy interventions to navigate the issue, as foundational learning is essential to primary focus on the countries development and capabilities of building more peaceful society .

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Despite Somalia's efforts to address high illiteracy from foundational learning, challenges persist, hence the need for proactive policies. To navigate the challenge of teacher deficit, stakeholders should invest in teacher training and support. Implementing a comprehensive teacher training program and issuing ongoing support, such as Ghana's Teacher Professional Development and Management System, would ensure professional development and bridge the gap in limited teachers. The in-training program has proven effective in Ghana, with 70% of teachers agreeing it increased productivity and development (Wolf et al., 2018). The program has had challenges, such as resource constraints and infrastructure limitations; hence, Somalia should lobby for support from donor agencies and international organizations to invest in infrastructure development and fund educators' training.

The second is integrating technology into education, inspired by the Kenyan digital literacy program. Somalia can navigate barriers to distance learning and improve education outcomes in remote areas by issuing interactive learning platforms and digital devices. The program has transformed the education system in Kenya as 86% of teachers have digital literacy skills, and the Teachers Service Commission acknowledges that over 80 percent of DLP devices are utilized in teaching and learning (Omboto et al., 2022). Despite challenges like inadequate infrastructure and limited interconnectivity, Somalia can capitalize on digital infrastructure and expand internet access through partnerships with telecommunication organizations.

Finally, community engagement and empowerment in education enable the locals to contribute to decision-making and support educational programs. A suitable example is Brazil's community-driven strategy, which has promoted accountability and partnership in education, prompting improved learner outcomes. However, since Somalia experiences challenges such as security concerns and political instability, it would be important for stakeholders to collaborate with community leaders and local authorities to guarantee safety and build trust in their educational programs. Capacity-building programs should also be utilized to advance community members' leadership capabilities and guarantee effectiveness in transforming foundational learning in Somalia.