

Investments Needed to Transform Education in Africa



Dr. Vongai Nyahunzvi,
Chief Network Officer and
Head of Africa Region,
Teach For All

We have long failed to make adequate investments in education across Africa. In 2020, the African Development Bank (AFDB) noted in the [African Economic Outlook](#) that African governments spend about 5 per cent of GDP on education. While in line with the recommendations of the [2015 Incheon Declaration](#), this is clearly insufficient considering the scale of the challenge facing Africa's education systems and growing populations. When we envision improving education, we often debate how to improve funding, government policy, teacher

training, technology, or curricula. Whilst these conversations put forward a relevant and important perspective, debates around financial investments have rarely taken into consideration all the other key building blocks that will lay the ground to enable us to realise the full benefits of these financial investments.

Of course, there is no silver bullet solution – many different pieces of the puzzle need to come together if we are to achieve the education we need in Africa. However, focusing on the following five big areas is central to making progress.

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1. Push for locally-led education solutions. Presently, an ever-growing force of locally-led initiatives is paving the way to enable all children and young people to thrive by supporting the development of promising African leaders at all levels, driving educational innovations, and inventing new development approaches. What these initiatives have in common is that they prioritise and believe that, for our education to truly transform, we need to support and work with local actors and change agents as they craft their own solutions to tackle some of the most pressing educational challenges in their contexts.

2. Transform how we recruit and train teachers. In most places across Africa, how teachers are trained has not changed for generations. We are using the same strategies in our teacher training academies and institutions as we did five decades ago. We could invest in education however we like, but unless we change this, we will not realise the progress we need. We must reimagine education so that it builds leaders of the future. How are we training and supporting teachers to lead the next generation? Taking a look at the curriculum of a number of teacher training institutions across the continent, the majority do not train teachers to address crucial

issues around girls' education or climate change – let alone about how to foster leadership. Educators need the knowledge, skills, and competencies to teach towards new outcomes. Both experienced and novice teachers need to receive training around new teaching methods and their own leadership development, including support for their emotional well-being. To reinvent and strengthen our education system, we need to train teachers as innovative leaders who will find creative ways to maintain student engagement and enable learning even in the most complex circumstances. We need to integrate leadership development into our

schools and teacher development programmes, along with enabling local leaders to learn from each other across borders, to expose them to what is possible and what is working in other places.

Evidence from the work of Teach For All's network partners across the African continent and beyond has shown that when teachers are given access to continuous professional development combined with professional coaching and support, they are more effective in their work.

3. Ensure that educational reforms are linked to policy changes. Across the continent, we continuously see scenarios where the education policies do not support the present and future needs of the populace, particularly young people. There has been a continuous mismatch between areas of need and policy changes by governments. To reverse this phenomenon, there needs to be a redesign of the policy processes and focus. The case of Rwanda gives credence to this. Over the last couple of decades, Rwanda has made great strides in the performance of its education

system. To improve education quality and outcomes, changes in areas such as [teacher management](#) and an improved [education strategic plan](#) have been implemented. The Rwandan government has ensured that investment is made in areas where there is a high need and deployed the right experts to lead the process. Rwanda shows that we cannot separate a strong political will demonstrated through government policy from sustainable and inclusive gains in education.

4. Rethink the purpose of education.

A number of education systems in Africa are still deeply entrenched in curricula that were defined during colonial periods. They were designed to create workers who would fully comply with their colonial masters, and not those with the critical thinking skills and awareness that could lead them to challenge their status quo. Very few countries have taken the time to redefine the purpose of education in their contexts. When one looks at how students are trained, they are taught how to cram content for exams rather than learning for understanding. Some of these

curricula have no real-life applications to students and their future paths. Rethinking and gaining clarity on the purpose of education is a prerequisite to a true transformation of education across the continent.

5. View students as leaders who can shape a better future for themselves. In most classrooms across the continent, we see a similar trend where students are considered as unable to make decisions for themselves. But increasing evidence from institutions such as the African Leadership Academy shows that students have inherent leadership that should be harnessed. We need to rethink how we involve students in the learning process and look for new and creative ways to unleash and harness their leadership potential.

If we get these five things right, we can greatly accelerate the progress of education systems across the African continent. The good news is that there are emerging examples of these changes throughout Africa. It is time that we amplify our efforts to bring these approaches to all corners of the continent. ■



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