



A Guide for Increasing the Social Impact of Scholarships

ESSA brings together a network of students, educators, and decision-makers. Together, we use evidence to improve tertiary education in sub-Saharan Africa: equipping young people in sub-Saharan Africa with the skills for work.



Introduction

As demand for higher education surges in the world's youngest continent, where 200 million people are aged between 15-24, the need for higher education scholarships in sub-Saharan Africa is rising too.

There is little tracking of the \$750 million spent on scholarships for students in sub-Saharan Africa annually. As a result there is limited evidence to know if scholarships are reaching those who need them, whether they are supporting young people to join the workforce, or having wider social and economic impact.

To find solutions to this challenge, Education Sub Saharan Africa (ESSA) carried out 18 months of in-depth mapping and research into over 350 providers from around the world who offer scholarships to students in sub-Saharan Africa.

We learnt about the best practices from providers, and the greatest challenges, such as limited data on impact for young people, programmes being vulnerable to fraud, and low completion rates due to limited support.

You can find further information about this research in our official monitoring of Sustainable Development Goal 4.b. (Scholarships), featured in [UNESCO's 2020 Global Education Monitoring Report on Education and Inclusion](#).

This research enabled us to develop Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for scholarship programmes which are set out in this document. The KPI framework has been designed to provide scholarship programmes with data and qualitative insights to measure effectiveness and accessibility. This measurement can be delivered for individual scholarship programmes to help with benchmarking and producing larger data sets. Ultimately, these KPIs should help funders and providers to understand how much impact is being achieved with their investment.

The KPIs are proposed as a starting point for the scholarship community to agree indicators that track performance and demonstrate progress in addressing four main challenges to scholarship provision:

- 1. Inclusive access**
- 2. Completion of degrees**
- 3. University engagement**
- 4. Transition into employment**

We recognise that funders and providers would seek to implement additional indicators to meet the specific objectives of their own programmes. These indicators would map closely to the theory of change for each programme and link specific strategies to success criteria.

Background

The KPIs set out below have been trialled anonymously with 20 scholarship providers. Providing over 10,000 higher education scholarships to students in sub-Saharan Africa.

All 20 providers position themselves as seeking to drive social impact in societies across Africa and embody best practice in scholarship programming globally. This sample of 20 providers has been selected to be representative of wider scholarship programming and includes governments, INGOs, international organizations,

corporations, foundations, universities and high-net-worth individuals.

To be representative of the geographical diversity of societies in Africa, the sampling includes programmes that educate students in sub-Saharan Africa as well as those operating in Europe, North America and Asia. The sample includes programmes that exclusively target Francophone or Lusophone students and those that operate in lower-income countries.

Below you will find detail on the KPIs and analysis of the trial with 20 sample providers.

Key Performance Indicators

KPI 1 - The number of 'appointable' applications for each scholarship place

Sub-indicators:

- Total number of applications received
- Total number of credible applications received
- Percentage of scholarship holders who drop out between acceptance and degree start date and the reason
- The cost per application of global outreach

KPI 1 focuses on the demand for scholarships by qualified applicants. This indicator is testing to what extent programmes access students of quality and credibility within their target groups and their methodologies for doing so.

High numbers of appointable candidates are not necessarily a positive. This could mean that a programme's selection criteria are too broad, or that the process is not adequately profiling students' backgrounds so the students who need scholarships the most aren't getting them. This KPI can also inform how many applicants who fit the criteria missed out on the scholarship, and how many more might have been appointed if more funds were available or if the effectiveness of spend was greater.

Most providers recorded total applications but few of them had data on the number of 'appointable' applicants. Providers that did record this information tended to strictly adhere to their criteria for talented and socially mobile candidates. This is an area for improvement to ensure scholarships are truly reaching those who need and qualify for them.

KPI 2 - Percentage of total scholarships awarded to students in one or more of the following categories:

- i. Resident in a rural community
- ii. Refugee
- iii. Living with a disability
- iv. First generation scholar
- v. Normally domiciled in a sub-Saharan African country on the UN list of least developed countries

Sub-indicators:

- Total number of applications received from each target area
- Total number of appointable applications received in each target area
- Percentage split for each background
- Number of strategic partnerships in sub-Saharan Africa with (i) High Schools (ii) Universities (iii) NGOs and local charities
- Duration of strategic partnerships i.e. more than 2 years
- How is the selection process resourced and what does it cost to select each application

KPIs 2 seeks to understand the representation of marginalised groups within scholarship programming. Outside of South Africa, where useful indexes are available, it is very difficult to maintain country-centred models that accurately profile and identify financially disadvantaged students. Some of the indicators currently in use can be unreliable and information is all too easily falsified. The focus is therefore on underrepresented groups, lower-income countries in Africa and 'First Generation Scholars', which means they are the first in their family to go to university. A criterion which, amongst other benefits, will help capture the urban poor.

Most of the 20 providers were unable to provide detailed information for KPI 2. Those that did have information on KPI 2 had encouraging performance statistics, but these providers also committed significant resources to support successful targeting of marginal groups and exemplified best practice in other areas. Most did not have KPIs that they could follow for finding target students or the capacity to track information in detail about the character of selected students.

KPI 3 - Percentage of scholarship holders who are women

Sub-indicators:

- Total number of applications received from women
- Total number of appointable applications from women received
- Total number of scholarships appointed to women

KPI 3 was measured for the most part by providers, with only two programmes exclusively targeting women. All other programmes measured between 32-57% of women in their cohorts with most at the upper end. This data is very encouraging but without adequate understanding of the background of these women, it may be the case that this higher level of representation sometimes reflects enhanced diversity amongst more privileged applicants.

32-57%
of scholarship
holders are women



KPI 4 - Percentage of scholars who complete their degree

Sub-indicators:

- Percentage of scholars who complete within the minimum timeframe
- Percentage of scholars who drop out in the first year and, if so, which term
- Percentage of scholars who drop out beyond the second year
- Attainment levels of graduating students in their final exams
- The global ranking for the university/universities where students are studying
- Cost per student to complete a degree
- Cost of a student dropping out at any given point

KPI 4 is the essential indicator to understand if programmes can support students through their degrees. Extremely low overall rates of completion for all students at both undergraduate and post graduate level are widely reported across sub-Saharan Africa, especially at public universities.

Even if students do complete their studies, the time it takes to complete can be much longer than the intended course length due to financial and other factors.

Almost all of the 20 providers recorded information on drop out rates for scholarship students specifically, and except in two cases, completion rates were 85% or higher.

Undergraduates, given their age and experience, were generally more vulnerable to dropping out than postgraduates, though the latter can suffer from the failure of African universities to complete their supervision.

Where drop-out rates were higher, there was corresponding evidence of the successful targeting of low-income students who are most vulnerable to dropping out of their degree. Some of the other programmes evidenced high completion rates, but patchy information on their students' backgrounds. It may be that some programmes are admitting higher numbers of more privileged students than they believe and that is why completion is high. Nonetheless, high completion rates reflect very well on this sample of social impact providers and reflect that scholarships, especially ones that offer full funding, do make a difference to completion.

KPI 5 - The percentage number of students studying in their own country who remain in-country during the 12 months after graduation

or

The percentage rate of return (ROR) of graduating students to their country of domicile (or another country in sub-Saharan Africa) within 12 months of graduation

Sub-indicators:

- Percentage of students who remain or return immediately after graduation (within three months)
- Percentage of students who leave or do not return to their home country, but do remain in sub-Saharan Africa
- Percentage of students who are offered competitive jobs outside Africa

85%
scholarship
completion rates



25-45%
student
return rates



KPI 5 evaluates how the structure, selection and values of programmes are reflected in students committing their future to their societies. Students, particularly undergraduates, who study outside of their home country and especially those who take degrees outside of Africa, are often predisposed to pursue careers outside of the continent, after graduation.

Many providers outside of the nominated 20, and especially those who educate students outside of Africa, often have student return rates of 25-45%.

Almost all providers recorded this data and the figures were very encouraging with all but two providers recording 80% of their students staying in Africa. This high figure reflects the quality, structure and values of the sample providers.

KPI 6 - Percentage of graduating students that transition, within 12 months, into:

- i. Formal Employment
- ii. Enterprise / Entrepreneurship Opportunities (equivalent to work in Formal Sector)
- iii. Further Education, in Africa

Sub-indicators:

- Percentage of employed or entrepreneurial students end up in decent work¹ that is closely aligned with their degree course
- Number of partnerships that exist with employers (both local and non-local)
- Average salary of graduating students
- Percentage of alumni providers are in direct contact with, five years after graduation

KPI 6 looks at pathways to productive livelihoods or further study in Africa after graduation and is critical to linking scholarships with SDG 8, Decent Work. Quality providers who operate in South Africa had excellent information on this KPI and exemplary success (90%+) in getting students into quality jobs. That reflects both the professionalism of those programmes and the relative buoyancy and transparency of the local Private Sector.

Outside of South Africa, information was much more sparsely recorded and there looks to be no programme that is successful at channelling graduates (at any kind of scale) into decent work in the Private Sector. More need to be done to understand the clear links between scholarships and decent work. In a country-centric and pan-African context, it is very challenging to build a consensus on short, medium or long-term demand trends in labour markets.

¹ Decent work: opportunities for work that are productive and deliver a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men. (ILO).

90%

in South Africa
gain employment



90%

of students
get quality jobs



Understanding costs

Scholarship funders and providers are faced with the challenge both of delivering impact and allocating scarce resources.

It is necessary to understand the costs of scholarship delivery alongside success, as measured through performance indicators such as transition to employment. We therefore include in this final indicator to be tracked as part of this KPI framework.

Full Costs of the scholarship programme to include:

- Cost of scholarship
- Staffing (and other fixed costs)
- Costs involved in:
 - Outreach and marketing
 - Study and pastoral support during degree
 - Workplace preparation
 - Selection
 - Extra funding needed for students who complete their degree but not on time.

Increased cost may mean greater impact for young people's lives. For instance, an undergraduate programme that targets rural students may experience high drop-out rates. The introduction of a six-month foundation programme might offer study and skills preparation that greatly reduces dropouts, increasing return on investment and impact even if costs are also increased.

A second potential model is one which measures the long-term social and economic value to sub-Saharan African countries of a new, skilled scholarship graduate entering the workforce, who would not otherwise have the opportunity.

This level of analysis has not yet been conceptualized but striving for models that can link tertiary education directly and measurably to long-term socio-economic impact is an important ambition.



"There should be more scholarships for needy, brilliant and intelligent students. If you are a good student but you can't afford the fees or tuition but someone is helping you, it means they believe in you. Even if you don't have the money they are hoping you are going to take that opportunity and make the best out of it."

Lareba Zakari, undergraduate student studying accounting on a scholarship at Wisconsin International University College, in Accra, Ghana

How we can change the discourse

There is an opportunity to to change game on scholarships, improving young people's lives and increasing return on investment for greater change in society.

A key change in the conversation must be about valuing quality as well as quantity. All scholarship funders and providers would benefit by seeing scholarships as part of an integrated process, which emphasizes the importance of the whole student journey from pre-application, through university and into decent work in counties across sub-Saharan Africa.

The six interconnected KPIs developed for this report gives providers a framework by which to evaluate the performance and the impact of their investments within

societies. This will promote transparency, lead to problem-solving and result in more effective strategies.

If we aim to be inclusive, we should not imagine that worthy applicants will simply self-nominate or that well qualified graduates will make an easy transition into decent work. Equipping students to get fulfilling jobs needs proper evidence-based approaches, alongside learning and adaptation.

To put this into practice, the scholarships sector needs to operate collaboratively in formal and informal collectives; listening to students, sharing evidence and using best practice models.

"I hope that a scholarship will help me in terms of seeking job opportunities. When employers see that you have a scholarship, that means it is a reward for excellence in some area. So it is something that really boosts your profile as a student and job seeker."

Ifeanyi Godfrey, Masters student from Nigeria, studying a Masters at ESMT Berlin, Germany





<https://essa-africa.org>



Info@essa-africa.org



[ESSA_Africa](#)



[EducationSubSaharanAfrica](#)



[Company/essa1](#)



[Essa_africa](#)

First published June 2020 ©ESSA 2020

Education Sub Saharan Africa (ESSA) is registered:
Charity no. 1166958
Company no. 10101086