



Our Vision and Why it Matters

Our vision is straightforward:

“Transformed educational outcomes in sub-Saharan Africa”

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Continental Education Strategy for Africa set a framework to cope with Africa’s challenges in education. Sub-Saharan governments typically invest 5% or more of GNP on education and this is boosted by others including development funds, corporates and NGOs.

The research, data and impact evaluation, critical to making the right policy and choices for everyone investing in this space, is improving considerably. Yet it remains of variable quality, can be hard to access and is often incomplete.

One reason why we believe there is an opportunity to increase the effectiveness of spending and attracting additional capital.

Moreover, as a demographic explosion gets underway many African nations already face multiple, complex and systemic challenges in delivering the education their societies need.

With this context we strongly believe that:

“Access to education at all levels and as importantly, its quality and relevance will be pivotal in determining whether the population growth envisaged becomes an extra-ordinary opportunity or a major threat to Africa and the wider world.”

We want to do all we can with everyone we work with to make it the former to help solve the paradox of high youth employment, even among graduates, at the same time as employers face striking skills shortages.

What needs to happen to achieve our vision?

In summary to:

“Join up, inform, inspire, focus and increase impact for everyone investing in education in sub-Saharan Africa.”

Our starting point has been to listen to students, teachers, communities, governments, businesses, academics, NGOs, philanthropists and others in and outside of Africa. The issues are as clear as they are profound and urgent.

Since our start up in 2016, we have been supported by a wide range of blue-chip funders, our way of helping has been to start in the Higher Education space and to focus on four things:

- Being a pro-active connector.
- Inspiring and supporting the development of capability and capacity.
- Building the “Go to” knowledge hub on Education in the region and;
- Driving knowledge into action through our work and our partnerships and relationships.



Examples of our work

These examples demonstrate how each aspect and how we work can make a practical difference.

The Demographics of Faculty

A billion more people and rising participation rates implies a huge increase in demand for faculty, even with the best use of technology. But how many, where, when and what needs doing now to avoid the possible tragedy of millions of Africans and their societies in fulfilling their potential?

Inspired by ESSA, Ghana’s National Council on Tertiary Education (NCTE), the Association of African Universities (AAU), and the Population Reference Bureau (PRB), with support from the MasterCard Foundation are engaged in a pilot model in Ghana to address this challenge as well as to produce planning tools and other resources to mobilise support to deal with this urgent challenge. The Ghana pilot project is now completed and with 213 institutions across the tertiary spectrum mapped, the results will be shared shortly.

Transforming the visibility and accessibility of Africa-based research on education.

It was hard to find the best African research on a subject of interest. It was even harder for African researchers to get their work published and to achieve awareness and influence. We wanted to change this.



With the REAL Center at the University of Cambridge and the support of two venture philanthropists and the Jacobs Foundation, the first step was to map evidence-based education research undertaken by researchers based in sub-Saharan Africa and to produce the first online, interactive and searchable database. The database was launched in June 2018 in Paris and with over 3,000 articles in it, has received a fantastic reaction. <https://essa-africa.org/AERD>

Piloting a Scholarship Impact Hub

Scholarships are a key component of achieving the SDG4. Our research and experience on the ground suggests that there is an opportunity to increase the impact of current spending and also for Africa to “leap-frog” global practice. Potentially this will encourage more investment as well as improve outcomes for all involved and change the discourse and increase impact.

With funding in place, the pilot project started in October 2018 and has so far mapped over 300 scholarship providers for African scholars, is identifying best practice and conducting a global mapping/stakeholder analysis, creating resources such as scholarship impact KPIs and a digital matching resource to make scholarships more accessible.

Building the “Go –to knowledge hub.

There is so much useful knowledge and data in existence. Yet it is far from easy to access. What we are setting out to do is to “Collate” what’s useful (e.g. African research on education) Create what’s missing (e.g. resources on most effective scholarship models). Then through our digital knowledge hub and physical activities provide a platform to “Communicate” and “Connect” those who need specific knowledge with those who have it and what’s available.



The way we work

Young Africans at the heart of all we do

Right from the start Africans and young Africans in particular, have driven our thinking. Our next step will be to form our pan-African Youth panel.

Step by step mentality

Starting with Higher Education and working on a small number of themes we are building momentum to further increase our impact and broaden our reach.

High Engagement

We are building communities of interest such as educational leaders, researchers and funders and delivering real value to them in an engaging way. The launch of our website in Swahili, English and French being just one example.

Partnership Model

There is so much good work being done by others who share our vision that we see no value in duplicating it. We’d rather learn from them and combine our insights and resources.

High impact mind set

Our choices and activities are driven by what will make the biggest impact. We know that our track record for delivery will determine our success and sustainability.

Cost efficient mindset

Our supporters, partners and funders have enabled us to keep costs low through secondments, pro-bono work and other values they bring.

ESSA’s funding partners



Our priorities for 2019/20:

As we approach our third birthday our priorities are to:

- Continue to deliver high impact from our current work.
- Build and deliver OpenESSA our digital resource platform with our partner the Hasso-Plattner Institute (HPI).
- Formally establish our pan-African youth panel with the Chair joining the ESSA board.
- Complete the work and raise funding to take our embryonic Knowledge Hub to the next stage.
- With our partners the African Association of Universities and Jobs.ac.uk create a pan-African academics job board.
- Move our work on the State of educational data and of Data Science capacity and capability in sub-Saharan Africa from seed to pilot stage.
- Establish our first development programmes for educational leaders.

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