SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE
CREATE MEANINGFUL CHANGE

ESSA
Education Sub Saharan Africa

ENHANCING
EDUCATION
RESEARCH
IN AFRICA (EERA)

Intervention 2:

Catalysing African funding for education research

NOVEMBER 2024

> "Doing research in a particular area you need funds, but this is not forthcoming. This may hinder the sample size and once this is limited, you may not generate the data that can be generalised to the larger population because you are confined to the size of your pocket".
>
> *Education researcher and university lecturer*

This concept note outlines a proposed intervention to increase funding for education research in Africa, focussing specifically on crowding in more African sources of funding. This requires that funders adopt a long-term vision of strengthening the education research field in Africa, by helping to reduce dependency on international donors. Catalysing more and better local funding for education research could involve various different mechanisms and channels, including partnerships with governments, independent research bodies such as think tanks, African philanthropies and the private sector. This is not a capacity-building intervention, it is an intervention to increase the control and power within Africa relative to the current dominance of Global North. It is about giving money to institutions in Africa that are able to fund education research, and attract African funding, while at the same time advocating for better policies to support local funding of education research.

This intervention is designed to be part of a wider system of **interventions.**

Please visit the EERA project page at **bit.ly/3OOssDV.**

It was identified through an intensive consultation and participative planning process with African education researchers and policy-makers, who highlighted the need to catalyse African funding as a strategic leverage point.

Why is this a crucial intervention for education research in Africa?

The education researchers and policy-makers who informed this intervention, identified African funding as one of five critical factors that will strengthen the field of education research (see the box below). Increased access to research funding will likewise help to advance several of the other factors, such as deepening the knowledge base on education amongst African scholars and within African institutions. The need to secure African funding for education research stems from four main considerations[1]:

1. **Resource constraints have a negative impact on education research in Africa**: A mature education research field needs sustainable and sufficient resources to deliver impactful research. Africa-based researchers are committed to contributing to education research at local and global levels, yet funding opportunities are very limited, and affect the quality and depth of the knowledge base. Resource constraints undermine the extent to which education researchers can ensure that their work remains relevant and contributes effectively to development outcomes.

2. **Dependence on non-African research funding distorts the research agenda**: Funding opportunities for education research in Africa mainly derive from organisations outside the continent. Over-reliance on foreign funding weakens local research capacities and funding systems, and also affects the ability of African researchers to set a research agenda that aligns with local needs and contexts.

   For more on setting **African research agendas**, see also **Intervention 1.**

   Please visit the EERA project page at **bit.ly/3OOssDV.**

3. **Reliance on foreign funding adversely affects access to research opportunities**: North-based research funding applications often come with complicated funding requirements and models, which many African higher education institutions and researchers, including early career researchers, find it difficult to compete for. The result is that research grants are often awarded to well established organisations with greater potential

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[1] The sources supporting this section are cited in full in the reference list at the end of the document and include ESSA & Southern Hemisphere, 2024; ESSA & REAL Centre 2023; OTT Consulting 2024.

for success, and limits funding to less well known, or established, institutions that are a critical part of local systems.

4. **African funding for education research is currently limited, yet the potential exists to change this**: African education research needs to be framed within the broader science and innovation research systems. African Union member countries fall short of their commitment to spend at least 1% of GDP on research and development, as identified in a recent study conducted for the Jacobs Foundation. However, many African countries have existing institutional mechanisms through which increased funding for research can be channelled, such as Ministries or Granting/Funding Councils/National Research Funds (NRFs) and Science Granting Councils (SGCs). There are also opportunities to grow African philanthropic giving for education research. Stakeholders such as think tanks and higher education institutions, that form part of the funding system and could serve as conduits. These organisations could act as the local Hubs in the collaborative research projects for example. (+ see concept note 6)

For more background information on why this intervention is crucial, read the situational analysis undertaken as part of this project, and/or explore how this intervention responds to the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats identified by African education research stakeholders.

A strong field for education research in Africa

Based on extensive input from African education researchers and policy makers, these five factors are critical to building a strong field for education research:

- → A robust **knowledge base**, aligned with local African priorities.

- → Sustainable **resources** to enable African-led research and dissemination.

- → A dynamic research **agenda** that reflects African education research priorities.

- → A vibrant research **culture** that champions collaboration, gender equity and social inclusion.

- → Reliable **infrastructure** to support knowledge repositories and communication.

Acknowledgement: The consultation process above made use of Bridgespan's *Strong Field Framework.*

Aims and objectives of the intervention

This intervention aims to strengthen the ability of African funding institutions to fund African education research. The assumption is that African-funded education research will:
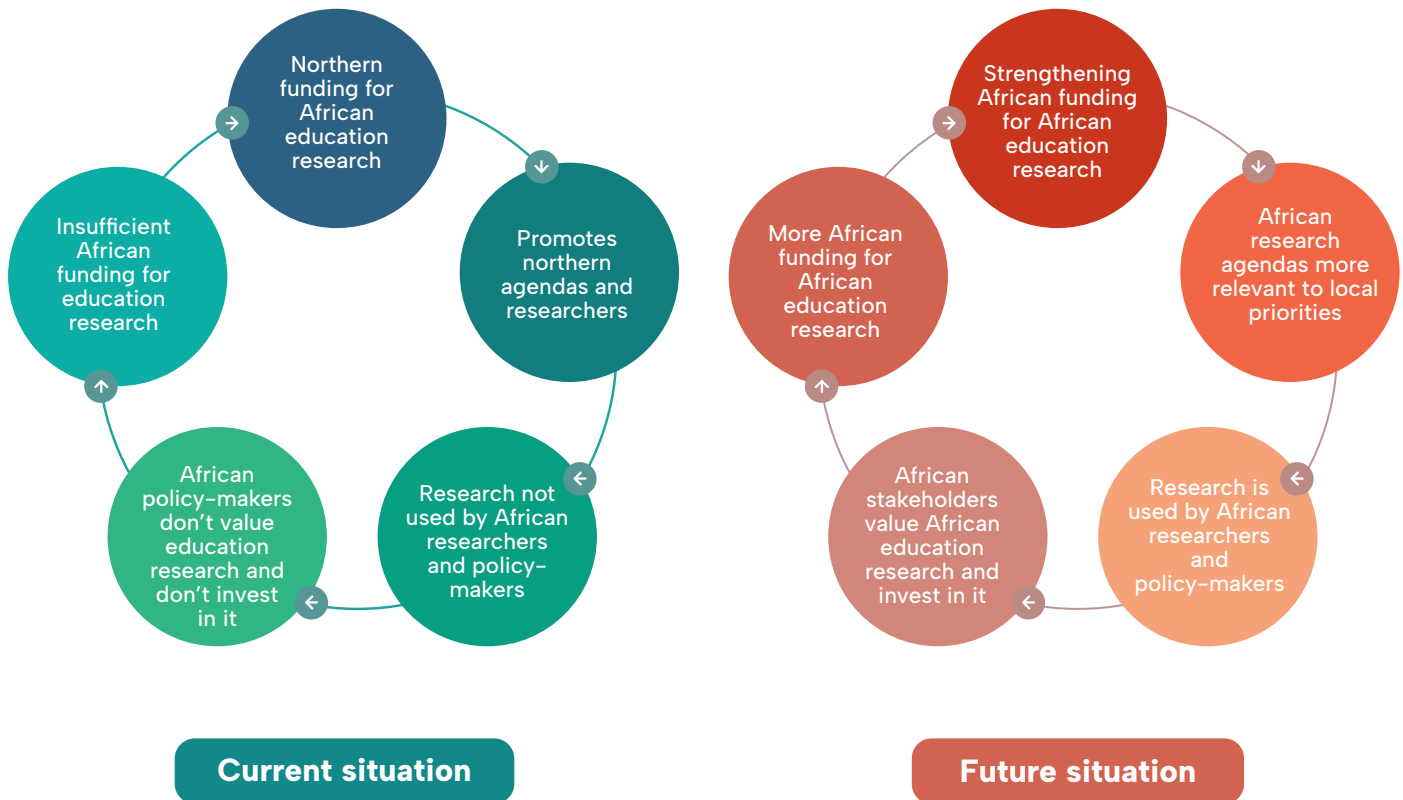
- → Better respond to local agendas, through engagement with local stakeholders and consensus-building around education research priorities.

- → Build African research capacity and expertise, and diversify and enrich the knowledge base by providing more equitable access to research opportunities, including for women researchers and early career researchers.

- → Promote a dynamic African research culture in which education research is undertaken not only for individual career advancement, but also to have a meaningful impact on local education policies and practices. This will, in turn, attract more African research funding.

In order to pursue the broad aims above, the specific objectives of this intervention are:

- → To strengthen African mechanisms for funding education research, including the relationships between NRFs and SGCs, education policy-makers, higher education institutions and education researchers.

- → To catalyse funding for education research from governments, the private sector and philanthropic organisations in Africa.

- → To encourage and enable existing African research funding bodies – such as NRFs and SGCs – to design, attract and manage grant funding for education research.

- → To advocate for the establishment or strengthening of NRFs and SGCs, where appropriate.

- → To stimulate thinking about other possible vehicles for private sector and philanthropic funding.

By investing in African education research mechanisms and capacity, this intervention will support a cycle of greater independence for and by African education researchers and policy-makers, as depicted below.

Breaking the cycle of depending on Northern funding for African Education Research

Northern funding for African education research

Promotes northern agendas and researchers

Research not used by African researchers and policy-makers

African policy-makers don't value education research and don't invest in it

Insufficient African funding for education research

Current situation

Strengthening African funding for African education research

African research agendas more relevant to local priorities

Research is used by African researchers and policy-makers

African stakeholders value African education research and invest in it

More African funding for African education research

Future situation

Lessons about attracting local funding from the Hewlett Foundation's 20 years of field-building in conflict resolution

The Hewlett Foundation's 20 years of field-building in conflict resolution highlighted several critical lessons, particularly in attracting local funding. One significant realisation was that establishing local ownership and sustainability requires a gradual shift from external to local funding sources. The Foundation learned that while initial stages of field-building may depend on international support, long-term success hinges on cultivating local financial commitment. To achieve this, they emphasised the importance of building trust and demonstrating value to local stakeholders, ensuring that local entities perceive the initiative as directly beneficial to their own communities.

This approach not only increased local buy-in but also diversified funding sources, enhancing the initiative's resilience and sustainability. The Hewlett Foundation served as a **catalyst for growth** by providing long-term, flexible funding that allowed the conflict resolution field to mature. Their approach was non-prescriptive, which empowered local organisations to experiment and innovate. (Kovick, 2005).
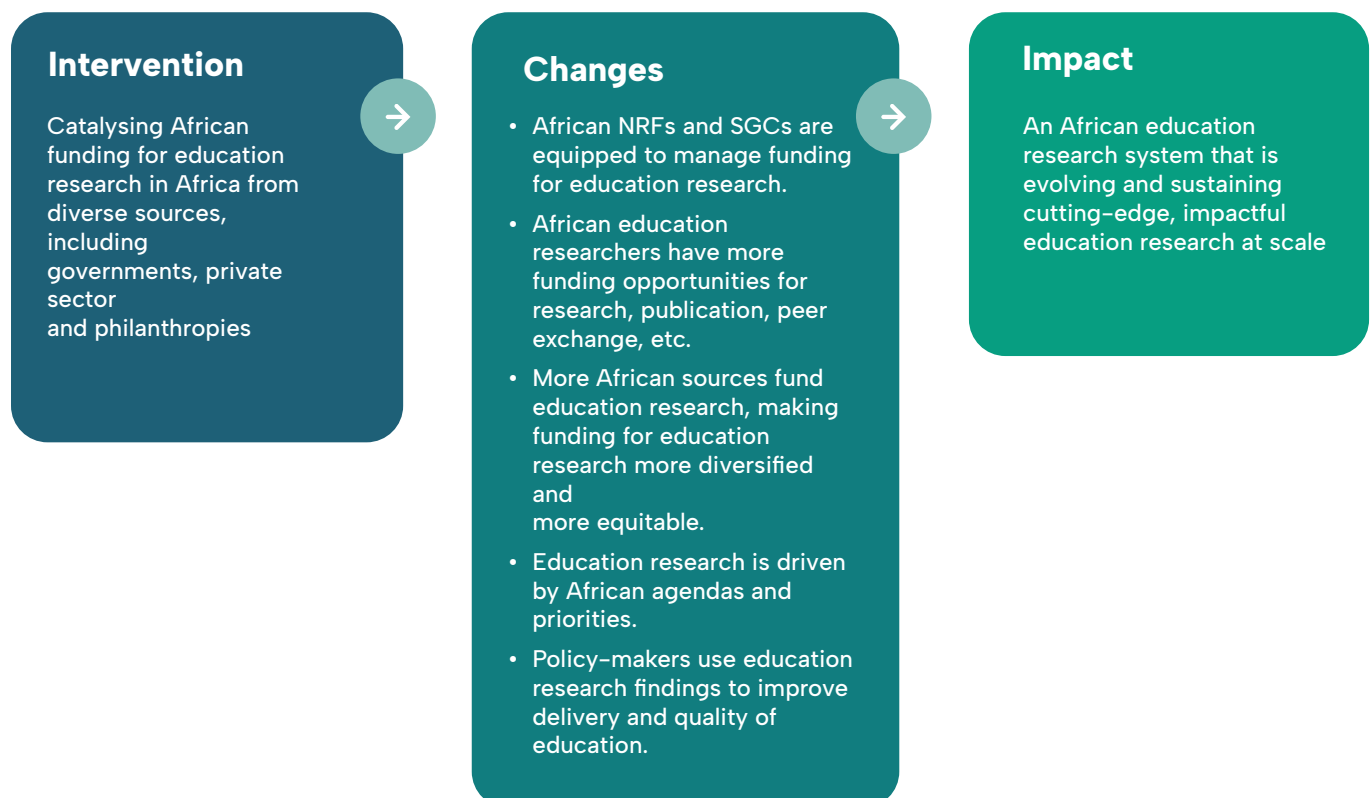
This non-prescriptive, flexible funding model can be an effective way to empower African institutions to take ownership of their research agendas, aligning them with local needs while still benefiting from international support.   Even though the example above is dated, the lessons about field-building are still relevant.

Expected outcomes

Drawing from the perspectives of African education researchers and policy–makers, the expected outcomes of this intervention are as follows:

→ **Outcome 1**: **Research funding bodies in African countries are resourced and equipped to establish and manage education research grants.** SGCs and NRFs are critical actors in national research and innovation systems. Setting them up to support funding for education research in African countries counteracts the cycle of over–dependence on external grant programmes. A recent study[2] on strengthening research institutions in Africa found that national funding bodies support local research and are able to coordinate and manage research grants and partnerships. They are also well–placed to support research communications, convening and other aspects of the research process. If SGCs and NRFs do not exist, or are not deemed appropriate, other African vehicles will support greater investment in African education research.

→ **Outcome 2**: **Strengthened policy framework for education research within national research and innovation eco–systems in African countries**. Local education priorities drive African research agendas, which in turn makes education research more useful to policy–makers, who will use the evidence generated to inform education policy and implementation. For SGCs and NRFs to perform well, they need to be supported by a policy framework that supports research and innovation – and that these policy frameworks need to be strengthened, and then they need to place value on education research in particular (many of them focus on STEM only).

→ **Outcome 3**: **Increased and more reliable funding from African funding sources and institutions for African–led education research**. This includes funding for research, publication, conferences and uptake of research into policy and practice.

These outcomes are seen to contribute to the following impact pathway:

Intervention

Catalysing African funding for education research in Africa from diverse sources, including governments, private sector and philanthropies

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Changes

- African NRFs and SGCs are equipped to manage funding for education research.
- African education researchers have more funding opportunities for research, publication, peer exchange, etc.
- More African sources fund education research, making funding for education research more diversified and more equitable.
- Education research is driven by African agendas and priorities.
- Policy-makers use education research findings to improve delivery and quality of education.

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Impact

An African education research system that is evolving and sustaining cutting–edge, impactful education research at scale
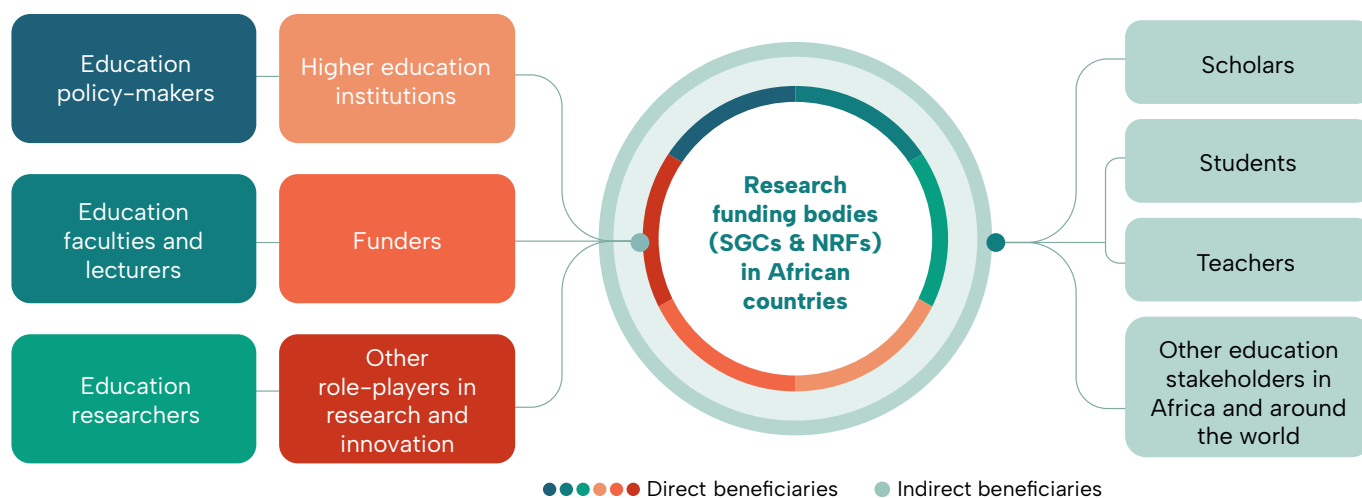
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[2] The study by Fosci & Loffreda, 2019, is cited in full in the reference list.

Who will benefit most from this intervention?

Catalysing African funding for education research will benefit the following actors:

→ NRFs and SGCs in African countries that will be better resourced and equipped to design, attract and manage funding for Africa-led education research.

→ Other role-players in the African research and innovation eco-system, who will have more scope to contribute to research agendas and knowledge exchange around improved education outcomes.

→ Education researchers (individuals and teams) in African countries who can undertake cutting-edge, impact-driven education research on a consistent basis.

→ Under-represented categories of education researchers, and early career researchers, who have greater access to research funding opportunities.

→ Education faculties and lecturers whose teaching and training can be enhanced by relevant research grounded in African priorities.

→ Policy-makers who have access to more research on education informed by African agendas, and therefore more useful to inform and guide decision-making and policy planning affecting education.

→ Higher education institutions and think tanks in Africa, who are associated with quality research production and enhanced academic reputation.

→ International and African funders, including philanthropists, who will have better avenues for giving, and stronger funding partnerships.

→ Ultimately teachers, students and scholars, who experience the benefits of improved policies and education practice, informed by robust, implementation-oriented research.

The chart below depicts the direct and indirect beneficiaries of this intervention.

Education policy-makers

Higher education institutions

Education faculties and lecturers

Funders

Education researchers

Other role-players in research and innovation

Research funding bodies (SGCs & NRFs) in African countries

Scholars

Students

Teachers

Other education stakeholders in Africa and around the world

●●●●●● Direct beneficiaries   ● Indirect beneficiaries

African institutions responsible for research and innovation

Several countries in Africa currently have dedicated science granting councils or national research funds. These include, for example, the National Research Fund in Kenya and the National Research Foundation in South Africa. In many countries, the national ministries responsible for science, technology and innovation play the role of research funding bodies.

There is a regional network, the Science Granting Councils Initiative (SGCI), which facilitates collaboration between 17 public science funding agencies across sub-Saharan Africa.

The majority of African countries do not currently have SGCs or NRFs. While there are opportunities to support countries in the process of addressing this gap, the establishment of SGCs and NRFs is not the main focus of this concept note. The intention is to provide direct funding to those who are already participating in the SGCI, but don't have enough people and funds to implement what they are learning, especially not in the education research field.

Designing this intervention: Important considerations

This section explores the design features to be taken into consideration when initiating this intervention. It is based on research on existing research funds and funding mechanisms, as well as consultations with African education researchers and policy-makers.

Geographical scope

The focus of the intervention is at country level. However, collaboration between SGCs and NRFs for multi-country or regional projects is also possible.

Scaling at a national level could be achieved by:

→ Increasing the funding for national research grant-making bodies as they develop and mature.

→ Offering long-term and flexible funding for research projects to deepen the impact of the research.

→ Encouraging a gradual shift from external funding to local funding sources, by maintaining close relationships with policy actors who will support ongoing funding for education research, while also encouraging co-funding from local actors.

Gender, equity and social inclusion

The intervention will require a focus on gender equity and inclusion. It should be designed to specifically:

→ Improve access to research funding for women, other marginalised groups, and early career researchers.

→ Build research capacity amongst early career researchers and female researchers.

→ Support research on topics related to access to education and quality education for girls, women and other marginalised groups.

Engaging with diverse sources of African funding and matched funding

The impact of this intervention will be magnified by its success in influencing governments, philanthropies and the private sector to invest more in education research, and to provide a vehicle for them to do so. Funders should either partner with, where they exist, or set up, where they don't exist, pooled funds that go directly to African institutions, that bypass northern researchers and intermediaries, and as they do this, to use their influence to crowd in local African funding.

Matched funding is one mechanism that could be used to increase spending on education research by local actors such as governments, the private sector and philanthropists. It could be a condition of the grant. Matched funding encourages greater buy-in from local actors, and hence encourages sustainability. Matched funding can be in kind funding.

A recent study on African Philanthropy also found that there is great generosity in Africa, and amongst the African diaspora, and there is opportunity to grow African philanthropic giving. There is also potential to bring in African-based value systems around giving, which are more about mutual accountability, relationships and trust. Another avenue for local funding is through Public-Private Partnerships. A barrier to increasing African philanthropic funding is that very few countries have governance models to encourage it, such as tax breaks or incentives for corporate social responsibility. This is something that should also be addressed[3].

Accreditation of national entities

Local entities – primarily SGCs and NRFs – should be accredited to manage the funds raised for education research. An accreditation process could be established that has a developmental agenda; the aim would be to support institutions where they are at, and allow them to increase their funding as they mature. Funding in some countries would be catalytic (for example, to set up an education research fund). In other countries it would focus on systems strengthening or scaling existing initiatives and ensuring that they have a focus on education research. Agencies could have accreditation for different levels of funding, and can progress through the levels as they meet certain criteria. Alternative vehicles for local entities could be research organisations such as Think Tanks, research institutes or Social Science councils.

[3] Noted by forthcoming research by the International Education Funders group on African Philanthropy,

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Direct access funding

These accredited African research funding bodies should receive direct access funding. This is a funding mechanism within international development financing that allows recipient countries to directly access funds from international donors or financial institutions without intermediary organisations (such as UN Agencies, international NGOs or consulting companies).[4]

This approach aims to empower national institutions by giving them greater control over how funds are allocated and used. It is supported by research conducted by OTT Consulting for the Oak Foundation, which recommended increased funding of local institutions, by "… bypassing international intermediaries (including large multilaterals based in local settings as they have lengthy and complex processes to disburse funds).". Direct access funding to national grant-making bodies should include core funding, and specific funding that is ringfenced for education research.

Core funding

Core funding is essential as research funding bodies need to have sufficient capacity (skills, number of staff, systems) to design, attract and manage education research funding. SGCs and NRFs need core funding to support their institutional growth and development, to improve systems and hire staff, and have flexibility to adapt to changing conditions. The 2023 evaluation of the SGCIs first 8 years found that the technical and capacity strengthening support from the SGCI has been of great value to the councils. However, the benefits of the funding was constrained by limited absorptive capacity – they simply have too few staff and resources to be able to do anything with their enhanced skills and systems. Hence, it is critical that there is direct funding to research funding bodies to be able to strengthen their institutions and mandates, and to establish and manage funds for education research.

Evidence for supporting core funding of research institutions was established by the Think Tank Initiative of International Development Research Centre, which allowed research organisations to attract, retain, and build local talent, develop an independent research programme and invest in public outreach to ensure that research results informed and influenced national and regional policy debates. The role of core funding, (also referred to as trust-based funding as it is not tied to specific project deliverables) is also emphasised as important in a forthcoming paper on Education Philanthropy in Africa supported by the International Education Funders' Group (IEFG).

Research funding linked to African education priorities and buy-in from policy-makers

African education research policy leaders need to value and demand African-led education research. Hence, key policy actors in the research and innovation eco-system should be involved in the design and management of these initiatives. As state funding agencies will already be accountable to policy actors, this should be easily achieved. Advocacy will also be needed to ensure that education research is recognised in national research and innovation policy frameworks. See also the box below on further principles for funding support.

Support strong national frameworks for research

Evidence suggests that SGCs are also more effective when underpinned by a strong national framework for research[5]. Hence support for strengthening the policy environment is also an important area to consider for funding support. Strong African-wide, regional and national research policies and frameworks that support education research would provide an enabling environment for research grant-making bodies to operate. Funding could be provided to support the strengthening of national research frameworks and policies – by generating the required evidence to inform policy agenda setting, development, implementation, or monitoring and evaluation.

Local monitoring of funding outcomes

Funding outcomes should be monitored by those closest to implementation, so that they can adjust funding mechanisms as necessary.

Criteria for education research to be funded

While the focus of this intervention falls on catalysing appropriate mechanisms for African funding of education research in general, the design of the intervention could also extend to guiding what kinds of education research should be given priority through the grant-making processes that follow. Some principles to consider are presented in the box below.

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[4] This approach has been operationalised by The Adaptation Fund for access to climate financing. The Adaptation Fund has a system of fully accredited National Implementing Entities (NIEs) that directly access financing and manage all aspects of climate adaptation and resilience projects, from design through implementation and monitoring.

[5] A national framework for research could comprise, for example, a national research policy; a national science, technology and innovation policy; a national research / STI funder; a ministry or department for research; and a knowledge exchange strategy.

What principles should guide the funding of education research made possible by African grants?

1. **Policy alignment:** Research should be aligned to national, regional and continental education priorities. Policy actors should be involved in shaping research agendas.

   ⬈ See also **Intervention 1** for ideas on how to support African research agendas.

   Please visit the EERA project page at **bit.ly/3OOssDV.**

2. **African–led and inclusive:** Research should be led by African researchers, with the majority of funding going to African institutions. Gender and social inclusion should be prioritised (see points above under design considerations).

   ⬈ See also **Intervention 3** on establishing education Research Chairs at African institutions.

3. **Long–term:** Funding should be long-term, taking the view that it takes time to build a field. Further, short–term funding results in incomplete or underfunded projects, reducing policy impact.

4. **Comprehensive:** Funding should be available for all aspects of the research process – from fundraising, research production and communications to uptake. Research funding should include teaching-buy-outs for academics with high teaching loads. [6]Funding should also be available for different stages in the career pathway of early career researchers, including scholarships for Honours, Masters, Doctoral studies and Post–PhD support programmes.

5. **Co–funding:** The funding should encourage co-funding by other local institutions. This could be in kind, if not in cash, and the proportion of co-funding should increase over time.

6. **Variety and flexible funding:** There should be a number of different funding options available to support education research projects through different stages. This should include options for long–term research projects (minimum of three years), multi–phase projects, rapid research funding (3 – 6 months) to prepare data or develop proposals, bridging funding and opportunity funds.

7. **Collaboration:** There could be specific grants to support collaborative research involving multiple institutions.

8. **Action–oriented:** Funding must be available for action-oriented research that is empowering and meaningful for those who participate in it.

9. **Multi/ trans–disciplinary research:** Education affects all disciplines, and there are thus definite advantages to multi–disciplinary and mixed–methods research, including action research. Wherever appropriate, the research should involve the stakeholders who the research is for.[7]

10. **Scaling:** Thoughts about how to scale, and who the scaling stakeholders are, should be built into research projects from the start.[8]

11. **Accessibility:** Funding application processes should be straightforward, and could become more complex over different stages of funding, depending on the sophistication of the researcher or the research institution.

    ⬈ To enhance administrative capacity for education research, see also **Intervention 4.**

12. **Communication of findings:** Platforms should be provided for education research to be shared widely. Research dissemination and knowledge translation is often not prioritised for funding, making research inaccessible to those who could use it.

    ⬈ For more on communications to support education research, see also **Intervention 7** and **Intervention 8.**

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[6]This is standard practice in Northern higher education institutions. Here is an example of the LSE buy–out policy for academics.

[7]To learn more about using an engaged research approach, see this overview from the Wellcome Trust.

[8]More information about scaling science, from the IDRC, can be found here.

Next steps

If you would like to help catalyse African funding for education research, the following steps will help you to start planning the process:

Funding mechanisms

1. Engage the existing role-players in the national research and innovation eco-system, in particular the Science Granting Council Initiative and the particular grant-making bodies that they fund, to find out what their specific needs are and how they could be supported with funding to strengthen education research. The SGCI has an annual forum and sub-Saharan African regional meeting which could provide a platform for this engagement.

2. Explore a collaboration between the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and the SGCI to map a pathway for NRFs or SGCs to become accredited agents to disburse GPE funds.

3. Start working with early adopters to develop a funding model. Early adopters include SGCs or NRFs that already manage grants for education or have shown commitment to supporting education research (for example, the NRFs in South Africa and Kenya). The full list of SGCs involved in the SGCI is here. For countries that have no, or very little funding for research, or education research, a partnership model could be developed where two countries cooperate to build a national education research framework where one does not yet exist.

4. Work with the relevant actors in a given country to establish a funding system for directing and managing grants for education research, giving attention to all the design considerations outlined in the previous section. This should result in the development of a direct access funding model that allows NRFs and SGCs to receive funds directly from donors without relying on intermediaries.

5. Develop a collaborative philanthropic platform: Encourage education research stakeholders to coordinate funding efforts and create pooled funding to support NRFs and SGCs. Use the platform to attract additional funders as you crowd in resources to support the field. The platform should have clear governance structures, including representation from African education research funders, African research institutions, SGCs or NRFs and African philanthropies.

6. Support the strengthening of SGCs and NRFs. Provide core funding to enable SCGs and NRFs to hire staff, develop systems and build capacity to manage, monitor and evaluate larger portfolios of education research grants. Support technical assistance (either through the SGCI or directly) to strengthen grant-making and monitoring capabilities.

What would it look like to start this Intervention off in Kenya?

→ Get to know the innovation landscape in Kenya. A draft Science Technology and Innovation (STI) policy was recently validated in May 2024.

→ Engage the people who are custodians of this policy in the Department of Higher Education and Research at the Ministry of Education, and bring them into a discussion about funding education research.

→ Connect all the stakeholders involved in the funding research and innovation eco-system in Kenya, including government agencies such as the NRF, philanthropic and corporate donors such as Safaricom and development partners who participate in the Local Education Group.

→ See if there is appetite to build a collective advocacy effort, and set up or support efforts for direct access funding mechanisms for education research.

Policy engagement

6. Engage policy-makers at national and regional level to ensure that education research is a key focus of science and innovation research policy frameworks. Enabling policy frameworks should encourage increased budgetary allocations for education research and support the role of SGCs and NRFs in driving research agendas.

7. Engage with the Local Education Groups (groups of education-funding donors) to maximise influence. Push to include research components in education sector plans, GPE grant proposals, World Bank loans, research and innovation policy and so forth.

8. Build the case for continued investment in education research funding. Consider funding a research study with which to engage policy-makers in the national research and innovation system, that motivates for an increased focus on education research. The study should also demonstrate where government funding for education research is currently going, and whether it is reaching early career researchers.

Use communication tools and stakeholder engagement to demonstrate impact and build momentum for further investments. Share success stories of how research funded through SGCs and NRFs has improved education outcomes and support platforms for disseminating education research findings.

See also **Intervention 7** and **Intervention 8** for more ideas on supporting research communications.

Organise events, roundtables and discussions where funders, government role-players and researchers can discuss progress and future priorities for education research funding in Africa.

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Appendix 1: SWOT Analysis and African funding for education research

The table below depicts how catalysing African funding for African education research is expected to address the SWOT analysis undertaken by education research stakeholders as part of the EERA process.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Commitment and resilience: Despite funding challenges, many African researchers show strong commitment and resilience in conducting education research.	**Heavy reliance on external funding:** Over 90% of education research funding comes from international donors, leading to dependency on external agendas.
International collaboration: External funding has facilitated international collaborations, bringing in resources and expertise to local research projects.	**Minimal public funding:** This leads to misalignment with national priorities and reliance on self-funding of education research projects for degree or career purposes, limiting the depth and quality of research.
Emerging local funding models: Some successful local funding models, such as South Africa's National Research Foundation and Kenya's National Research Fund, can be emulated.	**Project-specific funding:** Most research projects rely on programme-specific and limited funding, which hinders long-term sustainability, follow-up studies and research agendas.
	Researchers' dependency on consultancies: The lack of proper research funding drives some researchers to conducting consultancies for private organisations as an alternative source of income for their research projects, crowding out time for academic research and mentoring.

Opportunities	Threats
Building local funding mechanisms: Strengthening national research funds and encouraging local contributions can reduce dependency on external funding.	**Political influence and instability:** Changing political priorities and instability can lead to shifts in research focus and funding cuts.
Engaging the private sector: Encouraging private sector investment in education research can diversify funding sources and ensure research addresses practical needs.	**Donor influence on agendas:** External donors often set research agendas that may not align with local needs, compromising the relevance of the research.
Enhancing government support: Advocating for increased government support aligned with local and global goals (for instance, Africa 2063) can lead to stronger financial backing for research.	**Complex funding procedures:** Researchers often find funding application processes complex and countercultural, leading to exclusion from funding opportunities.