

Unlocking data to tell the story of Education in Africa: Focus on education into work



Summary and synthesis of workshop on 6th May 2021

August 2021

1. Overview



Note: Word cloud of the “most frustrating challenges surrounding education data in SSA” according to the webinar participants. Please see Table 1 below for more details.

On the 6th of May, [ESSA](#), [Zizi Afrique](#), [EdTech Hub](#) and [Decent Jobs for Youth](#) hosted a virtual workshop: “Unlocking data to tell the story of Education in Africa: A focus on education to work”.¹ The focus of the workshop was to understand how participants can work together to unlock data that will help partners to take concrete steps to support young people in the transition from education into work. The aims of the meeting were to:

- Present findings from previous meetings and share strategies for increasing access to education data.
- Share the experiences of attendees on challenges and successes in increasing access to data.
- Identify meaningful actions that we can take to increase access to education data.
- Define concrete actions for using data to support youth employment stakeholders in the design and implementation evidence-based policies and programmes.
- Explore links to other initiatives.

Key takeaways:

- Micro-level datasets on the transition from education to work are rarely available and accessible in SSA.
- Many stakeholders and data owners do not understand the importance of sharing data.

¹ We would like to thank the members of our different organisations who helped plan the Webinar. We are also grateful to Rigobert Pambe ([eBase](#)) and to Eesha Moitra, Susana Puerto, and Lena Yan (ILO) for their support in planning and facilitating the breakout group discussions. Likewise, we thank the Webinar’s attendees for their active participation and their genuine contributions.

- Further initiatives are needed to improve the education data ecosystem.

2. Introductory presentation

John Mugo ([Zizi Afrique](#)) introduced the webinar, welcoming the attendees from International Organizations, Academia, Government and Business (private sector). Findings from the previous workshops were presented to attendees as an input to stimulate discussions.

2.1 Background and progress so far

Back on the 21st July last year, 40 participants joined together for a workshop convened by [ESSA](#), [Zizi Afrique](#) and [EdTech Hub](#) to explore how we could collectively start to address this issue. Participants were based across the continent and from a range of institutions including academics, national statistics offices, funders and multilateral organisations.

There was a real enthusiasm to tackle this problem, while at the same time there was a recognition that the problem was complex, and that work is needed not just on accessing data but also increasing capacities to both analyse and use data. The challenges identified were:

Identifying problems

In discussing where we want to get to, the following problems were identified.

Data is often scattered, decentralised, and difficult to disaggregate

There is lack of funds to collect data, promote data literacy, and obtain specialists to analyse data

Lack of quality assurance

- Data may not be cleaned or presentable
- Data may not be accurate and representative
- Data may not be checked for sensitivity and privacy concerns

Data is outdated and not available when needed

There is difficulty collecting certain types of data, e.g., administrative data

The group came together again in October to discuss the formation of a Community of Practice that connects individuals and organisations who are working to improve access to and use of education data, largely at the country level. This 'unlocking data' community of practice includes African scholars, NGOs, national statistics offices and policy-makers. The intended outcome is to increase the effectiveness of members in their efforts to 'unlock' education data, increasing its availability and use for analysis that will improve education for young people.

Understanding the data ecosystem

Before deciding where we want to go to, we need to properly take stock of where we are.



One important barrier to action is that we do not have a full picture of the data ecosystem as it stands now. Before deciding where to go, we need to properly take stock of where we are. This means fulfilling a few key tasks to understand what is available and what is missing.

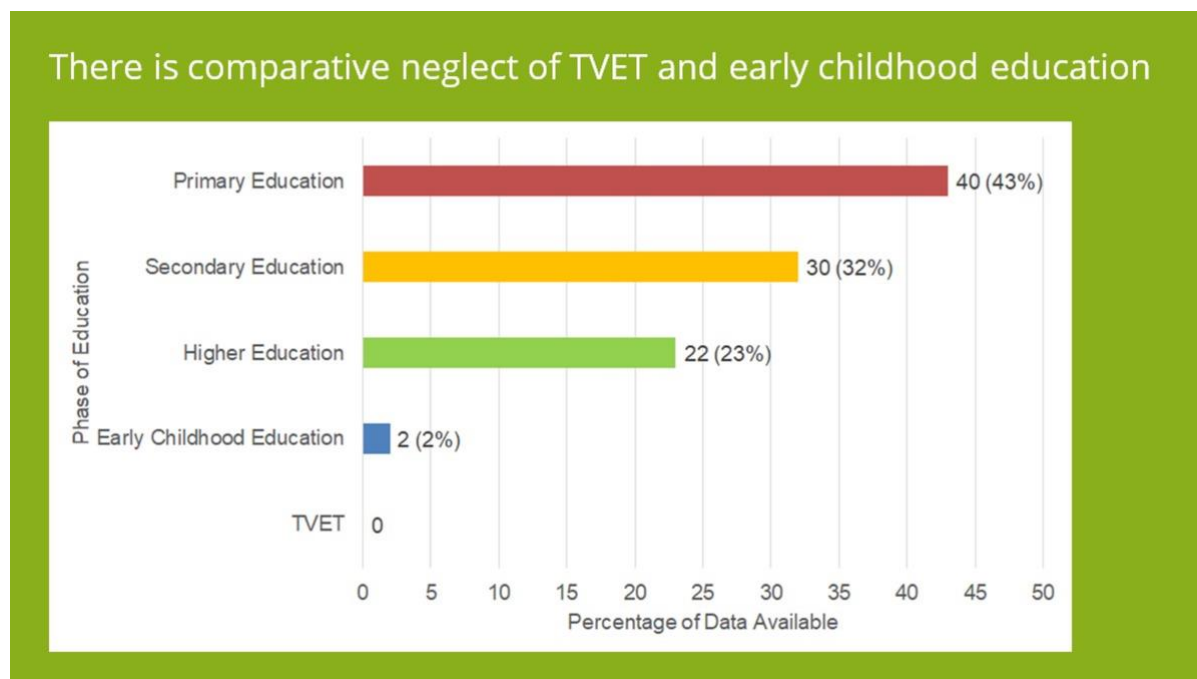
We are currently developing what we believe to be the first methodology for mapping education data. The mapping will ask the following questions: What do we know about what exists? What are the gaps and what more do we need? This is not a grand attempt to comprehensively map all data but to build a patchwork, focusing on a specific area where members of the community of practice are working, e.g. Technical, Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Kenya or private education in Burkina Faso.

2.2 The need for focus on the transition from education into work

Analysis of the [African Education Research Database \(AERD\)](#) revealed that just 3% of over 3.5 thousand publications are using secondary data.² Just 3% of published research papers exploit secondary data, 2% and 0% of which respectively deal with early childhood education and TVET. This is symptomatic of the restricted or poor access to secondary data to generate locally relevant knowledge. The situation is particularly bad outside of primary and secondary education, with just two publications in the African Education Research Database using secondary data related to Early Childhood Development and none at all for TVET.

² This database is a collaboration between [ESSA](#) and the [REAL Centre at the University of Cambridge](#), and contains all education research publications where at least one of the authors is affiliated with an African institution.

One concern that came up repeatedly was the lack of training for educators and students in using education data for contextual analyses and “policy makers do not pay attention to evidence in prioritizing decisions” have been mentioned but seems less related to data gaps.



Previous ‘unlocking data’ workshops engaged stakeholders across all stages of education. However, the issue of data access and use is particularly acute when we look at issues affecting the youth. Therefore, we have partnered with [Decent Jobs for Youth](#) to bring this conversation to a group of stakeholders focused on education and work, be that upper secondary, TVET or higher education.³ The introductory presentation is followed by breakout group discussions.

3. Breakout group discussions

The group discussions addressed three main questions: Where are the most frustrating data gaps? What are the challenges and concerns to access data? What steps can we take to increase access to, and use of, priority data?

³ [Decent Jobs for Youth](#) is an alliance of committed partners acting at country and regional level across a variety of thematic priorities, sharing knowledge & leveraging resources for more & better jobs for youth. Its goal is to scale up action and impact on youth employment through effective, innovative, and evidence-based interventions.

Participants coming from different professional spheres and working on or with different types of education data, the contributions and inputs of attendees cover a range of challenges. Here below, we highlight the main contributions to each individual question.

3.1 Where are the most frustrating data gaps?

Overall, the conversations relating to data gaps and challenges surrounding education and employment data in SSA were focused on coordination in the data sphere, quality, and the accessibility of primary and secondary education data. Table 1 gives an overview of the main points under these three topics.

Table 1: Overview of the most frustrating challenges surrounding education data in SSA

Coordination	Availability and accessibility	Quality
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Lack of coordination in data sphere -Lack of partnership between industry, policymakers, researchers for data production -States should have their own bureau of statistics as they understand better their problems. -Data owners hold data as exercise of power -Stakeholders do not understand the need for sharing data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of resources for data collection - No data on subsectors of education, on people with disabilities - Data is not readily available Geo-located data not available. - Lack of structural data on cognitive and non-cognitive data skills - Data from the informal sector is very hard to access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collection of data not synchronised, leading to data being not comparable - No granular data on Education and TVET, disaggregated by gender, location, and social status, vulnerable groups... - When data is available, it is unusable due to missing information - Unemployment data not always representative of the state of the nation (Case of Nigeria)

3.2 What are the challenges and concerns to access data?

Regarding concerns to access education data, attendees listed challenges that appear consistent with the ones identified in previous events. Additional concerns emphasised mostly relate to availability and accessibility as described above (Table 1).

Novelties in the discussions relate more to expectations than challenges surrounding access to data. The necessity of a *systematic reporting of data from school to the public authorities*, the need of a *unique data format*, the creation of a *portal that compiles data*, and the need for the ILO to *support capacities in collection and utilisation* of data. Also, participants mentioned the lack of data culture of African education stakeholders such as teachers who do not understand the value of education data.⁴

Finally, challenges relating to data collection, availability and quality during the pandemic were discussed. Caroline Thiongo raised concerns on data quality in the current era of Covid-19, where data collection has moved to remote tools. Collecting data, quality should be at the centre of the process to ensure that, even when remotely collected, the data is representative.

3.3 What steps can we take to increase access to, and use of, priority data?

The different contribution to this topic can be classified among what could be done and the structures needed to facilitate it.

What could we do?

The following next steps were suggested:

- “A common portal where education data is hosted is needed”. Nevertheless, given the existence of widely known data sources such as the WB microdata and ILO Stats and since keeping data up to date is challenging, “we should work better with existing data portals rather than create more platforms”.
- It is necessary to “bring the owners of data into the process”, “raising awareness among decision-makers about the importance of data collection and sharing”.
- “Negotiate with researchers whose work is entered into [AERD](#) to give open access to datasets through (selected) existing data repositories, research project websites, etc., and link to these through the AERD”.
- “Work together with African-based universities & with academic publishers to develop policies that require researchers to make data available for reuse and verification for a minimum of 10 years”.
- “Organise more training events to improve education data collection and use in Africa to improve the education system in Africa”.
- “Collaboration (rather than competition) between industry, policymakers, academics in data collection and sharing”.

⁴ “Data culture” refers to a person or an organisation’s ability to use data to make decisions.

The group discussions also highlighted the role of NGOs, INGOs and funders in promoting a culture of data use and sharing. Some attendees suggested that African research institutes and private funders should be encouraged to fund data collection and sharing initiatives, while NGOs, INGOs should also share data collected for case studies, evaluation, and consultancy services.

What structures are needed to facilitate this?

Lastly, participants also mentioned some institutional changes needed in improving the education data ecosystem in SSA. Among others, a “central body to control, monitor and upload education data across countries, catalogued in thematic areas” can help increase availability of data. Furthermore, a generalized open data (licensing) policy, improved national educational data systems, as well as horizontal and vertical partnerships between data users, data producers and decisions makers would be very helpful.

4. Lessons learnt

The webinar aimed to share experiences on challenges and successes in increasing access to data and to define meaningful actions. Respondents to the webinar feedback survey highlighted the following insights that they took away from the conversation:

- “Challenges need to be addressed from various angles depending on the stakeholder group, i.e., researchers, governments, practitioners, beneficiaries (learners, parents) as they have diverse needs (access to data, capacity building for meaningful use of data)”.
- “More organizations are focusing on increasing access to education data”.
- “Identified the areas that need improvement in the education data field”.
- “The production techniques and conditions of the data must be analysed and considered when using data”.

5. Considerations for next steps

Participants of the workshop mentioned some very practical steps in unlocking education data, which can be considered by the Unlocking Data Community of Practice for next steps or future workshop. These, among others, include discussions around:

- Tools for managing education data.
- How to collaborate well on this topic.
- Next steps/ ESSA plans.
- How to further education data analysis.

- Data collection skills disposition/ exposition.
- Dissemination of education data and use in higher education institutions for job analysis.
- Case studies and lessons learnt.

The suggestions from attendees will go directly into shaping the Unlocking Data Community of Practice. In particular, the calls to bring data owners into the process, raise the profile of the importance of data sharing and encouraging collaboration will be highlighted. All attendees are invited to join the community of practice by signing up to the mailing list on the [Unlocking Data Platform](#).

Several attendees volunteered to review or pilot the mapping methodology being piloted. We will follow up with the individuals who put themselves forward for mapping education data. Attendees are also invited to join the [YouthForesight](#) initiative by [Decent Jobs for Youth](#) and [Generation Unlimited](#).

Finally, attendees are also invited to participate in piloting the data mapping as well as joining the [YouthForesight](#) initiative by Decent Jobs for Youth and Generation Unlimited.

Please contact Lucy Heady (lucy@essa-africa.org) or John Mugo (jmugo@ziziafrique.org) if you want to find out more about the Unlocking Data Community of Practice and Lena Yan (yanx@ilo.org) to find out more about [YouthForesight](#).