



REGIONAL  
EDUCATION  
LEARNING  
INITIATIVE



# EQUITY AND INCLUSION

Towards an accelerated action to enhance learning in East Africa

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# What is Inclusion, Equity and Equality?

The Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs) 4 [commits the globe](#) to providing all children with inclusive and equitable education, with a further commitment to lifelong learning for all. Therefore, SDG 4 recognizes that education is a public good, which should be accessed by all, as a human right, irrespective of gender, socioeconomic, and disability status (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2015). Yet, the right to education for many children is not assured, particularly for living in marginalized areas around the world. In order to understand equality and inclusivity in education, we have to critically relook at three key constructs: equity, equality and non-discriminatory approaches.



INCLUSIVITY

[Inclusive education in essence, refers to the guarantee that every child, irrespective of ability, age, gender, language, nationality, religion or other characteristics](#), is 'supported to meaningfully participate and learn alongside his or her peers, and develop to his/her full potential' (Save the Children, 2016).



EQUITY

Equity on the other hand refers to a method or system of levelling the learning space for learners as it recognizes that some learners may be disadvantaged than others. Equity thus seeks to compensate for the learners' misfortunes, inabilities and disabilities to ensure that all learners can [attain the same quality and level of education](#).



EQUALITY

Equality-and/or non-discrimination approaches are pegged on the idea that everyone should be treated the same and accorded equal access to opportunities and enjoyment of rights. Thus, the difference between equality and equity is that the latter recognizes that different people will need different amounts of resources or support in order to progress or succeed in overcoming real or perceived barriers. Put differently, equity is a means to an end, where the end is equality – the unbiased/equal access to right to education, and enjoyment of rights, among others.



## What is the Global State of Inclusion In Education?

According to the Global Education Monitoring Report (2020), there exists layers of discrimination, based on gender, location (in terms of accessibility), socio-economic ranking, ethnic group, (dis)ability, language, migration, religion, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, history of incarceration, displacement, and other factors that may deny children the right to be educated together with their peers, and receive quality education (GEMR, 2020).

Research evidence shows that the exclusion of pupils has been exacerbated by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and estimates that learners may not have been supported during the schools-shutdown in about 40 percent of low and lower-middle income countries (UNESCO, 2020). In order to foster inclusion, it is important for all countries and education systems to lay emphasis on supporting those learners who are left behind. This will not only ensure that these learners access school but also enhance their resilience in school and beyond and by extension, foster equal and just societies.

It is worth noting that exclusion has persisted in education systems in many countries, even before the onset of COVID-19. As of 2019, approximately 258 million children and youth were unable to access education, with poverty being the most widely cited obstacle. Moreover, completion of lower secondary school is only possible for adolescents from 20 percent of high income households in low and middle income countries, as compared to those adolescents from households of lowest socio-economic status. It is worth noting that among those adolescents who did complete lower secondary education, it is those from the richest households who were twice as likely to have basic reading and mathematics skills, compared to those from the poorest households (GEMR, 2020).

Therefore, the challenges to equity, inclusion and provision of quality education for all persists globally as well as in sub-Saharan Africa. As education is a collective responsibility, the combined efforts of actors and governments is pivotal in addressing these challenges. Thus, education initiatives that seek to harness the collective power of education stakeholders, such as the Regional Education Learning Initiative (RELI), bring together different stakeholders in the education sector for collective action and impact.



# What are the Highlights of Inclusion and Equity in East Africa?

Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania are signatories to the national laws, regional and international conventions which reassert the role of the State to ensure the rights of children, particularly in education, are protected and fulfilled for enhanced equity and inclusive in education. Therefore, these countries cannot implement their national laws on inclusion without paying attention to the regional and international conventions guiding inclusion.

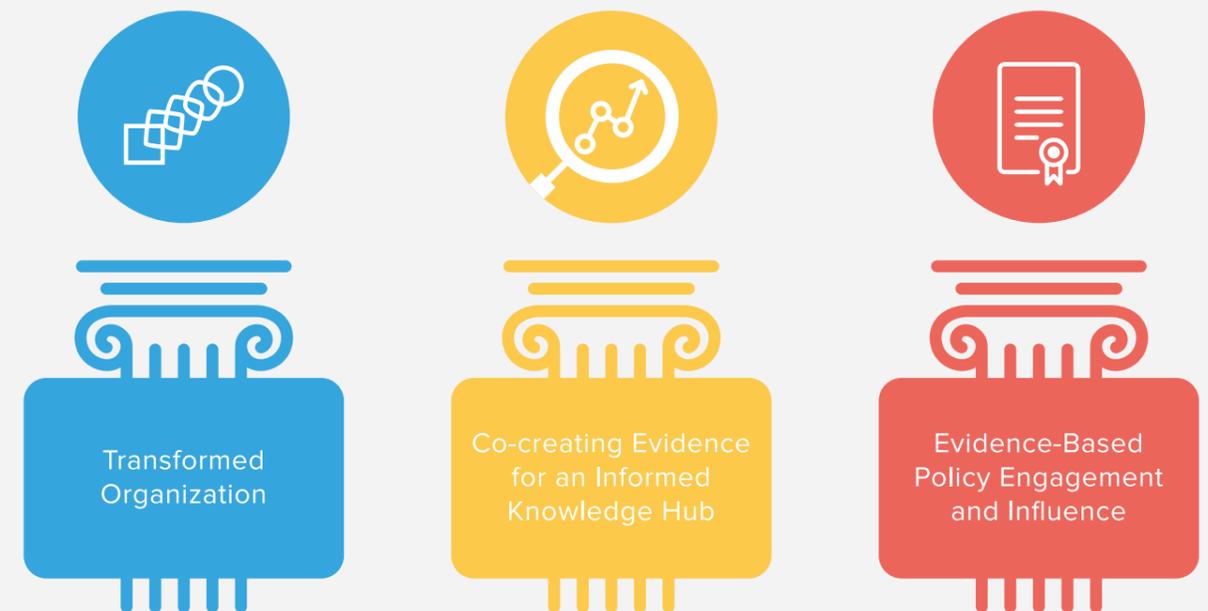
It is no longer enough to state that the 'right' education is offered; rather, education must be inclusive and equitable not only in its provisions, but also in the way in which disenfranchised populations are made aware of their rights and their active inclusion into the education system. This includes, but is not limited to hiring of teachers, building infrastructure, and putting in place a functional education system involving monitoring and evaluation of schools, teachers, and instructors; teacher- training; hiring and accreditation (Adoyo & Odeny, 2015). Foregoing debates on equity and inclusion, and the need for actors in the education sector to respond to these needs among children in their programs is what spurred the need for an education initiative, RELI. There was a need for RELI members to share their perspectives on what programs they are working on and how these programs are responding to the needs of children in East Africa, as pertains to Equity and Inclusion.

The Regional Education Learning Initiative (RELI) began in 2017 as a member-led initiative with a network of over 70 member- organizations in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, with the sole aim of addressing the challenges that affect the education of children in East Africa. The RELI initiative has three pillars that underpins its operations across East Africa, which are; transformed organizations, co-creating evidence for an informed knowledge hub, and evidence-based policy engagement and influence.

In order to navigate around topical issues across the region, a thematic group on Equity and Inclusion was formed in the three RELI member-states, with a Regional arm to champion the voices of the marginalized. Over the course of three years, the thematic group has enabled its members to broaden their understanding of equity, inclusion and equality, and the linkages therein. It should be noted that initially, the perception of many members was that inclusion only related to the issue of accommodating special needs of disabled learners. However, through discussions, interacting and critical reflection of what RELI members were implementing in their respective programs, members were able to broaden their perspective to appreciate the unique needs of all learners. These learners included all children left behind and marginalized.

They include but not limited to; pastoralists, refugees, disabled children, and children living in poverty, and out-of-school children (Abuya et al., 2020). Through the interactions among members, different organizations have shared the various ways in which they contribute to support the learning needs of these children, and how they navigate the policy environment in an attempt to improve learning outcomes of children in East Africa.

## RELI Pillars of Operations



# Tanzania

In **Tanzania**, RELI members through the Equity and Inclusion (EI) Thematic group (TG) in Tanzania provided inputs into the National Inclusive Education Strategy (2018-2021), and jointly mapped some of the gaps that may challenge its implementation. This has been spearheaded by Haki Elimu and the Technical Working Group on Inclusive Education. Through the leadership of Haki Elimu, working with the President's Office Regional and Local Government (PO-RALG), a coordinated stakeholder's meeting was held, to prepare a short implementation plan to aid the implementation of the strategy.

Some of the highlights that came as a result of deliberations with TG members included: First, the strategy is focused more on special education than on inclusive education; there are no systems in place and inadequate resources impair the government's ability to implement the strategy; dissemination of the strategy has not been done. For example, community participation and engagement is critical for the success of the strategy in part due to the importance of defining attitudes and values in support of implementation; and lastly the strategy does not adequately deal with the **issue** of differentiated learning in an inclusive setting, and does not seem to have a way in which teachers can deal with "fast learners", although it mentions the need to build teachers' capacity.

Moreover, some of the challenges in implementing the strategy have been attributed to:

- Its complexity which makes it difficult to understand. It is necessary to simplify it implementers at different levels.
- It is written in English, a language which majority of the implementing partners, some of whom are RELI members, are not very conversant with, especially at the community level. Since communities have a role to play in the implementation of the strategy, it is important that they are able to access the strategy document in Kiswahili.
- Lack of a Braille version for stakeholders who are visually impaired, making it exclusive.

Tanzania's Equity and Inclusion TG members adopted a number of ways to try to address the above challenges in order to improve the usefulness of the strategy and the learning outcomes of children in Tanzania as a whole. Firstly, is through simplifying the National Strategy in Inclusive Education for ease of understanding; secondly, through translating the simplified version; and thirdly, through packaging the IE strategy in a more user- friendly way by generating a popular version of the strategy for example, in form of a cartoon booklet that can be distributed to students and community members; and through the production of a simplified version in Braille to allow access to visually impaired learners.

# Kenya

In **Kenya** the RELI Equity and Inclusion members conducted an equity analysis of the Competency-based Curriculum (CbC) to identify potential gaps and challenges which, if not adequately addressed in the implementation of the curriculum, could result in entrenched inequalities. Examples of such inequities include: pupil-teacher ratio (and how this manifests itself in private versus public schools), rural versus urban schools, marginal versus non-marginal areas; access to facilities including ICT; disparities in parental empowerment levels (which includes literacy levels), socio-economic status; resource distribution in small compared to big schools, and disparities in teacher- empowerment and motivation levels.

Some of the Kenya Equity and Inclusion members have specifically focused on improving access to quality education for children living in urban poor areas through the Urban Education working group. This group focuses on strengthening the collective voice of organizations working on different education matters in low income neighborhoods in urban areas, collating evidence on the patterns of schooling among these learners, as well as evidence-based advocacy. Members of this group have been invited to participate in different technical working groups by the Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MoEST), to contribute to discussions on the Low Cost Fee Private Schools.



Photo by Adam Jan Figel

In addition, the members have also collaborated with the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) to review the parental empowerment and engagement guidelines intended to enhance parental involvement and empowerment in education as asserted under the new curriculum. This was with a view to input into the guidelines based on evidence from the programs that members have been implementing across Kenya. In addition, a community engagement model was developed that was an outcome of lessons learned among RELI members who are actively involved in community initiatives in different contexts such as post conflict environments, low income environments and rural areas. The model has undergone a small-scale pilot in Kenya in readiness to be replicated in other counties. Moreover, the Kenya EI group has begun to implement plans to better track policy and legislative discussions touching on inclusive education, to enable members to proactively engage with these policy discussions in real time, rather than contributing when the decisions have already been made by policymakers. Policy tracking is likely to reinvigorate the debates around how some of the policies that target inclusion, can better respond to issues of inclusion for all learners to be able to access quality education.

In Kenya, one example of this engagement, is the attempt to provide a second chance for girls to get an education, particularly for teen mothers through a Parliamentary bill. The proposed legislation, 'The Care and Protection of Child Parents Bill, 2016' aims to offer pregnant school going-girls the right to re-enter the school system after childbirth. It forbids the expulsion of girls who become pregnant while still in school, disallows compulsory pregnancy tests, and compels school- heads to ensure that learning institutions become harassment-free environments (Undie, Birungi, Odwe, & Obare, 2015). RELI partners have been at the forefront to champion interactive media campaigns aimed at persuading communities to change their behaviour and attitudes regarding school re-entry. There has been marked success as positive changes have been reported on school re-entry knowledge, practices and attitudes in communities (Walgwe, LaChance, Birungi, & Undie, 2016).

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Photo by Nolte Lourens

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# Uganda

In **Uganda**, the formation of the Equity and Inclusion thematic group has enabled member-organizations to plan, interact and collectively engage with other organizations in joint activities such as seeking of grants, in support of children's learning. In an attempt to improve the learning landscape for the children in Uganda, the thematic group has accomplished the following: active engagement in the Special Needs' Education Technical Working Group at the Ministry of Education and Sports and working towards its revival.

Secondly, the thematic group in liaison with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) engaged the Ministry of Education and Sports on the National Inclusive Education Policy (NIEP), as a way of including the voices of different actors and players. This was also meant to enable the thematic group members to have a broadened understanding of inclusion as it relates to education, by understanding what others are working on and the unique needs of different learners in different contexts, in Uganda. Consequently, the draft of NIEP was shared by the Basic Education Directorate to the Higher Education Committee, and finally it is to be shared with the Cabinet.

Thirdly, the thematic group developed a learning product on the Accelerated Education Programming (AEP) that was meant to enable disadvantaged learners to benefit from the education system. AEP was aimed at informing the strategy for refugee education under the draft NIEP. The Learning Needs Identification tool by the Uganda Society for Disabled Children (USDC) and Individual Learning Plans for learners with disabilities was shared to see how these can work both for nomadic communities, children living with disabilities, and others.

Fourthly, a visit to the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR) in Karamoja offered a unique opportunity to learn the modalities with which they manage the multi-age, multi-year, as well as the on and off learners within their program. This visit was to showcase the IIRR model, and see how other RELI members, particularly those from Tanzania can learn from the approach to inform a best strategy to reach pastoralist learners using the same curriculum.

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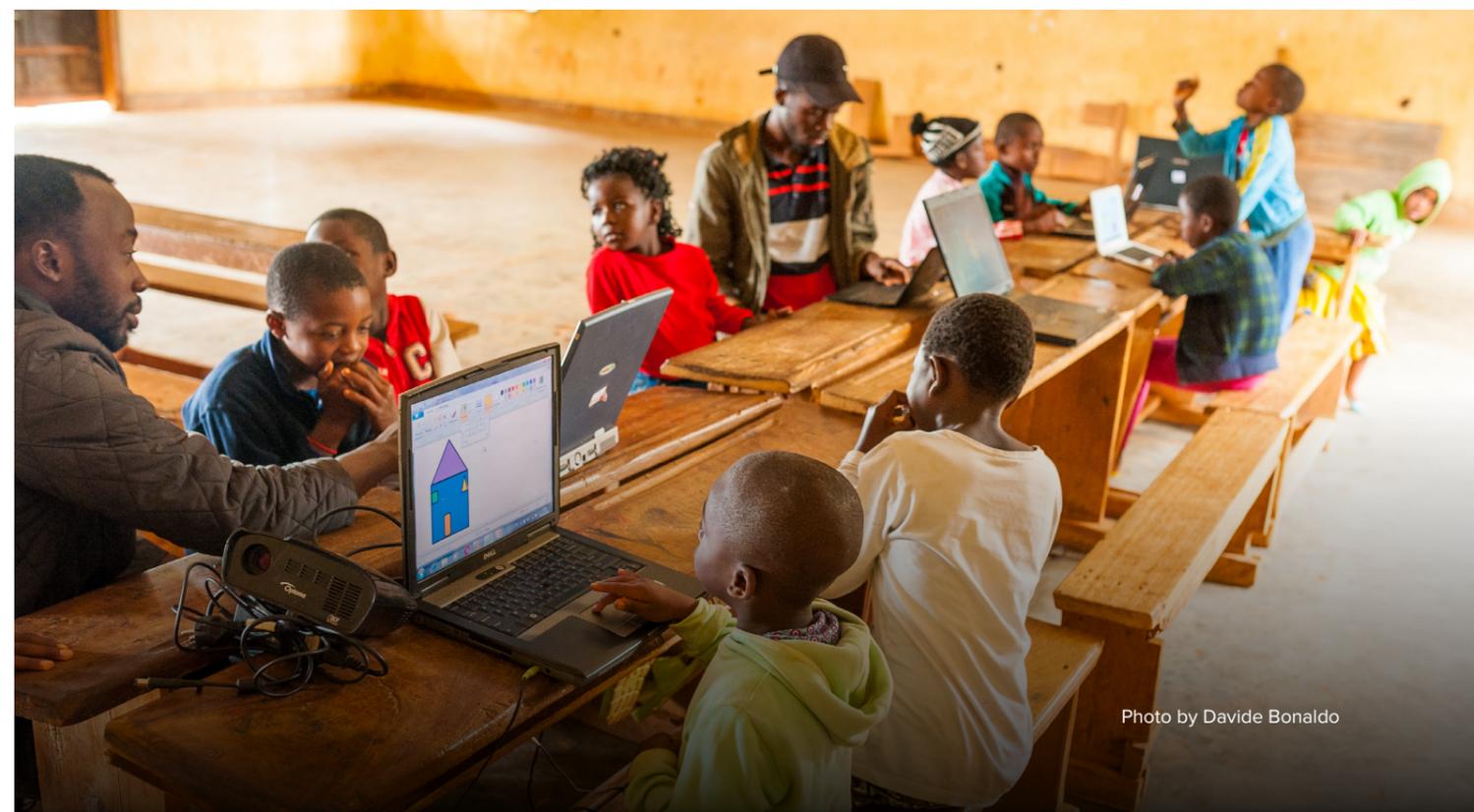
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# Conclusion

The Equity and Inclusion thematic groups in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania continue to contribute to the advancement of equity issues for the sake of children in East Africa. However, key lessons remain, with a persisting one being ensuring accountability by the duty bearers on inclusive education in the respective East African countries. There are takeaways that each country can get from the others, for example, the learning from Tanzania that the strategy privileges special needs and excludes fast learners is something that Uganda can learn from going forward as they continue to interact with the NIEP policy.

According to the Equity and Inclusion group members in Kenya, the dilemma of moving the inclusive education policies from paper to implementation, is compounded by lack of research in unearthing the vital elements of implementation. The question that remains, in the minds of RELI members is how does research aid in strengthening the steps towards the implementation of these policies. From Tanzania, the challenges of implementation is compounded by lack of proper documentation of the challenges, lack of uniformity in terms of the steps towards implementation, and limited knowledge among the teachers, who are the key frontline stakeholders, when it comes to implementation. Overall, the Equity and Inclusion groups hope to be able to get to the bottom of some of these issues, in an attempt to enhance the equity and inclusive education for the children in east Africa.



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