



USAWA AGENDA

Promoting Education Justice in Kenya & Beyond

STRATEGY FOR 2023-26

NOVEMBER 2022

Education justice is what keeps us awake deep into the night

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Abbreviations

ASAL	Arid and Semi-Arid Land
ASER	Annual Status of Education Report
CBC	Competency based Curriculum
CBO	Community based Organization
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DFID	Department for International Development
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ECDE	Early Childhood Development Education
EGMA	Early Grade Mathematics Assessment
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
GEMR	Global Education Monitoring Report
LAN	Learning Assessment Network
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MOE	Ministry of Education
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
PRIEDE	Primary Education Development Project
SACMEQ	Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UPE	Universal primary education
USAID	United States Agency for International Development



Message from the Executive Director

Usawa Agenda has a great heritage of working to transform education in East Africa. I am proud of the 14 years of pioneering work in the region and Kenya on foundational literacy and numeracy assessment, the lessons learned and shared, and the broad-based partnerships that the organisation has established along the way. The effort, resources and time spent by the thousands of community volunteers, sub-national, national and international partners, and members of staff have certainly paved the way for even greater milestones in Transforming Education. While our mainstay is research, innovation and engagement, it is noteworthy that our contribution to the education ecosystem in Kenya and the region transcends the direct outcomes of the work that we do. We have uniquely contributed to the development of a talent pool of education researchers and advocates across the country.

Looking forward, this new Usawa Agenda strategy will enable us and our partners to focus more on the substratum of the problem that the world continues to grapple with – the learning crisis. Usawa Agenda understands this underlying problem, which has rendered all the interventions hitherto implemented in education only partially effective, to be systemic education injustices. To confront this gigantic problem, Usawa Agenda will develop new and exciting partnership models, which will drive the agenda of repositioning the campaign for education justice for strategic investments. The focus is on four strategic outcome areas: evidence and insights generation; communication and engagement; institutional development; and documentation and sharing of lessons from implementation. The programs under these areas **are** aligned to contribute to **the** monitoring achievement of the **United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**. We have integrated four of the 17 goals into this strategy: 4, 5, 10 & 17, with **SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all**, as the overarching goal.

Developing this strategy has been a journey of learning. It has taken wide and deep consultations with stakeholders, joint reading of the national and global environment, and deep analysis to grasp the magnitude of the problem at hand. We are confident that we have articulated it well and we now have a clear target for the next four years of our work. I take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to all those who have put in the work to bring this strategy development process to successful completion. I appreciate the insights from stakeholders, partners and communities. In particular, I express deep appreciation for the support that we have received from our development partners (Wellspring Philanthropic Fund, Echidna Giving and Imaginable Futures), who put great faith in us right from our inception. With this new strategy, we will continue to generate evidence and insights, strengthen our partnerships and improve our value proposition to all our partners, especially, the children on the lee side of the education injustices that we now commit to push against. I look forward to seeing the contribution of Usawa Agenda to our promise of delivering Education Justice for every child in Kenya and beyond!

Emmanuel Manyasa, PhD
Executive Director
Usawa Agenda



Message from the Board Chairman

Three years ago, Usawa Agenda spun off from Twaweza East Africa where it had existed for 11 years as Uwezo program, to become an independent, not-for-profit organisation. Over the 11 years as Uwezo and the first three years as Usawa, we have significantly and positively impacted the basic education sector at the community, national and global levels especially foundational literacy and numeracy. Our impact has come from three sets of activities: evidence generation, mainly through consistently undertaking the Citizen-Led Assessments of learning at the foundational level; community engagement; and public and policy engagement. Our evidence has demonstrated that schooling is not the same as learning. And thus, contributed to a shift in the narrative about education away from the focus on schooling to learning; and informed multiple national-level and local interventions to improve learning. We have also shaped the relationships within the education sector by building alliances and coalitions among various stakeholders to enhance collaboration and optimise synergies.

In our work on foundational literacy and numeracy, we learnt many lessons, which inform this current strategy. Key among the lessons is the extent of inequities in the basic education sector in Kenya and beyond. Besides the lessons and introspection, this 2023 – 2026 strategy is a product of both extensive and intensive consultations led by the Usawa Board Members. Going forward, we have reframed the education problem away from being about “equity and inclusion” to one about “education justice”. In this strategy, Usawa Agenda will focus on four outcome areas: evidence and insights generation; communications and engagement; institutional development; and institutionalising internal and external learning.

In these four outcome areas, we shall focus on conducting learning assessments at three levels (ECDE, Primary and Junior Secondary); conducting primary and secondary school surveys; and conducting research on selected areas of policy and practise relevance. We shall also engage with education stakeholders at multiple levels from the village to the global level. Being our first strategy, we shall continue to strengthen the organisation and institutionalise internal and external learning.

In our strategy journey, we will seek the support of all stakeholders that include: the development community, the government, CSO partners, teachers, parents and the communities. These partnerships will enable us to effectively achieve our mission of promoting education justice for every child in Kenya through systems change.

I thank you all for your contribution in the development of this strategy; and those who will also partner with us in its implementation. Let us dedicate ourselves to achieving the great things we desire for all the children of Kenya and beyond.

Henry Kilonzo
Board Chairman
Usawa Agenda

1. Who we are

Usawa Agenda is a not-for-profit organisation registered in Kenya. We promote systems' change for education justice for every child through research, innovation and engagement. This vision is born out of 14 years of conducting learning assessments (11 years as Uwezo program and three as Usawa), which reveal stubbornly low and inequitably distributed learning outcomes. Deeper analysis has led to the conclusion that the low and inequitable learning outcomes are a derivative of unjust education systems that augment rather than eliminate the disadvantages children bring into school.

The name 'Usawa' is Swahili for 'Equality/Equity'. It underscores our commitment to the course of education justice through systems change, and underpins our strong conviction that the school system can be responsive to the unique needs of every child. With requisite systems changes, the school can neutralise the diverse challenges children come into school with and enable every child to access and benefit from quality education.

We believe in the primacy of rigorous evidence in driving the desired change. So, we regularly collect and curate large volumes of data, evidence and stories from all over Kenya and deploy them through public, policy and community engagement in order to change minds, hearts and behavior. Since 2009, we have regularly conducted the largest, most comprehensive, independent surveys of households and children ever implemented in Kenya, to evaluate learning outcomes among children of school going age. We have assessed over 940,000 children, in over 380,000 households across 24,000 villages and visited over 21,700 primary schools (both public and private), and produced an invaluable dataset for monitoring learning outcomes at lower primary level, one of the key target areas for measuring progress towards the Sustainable Development Goal for Education (SDG 4).

We have in the first three years of our existence as a full-fledged organisation - Usawa Agenda, conducted four surveys: a national survey of remote-learning during the pandemic-driven school closures; school readiness survey focusing on children aged 3 - 5 years in the urban informal settlements; a national secondary school survey focusing on school factors that impact learning outcomes; and a national learning assessment focusing on foundational literacy and numeracy. Safe for learning assessment, the other three surveys were the first ones of their kind and they unearthed hitherto unknown levels and drivers of inequalities and inequities in Kenya's education system.

To accomplish this, we leverage partnerships with individuals and organisations (both state and non-state). Working with these actors, armed with rigorous research evidence and fidelity to evidence-based engagement, we have contributed to changing the narrative about basic education in Kenya from focusing on school attendance, to learning outcomes.

In the process, we have picked up invaluable lessons while developing, adapting, and refining robust methods of citizen-led assessment (CLA) of learning at the basic level to national¹ and global recognition.² Going forward, we are sharpening our focus on evidence and insights generation, innovation and engagement to influence policies, practices and norms, and cultivate an ecosystem that enhances systems' change to deliver education justice.

1 Republic of Kenya. 2018. National Education Sector Strategic Plan for the period 2018 - 2022 <https://www.globalpartnership.org/node/document/download?file=document/file/kenya-nessp-2018-2002.pdf> Retrieved on 21/03/2022.

2 Bashir, Sajitha; Lockheed, Marlane E.; Ninan, Elizabeth; Tan, Jee-Peng. 2018. Facing Forward: Schooling for Learning in Africa. Washington, D.C. World Bank.

2. Our Strategy

2.1 Vision

A world where every child benefits from quality education.

2.2 Mission

To promote systems' change for education justice through research, innovation and stakeholder engagement.

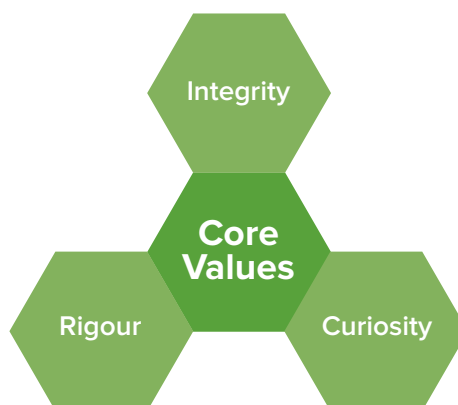
2.3 Values

Our work is premised on three core values: Rigour; Integrity; and Curiosity (RIC).

Rigour: We wear the badge of rigour on our sleeve with pride – it is our heritage and our promise to those we work for and with.

Integrity: We understand the invaluable role of integrity in building trust without which our mission would abort. We uphold it with utmost fidelity in our rank and file, and in everything that we do.

Curiosity: We are driven by a thirst for learning; to ask, listen, experiment, reflect and disrupt.



2.4 Guiding principles

In living our values, we are guided by five principles:

Collaboration

There is power in working with, and learning with and from others.

Diversity

To see through multiple lenses is to see better and understand more.

Creativity

Reimagining, experimenting and reframing ideas and situations guarantees push into new horizons.

Sustainability

Futuristic focus turns today's actions into building blocks for the future we desire.

Transparency

To be transparent is to be accountable and reliable.

3. Our Context, Heritage, Lessons Learnt and Promise

3.1 Education context in Kenya

The prevailing context reveals five critical issues around education justice that Usawa Agenda aims to contribute in addressing: access, quality, equity, inclusion and relevance. This focus is even more urgent given the pivotal role of formal education in social mobility, and the danger that education injustice may potentially make quality education heritable, thereby widening and entrenching social inequities^{3, 4}. Entrenched socio-economic inequities reproduce themselves⁵ and underpin a myriad global development and social stability risks⁶.

Kenya has grappled with four independent, yet intertwined issues of access, quality, equity and relevance of the formal education since independence⁷. Numerous taskforces and commissions have been set up with a view to delivering transformational and enduring reforms in the education sector. Key among them include the Ominde Commission of 1964⁸, the Mackay Commission of 1981⁹ and the Odhiambo Taskforce of 2011¹⁰. In between them, there were several other taskforces, commissions and working commissions. These three stand out for resulting in watershed education policy changes in the country.

The Ominde Commission responded to the needs of a newly independent society, seeking equal opportunity and justice for all. It sought to undo the racialised colonial education system that segregated different races. The Mackay Commission recommended the introduction of the 8-4-4 system, which was implemented in 1985, aiming to imbue learners with skills for self-reliance as a response to growing youth unemployment problem. The Odhiambo Taskforce was set up to align the education policy to the then new constitution of Kenya 2010 and respond to the exigencies of global socio-economic transformation in the wake of the emerging information society. The taskforce recommended the shift to the currently under implementation, Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC).

The CBC implementation in the new 2-6-3-3-3 system, has elicited mixed reactions among education stakeholders in the country with discordant voices spread across all the sectors (public, private and civil society). CSOs have expressed varied responses ranging from total opposition to cautious optimism. The tussle is mainly around the preparations for implementation, ominously indicating that the country has not learned from the past curriculum change processes and how they affected achievement of the desired outcomes.

Importantly, however, the tussle might obscure the risks attendant to implementing a new curriculum in an environment fraught with historical educational injustices¹¹. Disparities in access to quality education based on gender, nationality, disability, location (rural/urban), and region pervade the sector¹². The manifest equity-blindness of both the Basic Education Curriculum Framework¹³ and the Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2019¹⁴ is worrisome, given their pivotal roles in the delivery of the CBC promise - to fix the aforementioned problems in the country's education system.

- 3 Manyasa, E. 2015. Schooling without learning: the long-term implications of free primary education for income and welfare inequalities in Kenya, in Awoti, N. and Musahara, H. (Eds.). Implementation of Millennium Development Goals: Progresses and Challenges in some African Countries. Addis Ababa: OSSREA.
- 4 McKnight, A. 2015. Downward mobility, opportunity hoarding and the 'glass floor', Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE). London School of Economics.
- 5 Kremer, M. 1993. "The O-ring theory of economic development." Quarterly Journal of Economics. Vol. 108. 551-575.
- 6 Piketty, T. 2014. Capital in the twenty first century. London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- 7 Lelei, M. C. and J. C. Weidman. 2012. Education development in Kenya: Enhancing access and quality, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263389119_Education_Development_in_Kenya_Enhancing_Access_and_Quality/link/5b5f321aa6fdccf0b20152a8/download (Accessed on July 1, 2019).
- 8 Republic of Kenya. 1964. Kenya education commission report (Ominde Commission). Nairobi: Government Printer.
- 9 Republic of Kenya. 1981. Report of the Presidential Working Party on the Second University (Mackay Report). Nairobi: Government Printer.
- 10 Republic of Kenya. 2012. Task Force on the realignment of the education sector to the Constitution and Vision 2030 (Odhiambo Report). Nairobi: Government Printer.
- 11 Republic of Kenya. 2005. Sessional paper No. 1 of 2005 on a Policy Framework for Education, Training and Research. Nairobi: Government Printer.
- 12 Republic of Kenya. 2017. The National Education Sector Strategic Plan 2018 – 2022. Nairobi: Government Printer.
- 13 <chrome-extension://gphandlahdpffmccakmbngmbnjiiiahp/https://kicd.ac.ke/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/CURRICULUMFRAMEWORK.pdf>
- 14 <https://www.education.go.ke/index.php/downloads/file/643-sessional-paper-no-1-of-2019>

Yet curriculum reforms are not the only policy changes to take place in the sector. The government has in the past implemented policies with far-reaching implications for the quality, equity, and relevance of education. Among these are the free primary education (FPE), the free day secondary education (FDSE), and the 100% transition from primary to secondary school. Collectively, the interventions and curriculum reforms are focused on addressing quality, relevance, and access to education with a silent presumption that equity will self-resolve.

Kenya is signatory to all global protocols, declarations, and plans that emphasise the right to education, including the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). In 2010, the right to basic education became a constitutional right in Kenya¹⁵. Kenya has also committed to the Africa continental Agenda 2063 and the global Agenda 2030 that coincides with the country's own Vision 2030. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 in particular, obligates states to guarantee inclusive and equitable access to quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. Yet access remains the main focus of most government policies and initiatives^{16, 17, 18}. Notwithstanding the emphasis on access, many children remain out of school while many of those in school receive an education of inferior quality¹⁹, making the promise of education a mirage for a significant number of them²⁰.

Kenya is not the only country faced with these challenges. Many countries, including some developed ones, are not meeting the demands of SDG 4²¹. Across Africa, most countries are missing critical milestones in the realisation of the educational goals of the continent's Agenda 2063^{22, 23}. This has been complicated further by the COVID-19 pandemic that has ravaged school systems and their communal support structures in equal measure. Like any other shock, this pandemic has disproportionately affected the communities already steeped in myriad other disadvantages. Those on the periphery of the digital revolution and therefore could not benefit from remote learning interventions are the worst hit as well as those that were already socio-economically marginalised²⁴. This calls for robust engagement around the all-encompassing concept of education justice, which covers the five critical issues: access, quality, equity, inclusion and relevance.

3.2 Our heritage and experience

We have a rich heritage from which we draw many lessons as we power into the future with a clearer purpose and precise focus: 13 years of successful pioneering work on citizen-led assessments (CLAs) of learning in East Africa as Uwezo – a program of Twaweza East Africa. We reached over a million households in over 100,000 villages in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. We regularly assessed the foundational literacy and numeracy skills of millions of children of school age (in and out of school), and engaged with parents, teachers, local administrators and policymakers around the observed learning outcomes. We assessed school-level factors that affect learning outcomes in tens of thousands of primary schools across the three countries.

We experimented with generation of data at the micro level for use in community dialogues through a Public Agency (PA) project in two counties (Kilifi and Baringo), with great success. We have embedded co-creation of evidence, involving both citizen volunteers and diverse public officials to enhance buy-in by the key stakeholders, and forged partnerships to further the objective of ensuring that children attend school and learn.

We have curated the data into evidence²⁵, and used it to engage targeted policy actors around the perceived worsening learning crisis with significant success. These engagements have provided an accountability instrument

15 Republic of Kenya. 2010. The Constitution of Kenya 2010. Nairobi: Government Printer.

16 ECA. 2011. African statistical yearbook 2011, Economic Commission for Africa, Addis Ababa.

17 Glennerster, R., Kremer, M. Mbiti, I. and Takavarasha, K. 2011. Access and quality in the Kenyan education system: a review of the progress, challenges and potential solutions, (prepared for the office of the Prime Minister of Kenya). Nairobi: Government printer.

18 United Nations. 2012. The millennium development goals report. New York: United Nations.

19 Uwezo Kenya Reports: Are our children learning? (2009 – 2021).

20 UNESCO. 2018. Accountability in education: meeting our commitments; Global education monitoring report, 2017/8. Paris: UNESCO.

21 World Bank. 2018. World Development Report: Learning to Realise Education's Promise. Washington DC: The World Bank.

22 CESA. 2017. Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016-2025, CESA 16-25 Journal, Volume 1, July 2017.

23 African Union. 2007. Second Decade of Education for Africa (2006-2015): Plan of Action <http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/FIELD/Dakar/pdf/AU%20SECOND%20DECADE%20ON%20EDUCATION%202006-2015.pdf> Retrieved on 23.08.2021.

24 Uwezo. 2022. Are ALL our children learning? 7th Uwezo learning assessment report. Nairobi: Usawa Agenda.

25 Most of our data from the past assessments is now recognised as good enough to be complimentary to the official national data by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics.

through public and policy conversations around the assessment process and learning outcomes among children in and out of school. We are proud of the fact that Uwezo's evidence of the continuing 'learning crisis', together with evidence from other assessment systems, has contributed to a shift in education policy discourse globally^{26, 27} and nationally^{28, 29}.

We also contributed to the initiation of two nationwide early grade learning interventions: *Tusome*, an early grade literacy program funded by DFID (now FCDO) and USAID, and implemented by RTI International; and PRIEDE, an early grade numeracy program funded by the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and implemented by the Ministry of Education (MoE). We directly influenced Safaricom, the largest corporation in East and Central Africa, through its philanthropic arm, Safaricom Foundation, to invest in an intervention (accelerated learning program), to improve learning outcomes. Indeed, the Safaricom Foundation's education pillar in their 2018 - 2021 strategy was informed by Uwezo findings as evidenced by heavy referencing of Uwezo reports³⁰. We also significantly contributed to the academic and public discourses on the issues of learning outcomes through academic publications^{31, 32}, opinion pieces in the media and annual reports.

We have contributed to developing the education and civil society ecosystems in Kenya and beyond by nurturing leadership talent. The founding Director of Uwezo moved on to found and lead the People's Action for Learning (PAL) Network and moved further to hold a senior position in the Ministry of Education. Her successor at Uwezo also moved on to found and lead Zizi Afrique Foundation, which is implementing multiple initiatives that seek to improve education in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, including the ALiVE program that assesses life skills across East Africa.

3.3 Transition from Twaweza

The time for Uwezo to become a full-fledged organisation came after 10 illustrious years of operating as a program of Twaweza. During this time, we made significant contribution in pushing the learning agenda to the top of education policymakers' priorities, and systematically amplified citizens' voices to ensure that they are taken seriously in decision-making. However, new challenges emerged both in the education and governance domains, undermining Twaweza's ability to continue implementing both education and governance programs. Twaweza decided to transition out of the education domain. Context analysis, deep reflection and extensive consultations with our partners and critical friends that lasted a year, culminated into a twin decision to have a phased transition of Uwezo into three independent, national organisations rather than one regional organisation.

The organisation in Kenya is Usawa³³ Agenda. Phase I of the transition happened in January 2019 and it involved strategic separation. Phase II, involving legal and fiduciary separation happened in January 2020, while the final phase, which involved physical and operational separation took place in January 2021. Until December 2020, Usawa had an operational MOU with Twaweza that governed the sharing of space, resources and services, as well as general promotion of mutual interests.

Upon transitioning into a new, national organisation in January 2020, we took a fresh, critical review of our accomplishments and context. While the accomplishments were impressive, the learning crisis persisted. Cognizant of the intensifying efforts to address this crisis, we noted another crisis continuing unabated underneath it. This is the crisis of education injustice. It is bad enough that learning outcomes are low. It is worse that learning achievements are inequitably distributed, often following the traditional markers of broader inequities in the country. The education system as currently designed accentuates the inequities³⁴.

26 Bashir, S., Lockheed, M. E., N. E., Tan, J. 2018. Facing Forward: Schooling for Learning in Africa. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.

27 UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2018). Data to Nurture Learning, <http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/sdg4-data-digest-data-nurture-learning-2018-en.pdf> Retrieved on 14/02/2020.

28 <chrome-extension://gphandlahdpffmccakmbngmbnjiiiahp/https://kicd.ac.ke/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/CURRICULUMFRAMEWORK.pdf>

29 <https://www.education.go.ke/index.php/downloads/file/643-sessional-paper-no-1-of-2019>

30 Safaricom. 2018. Safaricom Foundation Strategy: April 2018 to March 2021. https://www.safaricomfoundation.org/safaricom_foundation_strategy_2018_2021/Safaricom-Foundation-Strategy-2018-2021.pdf Retrieved on 13/02/2020.

31 Jones, S., Schipper, Y., Ruto, S. and Rajani, R. 2014. Can your child read and count? Measuring learning outcomes in East Africa. *Journal of African Economies*. 23(5), 643-672.

32 Manyasa, E. 2015. Schooling without learning: the long-term implications of free primary education for income and welfare inequalities in Kenya, in Awoti, N. and Musahara, H. (Eds.). *Implementation of Millennium Development Goals: Progresses and Challenges in some African Countries*. Addis Ababa: OSSREA.

33 "Usawa" is Swahili for "Equality/Equity".

34 Manyasa, E. 2015. Schooling without learning: the long-term implications of free primary education for income and welfare inequalities in Kenya, in Awoti, N. and Musahara, H. (Eds.). *Implementation of Millennium Development Goals: Progresses and Challenges in some African Countries*. Addis Ababa: OSSREA.

The inequalities in learning outcomes are associated with among other factors, gender, region, location (urban/rural), school type (public/private), preschool attendance, mother's level of education and household socio-economic circumstances. Disparities also pervade in primary school inputs, including distribution of teachers and school facilities, and access to ICT services and infrastructure. The inequality in learning outcomes has intensified with the advent of COVID-19 driven by a wide digital divide³⁵.

In the first two years of our existence as Usawa, we have undertaken a survey on remote learning in May 2020, which had instant impact on the policy of government with regards to reopening schools remotely. On the basis of our findings, the government shelved the then planned reopening of schools online, instead opting to reorganise the school calendar to redeem lost time after in-person reopening. In 2021, we carried out 3 surveys: an ECDE survey in Nairobi focusing on whole child development in the informal settlements; a largescale nationwide learning assessment focusing on foundational literacy and numeracy skills for learners in the new curriculum (the first independent study of the same); and a survey of secondary schools focusing on the impact of school facilities and teachers on the performance of learners in the national examinations. All the reports have been released to the public and are available on our website.

3.4 Vital lessons learnt

We were set up to address twin problems of children schooling without learning, and unaccountable and unresponsive authorities. We learnt many vital lessons as we pursued this mission.

3.4.1 What did we get right?

1. Rigorous, largescale evidence is critical in driving educational transformation

We learnt, adapted and refined the CLA methodology from its pioneers (ASER India), and used it to generate largescale evidence on learning levels in the region, which underscored the fact that schooling is not the same as learning. In our 14 years' experience of policy and practice influencing through research in this region, we have learnt that only rigorous, well curated and packaged large-scale evidence can shift a needle in favour of systems change. We have a clearer picture of the lay of the land: history and current status of education; actors; legal and policy frameworks and bottlenecks; and the socio-cultural, economic and political context that support/impede education justice. We have learnt that education justice cannot be achieved purely through a bilateral conversation between researchers/citizens and the authorities. Critical actors are many and diverse. And each must play their part. Each must have their space at the table.

2. Compelling evidence is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for policy, practice, norms and programs change in favour of education justice.

After years of generating evidence and sharing it widely with the public and the authorities, we learnt that the relationship between information and action is non-linear. It overlies a power structure that must be understood and reckoned with. We learnt that availability of rigorous evidence alone doesn't spur action. Subsequently, we adopted a more concerted approach to influencing change through policy engagement. We built and joined several networks, and strengthened old ones to enhance opportunities for bringing our robust evidence to bear on policies, practices, programs, norms and investments. We co-founded the PAL Network, the Regional Education Learning Initiative (RELI) and Education Evidence for Action (EE4A); and joined the SDGs Kenya Forum. From participating in these networks, we have experienced the power of collaboration in driving positive education system changes and learnt how to make such Networks work.

3. Strategic engagement is invaluable

We have learnt the value of engaging strategically with critical actors. That it is possible to be publicly critical of other actors on the basis of evidence – and still collaborate closely to push the change agenda forward. We have learnt the value of co-creation of evidence with the intended users, especially government officials, in ensuring its uptake and utilisation. Co-creation solidifies partnerships – vertical and horizontal, whose primacy in pushing for systems change both locally and globally cannot be over-emphasised.

35 Uwezo. 2020. *Are our children learning?* The status of remote-learning among school-going children in Kenya during the Covid-19 crisis. Nairobi: Usawa Agenda.

3.4.2 What did we get wrong?

1. We did not pay sufficient attention to education injustice

We have learnt that inequities in education are more pervasive than widely believed and acknowledged. That they are being compounded by a digital divide in this covid-19 pandemic era³⁶. The extent, drivers and full implications of these inequities are yet to be grasped and factored into policy and practice changes as well as in programmatic interventions and financing of education. We learnt that guaranteeing education justice for every child is the exigency of our time, yet more complex in resolving than it is widely thought. We have since learnt that improving equitable access to quality education is a shared responsibility, requiring collaborative action from a multiplicity of actors. It requires parents of school-age children to play a more significant role. Importantly, however, it requires communities to take responsibility for learning of every child and operations of the schools in their midst. This also means that the underlying power structures that inhibit poor parents generally, but women in particular, from playing their roles effectively need to be exposed and deliberately reorganised.

2. We did not engage sufficiently with politics in the push to transform education

Through policy and practice reviews, and participation in national education policy formulation and review processes, we have learnt that policy influencing is important, but not as impactful to the transformation of education in Kenya as aptly timed political discourse influencing. A deep analysis of the National Education Sector Strategic Plans over the last 20 years reveals wide policy implementation gaps, yet the government of Kenya is a shining example in this region in terms of heavily spending on education. So where do the funds go? The government mostly funds implementation of the ruling parties' manifestos and campaign time promises, which are transformed into policies without public participation. Imbuing such promises with properly timed, relevant evidence during the electioneering period may be a critical intervention.

3. We did not fully appreciate the role of international funding in supporting the push for education justice

We have learnt the inalienable role of international funding for the activities that bring the requisite evidence to bear on policies, practices, norms and programs in this region. We know how encumbering running an organisation on project funds can be as well as the value of core funding in enabling institutional development, capacity enhancement and impactful programming. Through constant engagement with our funders, we have come to understand the challenges that they face in mobilising resources to support our course in a world fraught with monumental socio-political, economic and climate change-related upheavals, and shifting global priorities. And learnt that the best way to appreciate and support their unwavering dedication to our shared mission of a just education for every child, is prudent and efficient utilisation of the availed resources and relentless pursuit of optimum impact for the benefit of all children.

3.5 Looking forward

Drawing on the lessons of the last 14 years, we conclude that generation of evidence on quality education becoming heritable and widening equity gaps as well as on the drivers of the inequities, is both necessary and urgent to inform the requisite policy, practice, programming and financing interventions. Even more urgent for Kenya is a strategy to effectively engage the political leadership at different levels, bearing in mind that politicians, almost always, seek to optimise their "political support functions"³⁷. Indeed, the first guiding principle for the implementation of the Plan of Action of the Second Decade of Education for Africa, emphasises the need to ensure "... enhanced political support particularly at national levels"³⁸ Our call is to use evidence to shift the political support function.

In view of these, Usawa Agenda will in this strategic period, use multiple methodologies, to inquire into and expose the multifaceted and multi-layered nature, extent and drivers of (in)equity in basic education³⁹, and advocate for action to reverse the current trend. We reframe the education problem from one of "equity

36 Uwezo. 2020. Are our children learning? The status of remote-learning among school-going children in Kenya during the Covid-19 crisis.

37 Becker, G. 1983. "A Theory of competition among pressure groups for political influence." Quarterly Journal of Economics. Vol. 98. 371-400.

38 African Union. 2007. Second decade of education for Africa (2006-2015): Plan of Action <http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/FIELD/Dakar/pdf/AU%20SECOND%20DECADE%20ON%20EDUCATION%202006-2015.pdf> Retrieved on 23.08.2021.

39 This covers pre-primary, primary and secondary level of education.

and inclusion” to one of “education justice”, which we believe is the substratum of all manifest educational problems. We also reframe the conversation on transforming education away from the citizens and government bilateral engagement model to a multilateral approach in which communities (local and international), play a major role in driving systems change to deliver education justice.

This also inevitably means confronting the socio-cultural and economic power structures and norms that preclude women’s and other marginalised groups’ effective participation in critical discourses at all levels of society, and exercise of agency in promoting education justice. Passive participation of female parents in school-level decision-making⁴⁰, for instance, could be the underpinning factor in the failure of formal education to deliver transformative impact for girls and women. This failure is manifest in the fact that only 29 percent of Kenyan women are empowered⁴¹ after decades of promoting girls’ education.

Our research and engagement agenda seeks to contribute to the global 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in three ways: holding to account the duty-bearers and a multiplicity of other stakeholders through monitoring of the achievement of SDGs 4, 5, 10 & 17; generating insights that may contribute to decisions that accelerate progress towards realisation of education justice for every child; and sharing lessons from our experience and experiments in strategic policy influencing for global educational development and transformation.

While at it, we shall keep in mind this fact:

***“Data defines narratives, narratives allocate power and profits.
Data is thus political and contested”.***

We will thus endeavour to free our data from contestations to optimise its impact while alleviating the inequities in data generation, relevance and utilisation between people and countries.

3.5.1 Why Usawa Agenda is well placed for this task

Over the past 14 years, we have developed unique abilities, assets and networks that make us best-suited to deliver on the mission set out in this strategy.

1. We have established an exceptional, tested and reliable data collection platform

We demonstrated our ability to organise and deploy tens of thousands of volunteers across the country to gather robust, high-quality data within short periods of time and in the most cost-effective way. We have gained critical experience in learning, adapting and innovating to enhance our data capabilities. The CLA methodology that we use has been tested for robustness in different contexts in the global south, and stood the test of time. The fact that we work with local volunteers who belong to the communities in which the assessments are conducted, makes them “...likely to be more sensitive to the specificities of the local population distribution and (recent) changes than those centrally sourced; and may be more effective at reaching hard-to-reach groups... than the international, standardised household surveys”⁴².

2. We bring exceptional analytical and communication skills

We are good at analysing the data that we collect, as well as triangulating it to other sources and uncovering fresh insights from the analysis. We also produce strong reviews of policies, programs and regulations affecting education justice. We communicate effectively, the essential issues and their wider societal implications to community-level, national and global policy, practice and financing actors. Media houses regularly seek our evidence, analysis and comment to enhance their coverage on a wide range of issues affecting education.

3. We have strong convening power through extensive vertical and horizontal networks

Our vertical networks span the length of the education sector actors from the village, all the way to the halls of global actors like the UIS. At the village level, we partner with village elders and volunteers in conducting learning assessments and engaging households in the pre- and post-assessment periods about the learning outcomes of their children and their drivers. At the sub-national level, we have hundreds of CSO and CBO partners spread across Kenya, with whom we conduct the assessments and sub-national policy and community

40 Female parents form the majority of parents who attend school meetings especially in rural areas. But social norms there also encumber their effective participation in decision-making.

41 Republic of Kenya. 2020. Women’s empowerment in Kenya. Nairobi: Kenya National Bureau of Statistics.

42 Carr-Hill, R. 2017. Improving Population and Poverty Estimates with Citizen Surveys: Evidence from East Africa. World Development. 93, pp. 249–259.

engagements. We also partner with sub-national government officials. At the national level, we work with government institutions, including KNBS, KNEC, KICD, MOE, TSC, to mention but a few.

Our horizontal networks span Kenya to the globe. We have strong relationships with other national CSOs with whom we work both in formal networks including RELI, EE4A, SDGs Kenya Forum and **Elimu Yetu** Coalition, as well as through bilateral partnerships. RELI affords us national and regional horizontal networking and learning. The PAL Network gives us strong links to organisations across the global south with whom we partner for mutual learning and global policy influencing.

Due to our reputation of non-partisanship, we have strong convening power within and beyond these networks. We have strong working relationships with the two head teachers' associations: Kenya Primary School Heads Association (KEPSHA); and Kenya Secondary School Heads Association (KESSHA), as well as the main teachers' unions – Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNUT) and Kenya Union of Post Primary Education Teachers (KUPPET). We have an equally strong working relationship with the National Parents Association (NPA), which has representation down to every classroom in Kenya and the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB), who are sponsors and thus have leverage over at least 30 percent of public schools in the country (both primary & secondary). The combination of our deep research experience, strong analytical and engagement expertise, and demonstrated neutrality, offer trust and comfort to those whom we invite to engage with both our work and ourselves.

4. Outcome Areas, Goals and Objectives

We define four outcome areas for this strategy as: evidence and insights generation; policy and practice influencing; institutional development; and institutional learning, along a non-linear but progressive, mutually-reinforcing continuum. For each of the areas, we outline one strategic goal as follows:

1. Be the to-go-to source of comprehensive and reliable evidence and insights on the levels and drivers of learning outcomes and state of education justice in Kenya.
2. Significantly contribute to at least two policy and one practice changes with potential to improve learning outcomes and the state of education justice in Kenya.
3. Establish Usawa Agenda as a capable, reliable and accountable educational research and stakeholder engagement organisation.
4. Institutionalise an internal and external organisational, collaborative learning culture.

For each of the goals we outline specific strategic objectives and outcomes that will be achieved through a variety of approaches. Outcomes will be achieved at both the level of specific targeted actors, and at the wider societal level across all areas of our work. Measurable progress on each of them will be made by the midway point of the strategic period (2 years). At this point it will be possible to assess the direction of travel, towards achieving the stated objectives. We, however, leave room for relevant partner contributions towards shaping the different pathways of change, particularly at the community level. Our theory of change embodies this flexibility. It embraces adaptive and collaborative management that allows regular but careful joint reading of the signals that may inform course correction.

Notwithstanding the flexible approach, we owe it to ourselves, the children, the partners we work with, the communities for whom we work and our financiers to be accountable. Thus, we articulate more specific and quantifiable targets on a project-by-project basis through the Idea Huddle and Decision Memo process.

4.1 Evidence and insights generation

Objectives

In this strategic period, we set out to pursue the following three objectives in this outcome area:

1. To conduct two biennial national learning assessments at multiple levels of basic education (ECDE, Primary & Junior secondary) and publish the findings⁴³.
2. To strengthen the capacity of at least 10 sub-national partners to generate and utilise evidence on learning outcomes and the state of education justice to inform relevant community dialogues.
3. To undertake at least two research studies to generate insights on policy, socio-cultural, economic and political factors that impact education justice in Kenya.

Desired outcomes

1. A repository of high-quality data, stories and insights on the learning levels of children, factors that affect learning outcomes and their distribution, and the state of education justice in Kenya is available for public interest use by all actors in education.
2. Researchers are aware of the evidence gaps on learning levels and drivers of learning outcomes in basic education, and the state of education justice in the country and use this awareness to inform their future research activities and programs.
3. Community level actors are capacitated to generate locally relevant evidence on learning levels and state of education justice to inform community dialogues on desired improvements.

⁴³ The current policy defines basic education to include secondary education.

Strategies

To achieve the above outcomes, we deploy the following specific strategies:

We use multiple methodologies including CLAs and mixed research approaches to generate evidence on the learning levels of children aged 4 – 15 years old regardless of their schooling status. This age range covers children expected to be enrolled in pre-primary one (PP1) to grade 9 (end of junior secondary). We, however, assess the learning levels of children outside of this age range, if they are enrolled in school within the relevant level (up to junior secondary). The children aged 4 – 5 years are assessed for school readiness, while those aged 6 – 15 years are assessed in foundational literacy and numeracy (if in primary school or out of school) and in higher order literacy and numeracy (if in secondary school or completed junior secondary school). The assessments are pegged at PP2 (end of ECDE); grade 3 (end of early years learning); grade 6 (end of primary education); and grade 9 (end of middle years learning). This aligns our findings with the demands of multiple indicators of SDG 4 thus enabling us to contribute to the global SDG 4 monitoring.

Proficiency in the use of digital devices has become a critical component of literacy. We assess digital literacy and fluency in use of selected ICT devices among children at grade 9 as well as primary and secondary school teachers. We also assess the availability of functional ICT infrastructure in schools.

Learning assessments at PP2 focus on whole child development and its drivers; assessments at grade 3 focus on foundational literacy and numeracy skills; assessments at grade 6 focus on higher order literacy and numeracy skills; while assessments at grade 9 focus on digital literacy, core subject mastery (one for each senior school pathway) and senior school pathway preferences. Grade 9 assessments on the pathways seek to generate independent, gendered data on expressed and merited distribution of learners into the envisaged pathways. This is to help policy actors and other stakeholders to plan for provision of adequate, required and relevant spaces in senior secondary school.

We conduct research on parents' contribution to school-level decisions and assess the impact of female parents' participation on transformative education for girls in primary schools. This is informed by the finding in our most recent school survey⁴⁴ that most teachers (60%) in the primary schools are female, but most managers (71% of head teachers and 84% of boards of management chairs) are male. There is anecdotal evidence that in the upwards of 70% of parents who attend school meetings are female. Coupling this with the cultural conservatism of most rural settings in the country, and the shackles it places on women, raises several important questions that we seek to answer.

We strengthen the capacity of our community level partners to generate micro-level, relevant evidence on the drivers of learning outcomes in their communities to inform community-level dialogues and action. We seek to infuse evidence into local-level initiatives that respond to local barriers to education justice, especially, with respect to gender-based, socio-cultural norms and practices. Co-creation of evidence remains at the core of all our research activities to ensure buy-in by communities, school leaders and policy actors at multiple levels.

4.2 Policy and practice influencing

Objectives

In this strategic period, we set out to pursue the following three objectives in this outcome area:

1. To curate and package the evidence and insights generated into relevant policy and practice engagement pieces for specific target audiences.
2. To conduct strategic engagements with key stakeholders to positively shift at least two policies and two practices in advancing education systems change.
3. To cultivate a network of pro-education justice actors (local and global), bringing together at least 30 organisations and influential individuals.

44 Uwezo. 2022. Are ALL our children learning? 7th Uwezo learning assessment report. Nairobi: Usawa Agenda. <https://usawaagenda.org/project/uwezo-learning-assessment-2021/>

Desired outcomes

1. Parents, school leaders, teachers, communities, policy actors, practitioners and the public have improved knowledge and understanding of the learning levels of children, factors that affect learning outcomes and their distribution, and the state of education justice in Kenya.
2. A coalition of diverse stakeholders is leveraged to use the available evidence to inform policy, investment and practice decisions, and to tackle socio-cultural and economic obstacles to education justice, especially for girls and other marginalised groups of children in Kenya.
3. A pro-education justice network of at least 30 members (organisations and influential individuals) exists, and lessons on its cultivation are documented and shared internally, domestically and globally for continuous improvement and global learning.

Strategies

To achieve the above outcomes, we deploy the following strategies:

We have learnt over the years that robust evidence is a necessary but not sufficient condition for transformation of education. And learnt that in the case of Kenya, policy changes in themselves don't guarantee changes in investments and practice, which crucially, determine improvements in learning outcomes and their distribution. So, we have adopted a systemic approach and are investing in robust engagements with three broad groups of actors to make the evidence and insights that we generate to bear on the critical decisions that affect education justice.

a. Engaging with policy actors

We define policy actors as all individuals, institutions, government departments and global actors that make classroom, local, sub-national, national, institutional and global policy, investment and practice decisions that impact education justice. We engage in co-framing the issues of policy relevance and interest together with the policy actors. Our engagement at the national and global levels has been more robust than at the sub-national and community levels. This explains why we have hitherto, contributed more to the policy discourse and change and less to practice change.

In this strategic period, we are investing more in granular engagement with sub-national and community level actors to impact practice changes and narrow the gap between policy and practice. We leverage the working relationships that we have forged with KEPSHA, KESSHA, KNUT, KUPPET and NPA to get to the lowest level of the education system to achieve these changes. KEPSHA and KESSHA have representation up to the school level – primary and secondary respectively. KNUT and KUPPET, combined represent more than 80% of all the teachers in primary and secondary schools. The NPA has membership down to the classroom level in all public schools.

Importantly, we are leveraging the institution of the County Commissioner, to engage with all relevant county-level public officials to push the agenda of education justice and communal norm change in favour of the marginalised groups at the local level. The Commissioner chairs the national development committee at the county level and is responsible for enforcing the compulsory enrolment of children into the primary school, and the 100% transition to the secondary school.

b. Engaging with citizens

We rally citizens' support for key policy, investment and practice concerns that emerge from our evidence generation endeavours. Through sharing of compelling, appropriately packaged and timely disseminated evidence, we mobilise communities and the public to realise that education is a public good with immeasurable positive externalities. And invite their direct involvement in championing access to quality education for every child. Specifically, we seek to undo two widespread notions that undermine education justice:

- i. The idea that benefits of quality education can be fully internalised, which has fuelled efforts by the economically well-off households to deploy hefty resources in leveraging education to build glass floors for their children. These floors also serve as glass ceilings for the children from less privileged households, which entrenches education injustices.
- ii. The idea that promotion of improved learning outcomes and equity in education is the responsibility of the government and its bilateral and multilateral partners. Our many years of work in this sector, as well as available research show that this is a shared responsibility where all actors, including

parents, communities and the general public have a critical role to play. The new curriculum in Kenya emphasises the role of the parents in education, but only assigns them mere supporting role⁴⁵ similar to what is allocated by the Basic Education Act⁴⁶.

We work with our sub-national partners, to curate and package locally relevant evidence and engagement pieces to drive this transformation. We specifically target socio-cultural norms and practices that hinder girls' access to quality education, children with disabilities, children in female-headed households, which our most recent findings show are more likely to be out of school than their counterparts in male-headed ones, and other disadvantaged groups of children. We particularly engage community, cultural, local administration, religious and interest group (women, youth, etc.) leaders around the issue of transformative education for girls, to respond to the fact that despite decades of activism for girls' education, socio-economic outcomes of the "educated women" don't seem to be changing in tandem with numbers of girls' enrolment in schools.

We have learnt over the years that multi-level collaborative action is more impactful in delivering education reforms and influencing policy changes than single organisation efforts and programs. But there is a gap – we lack a truly, locally embedded and globally connected coalition of actors that is focused on harnessing and translating global knowledge into locally relevant pieces of information to stir contextualised practical action to advance education justice. Such a coalition would also provide the channel through which local information and experiences from action are translated into globally relevant pieces of information that shape global policies, programs and investments into the promotion of education justice.

Drawing from past experiments, we are developing an evidence-based model of mutual accountability with roots in Kenyan villages and which spans the breadth and length of the education policy and practice space. At the local level, parents, teachers, community groups and local administration officials hold each other accountable for the attendance of school by all children in the community and attendance of class by all teachers in the local schools. The sub-national level actors (government officials and CSOs) are accountable for ensuring that the community level initiatives operate within the national policy parameters, translating national policy and programs into context-relevant programs. They also aggregate the community-level experiences for sharing at the national level.

The national level, government officials and CSOs are accountable for aggregating locally generated evidence, experiences and voices into a national discourse on how to promote education justice. They break down and contextualise relevant national and international discourses and programs and ensure that sub-national voices inform the national policy and resource allocation decisions. Usawa leads the national level actors in ensuring that the national experiences are documented and voices aggregated and shared inform local and global education policy, programming and financing decisions. Global actors are accountable for creating space for this Kenyan experiment to be shared globally and feedback on how the model fares when tried in other contexts. They are also responsible for factoring the knowledge and evidence shared on the model into global education discourses, financing, investment and programming.

We provide thought leadership in this critical area of promoting education justice. ***We are creating a distinct grouping of actors, which we intend to plug into other coalitions and enable other coalitions to plug into, around the mission of promoting education justice for every child.***

c. Engaging the political class

The political class wields a lot of power in terms of influencing the policies and investments in education. This is why the African Union has attached a huge premium on mobilising political will to support improvements in education⁴⁷. In the last 20 years, the ruling parties in Kenya have generally invested in the implementation of their campaign manifestos rather than pre-existing national policies on education. It is understandable because that is what optimises their political support functions, especially in the Kenyan context where the political culture is such that the campaigns for the next election begins immediately after conclusion of the preceding one.

45 Republic of Kenya. 2019. Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2019: A Policy Framework for Reforming Education and Training for Sustainable Development in Kenya Nairobi: Government Printer.

46 Republic of Kenya. 2013. Basic Education Act 2013. Nairobi: Government Printer.

47 African Union. 2007. Second Decade of Education for Africa (2006-2015): Plan of Action <http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/FIELD/Dakar/pdf/AU%20SECOND%20DECADE%20ON%20EDUCATION%202006-2015.pdf> Retrieved on 23.08.2021.

We directly engage with the leading political parties/coalitions in the General Elections year to get key issues of concern in basic education into their party manifestos. This is to ensure that we extract public commitments from the front-runners in the presidential elections to implement specific programs that advance education justice for the disadvantaged groups of children (girls, children with disabilities and those in pastoralist communities). However, our main strategy is to engage robustly with communities and the public through diverse media outlets, to ensure that the key issues of concern get onto and remain on the front banner of the public discourse in the run up to the General Elections.

We sustain the engagement with the political class in the post-election period through regular meetings with the Parliamentary Committees on education and the Education and ICT committee of the Council of Governors. These committees are instrumental in influencing resource allocation in the education sector both at the national and county levels.

4.3 Institutional development

Objectives

In this strategic period, we set out to pursue the following three objectives in this outcome area:

1. To strengthen the organisational internal control systems.
2. To enhance the financial resource base by tripling the funds available to the organisation.
3. To optimise the human resource capacity by increasing the numbers and diversity of the staff to achieve the full staff establishment by 2025.

Desired outcomes

1. Internal control systems are in place and are regularly reviewed and enhanced.
2. Usawa has the human, ICT, infrastructural and financial resources and capacity to carry out its mission.

Strategies

This goal is unique to this inaugural organisational strategy. We seek to strengthen Usawa Agenda to enhance its effectiveness and accountability in its work in the education sector. We also seek to deepen its operational relationship with the government, CSOs, communities and other actors at the community, sub-national, national and global levels. This includes strengthening: organisational systems and structures; policies, standards and procedures on among others, staffing, child protection, monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) systems; acquisition and maintenance of ICT systems that ensure efficiency and cyber security in its operations; and financial and administrative systems, that comply with national and international laws, regulations and standards.

We have a strong organisational heritage. We build on this foundation by enhancing the systems, policies and standards that we inherited to effectively respond to the accountability demands of our time. We know that we have come into existence at the time when civic space, especially in this region is shrinking. Our only full proof strategy to survive, accomplish our mission and thrive is to be fully accountable so we can have the moral authority to speak truth to power. This is the philosophy underlying our establishment. We have populated our governance structures with men and women of impeccable character. We are proud of the team that gelled fast and continues to work with unimaginable zeal and commitment to the course.

Our success as a program prior to spinning off from our mother organisation and the trust bestowed upon us by our original funders, have set us on the path to fundraising success. We are committed to delivering maximum possible value for every dollar/shilling donated to us. Our priority in fundraising is to reciprocate the trust put in us by our current funders by achieving measurable, optimum impact, to encourage them to continue to support our work, champion for it and invite others in their circles to support our course. We are on course to assembling one of the most formidable teams in this space - one that reflects the diversity of the Kenyan society and blends the insightfulness of experience and the exuberance of youth. Importantly, the team we are building also reflects our values and a commitment to nurturing women and youth leadership for sustainable change.

To complement the team, our experiment with the use of ICTs during the COVID-19 pandemic has opened a whole new world of possibilities. We are acquiring and adapting the best available technologies in our research, communications, operation and management activities to optimise efficiency and impact. Already most of our operations and management activities are on ICT platforms. We are extending this to cover most of our research activities.

4.4 Institutional learning

Objectives

In this strategic period, we set out to pursue the following four objectives in this outcome area:

1. To undertake a strategic baseline analysis of the idea of education justice.
2. To strengthen our internal monitoring and evaluation processes and systems.
3. To strengthen both internal and external organisational learning platforms.
4. To draw and share lessons from our programming and institutional development journey.

Desired outcomes

1. Baseline study report that defines the key concepts and metrics of education justice.
2. Internal monitoring and evaluation processes and systems are in place and are regularly reviewed and enhanced.
3. Internal and external organisational learning platforms are in place and are regularly reviewed and enhanced.
4. Lessons from program implementation and institutional development are documented and widely shared.

Strategies

To achieve the above outcomes, we deploy the following strategies:

We distinguish between reporting for internal purposes, coordinated by the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) officers – and reporting that is part of the core activities and seeks to influence a range of stakeholders. We are putting in place a number of different processes and methods (qualitative and quantitative) and a variety of tools to facilitate effective MEL for organisational learning and progress assessment. Specific indicators are identified early at the program/project planning stage and used during implementation to monitor progress in achieving the set goals, and evaluate achievement of the expected outcomes and impact.

We are strengthening our internal monitoring capacity through targeted training on Results-Based Management. Activity and results monitoring tools are formulated and/or adapted to facilitate easy, robust data gathering and results reporting on a quarterly basis. Thematic learning platforms as well as semi-annual & annual reflections provide additional avenues to monitor progress of various projects/programs and to learn from what we are doing. Technical oversight and quality assurance are led by the Senior Management Team (SMT), composed of the ED and the Directors.

Our technical team and downstream partners are supported to use results of the review to proactively engage with critical external interlocutors who are key in our movement towards the desired results. We engage technical/learning partners to build capacity of our program teams to mainstream Outcome Mapping (OM) and Outcome Harvesting (OH) into our project designs to improve planning, monitoring, capture and reporting of evidence of results' achievement.

We will review our Theory of Change midway the strategic period to map the trajectory of targeted results to the changing roles of all critical actors/partners in attainment of those results. We will commission midterm and end of strategy evaluations led by external experts.

We continue to adapt the learning activities for staff and partners that we developed over the years⁴⁸ to maintain a learning culture, encourage innovation and stay in sync with the socio-economic realities of the communities we serve. Our learning approach also draws on the insights from the monitoring and evaluation

48 Twaweza East Africa. 2015. Twaweza East Africa Strategy 2015-2018, Dar es Salaam: Twaweza East Africa. <https://www.twaweza.org/uploads/files/TwawezaStrategy2015-2018.pdf>

processes and reports. Opportunities are created for sharing experiences acquired from within and outside, e.g., from attending conferences and external meetings. Staff and partners are supported to attend relevant short trainings, study visits and selected conferences as part of learning to improve their professional knowledge and skills. The staff who attend these events lead learning sessions at organisational level for the benefit of the rest of the staff. Partners supported to attend external learning events share lessons with other partners through established platforms. The MEL officers for different programs/projects document the lessons from implementation of all programs, whether carried out by Usawa alone, or in partnership with others to inform internal learning.

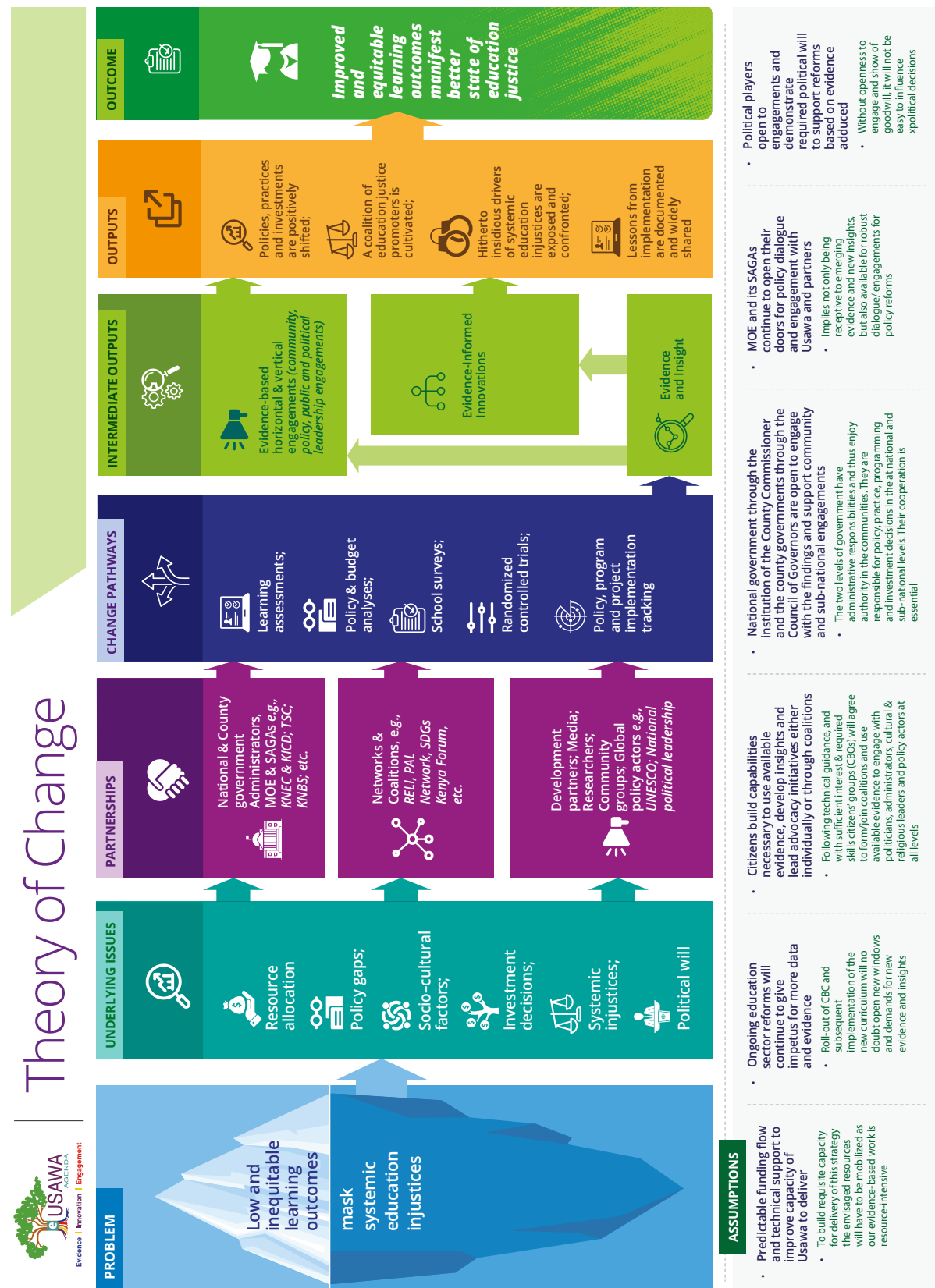
We create learning opportunities for selected fresh graduates through 3 to 6-month internships. Besides internship, we also provide opportunities for established academics and researchers to spend their sabbatical leaves with us, utilising our data to do their writing. From this, we gain enhanced visibility and contribution to global knowledge, while also receiving feedback on any data quality issues the researchers encounter with our data. Such academics may also be involved in designing and executing specific studies as per our strategic plan to complement internal capacities.

Thematic learning platforms and other outward learning events are organised to facilitate external learning. These include:

- i. **Ongoing learning and adaptation:** Review emerging lessons from implementation - what is working and why? What is not working and why? What local partners, the public, public officials and communities are learning from our work and how these lessons are being applied to cause positive system shifts in favour of education justice; assessing adaptation of any approaches or activities from what they have learnt or learning; and whether or not the adapted approaches/activities are working.
- ii. **Participatory planning and reporting:** An annual staff retreat (3-4 days) is organised to reflect on the progress made in the year, draw lessons from what worked and what didn't, and plan for the following year. The annual staff retreat allows staff to reflect on their practice and performance, document progress, gaps, lessons, challenges and way forward. Opportunities for staff to share experience and insights, and to allow the strengthening of continuous learning, participation and teamwork are provided. The outcome of the retreat is a draft annual report and plan for the following year.
- iii. **Annual reflections:** We bring together key stakeholders in our different projects including representatives of local communities, teachers and parents as well as CSO partners, CBOs, government and relevant SAGAs. Successes, challenges and lessons emerging from implementing activities are consolidated, documented and shared with all the stakeholders during the annual reflections. The stakeholders review any changes in the country context that need to be considered in the plans for the subsequent year. They also reflect on the Theory of Change – looking at assumptions vis a vis emerging lessons to determine if there is need to adjust the design, and confirm whether the assumptions are still valid. In the final analysis the reports from these annual events inform the decision to change/maintain the intervention strategies and indicators being tracked.

5. Our Theory of Change

WHEN granular yet largescale, robust and independent evidence on learning levels, their distribution and their drivers is regularly generated, curated and applied through innovation, partnerships and evidence-based engagement by a locally embedded and globally connected coalition of actors to inform systems change, **THEN** we can guarantee education justice for **every child** and achieve improved and just learning outcomes for **ALL**.



6. Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning (MEL)

The power of evidence and new knowledge plays a key role in tracking results, informing strategy implementation, course correction, policy and public engagement, and thought leadership. We are developing the relevant M&E systems that comprehensively measure, track, review and document the strategy's results. The relevant results are shared with internal and external stakeholders to inform timely evidence-based decision-making. We document and share evidence, insights and stories of change using both print and digital media; and other forums; and alongside others, influence desired systems change in favour of education justice.

a. Monitoring

Monitoring is concerned mainly with the baseline, the inputs and processes of the various activities (such as staff, volunteers, software, time spent and costs), and the immediate outputs and feedback (such as data obtained, findings reported and interactions with stakeholders). The monitoring also focuses on coverage, reach, quality of products, users' feedback, emerging effects, stories of change from the field as well as challenges. Monitoring records enable consideration of issues such as cost-effectiveness.

In order to monitor progress throughout the plan period, performance scorecards are used as the main mechanism for tracking implementation of planned activities. This helps to link activities with the budget, serving as a form of budget control tool. In addition, results at output and outcome levels are monitored using an indicator tracking tool/reporting matrix. Field monitoring visits provide insights into project implementation progress, processes and opportunities for engagement with the local education authorities, stakeholders and other boundary partners.

Since we work with a large number of volunteers and partners who are entrusted with additional responsibilities, a rigorous process of follow up, performance assessment, recording progress, changes and lessons is used to manage their quality, adherence to process, and results. We leverage technology to improve the quality of monitoring data collected and the turnaround time, as well as controlling the cost of the entire process.

The monitoring process focuses on the following main activities from the planning to the implementation stage:

- i. **Regular monitoring visits and spot checks to ensure fidelity of implementation:** Each participating school or community is visited at regular intervals by either Usawa Agenda staff, local partner organisation or volunteer on the ground. The purpose of these visits is to monitor progress and delivery of field activities. Field visits and observations are guided by a designed monitoring framework to include activities such as site visits, surveys, observations, interviews and self-reports to understand the effectiveness of implementing our intervention from the perspective of the multiple stakeholders. As part of our internal control process, field visits/spot checks by staff, IPs or local volunteers focus on the effectiveness of approaches; to look at work plan implementation status – extent to which activities are implemented as scheduled and as designed (fidelity of implementation); documenting of potential case studies and stories of change; and assessing potential for sustainability e.g., extent to which activities are being embedded in local structures and systems.
- ii. **Media monitoring:** We are creating an internal monitoring tool, and partnering with specialised organisations to conduct media monitoring and track media coverage of Usawa Agenda activities as a measure of wider influence.
- iii. **Monitoring of engagement:** Since we engage with policymakers, practitioners and citizens at national, county and community level, we monitor the process of engagements through documentation of outputs and reflections on meetings attended.
- iv. **Quarterly reviews:** Drawing from the annual plan, our staff sit quarterly for half a day or one day to review progress of implementation and adjust accordingly. Reports are shared with the entire organisation and Board for advice and internal learning.

b. Evaluation

Evaluation exercises focus on both immediate and longer-term outcomes. Thus, they focus on whole areas of activity (e.g., the national assessments of learning). Every major initiative/intervention has a baseline, mid-line and endline evaluation. Unplanned evaluation exercises are introduced where necessary, such as when contextual shifts significantly affect intervention implementation such that attaining of outcomes may be hampered. However, evaluators are well briefed on the baseline, inputs, processes and outputs in order to reach valid conclusions. In relation to evaluating the policy and practice impact of Usawa Agenda's work, great caution is taken. In some cases, it influences global understanding and national discourse sooner than it influences policy. We involve external researchers and consultants in evaluation exercises.

There will be three main evaluation points/exercises:

- i. **Preliminary analysis to set baseline data:** Context analysis and baseline surveys are being undertaken in 2023 (year one) to set the starting points for the indicators against which progress during quarterly reviews, annual reflections, and mid and end of strategy evaluations will be compared. Data generated from these assessments will be used to review and validate the proposed performance measurement framework, establish base indicators and set or confirm targets/milestones.
- ii. **Midterm review:** This will take place after two years of implementation. The evaluation report will be for internal use and will be shared with the board and development partners to understand and further support the progress towards achieving the strategy goals and outcomes; and
- iii. **Final/endline evaluation:** This will be conducted by an external evaluator in the final quarter of the fourth year of the strategy. The evaluator will be provided with necessary information, documents and baseline reports for reference and other related support. The evaluation will track outcomes and impact at the subnational, national and global level. This evaluation report will be shared with the board, development partners, other partners, and the wider public by posting on our website. It will serve as an accountability statement.

c. Organisational and external learning

Documenting the internal lessons learnt from the implementation of this strategy is a strategic outcome of interest. We are developing a tool to document all the lessons, especially those highlighted at the critical strategic evaluation points. We will also keep engaged in external networks besides continued reading of the context and its evolution to gather external lessons. Both internal and external lessons will inform strategic reviews during the current strategy period to inform course correction as may be needed, and after the current strategy period to inform the next strategic focus.

7. Staffing

Usawa Agenda is a research and stakeholder engagement organisation. This means that its main asset is its people. Yet at the time it was spun off Twaweza in January 2020, Usawa Agenda had only one staff - the Executive Director, and one intern. The team has since grown to 11 with six fulltime staff, three consultants and two interns. We know the power of having a passionate, competent, self-driven and well-motivated team and the mountains it can move no matter how lean it is. We have experienced this magic in the last three years of our work as an independent entity. But as we have grown and developed our systems, so have we identified gaps that require filling to enhance both the functionality and accountability of the organisation. And thus, we have intensified efforts to strengthen the team to deliver this strategy.

The team is headed by the Executive Director (ED) who reports to the Usawa Agenda Board of Directors. Below the ED there are established positions of three directors who are responsible for our three core work components as follows:

1. **Director of research and evidence:** Leads in designing and implementing the citizen-led assessment (CLA) of learning, and multiple, innovative research initiatives that focus on unearthing new insights and evidence to inform the campaign for education justice. The Director is assisted by senior staff for both areas of work.
2. **Director of communication and engagement:** Leads in designing and executing a portfolio of multi-level communication and engagement initiatives. The team in this unit curates the evidence from assessments, and research initiatives and uses it to engage with multiple education stakeholders (local, sub-national, national and global). It aggregates community-level voices and channels them to the sub-national, national and global policy and financing decision-making platforms. They also break down relevant global and national discourses and policies, and ensures they percolate through the communities. The Director leads our efforts to cultivate the ecosystem for promotion of education justice.
3. **Director of learning and strategy:** Leads strategic planning, plays a critical role in designing programs, monitoring and evaluation of execution and results, leads the organisation in deep reflection about the outcomes and emerging lessons, and designs and executes the organisational learning agenda.

The Executive Director and the three directors constitute the leadership team (total of four), which is chaired by the Executive Director. This leadership team is charged with deliberating on strategic decisions and lead fundraising efforts. Each director, with guidance from the Executive Director, is responsible for building, motivating and maintaining a team that constitutes of staff with a range of skills, experience, and qualifications for the job. A second level of management that consists of program managers bridge management by the directors over the entire team. This management team also includes the finance and operations managers. In total, the staff establishment comprises of 30 full-time professional positions is required to function effectively and achieve the desired results as articulated in this strategy. The current and proposed staffing positions are detailed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Staffing numbers by designation and year

Position/Designation	Numbers/Year			
	2023	2024	2025	2026
Executive Director	1	1	1	1
Directors	1	2	3	3
Managers/Advisors	2	3	5	5
Senior Program/Finance/Operations Officers	2	3	5	5
Program/Finance/Operations/Executive Officers	3	4	5	5
Assistant Program/Finance/Operations/Executive Officers	4	5	6	6
Program/Finance/Operations/IT Assistants	3	5	5	5
Total	16	23	30	30

8. The Budget

Usawa is on an upward trajectory as it powers ahead with implementing its ambitious but well-reasoned strategy. We aspire to make great impact and generate lessons that would benefit the course of education justice beyond our country of focus and its people. We know what is required, and how to mix the ingredients to achieve the desired outcomes cost-effectively. Our projected budget of USD10,694,939 over a period of four years reflects this confidence in our abilities, and vision for transforming in Kenya and indeed the world. We set out to address challenges that have withstood many, expensive interventions designed to redress them. Hitherto, the responses to low learning outcomes have addressed manifestations of the problem, but missed its substratum – education injustice. Our budget is distributed as follows: 37.8 percent on evidence generation; 28.3 percent on communications and engagement; 14.9 percent on learning and sharing the lessons; 13.6 percent on operations and finance; and 5.4 percent on governance and management. With this budget, we shall avail relevant evidence and engage with a wide range of stakeholders to acknowledge existence of education injustice and initiate interventions to address it as the root cause of the manifest and stubbornly enduring learning crisis.

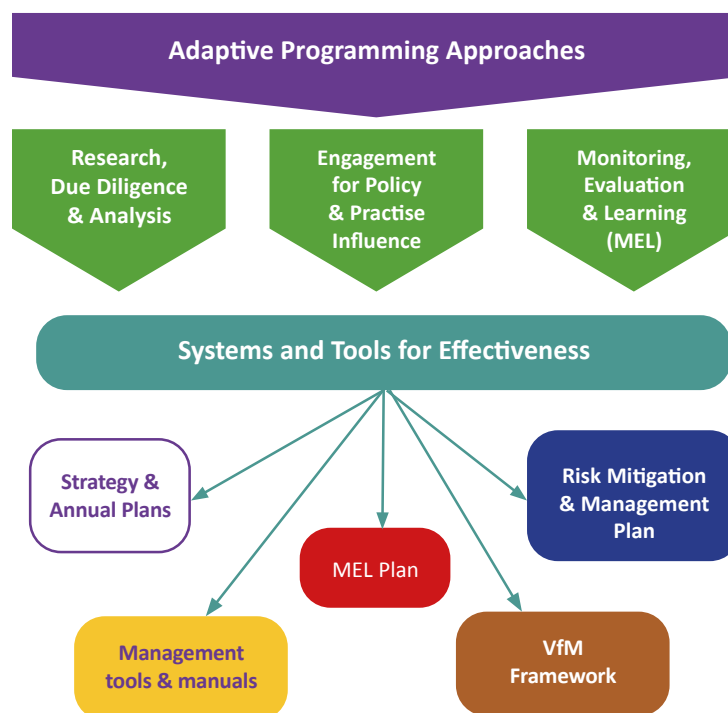
RESOURCE REQUIREMENT						
Program	Amount (USD)					
Year	2023	2024	2025	2026	Total	%
Research and Evidence	968,597	539,880	1,602,000	938,600	4,049,077	37.8
E1: Rigorous evidence on the learning levels of children, their distribution and factors associated with them is generated.	713,097	59,480	1,091,356	180,800		
E2: Research on innovations that have the potential to improve the level and distribution of learning outcomes in basic education is conducted.	255,500	480,400	510,644	757,800		
Communications and Engagement	182,050	725,193	867,550	1,249,120	3,023,913	28.3
C1: A coalition of actors championing systems change for education justice is cultivated.	53,350	135,017	207,330	368,500		
C2: Policy actors and the public are engaged with to influence and promote policies and practices for improved and more equitable learning outcomes.	71,100	137,617	129,600	240,620		
C3: Communities, the public and political actors are engaged with to enhance goodwill and commitment to improved and equitable learning outcomes.	57,600	452,559	530,620	640,000		
Learning and Strategy	203,046	430,000	365,191	596,000	1,594,237	14.9
L1: Baseline, midterm & endline data on key strategic goals is collected, curated and shared both internally and with key partners to guide the implementation & evaluation process.	90,000	200,000	50,000	280,000		
L2: Evidence from practice (implementation) is collected and shared internally (as well as externally) in a timely manner, with the main purpose of informing better implementation and accountability.	76,035	156,852	223,784	260,000		
L3: Staff are engaged in active reading and learning, drawing on various components of MEL work, internal practice, and external (country, regional, global) relevant evidence, practice, and new ideas.	37,011	73,148	91,407	56,000		
Operations and Finance	328,655	347,896	365,349	408,012	1,449,912	13.6
Governance and Management Costs	103,400	150,040	159,560	164,800	577,800	5.4
Grand Total	1,785,748	2,193,009	3,359,650	3,356,532	10,694,939	100

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Adaptive programming and management approach

Our business style is problem-driven and issue-based. Lessons from previous programs and initiatives like Uwezo learning assessments inform our strategies and interventions. Our approach emphasises locally-led ways of working that ensure a wide range of interest groups come together to solve tangible education delivery problems at school, community, county and national levels. We promote community empowerment, build citizens agency and cultivate coalitions that build bridges between stakeholders and facilitate dialogues between citizens and school, county and national officials for sustained change. By working on issues related to education justice in the provision of services we link upstream/back-end sector reforms to downstream/front-end service delivery for improved outcomes. We therefore approach the strengthening of accountability in the delivery of services through data/evidence generation, identification and framing of locally relevant issues, mapping of entry points and brokering of Local Engagement Coalitions (LECs) or Community Action Groups (CAGs).

We are guided by evidence in our work with technical and learning partners towards strengthening our analytical techniques, new ways of working, political sensitivity, flexible approaches and responsiveness to emerging issues and risks. The diagram below gives a summary of our core adaptive approaches as well as systems and tools for effective delivery of interventions.



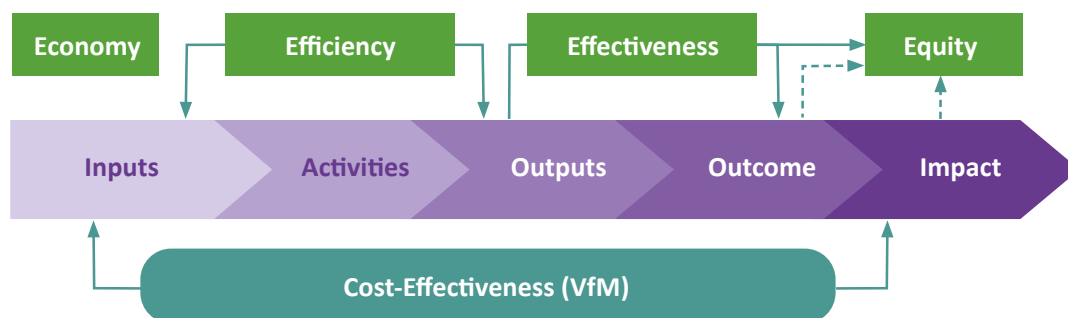
Appendix 2: Value for money (VFM) analysis

To complement our new business model, a new Value for Money (VfM) policy and framework will be introduced to help us assess extent of benefits obtained from the goods and services we acquire and/or provide, within the confines of available resource envelopes. Apart from measuring the cost of goods and services, we also take account the mix of quality, cost/resource use, fitness for purpose, timeliness and convenience to evaluate whether or not, together, they constitute good value for Usawa, our partners and the communities we work for. Our key costs and performance are driven by: sizes of direct grants; management & absorption capacity; quality of financial management; operating environment (context); and the number of downstream partners we manage. Our programs are implemented within our Value for Money framework and Due Diligence policies.

VfM's 4Es:

This framework provides an effective input-process-output analysis to ensure that our assets and resources are used economically, effectively and efficiently to achieve our organisational and strategic goals. At the outset of delivery of this strategy we focus on the economy, effectiveness, efficiency and equity indicators, and follow them throughout the life of the strategy. During implementation, we are driven by results and prudent management of resources.

Figure I: Four 'E's of value for money



VfM indicators

VfM Pillar	Definition	Description	Illustrative Indicators
Economy (\$ to inputs)	Careful use of resources to save expenses, time, or effort.	Continuously improve service offerings, utilise resources fully, and realise potential savings from economies of scale and scope in our programs.	1. Average fee rates, unit costs. 2. Admin costs as % of total expenditure; and 3. Cost savings (\$)
Efficiency (inputs to outputs)	Delivering the same level of service for less cost, time, or effort.	Work with partners, and adopt right systems, tools and processes as drivers of change to ensure efficiency of our activities.	1. Average cost per activity or project. 2. Partner leverage ratio; and 3. % level of effort resulting in sustainable change
Effectiveness	Delivering a better service or getting a better return for the same amount of expense, time, or effort.	Usawa to focus on setting measurable output and outcome milestones. Work towards sustainable & lasting change in schools, communities and other institutions.	1. Number or % of children with improved learning outcomes per each \$1 spent; and 2. Number of beneficiaries per \$1 spent (Cost-benefit ratio)
Inputs - Outputs - Outcomes - Impact = Cost Effectiveness			
Equity	Equal access by all categories of beneficiary groups	Ensure that benefits and opportunities are fairly distributed by implementing systemic initiatives that are just to all, especially the marginalised groups.	1. Diversity & inclusion -% of beneficiaries that are poor, female, young, old, rural, and urban. 2. Cost-benefit incidence

Appendix 3: Risk management

Delivering results in Kenya's highly complex political economy, at high quality and best Value for Money (VfM) to our partners, requires effective risk management. Our approach to risk is that it is not possible to wring all risks out of a program, but that all risks should be clearly identified, assessed and managed. Our entire programming approach builds on ensuring that we have the systems, processes and tools in place to respond to risks quickly and effectively.

Understanding potential risks and having people who operate with integrity and institutional support, supplemented by strong policies, procedures, and tools is fundamental to management and successful delivery of this strategy. We gather information from multiple sources, and continuously review risks, in order to tailor mitigation strategies for the safety of staff, partners and beneficiaries, as well as for the success of our initiatives. We practice risk management as a continuous process of assessing and understanding given threats, harmful environments, analysing different levels of vulnerabilities within such environments, and applying countermeasures to mitigate the potential impact.

Classification and rating of risks

We understand risks facing us to be multidimensional and fluid yet they need to be identified, articulated and mitigated for effective program management. Risks have the potential of creating domino effects and sometimes have a negative interdependency. One can trigger other risks. Our risk management strategy has four basic elements:

- a. Risks identification and articulation;
- b. Risk indicators;
- c. Preventive mitigation measures; and
- d. Responsive mitigation measures.

Risk Levels: We understand risk at two, concurrent, non-hierarchical levels.

Internal risks	Certain risks that arise as a result of the organisation's activities or even its existence. Some of these are internal to the organisation (e.g., financial or human resource management), and can be mitigated and managed internally by the organisation and our implementing partners.
External risks	These arise as a result of the external factors in the outside environment and include political and security related risks.

In addition to the above classification, we also categorise risks in terms of their probability of occurrence and their potential impact to our organisation. Certain events may be less likely to occur but have the potential to critically endanger the entire organisation, while others are more likely to occur but have less impact should they occur. Moreover, some risks could affect or derail our programs in one location but not in others.

Our risk management approach

We provide broad-spectrum implementation capabilities on the ground while always insulating our staff, development partners and IPs (implementing partners) from all types of risks. Our flexible risk management approach accounts for changing dynamics to ensure that we have measures that are responsive to organizational, program and individual level risks. We rely on information management, not only from partner agencies and communities, but also government platforms, in addition to other formal and informal networks in Kenya. These include media outlets, local and national government, UN agencies, donor advisories, or information from local CSOs and other foreign embassies. We adapt a suite of preventive, investigative, diagnostic, and corrective tools that allow us to identify and deal with risks throughout any program's lifecycle. We review our risk register/matrix quarterly. Out of the internal and external risks outlined above, we focus on three broad categories, namely:

- a. Financial & fiduciary risks
- b. Delivery & implementation risks
- c. Political & security risks

The ultimate aim of mitigation is to drive risks from positions of high impact and high probability to positions of low impact and low probability. Our approach to mitigation takes two forms: preventive; and responsive.

Preventive risk mitigation	Responsive risk mitigation
This seeks to minimise both the impact and the probability of risks before they occur. We deploy a suite of mechanisms to this end, including: a. Organisational readiness b. Low profile strategy c. Strategic communication d. Reinforced channels for constant communication e. Programming and contractual arrangements f. Mitigation through stakeholder involvement g. Established networks and relationships h. Financial management procedures/manuals & MEL tools i. Due diligence assessments and spot checks j. Continued oversight and technical support to downstream partners	Despite preventative measures, some risks may arise or even escalate during the course of implementation. Our responsive risk mitigation strategy consists of: a. Risk mitigation structure b. Early warning systems c. Coding risk indicators or triggers of mitigation measures d. Escalation ladder and process e. Regular risk reviews & monitoring f. Contingency budgeting



PHOTO: Usawa Agenda staff, board members and partners taken during the Annual Usawa Agenda Strategy Retreat, Nairobi 2022.



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