

HARNESSING EDUCATION RESEARCH FOR IMPACT IN AFRICA (HERI-AFRICA).

1. Overview of HERI

Lead Partners
Zizi Afrique Foundation & Commission for University Education (CUE)
Lead Implementation Partners
State Department of Higher Education
Kenyatta University
University of Embu
Kisii University
African Population and Health Research Centre
Education Sub Saharan Africa
The Education Partnership (TEP) Centre - Nigeria
Horizon: October 2025- June 2050
Phase 1: Oct 2025 – Dec 2028

2. The Vision and Idea of HERI

HERI-Africa is a Pan-African collaborative initiative designed to revitalize Africa-led, university-based education research and drive policy, practice, and societal transformation. In Kenya, the initiative will launch in October 2025 and expand to at least four other African countries by 2028, with the medium-term goal of covering 10 countries by 2035. In the long-term, research will be of service to our African society and communities, informing the way children learn, connecting young people to opportunities, and inspiring the path to the prosperity of our nations.

HERI was born from a bold continental inquiry: **Why does Africa — home to 19% of the world’s population — contribute only 2–3% of global education research output?** In 2021, Imaginable Futures, Echidna Giving, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and Porticus launched the **Africa Education Research Consortium** to address this imbalance. Their findings, documented by ESSA and Southern Hemisphere, confirmed deep structural barriers, among them **fragmented agendas** and low alignment with national priorities, **severe funding gaps** (only ~10% of African education research is funded, 90% of it from outside Africa), **weak infrastructure** and limited capacity pipelines, as well as **poor uptake** of research by decision-makers.

While the 2023 ESSA/Southern Hemisphere report and the Eight Concept Notes offered bold recommendations, this needed to be taken up by a country, to implement these recommendations in context. Kenya has stepped forward to lead, while opening up the space for replication across the continent.

3. The problem HERI is solving

Africa contributes only 3% of global education research, and our research has little impact on society and communities. Yet, Africa is home to close to 20% of the global population, and half of the world's under 25. It is estimated that by 2050, nearly 40% of new entrants to the global labour market will be young people from Africa. We are staring at an opportunity here, human capital will be Africa's new oil and minerals. If well harnessed, education research can render critical service to this ambition.

A stakeholder consultation session held in Limuru in May 2025 identified **five major gaps** in Kenya's education research ecosystem: the poor relevance of research to national education priorities and the fact that we lack a national agenda that informs prioritization of research questions and projects; over-reliance on Western theories and weak documentation of indigenous African knowledge, that weakens proper interpretation of our realities and alignment of interventions and programs; poor research communication that disconnects research results from the needs, aspirations evidence users – teachers, politicians, parents and others; low capacities of researchers for impactful research, including the lack of connection to collaboration and growth opportunities; and inadequate access to funding, especially for university-based and Africa-led research, as well as the low interest of governments and African philanthropy to support research.

The impact of inadequate evidence supply in Kenya is dire. Over the last decade, the government has sunk at least three trillion shillings (ca. USD 23 billion) to reform the education system, including the reforms in TVET and higher education, but no one can answer today whether these reforms are delivering the intended value, where and why. Sustaining evidence generation and use can elevate the impact of this political will, informing course-correction real-time and supporting timely capacity development at the right points of need. This way, Kenya could accelerate towards the aspired prosperity and global competitiveness of the graduates.

Goal: By 2050, Africa is contributing 30% of global education knowledge , and research is informing change in real-time, and assuring the success and mobility of young people.

HERI hopes to change the equation. Systematic and sustained investment will install **resident, in-country research engines**, align research to the **needs of the education system**, create feedback loops so that **reforms can get adapted in real-time**, and shape **dignified work futures** for Africa's young people. The journey to 2050 will consist of several 3-5 year phases or investment cycles to embed iteration and course-correction.

4. Phase 1 (Initialization): 2025-2028

By 2028, Kenya will have a **coherent, Africa-led education research ecosystem supplying research evidence for change in education and society**:

- i. A **National Education Research Agenda** that documents and prioritizes the most important questions, informs and drives education research in Kenya, with at least 50 percent of the studies aligned with and contributing to its priorities.

Outcome leads: Commission for University Education + APHRC

- ii. A **Centre for Education Research and Innovation** (CERI) is founded, and capacities of at least 100 university-based early-career researchers (50 percent women and 10% being persons living with disabilities, and deliberate targeting of young people) are strengthened in research methodology, grants management, and research communication and publication.

Outcome leads: APHRC and Commission for University Education

- iii. At least five **Research Chairs** (with 50% held by female professionals) are operationalized, producing a minimum of 200 publications with demonstrated use in education policy, theory, and practice. Adapting the South Africa's Research Chairs Initiative, support the revitalization of university-led research for impact and sustainability.

Outcome leads: University of Embu (Math Education), Kenyatta University (Life Skills and Values), Kisii University (Language education), and 2 other universities to be identified (Gender in education & African theories/perspectives);

- iv. **Research communication** is democratized, with at least 1,000 research outputs shared in diverse formats through platforms suited to African contexts. Research results are informing the improvement of learning outcomes, holistic youth development and the expansion of dignified livelihoods and transitions for young people.

Outcome Leads: Commission for University Education and Education Sub Saharan Africa.

- v. By 2030, HERI-Africa is **fully institutionalized in a government agency** and is running an **Education Research Fund** equivalent to two percent of Kenya's annual education budget, with at least 25 percent of the funds raised from government, African philanthropy and Africa's Diaspora community (technical contribution).

Outcome Leads: Commission for University Education and Zizi Afrique Foundation.

- vi. HERI-Africa (may have different names elsewhere) is established in **at least four other countries** in Sub-Sahara Africa. The TEP Centre (Nigeria) is creating connections to Nigeria, Senegal and Ghana, while in east Africa, outreach has started to the education research communities in Tanzania, Rwanda and Uganda.

Outcome Leads: Zizi Afrique + The Education Partnership (TEP) Centre - Nigeria

5. Delivery and Accountability Structure

In the initial phase, 9 institutions will co-implement HERI and form the **Technical Leadership Team** (TLT), meeting regularly to align the different outcome areas, review monitoring data and apply learnings to adapt the intervention. The lead institutions will open space for other collaborators in the system, making HERI an open space for a robust community of actors. The Commission for University Education (CUE) has provided office space where the **HERI Secretariat** will be housed, including seconded CUE staff and newly-hired staff through Zizi Afrique.

The **Funding Pool** will be created at Zizi Afrique Foundation, with capacities to manage grants, ensure accountability and efficiency in facilitating the implementers. This will be on transitional basis, as the TLT explores the most suitable government institution to sustain the funding pool, among them CUE, the National Research Fund, and others. As stated, the hope is that this fund is transferred and sustained in government, by 2030.

The **HERI Steering Committee** (HSC) will be established as the accountability mechanism. Key functions of the committee will include strategy development, oversight and accountability to implementation, as well as resource mobilization and policy linking. Membership will be inclusive, with the heads of eight institutions (checking for gender balance): PS-in charge of Higher Education, PS-in charge of research, National Research Fund, National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation, a representative of the Vice Chancellors of Public and Private Universities, the African Population and Health Research Centre, Commission for University Education (Secretariat) and Zizi Afrique Foundation (transitional pool for funds).

6. Fundraising Targets (USD, cumulative)

2026	2028	2035	2050
7 million	12 million	50 million	100 million

Seed funding is sought from global private and family foundations, as well as Bilateral and Multilateral funders, to catalyse increased government investments and matched contributions from African Philanthropy. The Africa Diaspora is targeted for contributions in cash and in kind (technical expertise).