

CONTINENTAL EDUCATION STRATEGY FOR AFRICA (CESA) CLUSTERS

This research brief is part of the series compiled by the GCE Secretariat to disseminate and present findings and summarized information from the published report entitled, *“In Search for A Place in Implementing the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA)”*. The research was commissioned by GCE to understand how the African Union (AU) and its Regional Economic Communities (RECs) engage with the theme of education, and to identify what spaces and opportunities exist for civil society education groups in Africa to interact with those bodies in the service of more equitable and democratic public education systems on the continent. This brief summarizes the research findings on CESA clusters which are the most visible and operational part of the CESA implementation strategy.

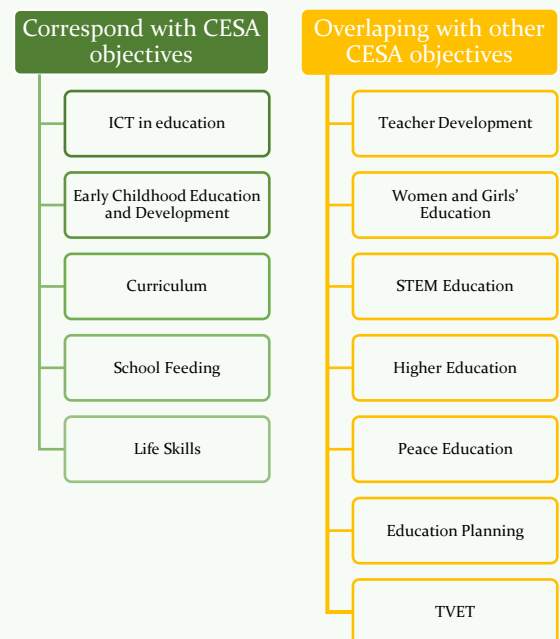
CESA Cluster Approach

The CESA cluster approach is described by the AUC to have a primary function of providing a robust opportunity for a variety of players to participate, on their own and/or in a coalition, in the implementation of the continental framework. Every participating agency contributes with its particular strengths towards the achievement of the overall vision and mission of the Continental Education Strategy for Africa, within identified action areas”.

The emphasis here is on a delegated approach, which gives great autonomy to the interested stakeholders to self-organize according to their priority areas or expertise. The conceptualization of the clusters is one that invites multiple national, regional, and continental players, programs, institutions and development partners to step forward and take leadership for convening and integrating other relevant stakeholders. The AUC sums this up by emphasizing that clustering “seeks to provide each education stakeholder the opportunity to make its best contribution to education and training in Africa”. The expectation is that the cluster leadership and members will mobilize their collective resources to publicize and promote the thematic area and sustain the work of the cluster. Clusters are expected to meet regularly, to document their work, and report on their activities and results to the AUC.”

The lack of detailed information on all 12 clusters makes it difficult to assess the relative strengths and advantages that the different categories of coordinating agencies bring to their roles. This could be a question for the forthcoming CESA Evaluation to look at. Of particular interest to civil society is how each of those categories do -and can- reach out to them, and how they can facilitate access to the cluster spaces and to information about cluster activities.

Twelve (12) thematic CESA Clusters



Coordinating Agencies: Four (4) Categories

- Six Professional and Specialized African Organizations (AU-related / inter-governmental / hybrid):** African Union International Centre for the Education of Girls and Women in Africa (AU/CIEFFA), Association of African Universities (AAU), African Curriculum Association (ACA), Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), African Union Development Agency-NEPAD (AUDA-NEPAD), African Institute for Mathematical Sciences (AIMS)/Centre for Mathematics Science and Technology Education in Africa (CEMESTEVA)
- Two Pan-African Networks:** Africa Early Childhood Network, Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE)
- Two UN agencies:** World Food Programme (WFP), UNESCO-International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (IICBA)
- Three International NGOs:** Save the Children, International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), Global eSchools and Communities' Initiative (GeSCI).

Key Findings

1 Information about Clusters is Difficult to Access.

- There is no dedicated single online resource for information on the clusters. The Early Childhood Cluster is the only one which maintains a website, with information on the cluster's background, its objectives and structure. It also provides the possibility of applying for membership and for subscribing to the cluster's newsletter. The other clusters have no similar websites.

2 Clusters are Self-Managed.

- The CESA architecture is a voluntary one. While the CESA design is elaborate on different components of the architecture, the implementation of the CESA Framework clearly depends on the voluntary commitment, dedication, and actual time investments of a multitude of actors including, professionals, financial, material and knowledge resources of each coordination agency.

3 The AU does not provide budgets to the clusters.

- It provides them with expert and technical support from the Secretariat and provides the important inter-cluster coordination mechanism and structured access, when needed, to the high-level political leadership of the African continent. The AUC encourages clusters to report on their activities, particularly when specific clusters are seen as key actors in the work for the realization of specific CESA Strategic Objectives.

4 Clusters are at different levels of development and activity.

- The CESA clusters differ from each other in many ways, depending on: the history of their formation; the capacity, inclusiveness and openness of the coordinating agency; resources at their disposal; the level of difficulty of the theme ; favorable factors such as the priority accorded to the theme by global agendas and funding agencies; and the coordinating agency's skill in convening and activating a broad membership. Most clusters were established and launched in the period of 2016 – 2018, but the similar start times do not mean that they work at the same pace or have achieved similar levels of progress in their work.

5 Memberships of Clusters Vary in Size and Nature.

- The Early Childhood Cluster boasts a membership 1,800 strong, comprised of government representatives, academic institutions, UN agencies, civil society organizations, INGOs, and individuals (experts and researchers).

6 Civil society leads a third of the clusters, but the overall density of civil society in the clusters appears to be thin and their presence unevenly spread.

- With information on the full memberships of the different clusters missing, it is difficult to establish the exact density and weight of civil society organizations in the CESA clusters. Information gathered for this research shows that the Peace Education Cluster and the Early Childhood Clusters are the two where the highest level of civil society participation can be observed. Nine National Education Coalitions (NECs) are members of the Peace Education Cluster.
- Two international NGOs with extensive histories of work in Africa, Save the Children and the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), coordinate clusters. Education International's Africa Regional Office chairs the Teacher Development Cluster. The Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) is joint-coordinator with AU-CIEFFA of the Gender Equality Cluster and participates in the Teacher Development Cluster. Those are significant leadership positions for civil society groups within the clusters and show the recognition and appreciation of their expertise in the given thematic areas.
- Cluster structures that are well-organized, such as the Early Childhood and the School-Feeding Clusters, provide enabling environments for the successful integration of members and the utilization of their expertise and networks, and builds on their interests. There are thematically well-defined sub-groups in the EC Cluster, as described above, while the School Feeding Cluster distinguishes between three levels of coordination: policy-level, technical-level, and implementation-level, with specific actors included in each . Both early childhood and school-feeding are multi-sectoral in nature and require the participation of and collaboration with non-education actors and agencies, at the AU regional and national levels, which could be factors in explaining the more developed architectures of those two clusters.

7 A special role for the Gender (Girls and Women) Cluster.

- In addition to being a stand-alone cluster, the Girls' and Women's Education cluster, coordinated by FAWE and AU-CIFFA, plays an additional role of providing technical support to other clusters on integrating gender into their work. FAWE formally participates in four clusters (Teacher Development, TVET, STEM, and Early Childhood) where it plays this role of technical support to those clusters to integrate gender into their work, especially as FAWE itself works on those very same areas too. In addition to this formal participation, the Cluster is involved in the work of all the other clusters , responding to their requests for support and following their work from a gender perspective. FAWE authored the CESA Gender Equality Strategy (see previous chapter), which put forward gender-specific objectives and indicators for each of the CESA SOs.

WHY ARE CLUSTERS IMPORTANT FOR CIVIL SOCIETY?

1

STRUCTURED OPPORTUNITY

From a civil society perspective, clusters are extremely important in that they offer the most structured opportunity, within the continental education architecture in Africa, for regular and sustained engagement with CESA.

2

OPPORTUNITIES TO ACCESS AND SHARE INFORMATION

Civil society has an interest in inclusive and well-functioning thematic clusters which it can participate in and engage with, learn from, contribute and provide support to. Assuming that a cluster is active and meets regularly, it offers civil society with opportunities to access information on developments in specific thematic areas, be in contact and engage with experts and education officials, and to bring structured contributions to the cluster (policy proposals, advocacy themes, and campaign ideas).

3

ENGAGE IN DIALOGUES

A cluster can, in this way, perform the role of a community of practice and the role of a forum for stakeholders and experts to engage in dialogue, technical consultations and exchanges of best practices, where stakeholders collaborate to produce inputs and contributions that informs policies and strategies. If civil society is not present nor active in the clusters, effectively it is shut out of -or shuts itself out- of potentially important policy spaces.

ENGAGEMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY?

Other participation mechanisms for civil society in AU-led and AU-related education processes, such as the High-Level Political Leaders Meetings, or the regional Ministers of Education meetings, are uncertain and more difficult to access. Those spaces are formal, closed for external participants, who -if invited- can attend as observers only. There is no established culture, or practice, yet of organizing spaces for civil society to hold parallel activities, where it can voice its points of view and advocate for certain issues relevant to the official meeting taking place, as well as being able to interact with the people attending the formal event.

Civil society parallel events are a feature of many formal global, regional, and multilateral meeting spaces, such as the G7, European Union, and World Bank/IMF meetings, but the same organized and structured format is not followed in the AU education spaces. The recommendation of this report is that the AUC and the RECs should provide civil society organizations with calendars and agendas of AUC and REC-organized education meetings for heads of state or regional Ministers of Education, and to provide an officially accredited space for parallel civil society events (around the same priority themes of the formal meeting, in addition to other issues of interest and concern to civil society) which overlaps with the formal meeting. The accreditation is crucial as it signifies civil society as an important education stakeholder whose participation in the formal events, using this format of parallel forums, is not only legitimate but invited and welcome.

Lack of detailed information on all 12 clusters makes it difficult to assess the relative strengths and advantages that the different categories of coordinating agencies bring to their roles. This could be a question for the forthcoming CESA Evaluation to look at. Of particular interest to civil society is how each of those categories do -and can- reach out to them, and how they can facilitate access to the cluster spaces and to information about cluster activities. For the three clusters which are managed by INGOs, the important question is whether they are able to facilitate an increase in the meaningful participation of civil society in the clusters they manage, particularly organizations working at the national level, where these INGOs have chapters or programs.

THE PLACE OF RECs IN CESA CLUSTERS

1

The set of actors whose participation in clusters is not clear are the Regional Economic Communities (RECs). In the initial CESA architecture design, RECs were afforded an important role, alongside member states, in linking the continental strategy to the national level of member states, through regional programs, thematic networking, and through setting and scaling up centers of excellence.

2

RECs were also tasked with sensitizing member states, civil society and the private sector to CESA, and also with supporting member states to develop national strategies for achieving CESA goals.

3

Available information on the clusters shows that RECs are always mentioned as an important actor and are invited to attend cluster meetings, but there is no trace of their actual, active participation in any of the clusters.

4

The inter-cluster coordination meeting of April 2019 was that "Regional Economic Communities should be on board to ensure coherence and added value of work with Member States", in what could be construed as an affirmation that such a role is aspired but is not played by RECs.

5

The education desks and arms of the RECs are severely under-staffed, and the expectation that they can be fully active in the clusters, when their capacity is constrained, is not realistic. Nevertheless, other stakeholders who are engaging in the clusters, including civil society, should seek to keep the REC Education Desks informed of developments within the clusters and to solicit their feedback and input.

Clusters position and role in the conceptualization of the governance and implementation structures of CESA

COMMITTEE OF TEN HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT
Champions of Education, Training and Science, Technology and Innovation

CESA IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK



CLUSTER STRUCTURE
Member States, RECs,
Education agencies
Volunteer Coordinators
Agreed Terms of
Reference

OPERATION
Joint Work plans
Baseline Studies
Experience sharing and
mutual learning events

REPORTING
CESA Journal
Education Outlook
RACA

E.M.I.S
INDISPENSABLE MEASURING TOOL
Indicators, Data, Performance, Impact, Early Warning,
Knowledge Based Policy and Practice

To view this brief online, visit <https://campaignforeducation.org/en/resources/gce-reports>. GCE conducts policy-oriented research to generate evidence that inform credible and informed influence in national, regional, and international education policy processes aimed at ensuring that governments and the global community fulfil their commitments to deliver the right to education and achieve the SDG Goal 4 of the Education 2030 agenda.