

The Potentials of Knowledge Adaptation and Creation in Africa: Experience from PAL Network

By: Zaida Mgalla, Amos Kaburu,

Introduction

Africa is culturally diverse, eventually affecting education and knowledge creation. In this paper knowledge is considered in its acquisition through observation, sharing, or and phenomenological that adds value by benefiting learning. Formal education delivery in modern Africa complies with international commitments, recently the SDG 4. Measuring learning in many countries has long been associated with measuring children's mastery of curriculum content than competencies that are useful for knowledge application in daily life.

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to share and describe the **potentials of** Knowledge Adaptation and Creation in Africa based on the experience of implementing Citizen led Assessment on literacy and numeracy among children aged 5-16 years, as implemented by PAL Network member organizations in Africa.

Methodology and Process of Adaptation: The adaptation process of CLA in Africa took many forms and processes to make CLA relevant and appropriate to the African context as guided by education policies and school curriculum.

Way back in 2008, a team of education experts from Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania visited Pratham organization in India to learn about the Citizen Led Assessment approach that involved assessing literacy and numeracy competencies among children aged 5-16 years (ASER, 2008, Uwezo East Africa Assessment reports, 2013, 2015). The visit was triggered by the fact that many children were in school but their learning levels of foundational literacy and numeracy skills were very low, hence threatening the achievement of national education goals and global commitments (e.g. through SDG4) for provision of quality education for all. Also a good number of children are out of school with poor reading and numeracy skills. The Visit to India was part of knowledge exchange to connect practitioners from Africa and South Asia to share experience from one another and allow the team from East Africa to learn new approaches and practices in assessment and create new knowledge for adaptation to improve learning assessment in Africa. "Knowledge exchange", as described in World Bank report 2015, "is a powerful way to share, replicate, and scale up what works in development. Development practitioners want to learn from the practical experience of others who have gone through, or are going through, similar challenges. They want to be connected to each other and have ready access to practical knowledge and solutions. When done right, knowledge exchange can build the capacity, confidence, and conviction of individuals and groups to act." (World Bank 2015).

The knowledge gained in India was key ingredient that led to establishment of "Uwezo", a Kiswahili name that means "Capability" to contextualize CLA and make it relevant to East African context. Uwezo became operational in Kenya from 2009 followed by Uwezo Tanzania and Uwezo Uganda from 2010. Leadership and management structures were well established at the country level and coordinated through Uwezo East African regional office which was also responsible for quality assurance of all Uwezo standards, process and tools.

The adaptation of CLA took a very systematic approach where the team that visited India extended the knowledge gained to Uwezo East Africa team including cross country learning visits of Uwezo staff and

partners for further knowledge creation. That was followed by development and documentation of Uwezo vision, mission, goals, principle, theory of change, assessment standards, tools and process, language choice for assessment, training model for capacity building of key partners and implementers, data management systems and tools, and systematic monitoring of assessment activities. A communication strategy was developed for effective dissemination of findings to key education stakeholders at national, subnational, regional and global level to amplify Uwezo work and achievement in creating awareness on learning crisis, and strengthened advocacy to influence policy change for improved practices in the provision of quality education for all children.

In 2015, Peoples' Action on Learning (PAL) Network was established to coordinate all countries that are implementing Citizen Led Assessment in Africa and South Asia, and later expanded to include Latin America. PAL Network played a major role to promote the uptake and use of the most effective knowledge and assessment tools through provision of guidance and standards, partnerships to support effective networking, and provision of training and advice to member organizations.

Outcomes:

- Uwezo created a network of more than 42,000 citizen volunteers who were coordinated by more than 450 local NGO partners to conduct Uwezo assessment in all districts reaching more than 1,539,000 children in about 695,000 households, in the three countries within 7 rounds of Citizen led assessment. The adaptation of CLA in East Africa resulted to creation of new knowledge about contextualization process of CLA in Africa, the magnitude of learning levels in East Africa and systematic approach. Over the years Uwezo assessment has provided hard truth that was/is largely ignored – children are in school but not learning!

East Africa: Some Assessment findings:

- *On average only 3 out of 10 children in grade 3 can pass Uwezo literacy and numeracy tests of grade 2 level in East Africa. (Uwezo 2015, Jones et al. 2014; Uwezo 2017).*
- *About 30% of class 7 pupils cannot pass a grade 2 literacy and numeracy test.*
- *In 2017, Uwezo assessment in Tanzania revealed that 14% of class 7 pupils complete primary school illiterate and innumerate.*
- Large proportions of children aged 9-13 years had not acquired Grade 2 literacy competencies in any of the languages assessed: 31% in Kenya, 46% in Tanzania and 70% in Uganda (Uwezo 2017, 14). Even larger proportions were unable to perform Grade 2 level numerical tasks.
- *There is high inequality in access and learning across the countries, by Regions, and districts, family poverty status e.g.*
- *About 13% of children aged 6-16 in East Africa were out of school and most of them had limited literacy and numeracy skills compared to those in school. In Tanzania about 11% of children aged 7-16 were out of school (Uwezo Tanzania 2017).*

The success of Uwezo assessment in East Africa were amplified through presentations in various education forums and conferences in Africa and internationally (e.g. CIES conferences), as well as PAL website and citation in reports of reputable international organizations such as World bank and UNESCO.

Within few years, PAL network facilitated the hosting of many organizations from African countries (especially from Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroon, Malawi, Mozambique, Mali, Senegal, and Botswana) in East

Africa for knowledge sharing and capacity building to adapt and conduct CLA. From 2015 to date more than 8 NGOs in Africa joined PAL network and are implementing CLA with great success in knowledge adaptation and creation to advocate and address learning needs of children in the continent. (PAL reports 2015 -2019). Their efforts in CLA increased awareness on learning crisis in respective countries, with remarkable changes in education policy and curriculum for improved learning outcomes.

PAL facilitated systematic CLA data compilation and management for cross country comparisons which strengthened collective voice and joint advocacy to amplify CLA as a tool that can contribute to measuring achievement of SGD4 in the continent.

Through citizen-led assessment, PAL member organizations have become a generator of sound, innovative and appropriate policy ideas to guide policy and curriculum changes and planning for delivery of quality and equitable learning for all. The initiation of an International Common Assessment on Numeracy (ICAN) through PAL, received global attention for application as effective tool to measure achievement of SDG4 in Africa and globally.

PAL network has created regional hubs/platforms and software tools for open data management and access that enable online networking and knowledge sharing across organizations for further sharing of knowledge and co-creation, and celebration of successes of our work (PAL annual Report 2019). PAL conducts annual conferences which have created space for members to continue sharing best practices and continue to learn from each other and improve their practices and transform their organizations for better performance to ensure that all children access quality education and develop competencies for lifelong learning.

Conclusion: This paper demonstrates the potentials that exist in Africa for Africans to generate useful knowledge, learn from each other and adapt best practices to inspire development of policies and practices that are grounded in evidence about what works in establishing actual ability of our children in learning, in varied country contexts. The CLA for example, can trigger responses of education stakeholders and government officials to improve policy and practices for improved quality of education services and learning outcomes. Systematic knowledge adaptation and connections within and outside Africa bred contextual assessments, new knowledge, collaboration, and coherence, resulting in a South-South community of practice.