# *Transforming Education for Sustainable Futures* in Africa: Researching education, poverty and sustainability in the context of Covid-19

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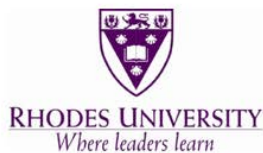
What is TESF?

- GCRF-funded network. University of Bristol is lead institution, with partners around the world & national research hubs in India, Rwanda, Somalia/Somaliland & South Africa
- TESF will support ~80 projects led by researchers in these countries aimed at transforming education for sustainable futures (sustainable livelihoods, cities & communities; climate action)
- Emphasis on social and environmental justice, particularly for historically marginalised groups most affected by poverty

- Twin objectives –
  - **Research for transformative change** in education policy & practice
  - **Mobilising capacities** for research and action

- From May 2020, the TESF research hubs started planning research in response to C19…

Research outputs from region (Education)

| Most |
| Least |

Based on 3067 publications in African Education Research Database in Feb 2019. (Mitchell et al. 2020)

	Country	# of studies in African Education Research Database
1	South Africa	N/a
2	Nigeria	704
3	Ghana	301
4	Kenya	295
5	Mozambique	260
6	Tanzania	174
7	Uganda	169
8	Botswana	145
9	Ethiopia	137
10	Zimbabwe	136
11	Angola	109
12	Cape Verde	80
13	Malawi	67
14	Mauritius	48
15	Zambia	45
16	Namibia	44
17	Cameroon	40
18	Rwanda	36
19	eSwatini	25
20	Lesotho	23
21	Sudan	22
22-28	Burkina Faso, Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Senegal, Madagascar, Mali	<20
29-39	Benin, Côte D'Ivoire, Eritrea, Gambia, Liberia, Niger, São Tomé and Principe, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Togo, Somalia	<10
40-49	Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Guinea, Mauritania, Republic of the Congo, Seychelles	<5

A New Paradigm Shift in Covid-19 Research: Building on the Indigenous

- Covid-19 has exposed and worsened the uncertainties and contradictions in the conceptualizations of global challenges including pandemics, poverty, climate change, educational transformation, social justice and human rights;

- Just as pandemics are not mere biological challenges, poverty is not a mere economic issue

- They have social, cultural, spiritual and environmental dimensions;

- This necessitates multi- and transdisciplinary research approaches for a holistic understanding, from the perspectives of the affected communities and social groups themselves;

- The affected need their voices to be heard, so that policy strategies should be based on the authentic expression of their own conditions, i.e. building on the indigenous.

Covid-19 – Africa's educational experience

Educational institutions, at all levels, closed abruptly, exposing and worsening existing socio-economic inequalities between privileged and underprivileged pupils, students & families as learning moved online:

- Exposed and worsened the existing digital divide between communities and social groups;

- Historically disadvantaged education institutions and social groups had no contingency plans in place due to lack of capacity to move abruptly to virtual learning environments;

- Many parents, in marginalized communities and social groups, lack the skills and capacity to assume the role of school teachers at short notice;

- Learners, teachers, parents and members of civil society, experience drastic budget cuts in education and other sectors, with devastating impact on realizing the constitutional right to basic education;

- Learners and teachers miss social connectedness as an integral part of African "Ubuntu" way of life in the educational process;

- Budget cuts on education worsened and exposed the dependence character of western education on external resources; importance of self-reliance, building on the indigenous and complementarity of knowledge systems in the global pool of knowledge systems.

Professor Hassan O Kaya, Director of Centre for Indigenous Knowledge Systems, University of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa

TESF Research in South Africa

Covid-19 has exacerbated existing challenges especially as they pertain to food security, access to water and ongoing economic precarity

Poverty of information - western discourse of Covid-19 landed untranslated

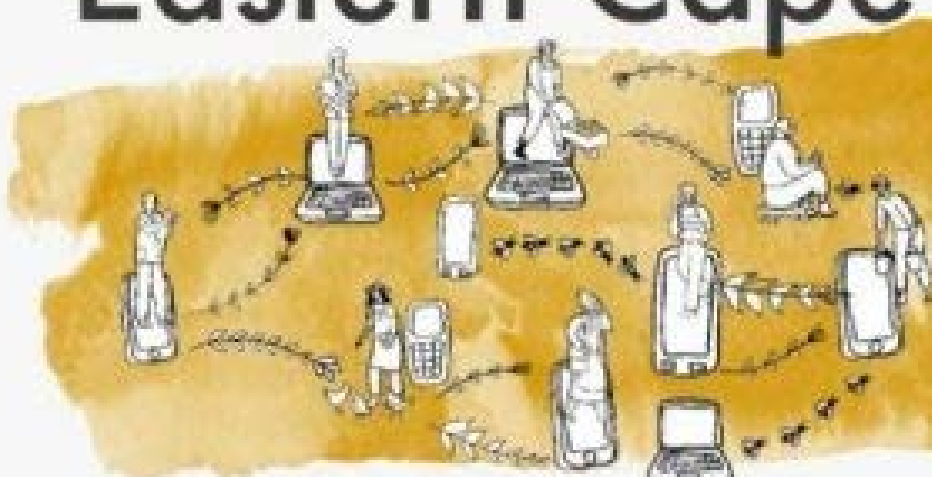Poverty of trust - trust deficit between the people and their government

Poverty of connectedness across the most unequal country in the world

Poverty of grounded context-based alternatives that build towards a better vision of the future beyond the pandemic.

How different Community Action Networks (CANS) have responded to these related concerns:

TESF research in Rwanda

Phase One

- We sought to work with communities to identify the most vulnerable families who have children basic education but have not been able to access remote learning

- **2467 solar powered radios** have been distributed to families. Children from such families are able to participate in remote learning but *inequalities remain* as they may not be able to catch up with their former classmates. Teachers' capacity to provide remedial teaching when schools resume is of great concern

Phase Two

- What opportunities and challenges do communities experience as they negotiate their children's continuity of learning and working to provide basic needs?

- How can existing local community structures be empowered to proactively support children's learning during and post Covid 19? How best can they tap into the local resources they have?

- How have formal education systems, and informal and public education practices responded to the pandemic, and with impact for disadvantaged groups? What forms of curricular are contextually relevant?

- What is needed for education institutions to safely re-open in a way that promotes the access and learning of disadvantaged groups?

- What lessons can be drawn from this C19 research for future collaboration and capacity mobilization but also for mitigation of challenges when similar epidemics strike?

TESF research in Somalia / Somaliland

- 131 interviews and four focus group discussions (all via phone) with government officials, educators, and members of the public in Mogadishu & Hargeisa

- Explores the educational & social impacts of C19 control and compensatory measures (e.g. control = schools closures; compensation = online, TV & radio lessons provided by government, ed institutions & international actors)

- Findings – formal education system's response to C19 exacerbated educational inequalities for disadvantaged groups (girls, poor households & rural areas); primary students faced educational "blackout", picture is slightly better in HE

- Participants' accounts on education (and their commentary on preliminary analysis) provide **rare and valuable insights** on the current state of education and participants' priorities for improving access & quality

Herring, E., Campbell, P., Elmi, M., Ismail, L., McNeill, S., Rubac, A., Ali, A. S., Saeed, A., & Shidane, M. (2020). COVID-19 Responses and Education in Somalia/Somaliland. *Sociology Mind*, 10, 200-221. https://doi.org/10.4236/sm.2020.104013

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Conclusion:

- Western knowledge systems do not have all sustainable solutions to global challenges including pandemics and socio-economic inequalities;

- Emphasis on conceptualizing cultural diversity as an asset for complementarity and democracy of knowledge systems to mitigate global challenges;

- Need to look at global challenges from the perspectives of the affected communities and social groups to build on the indigenous, i.e. what they consider to be an authentic expression of their own conditions;

- This creates confidence and self-reliance among marginalized communities and social groups, for the sustainability of interventions;

- Sensitize policy makers and other development agencies to support research on community-based survival strategies in disaster situations in order to build on the indigenous.

Visit our website - https://tesf.network/

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