

## Africa Foundational Learning Exchange (FLEX) 2026

*From commitment to results: Delivering foundational learning at scale*

Lilongwe, Malawi, 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> July 2026

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### DRAFT CONCEPT NOTE

#### Introduction

Malawi will host the third Africa Foundational Learning Exchange (FLEX) from the 15th to the 17th of July 2026 in Lilongwe, Malawi. The Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education of Sierra Leone hosted the first FLEX in 2023. The Ministry of Education in Rwanda hosted the second in 2024. The Government of Malawi is collaborating with key partners, including the African Union (AU) Commission, ADEA, the World Bank, the Gates Foundation, the Hempel Foundation, FCDO, UNICEF, and Human Capital Africa (HCA), to convene education actors across the continent for FLEX2026.

At FLEX2024 in Kigali, African Ministers made a bold commitment to ending learning poverty by 2035. They underscored that foundational learning is the basis for all future learning, equipping children with literacy, numeracy, and social and emotional skills to develop, learn, and contribute to the continent's social and economic transformation. Since then, African Ministries of Education, in collaboration with education stakeholders, have been working to fulfil the commitments outlined in the [FLEX2024 Declaration for Action](#). Shifting the focus from schooling to learning outcomes is more urgent than ever amid fiscal pressures, an acute youth employment challenge across the continent, and rising public expectations. Government leadership and ambition must now be matched by high-quality foundational learning programs that address implementation fidelity challenges and strengthen the effective use of data and evidence.

FLEX is an African-led platform, and government leadership is the cornerstone. As a peer-to-peer platform, FLEX is hosted by governments for inter-government engagements and with partners. The platform centres policymakers' voices, experiences, and reform priorities, with partners playing supportive roles.

The FLEX platform serves as the premier pan-African platform for education ministers and senior government officials to exchange knowledge and insight and engage with technical and financial partners, the private sector, civil society organizations, researchers, and local implementers as they work to improve learning outcomes. The platform allows governments

to take stock, examine what is working, what needs to be adapted, and how to accelerate progress.

Thus, FLEX's identity as a government-led policy platform provides an important foundation for turning the continent's strong ambitions into concrete actions. By anchoring commitments in Ministerial leadership and peer accountability, FLEX drives the translation of bold goals into real change for millions of children.

## Rationale

Since FLEX2024, the education landscape has shifted significantly. The continued decline in Official Development Assistance (ODA), alongside the withdrawal of USAID in early 2025, one of the major funders of foundational learning on the continent, disrupted education programming with serious consequences for learning outcomes at the foundational level.

Recognizing the risk of reversing hard-won gains in improving literacy and numeracy outcomes as well as socio-emotional skills, African Ministers of Education moved from crisis to clarity, becoming architects of opportunity. They recommitted to strengthening foundational learning, recognising two programmatic investments that have the greatest impact on learning outcomes – structured pedagogy and targeted instruction. More countries are pushing to scale these evidence-based interventions, but not yet enough. Unlike other areas of the education sector, where evidence is weak, what it takes to improve foundational learning outcomes is known, and what works is clear. At the same time, within foundational learning, countries are deepening their focus on Early Childhood Education (ECE) to support school readiness. While a child may benefit from quality ECE, without a package of quality teaching (pedagogy), aligned with learning materials and system support in the early primary grades, progress from ECE risks stalling.

As 2025 revealed the end of big support and external partner-driven development, it created more space for government-led catalytic partnerships. First echoed at the high-level Ministerial side event on foundational learning dubbed 'Disrupt to Deliver' at UNGA80 in September 2025? and the 2025 ADEA Triennale in Accra in October 2025. This momentum led to the launch of the Foundational Learning Initiative for Government-Led Transformation (FLIGHT), the Africa Foundational Learning Assessment Initiative (AFLAI), the development of FLEX indicators to monitor and track progress, hosting of the African Union Commission's technical workshop to develop a scorecard for foundational literacy and numeracy, and launch of the Promoting Better Governance: Enhancing Accountability and Capacity in Foundational Learning in Africa project, among others.

Additionally, several African countries launched national End Learning Poverty in Africa (ELPAF) campaigns as well as foundational learning roadmaps. The challenge now is to sustain these reforms and increase the number of countries implementing evidence-based programs at scale amidst fiscal constraints and climate-related school disruptions. More than ever, we know what works to improve [learning outcomes in languages across Africa](#).

Evidence also shows the [economic and social returns](#) to growth, jobs, earnings, health, and other outcomes from improving learning outcomes. With the evidence, roadmap, new catalytic financing models, governments wanting to spend better with what they have, accountability mechanisms taking shape, and talented local implementing partners, 2026 is the year to **track implementation and progress and orient systems for learning, delivery, and impact at scale**. The momentum from the 2025 ADEA Triennale for greater government ownership of educational systems transformation, improved governance and accountability, increased investments in education, and improved data generation and use for evidence-based decision-making will be further propelled at FLEX2026.

## FLEX2026 objectives

Governments will engage with thought leaders, development partners, implementers, and other education actors to catalyse the scaling of evidence-based interventions and share initiatives that support teachers and learners in improving foundational learning outcomes. Specifically, FLEX2026 will:

- Share progress on implementing foundational learning commitments, including progress since FLEX2024 and the 2025 ADEA Triennale.
- Showcase successful system reforms, program design, and implementation quality backed by strong data, research, and evidence.
- Reflect on modalities to improve implementation and seize opportunities for adaptation at scale.
- Strengthen accountability for improving classroom instruction and learning outcomes.
- Foster new partnerships and cross-country technical exchange.
- Produce an outcome document, communiqué, and youth call to action.

## Expected outcomes

- Documented progress on foundational learning commitments
- Curated evidence base for system-level impact
- Document critical success factors for scaling interventions
- Strengthened accountability framework
- Development of FLEX 2026 outcome document

## FLEX2026 Themes

Proposed sub-themes for FLEX2026 include data for action and accountability, strengthening learning assessment systems, education technology and artificial intelligence (EdTech & AI), early childhood education (ECE), socio-emotional learning (SEL), classroom instruction, pedagogy and teaching materials, school leadership and the middle tier, community engagement, teacher professional development, sustainable funding models, and interventions that improve learning outcomes. Assessment tools for tracking progress on improving foundational learning outcomes will also be discussed.

The convening builds on commitments made at high-level forums, including the [2024 Africa Foundational Learning Exchange in Rwanda](#), the [South-South high-level engagement in 2025](#), and the [2025 ADEA Triennale in Ghana](#). It aligns with the African Union Commission's End Learning Poverty for All (ELPAF) campaign and its Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2026-2035 (CESA 26-35), which prioritizes foundational learning as a core pillar for eradicating learning poverty by 2035.

Since FLEX2024, evidence and country exemplars increasingly make clear that improving learning outcomes requires translating political will into technical action to improve classroom instruction. This includes a recognition that:

- **Government ownership drives results.** When reforms are government-led and financed, commitments translate into visible priorities across policy, budgets, and institutions. This is crucial to anchor foundational learning within national development strategies.
- **Evidence must drive practice.** Several countries in Africa and other global south contexts are examples of implementing at scale. This is done through high-quality learning materials, sequenced teacher guides with lesson plans, and coaching that reinforces instruction, offering a model for countries seeking to translate research into lasting learning gains.
- **Scale requires system-wide alignment.** Curricula, teaching and learning materials, assessments, teacher training, and coaching reinforce one another; their overlap multiplies impact.
- **Budgets must fund what matters.** Beyond teacher salaries and infrastructure, it finances the instructional core and delivery capacity that directly improve learning. This includes investing directly in the inputs that shape classroom practice.
- **Partners should amplify, not substitute, the system.** CSOs and other funding partners, including foreign and domestic philanthropy, can strengthen national and sub-national systems, ensuring sustainability. They are most valuable when they are embedded in government systems rather than operating in parallel. Partnership must be embedded and leverage local ecosystems.
- **Political and domestic demand sustains momentum.** Promote healthy sub-national level engagement on learning outcomes. When learning becomes a source of political credit, reforms seep through the system.

## Taking Stock Together

FLEX2026 will provide a structured opportunity to take stock of progress against the five commitments of the [FLEX2024 Declaration for Action](#). In Kigali, 34 government representatives endorsed the five FLEX commitments to:

1. Enhance inter-country collaboration on foundational learning.

2. Adapt, integrate, and scale evidence-based approaches to improve foundational learning outcomes.
3. Enhance the production and utilisation of quality data, evidence, assessment, and accountability mechanisms.
4. Accelerate impact by intentionally and efficiently allocating country resources to evidence-based approaches, with a focus on scalable, cost-effective interventions.
5. Increase coordination and integration of partner initiatives in foundational learning at the country level to eliminate duplication and maximise efficiency in resource utilisation.

Through the FLEX accountability mechanism, governments are supported in tracking reforms, reflecting on implementation challenges and solutions, and sustaining momentum between convenings.

Participants will contribute to stock-taking by presenting data and evidence. This includes the African Union's foundational learning scorecard as a continent-wide accountability mechanism, the FLEX2024 monitoring framework, and the Foundational Learning Action Tracker (FLAT), which will present a continent-wide overview of policy action on foundational learning, offering a shared evidence base to inform dialogue. They will also discuss new ways of measuring learning outcomes.

## Target audience

The event will bring together more than 300-500 participants, including Ministers of Education and senior government officials of African countries. Participants will include international organizations such as the World Bank, UNICEF, HCA, ADEA, FCDO, EdTech Hub, Fab Inc and other AI technical partners, Co-Creation Hub, Save the Children, Global Partnerships for Education (GPE), World Vision, the European Union, UNESCO, and EDC; philanthropic partners such as Prevail Fund, Gates Foundation, Hempel Foundation, Jacobs Foundation, and Roger Federer Foundation; and civil society organizations such as teacher unions, parents' associations, and youth education advocates and local implementing partners.

## Format of the convening

Through presentations, ministerial roundtables, plenary panels, technical deep dives, and formal and informal dialogue, participants will co-create a forward-looking agenda to accelerate progress toward the 2035 targets to end learning poverty in Africa.

The three-day event will therefore consist of the following:

- **Day 1:** Technical Exchange Sessions. This will include technical workshops held in parallel and focusing on key thematic areas of foundational learning.

- **Day 2:** Official Opening, Ministerial Round Table, and Technical Exchange Sessions. The official opening will be followed by a plenary session, which the host country will open. The afternoon will comprise high-level participation by Ministers, senior government officials, heads of government delegations, and key partners.
- **Day 3:** School visits and report-back session, sessions, joint resolutions, and closing. The event will end with resolutions on the way forward.

## Collaborating Partners

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