Policy Brief on the Assessment of ICT Needs among Member States' Education Sector Staff for Increased Engagement and Participation in the KIX Africa19 Hub Activities

Introduction

The regional KIX Africa 19 Hub has been set up in place to generate, collate, and disseminate data, and facilitate the effective use of evidence-based knowledge and innovation for education policy formulation and implementation among education stakeholders in 18 Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries. This objective will be largely achieved using the KIX Digital Platform as a knowledge sharing and management tool.

To find out if the member states, staff and partners are ready to use the platform, an ICT needs assessment had to be carried out to uncover the gaps and opportunities in ICT capacities and infrastructure among the member states' education staff and their institutions.

Data was collected from staff members of ministries of education and local partner organizations in each of the 18 KIX Hub member states. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, we strictly stuck to using online methods to collect data.

Findings indicate that the majority of the respondents were senior staff with over 58% of the staff having experience of more than 10 years. 82% indicated they had an ICT department and are thus able to support their KIX member staff. 91% indicated they had internet connectivity in their offices with 62% confirming that it was reliable and available all the time.

What is important to note is that the majority of the participants indicated that they were "good" at using social media tools which has become a key tool for communication during the COVID-19 era. They also indicated they were good in using Google suite tools. This therefore means they are more than capable of using the KIX 19 Hub platform with sufficient training.
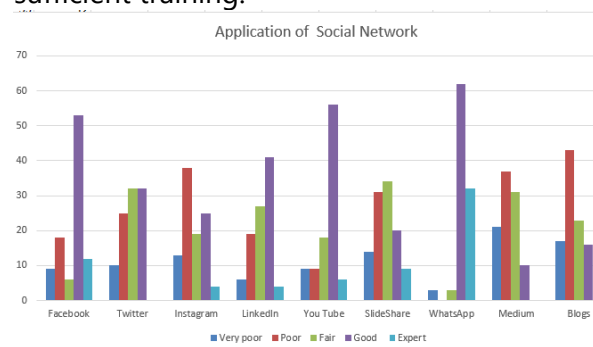

Figure 1 Use of Social Media

Figure 1 above shows that participants have good knowledge and understanding of social media.

Some of the challenges are that there is a high need for ICT training and capacity building and infrastructure; lack of ICT policies for member states; and awareness of the KIX Hub 19 platform and activities that was critically lacking among the participants. Recommendations are mobilising resources to support ICT training for both technical and non-technical staff; acquiring of licensed software; hiring of consultants to assist in development of ICT policies for member states and organisations; and increasing infrastructure and bandwidth to permit online activities and collaboration.

Context

The Global Partnership for Education Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX), a joint endeavor between the Global Partnership for Education and IDRC, aims to contribute to the improvement of education policy and practice in the Global South.

A key component of KIX is the knowledge sharing and exchange function in which country representatives come together to share information, innovation, and best practices related to education policy and programming, and to inform knowledge gaps and policy priorities.

This can only be achieved with member states coming on board and fully participating in the KIX Digital Platform. But to achieve this there is a need to identify the status of their ICT capacities and infrastructure and gaps and opportunities so that the participating KIX member states can hence achieve the major objective of the of the KIX initiative.

Rationale for emphasis on assessing ICT needs for KIX Africa 19 Hub education sector staff.

Information and communication technology (ICT) can complement, enrich, and transform education for the better. ICT is the tool that will accelerate the progress towards achieving the full potential of the KIX Initiative by allowing education sector staff of selected countries to contribute to this global cause from their localities while sharing and accessing education knowledge from different sources on the KIX 19 Hub Digital Platform.

The findings of this assessment reveal that the KIX member states need urgent support in ICT training, ICT policy development, ICT infrastructure support,

and dissemination and awareness of the KIX 19 Hub activities. The figure 2 below clearly shows there is a need to carry out awareness of the KIX Africa Hub activities and roles so that the stakeholders can wholly embrace it.
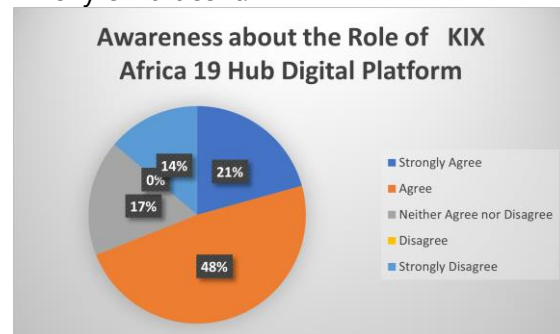

Figure 2 Awareness of KIX platform

Key Findings from the ICT Needs Assessment

The key results from the assessment include lack of ICT training; lack of updated ICT policies; lack of awareness about the existence and purpose of the KIX Hub platform amongst some member states; and member states' good use and understanding of social media and Google suite tools, among others.

Below are the key findings based on the focus areas for the ICT Needs Assessment.

a) ICT infrastructure (hardware, software and networks)

82% of the respondents indicated that they have an ICT department which is a particularly good indicator. 70% of the KIX member states offices have computer networks. 80% of all the respondents indicated that they use Microsoft Operating Systems on their computing devices.
91% of the respondents indicated that they had Internet connectivity and 62% agree that it is reliable. This means they will be able to use the KIX Digital Hub once fully rolled out. 68% indicated that they their organisation has a digital library and can publish online publications.

b) Use of social networks and other online ICT tools in content sharing.

Social media networks have been used as tools for collaboration, sharing of education resources and lessons learned, mobilization of resources, and other relevant uses. The survey found out that the participants have a **good grasp and understanding** of social media tools (WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, etc.) as well as Google and Microsoft Suites.

c) ICT capacity building among the KIX Africa 19 member states

69% mentioned that they had an ICT budget. Priority is given to hardware and software purchases covering 25% of the budget, while hardware/software maintenance and Internet subscriptions both cover 23% and hardware/software upgrading and staff training respectively cover 14% and 13%, with ICT professional certification getting the least coverage of only 2%.

d) ICT Training Capabilities

Over 80% indicated they had not received any formal ICT training in the past two years. The other 20% that received training were mainly ICT technical staff.

e) Lack of updated ICT policies and frameworks

58% of the respondents mentioned that they did not have an updated ICT policy. 60% indicated that ICT policies and frameworks were not part of their overall strategic plans.

f) Awareness of the existence of the KIX 19 Hub Platform and its activities

69% of the member states of the KIX Africa 19 Hub agree and are aware of the objectives of the KIX Africa 19 Hub Digital Platform where 14% are not aware of its existence and purpose among the participants of the study.

g) ICT future funding priorities among the KIX Africa 19 Hub member states

The assessment revealed that ministry of education and local partner organizations within the KIX Africa 19 member states have high need for ICT training and capacity building (55.1%) following by ICT infrastructure (27.5%), while hardware and software needs emerged at 10.3% and 7% respectively.

General Challenges Affecting the Implementation of the KIX Africa 19 Digital Platform

a) Unstable internet connectivity

There is a need to support the member states to acquire reliable and stable Internet in their offices. Those without good Internet connectivity may lag behind and fail to use the Digital Platform.

b) Limited understanding of the KIX Hub 19 Platform and objectives

There is need to raise awareness of the KIX Initiative among member states that indicated they did not know anything about it. All the 18 selected countries need to be brought on board.

c) Low prioritization of ICT funding/budget

The lack of sufficient funding for ICT activities and failure to prioritize them will undermine the implementation of the KIX platform. Without funds, they will also fail to implement e-learning, which has become the primary tool for learning during this COVID-19 period.

d) Obsolete and lack of ICT infrastructure

Without appropriate infrastructure, the needs of the KIX 19 Digital platform will

not be achieved. KIX Africa 19 Member states need to be supported with acquiring state of the art hardware and software.

e) ICT Policies and Frameworks

Most of the challenges we identified are due to lack of ICT policies and frameworks and failure to integrate them into overall organizational strategic plan.

Entry Points for the Implementation of the KIX Africa 19 Hub Digital Platform

Findings showed that majority of the KIX Africa 19 Hub Education sector staff are ready to go ahead and use the Digital Platform. This because they have a good understanding of use of social media and online publishing tools; understand the need for having the KIX Africa 19 Hub Digital platform; have the requisite infrastructure and showed relevant ICT capabilities. This provides a soft landing for the KIX implementation team to engage with full gear and start introducing the Digital Platform throughout the member countries as they address the challenges and key findings in the ICT assessment.

Recommendations

a) Raise more awareness about the Role of KIX Africa 19 Hub Digital Platform

There were a few countries that indicated in the study that were not aware of its existence and purpose among the participants of the study. For the KIX Africa 19 Hub Digital Platform to fully achieve its objectives, all the countries must be on board and fully aware of the activities and roles of the KIX Africa 19 initiative to promote education in their countries.

b) The need for ICT training

This is one of the most critical areas that need to be addressed.

There is need for mobilization of resources to support capacity of ministry of education sector staff and local partner organizations through ICT training, refresher training non-ICT staff and ICT certification for technical ICT staff. Advanced and consistent training of staff in the latest social networking tools and other ICT tools, such as Google Suite, is necessary.

c) Development of ICT policies

Development of up-to-date ICT policies by experts either through outsourcing or internal must guide the implementation and management of ICT infrastructure and other digital resources. These policies should then be integrated into the overall institutional strategic plans.

d) Upgrade of hardware and software

All obsolete hardware and software by the participating institutions must be replaced or upgraded. This affects staff performance and access to resources. All institutions must acquire update software for office both operating systems software and applications software. Software piracy is illegal. The majority of software vendors such as Microsoft and Google provide subsidized or even free licenses for institutions involved in education. This initiative should be taken advantage of.

e) Development of institutional websites and digital libraries.

It is necessary to support and facilitate all ministries and local partner organizations to develop institution websites and digital libraries and e-learning portals for publishing learning content.

f) Repair and upgrade ICT infrastructure.

The KIX 19 Member countries need to be supported to improve their computer

networks, hardware, software, and internet connectivity. There are still a few using obsolete equipment and unlicensed software and hardware, and there are those that completely lack computer networks. Proper ICT infrastructure will fasten the implementation of the KIX Africa 19 Hub across organisations and countries.

More information can be accessed on the KIX Africa 19 Hub webpage on the UNESCO International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa's website.