

Interview with

Dr. Claris Ujam

KIX Africa 19 Focal Point and Deputy Director in the Department of Educational Planning, Research and Development at the Federal Ministry of Education in Nigeria

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Interview conducted by Daniel Ergetachew, Gabriel Mekbib, and Kaoru Yamauchi



IICBA: Thank you so much for joining us. Would you please tell us your name, your organization, and what it is that you do.

My name is Dr. Claris Ujam. I am a deputy director in the Department of Educational Planning, Research and Development at the Federal Ministry of Education in Nigeria. I am the focal person for the KIX Africa 19 Hub in Nigeria.

IICBA: What has your experience been like as a KIX focal point?

It has been very interesting working with the KIX hub. In Nigeria, we have participated in many of the activities of the hub, and we have also carried out some programmes in Nigeria.

For example, through the hub, we shared experiential knowledge on the use of technology to organize national examinations in Nigeria with Somalia. It was very impactful. We have also carried out a national dialogue on educational issues where we focused on data and achieving gender equality and inclusion in Nigeria. It

was very exciting, with many people attending, and it created awareness of the KIX program in Nigeria. We also participated in the GPE KIX Continental Symposium on Educational Research in Africa last year, where we presented a paper on children with disabilities. So, working with the KIX hub has been an interesting experience accompanied by a significant amount of knowledge exchanged and learnt.

IICBA: What was your motivation for getting involved in education?

I am a teacher by profession, and I love teaching. I spent years in the classroom before I came into the administrative cadre in the Ministry. Education is foundational. If we get it right in the education sector, we will get it right in every other sector. It is like a tool for national development and a tool for sustainable development.

In Nigeria, we have a ministerial strategic plan that stands on ten pillars. With our strategic education plan, we hope to achieve much more with support from both national and international development partners.

Geographic Coverage of the KIX Africa 19 Hub



The KIX Africa 19 Hub comprises the following 19 partner countries in Anglophone Africa: Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia (Somaliland and Puntland), South Sudan, Tanzania (mainland and Zanzibar), Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

This interview is part of a series conducted in May 2023 on the occasion of the inception meeting held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, for the extension (phase 2) of the KIX Africa 19 Hub project. The transcript of this interview has been slightly edited versus the video version, which is also available on the UNESCO IICBA website.

The Global Partnership for Education's (GPE) and the International Development Research Center (IDRC) Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX) project aims to meet the needs of national education systems for evidence-based policy. KIX creates spaces for GPE partner countries to share information, innovations, and good practices. Knowledge exchange is facilitated by four regional hubs, including two for Africa: the KIX Africa 21 Hub which covers francophone and lusophone GPE-eligible countries and the KIX Africa 19 Hub which covers anglophone countries. Both hubs function as regional fora within the framework of the KIX project to bring together countries with similar educational, socio-economic and linguistic characteristics for exchanges of experiences.



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IICBA: Which of the KIX themes is your government currently prioritizing the most? And why is it a priority for you?

Our priorities are on data, teacher professional development, early childhood education, and gender issues. Data is a challenge to us, and it is not peculiar to Nigeria; from discussions with other African countries, it is observable that we all have a collective challenge regarding data.

If we get it right in the area of data, we will get it right in planning and policymaking. Data does not only affect educational issues but can also help address economic, cultural and other sectoral issues. We will get it right, if we are able to get it right with data. That is part of the reason we focused on data during the Nigeria national dialogue.

IICBA: Could you share more information on other areas of priority and how you feel progress could be made to address those priority areas?

Another area of focus is teacher professional development. There is a saying that goes "No teacher, no nation" because teachers make nations. Teachers educate and provide knowledge to a child, teachers build up that child, and the child may become a very prominent person.

So, the role of a teacher in national development is vital. Therefore, attention must be paid to the teacher and the teaching profession. We have many organizations, parastatals, and agencies that are working to ensure that we have quality pre-service and in-service teacher training and are building the capacities of teachers to a global standard.

Our focus is also on early childhood care education, and we are organizing capacity building for teachers, caregivers and facilitators at that level of education. So, when we bring children up this way, they will grow, and they will not depart from these important early childhood learnings when they become adults. So, there is a need to focus and pay serious attention to early childhood education.

We are also working on gender issues and inclusiveness. When we talk about gender, we are talking about both females and males. We are also talking about inclusivity which is to leave no one behind. You make sure to carry everybody including learners with disabilities. So to achieve that, we are providing facilities that will help make the environment conducive for learning for all calibre of persons.

IICBA: What is something that your education sector has learned or is doing well that you feel should be shared with other KIX 19 African countries?

We are doing a lot that others can learn from. We have advanced in our usage of ICT to organize national exams as well as to enhance teaching and learning pedagogies. During COVID-19, although we were out of school, we were still in school because we were using technology to reach out to learners.

We are also making a lot of improvements in our processing, utilization, dissemination and reporting of data. All agencies that are collecting data have agreed to utilize a uniform integrated data system such as a one-stop shop where data will be harmonized, collated and disseminated. We are trying to avoid a situation whereby various organizations are providing different kinds of data on different issues.

Nigeria is a wonderful country where people can learn a lot of things from. As I mentioned, we have a ministerial strategic plan that stands on ten pillars. We are tackling the issue of out-of-school children; we are paying serious attention to STEM, TVET as well as adult and youth literacy.

IICBA: What was the key knowledge gained from the national policy dialogue?

During the KIX national dialogue that was held in Abuja in March 2023, we focused on data issues, and we were able to gather stakeholders that work on data. We all agreed that you can collect data, but you do not have permission to release it to the public until it is confirmed to be reliable and credible by the Federal Ministry of Education.

So, we are developing a system, which came out of the national dialogue, which can function as a one-stop shop for data. It is a system where all data collectors can input their data and where the data can be analysed. We will ensure that the data we are providing is harmonized, reliable and timely. So, this is one of the takeaways from the national dialogue.

We also discussed the issues of gender and we saw the need to actually make sure that gender and inclusion are considered when creating a conducive environment for all to learn.

IICBA: Do you have any requests for KIX, for example, the suggestion on how to improve the national dialogue or how to tackle some challenges you have right now? Is there anything that KIX can support you with?

KIX has been doing a lot, but we expect them to do more. KIX has been supporting the nineteen countries and focal persons with knowledge that we can use in our respective Ministries. However, sharing what has been learnt will require many activities and funding, so KIX should be ready to support the countries in this second phase of the program where we have four thematic areas.

In Nigeria, we are going to begin to implement sharing some of the knowledge learnt to the regional states and to the local government. We hope KIX will be ready to support us in the new four thematic areas. Many of these activities might not be in the national budget, so for us to achieve what we set out for, we may need external financial support from KIX.

Disclaimer & Acknowledgment

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