

Interview with

Lorato Palesa

Gender Data Research Officer with the African Union's International Centre for Girls Education in Africa (AU CIEFFA)

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



ICBA: *Thank you so much for joining us. Would you be able to introduce your name, your organization and what it is that you do.*

My name is Lorato Palesa Mondongo and I am currently a gender data research officer based at the African Union's International Centre for Girls Education in Africa (AU CIEFFA). We are based in Burkina Faso.

ICBA: *Could you briefly describe some of the activities AU CIEFFA is doing and what are the plans for the AU year of Education next year?*

So, the African Union CIEFFA is mandated with the promotion, coordination, and championing of girls' education in Africa.

We have a strategic plan to champion education for girls and women's education in Africa which is really rooted or anchored in four strategic axes. The first axis is gender responsive education frameworks. The second is curriculum reform and teacher education. The third is science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics and skills development or STEAM, the emphasis being to show the innovation part and trying to pay homage to innovation and creativity in terms of skills development.

And then lastly, responding to education emergencies and the humanitarian context in Africa is the fourth axis.

In trying to implement that strategic plan, we have a number of flagship programmes. We lobby and mobilize African Union Member States and we engage them through various fora. We have a high-level dialogue that we run every year, typically at the margins of the AU summit at the beginning of the year. We engage young people through our youth capacity building workshops, in which we build their capacity to champion girls' education in Africa. We also engage traditional and religious leaders, knowing the very important role that they play in mobilizing communities and even shaping cultural norms in those communities.

Then we also have our Africa Educate Her campaign through which we are trying to make visible some of the issues that affect girls, particularly here in Africa. Lastly, we have an engagement with education experts across African Union Member States and we also engage the Pan African Parliament on mobilizing, lobbying, and championing girls' education through policy reforms, legislation, and on-the-ground initiatives with development partners. This is what we do at AU CIEFFA.

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: What can be done to avoid occupational segregation? For example, one issue is fewer girls in STEAM as compared to boys.

To answer that question around occupational segregation, we first have to tackle the issue of girls' access to education in the first place, before they can even go to STEAM fields. So firstly, we think it is imperative for Member States to prioritize legislative and policy reforms that can ensure the integration of girls in schools.

Today the evidence is showing that a large number of girls are still out of school with some of them not even being able to set foot in classrooms. So, we need policy reforms, legislative reforms, and prioritization for girls. We also need investments in funding ways to champion girls' education and we need strategic partnerships with different key stakeholders in the education sector and beyond, including for mainstreaming gender in that conversation.

For STEAM fields in particular, we need investments to ensure that there is an uptake from girls in those specific

areas. We also need to see curricular reform to challenge some of the gender stereotypes that are still prevalent, contributing to gender inequality and social norms that negatively affect girls. We still sometimes see those stereotypes in the curriculum, in textbooks, and in the classrooms. We also need to see schools being safer for girls, including for them to learn ICT.

There is also an important issue of representation. We need to see as many women as possible as role models, so that younger girls can see that it is possible to actually pursue STEAM fields, to make a livelihood, and to participate socio-culturally, economically and politically in the development agenda of Africa.

IICBA: What progress, or lack of progress, has been made in education before, during, and after, and what are your hopes personally for the future of girls' education on the continent?

As we know, initially girls' education really has been a problem with many girls from poor backgrounds or less privileged backgrounds from marginalized communities.

For example, nomadic girls and girls with disabilities have not been able to access education, even though we saw progress in enrolment rates across African Union Member States, particularly in primary schools.

There has been some progress, but unfortunately COVID-19 came, and the pandemic disrupted that progress, including with school closures. We know that forms of learning had to change because of the lockdowns and school closures. Digitalization of the education system had to happen quickly. Teachers and schools had to produce newer, innovative ways of teaching and maintaining learning for students. Unfortunately, many countries were not equipped for digitalization due to lack of access and affordability. This disrupted learning, especially for girls. It is only now that countries are really trying to assess the learning losses that came as a result of COVID-19. We have evidence of learning losses, but we need more evidence on what cross cutting solutions could help to recover from these learning losses.

At AU CIEFFA, we hosted an education expert meeting last year in Dakar in which we convened experts from different African Union Member States to reflect on learning losses and how to recover from them. We came

up with the Dakar Declaration, in which we listed practical ways through which we believe that learning losses can be recovered from COVID-19 disruptions. So, we have the Dakar Declaration that we are willing to share with everybody and that ties in very well with the Africa Educate Her campaign that we are running, and we are hoping to gain momentum, particularly next year for 2024 since this is the Year of Education for all education stakeholders in Africa. As we are championing education, let us not forget girls' education, particularly in Africa.

Thank you.

Disclaimer & Acknowledgment

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