



Counting Every Child: Evidence-Driven Pathways to Inclusive Primary Education

Good practice in using evidence for education policy and practice

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Overview

Summary

The Educate A Child (EAC) places evidence at the core of its programming. Its approach supports interventions for out-of-school children (OOSC) that are grounded in rigorous data, adapted to local contexts and used to inform national education policy.

EAC's "Count Every Child" principle seeks to ensure that no child remains invisible in education policy and planning processes. EAC requires all partner projects to use robust situation analyses, household mapping, and EMIS or local data sources to identify OOSC, design interventions and monitor persistence. This is supported through continuous evidence generation via monitoring frameworks aligned with SDG 4 indicators and EAC's global key performance indicators (KPIs), such as enrolment, retention and survival rates.

Evidence is used both internally and shared with governments and national stakeholders, contributing to education sector planning processes and financing decisions. For example, EAC-supported OOSC data has been integrated into national EMIS in multiple countries, thereby increasing the visibility of previously excluded children within education planning and implementation processes.

EAC's system-wide approach also includes evaluations, learning reviews, and dissemination of knowledge products that inform both practice and policy. This contributes to education interventions that are context-relevant, cost-effective and scalable.

The practice has resulted in improved policy prioritization of OOSC, increased investment in inclusive education, and strengthened ministerial capacity to use evidence in decision-making.

Organization (Relevant Website)

Education Above All (EAA) Foundation – Educate A Child (EAC) Programme
(www.educationaboveall.org/)

SDG 4 target(s)

4.1 Universal primary and secondary education; 4.5 Gender equality and inclusion; 4.7 Education for sustainable development and global citizenship; 4.c Qualified teachers

Thematic area(s)

Inclusion and equity; Gender equality; Education in emergencies; Primary and secondary education; Alternative education and learning; Education for sustainable development including climate change and greening education; Education policy and planning (sector-wide)

Policy stage(s)

Situation analysis; Policy formulation; Policy implementation; Policy monitoring; Policy evaluation

Timeframe

2012 – present

Context

The persistent exclusion of children from education remains a critical challenge. UNESCO estimates that over 272 million children of primary and secondary age are still out of school. A lack of reliable data on out-of-school children (OOSC) has historically constrained governments' ability to target interventions effectively. In many countries, national EMIS did not capture the most marginalized children, leaving them largely invisible in both EMIS and policy planning processes. EAC addressed the exclusion of millions of OOSC at the entry point to education by embedding evidence generation and use within both project design and education system strengthening. The programme recognized early that accurate, disaggregated data was a precondition for inclusive policy.

Lack of access to quality primary education is a global problem. In 2012, EAC planned to address the 60 million OOSC at the global level. Since then, 14.8 million OOSC have been enrolled. However, the number of OOSC at the primary level has increased again, largely due to factors beyond the education sector. This is a persistent challenge to SDG 4.

EAC's evidence-driven advocacy led to commitments from Djibouti, The Gambia, Rwanda and Zanzibar to adopt a Zero OOSC approach. These governments signed framework agreements with EAC and integrated OOSC as a top policy priority in national and sub-national education plans.

Intended beneficiaries are OOSC, but also governments who gain improved capacity to identify and plan for these children. The programme had a dual aim: to enroll and retain OOSC, and to strengthen education systems so that exclusion is systematically addressed.

Description of good practice

Evidence used



The Educate A Child (EAC) programme relied on a combination of international, national and local evidence sources to design and implement interventions for out-of-school children (OOSC) effectively. At the global level, UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) OOSC data provided a baseline to estimate the scale of exclusion and identify priority countries. At the national and community levels, household surveys, community mapping and partner-led assessments were conducted to identify children missing from official records and to understand the specific barriers they face.

Evidence was jointly generated by EAC partners, including ministries of education, national statistical agencies, UN agencies (e.g., UNICEF, UNESCO, The World Bank) and civil society organizations and complemented by community-level data collection involving parents, teachers and local leaders. This combination ensured both methodological rigor and local relevance.

Advocacy tool: The “Zero OOSC Strategy” brochure translated evidence into a clear call to action, demonstrating to governments that the social and economic costs of exclusion outweigh the investments required to achieve universal primary education.

A major challenge was the limited availability or reliability of national EMIS data in fragile or low-resource contexts, which resulted in OOSC not being adequately captured. To address this, EAC supported the strengthening of EMIS by integrating OOSC indicators, providing technical assistance, and building government capacity to analyze and use the data. The evidence was highly relevant and tailored to local contexts. It enhanced education policy and planning across multiple settings and, notably, prompted four countries to formally adopt Zero OOSC strategies, placing previously invisible children at the center of national education policy.

Beyond engagement at community, district and national levels to collect data and ensure its integrity, EAC also engaged in regional and global advocacy for OOSC, particularly to improve the accuracy of identification, enrolment and persistence in education programmes.

To strengthen data integrity, EAC requires all implementing partners to identify and track individual students, rather than relying on estimates.

Stakeholder engagement

The practice engaged a broad coalition of stakeholders at multiple levels.

- Ministries of Education served as the primary policymakers, ensuring the integration of OOSC data into education sector plans and national EMIS.
- International organizations, including UNICEF and UNESCO, provided technical expertise, comparative evidence, and advocacy platforms.
- Civil society, UN organizations and NGOs acted as implementers, collecting household-level data and piloting interventions tailored to local contexts.
- Local communities, including parents, teachers and school management committees, were actively involved in data collection, validation and monitoring, ensuring that evidence reflected lived realities.

The EAC programme functioned as both funder and knowledge broker, establishing requirements for evidence generation and facilitating two-way learning between evidence producers (partners, researchers and communities) and users (ministries and sector planners). Collaboration strategies, including joint monitoring missions, shared reporting frameworks and public dissemination of results, promoted continuous dialogue and accountability.



Process of using evidence in policy development or implementation

Key steps

- Evidence was integrated at every stage of the policy cycle. Situation analyses and community mapping informed project design, while continuous monitoring and independent evaluations guided implementation and adaptation.
- Ministries received real-time data through joint reporting systems, enabling them to adjust sector priorities to include OOSC.

Resources required

- Co-financing: EAC typically covered 50% of project costs, while partners mobilized the remainder.
- Technical assistance and capacity-building for national data systems.
- Human resources: ministry staff, partner organizations, trained community volunteers and EAC personnel.

Challenges

- Weak EMIS in fragile states and limited technical capacity for data analysis. These were addressed by strengthening EMIS with OOSC indicators, providing training for ministry staff and introducing innovations such as digital data collection and rapid-response monitoring during emergencies. For example, during COVID-19, evidence guided adaptations to ensure the continuity of teaching and learning.
- Many barriers faced by OOSC lie outside the education system, necessitating the use of data and information from other sectors. While such data may exist, cross-sector data-sharing is often uncommon or poorly managed.

Outcomes and insights

Results and impact of the evidence-based policy - 5Capacity and sustainability

Results and impact

The practice generated both direct and systemic outcomes. At the direct level, 14.8 million out-of-school children (EAC, January 2025) were enrolled in primary education, with an average retention rate of 90 percent, representing a substantial contribution to SDG 4.1 on universal primary education.

At a systemic level, EAC's evidence-based advocacy supported structural reforms across multiple contexts. The Zero OOSC strategy was formally adopted in four countries (Djibouti, The Gambia, Rwanda and Zanzibar), ensuring that previously invisible children were prioritized in education sector planning and resource allocation. At the regional level, EAC supported the ASEAN Declaration of Out-of-School Children, reinforcing government commitments to reduce exclusion through regional collaboration and knowledge sharing. Together, these initiatives positioned OOSC not as peripheral, but as central to national and regional education policy frameworks.

Progress is measured through EAC's global measurement framework, which tracks commitments, enrolments, retention and survival rates, supplemented by national EMIS data, partner reports and



independent evaluations. These assessments indicate increases in OOSC enrolment, alongside improvements in retention and progression through primary education.

The integration of OOSC indicators into EMIS and sector plans – both nationally and regionally – demonstrates concrete systemic change. By embedding Zero OOSC approaches in policy and leveraging regional platforms such as the ASEAN Declaration, EAC has advanced more inclusive, equitable and resilient education systems, reinforcing global momentum towards achieving SDG 4.

Capacity

At the outset, many ministries had limited skills and infrastructure for measuring and planning for OOSC. EAC addressed this gap by requiring evidence-based project design and providing structured capacity-building. This included training ministry staff and partners in data analysis, supporting EMIS reforms and offering technical assistance in results-based planning and programming.

At the Institutional level, EAC embedded accountability through partnership agreements that mandated evidence use, while providing thought leadership by sharing global resources and knowledge products. These measures strengthened institutional cultures of evidence-based planning and policymaking in partner countries.

Sustainability

Sustainability is ensured by embedding OOSC indicators within national EMIS, thereby making children visible in routine planning and budgeting. Co-financing arrangements foster national and local ownership, reducing dependence on external funding. Communities are further empowered through parent-teacher associations and local monitoring structures, creating accountability beyond the life of individual projects. In several countries, youth were actively engaged as advocates and supporters of OOSC, reinforcing commitment to inclusive education.

Lessons learnt

What worked well

- Embedding evidence requirements into partnership agreements ensured accountability and relevance.
- Engagement with local stakeholders enhanced the quality and contextual fit of the evidence.

What did not work

- Reliance on weak national data systems in fragile contexts often slowed evidence integration, necessitating additional technical support.

Success factors

- Strong political commitment, co-financing arrangements, global partnerships, local engagement and clearly defined monitoring frameworks.

Challenges and obstacles

- Insecurity and sociocultural barriers frequently constrained data collection and intervention design. These challenges were addressed through adaptive, locally grounded solutions, such as school clubs for girls and community engagement initiatives.



Additional information

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5. International Rescue Committee. (2017). Case Study: “*Save for School*” Program in Côte d’Ivoire. Commissioned by Educate A Child, Education Above All Foundation. Doha: Education Above All Foundation. (EAC’s first formal evaluation in a post-conflict setting.)
6. Education Above All Foundation. (2020). *Raising the Bar: Promising Practices for Refugee Education from UNHCR and Educate A Child*. Doha: Education Above All Foundation. (Highlights evidence-driven interventions for refugee education.)
7. Education Above All Foundation. (2020). *Occasional Paper #8: Beyond COVID-19 – Lessons for Addressing Education Inequalities in the Long Term*. Doha: Education Above All Foundation. (Captures EAC’s evidence-informed pandemic response and adaptation.)
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10. Education Above All Foundation. (2022). *Value-Led Development: How Educate A Child Provided Education for Millions of Children*. Doha: Education Above All Foundation. (Highlights the principle of “Count Every Child.”)
11. Education Above All Foundation. (2023). *Enabling Readiness for Post-Primary Transition*. Doha: Education Above All Foundation. (Analyzes barriers and policy responses for transition beyond primary.)
12. Education Above All Foundation. (2023). *Annual Report 2023*. Doha: Education Above All Foundation. (Includes the Zero OOSC Strategy and updated enrolment of over 12.3 million children.)
13. Education Above All Foundation. (2023). *Why Hasn’t the Needle Moved?* Doha: Education Above All Foundation. (Reflects on persistent challenges and system-level barriers to addressing OOSC.)
14. Education Above All Foundation. (2024). *Children out of Primary School: Trends, Measurement, Contributors*. Doha: Education Above All Foundation. (Provides analysis of underlying causes and measurement of OOSC.)



15. Education Above All Foundation. (2025). *EAA Foundation and UNICEF partner to support learning for out-of-school children in Sudan*. Doha: Education Above All Foundation. (News article highlighting operational evidence and policy partnership.)

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