



African Centre
for School Leadership



ACSL'S APPROACH TO MAPPING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP INITIATIVES

2026

The African Centre for School Leadership (ACSL)
is a coalition of partners coordinated by
ADEA, ESSA, FAWE and VVOB.



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الرابطة لأجل تطوير التربية في أفريقيا
Association for the Development of Education in Africa
Association pour le développement de l'éducation en Afrique
Associação para o Desenvolvimento da Educação em África



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List of acronyms

ACSL	African Centre for School Leadership
ADEA	Association for the Development of Education in Africa
AERD	African Education Research Database
AJOL	African Journals Online
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
DSpace	Digital Space Repository
ESSA	Education Sub-Saharan Africa
FAWE	Forum for African Women Educationalists
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GEM	Global Education Monitoring
IIEP	International Institute for Educational Planning
KII	Key Informant Interview
LIT	Leadership in Teaching
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
PD	Professional Development
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa



1. Introduction

1.1. About ACSL

The African Centre for School Leadership (ACSL) is a collaborative initiative working with governments and partners to establish and strengthen school leadership systems that enhance teaching, learning outcomes, and student well-being. Through strategic partnerships, ACSL promotes leadership at various educational levels across Africa.

ACSL's work is grounded in the recognition that effective school leadership is a critical lever for improving teaching quality, strengthening school systems, and advancing equitable learning outcomes across African education systems.

ACSL functions as a coalition of regional and in-country partners implementing donor-funded projects, and it is coordinated by four key Pan-African organisations: the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), Education Sub-Saharan Africa (ESSA), the Forum of African Women Educationalists (FAWE), and VVOB – education for development. These partners coordinate their efforts to implement ACSL's initiatives across four focus areas, as

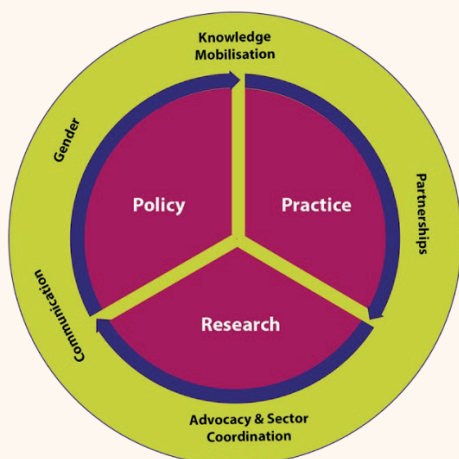


Figure 1: ACSL Focus Areas

Policy Development and Reform (Focus Areas 1): ADEA contributes to the development of policies that promote effective school leadership standards, career progression pathways, gender equity, and leadership assessments. It also produces evidence-based policy briefs and an online course for policymakers.

School Leadership Professional Development (Focus Areas 2): VVOB provides expert guidance on professional development for school leaders, offering blended and online learning approaches, induction programs for new leaders, and professional learning networks. Evidence-based practice briefs and an online course for professional development providers have also been developed.

Research (Focus Areas 3): ESSA generates new evidence on school leadership, supporting the application of this knowledge to inform policy and practice. Through a co-created research agenda, this work identifies scalable practices, strengthens African-led research, and improves the translation of evidence into decision-making.

Communication, Advocacy, and Sector Coordination (Focus Areas 4): ACSL creates platforms that unite researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to define a shared agenda, identify knowledge gaps, and drive solutions through learning exchanges and collaborative efforts.

Gender and Equity: FAWE ensures that gender and equity considerations are integrated across ACSL's focus areas, embedding these perspectives into knowledge products and activities.

1.2. ACSL Objectives

Across these focus areas, ACSL's work is guided by the following objectives:

- To strengthen policy and institutional frameworks that support effective school leadership systems
- To improve the quality, relevance, and accessibility of professional development for school leaders
- To generate and promote the use of African-led evidence to inform leadership policy and practice
- To enhance coordination and knowledge sharing across stakeholders within the school leadership ecosystem
- To ensure that leadership systems are inclusive, gender-responsive, and contextually relevant

ACSL has secured funding from the Mastercard Foundation to support leadership under the Leaders in Teaching (LIT) initiative of the Mastercard Foundation flagship programme, which aims to strengthen teaching and learning at the secondary level to ensure young people gain the 21st-century skills and competencies needed for employment, lifelong learning, and adult life. The LIT initiative is structured around four strategic pillars: RECRUIT, TRAIN, LEAD, and MOTIVATE—each focusing respectively on teacher recruitment, professional development, school leadership, and teacher motivation. Under the LEAD pillar, ACSL is implementing a six-year programme aiming to build supportive school leadership systems that enhance teaching quality and improve learning outcomes.

ACSL's work is further recognized at the continental level. The African Union's Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) 2026–2035 (African Union, 2025) explicitly acknowledges the importance of school leadership.

This document outlines ACSL's approach to mapping of school leadership initiatives at both national and continental levels, combining desk reviews, primary data collection, and stakeholder engagement. It details the standardised ACSL mapping methodology, objectives, and phased implementation process. The document also describes the data collection protocol and strategies that supported comprehensive and participatory data collection.

1.3. ACSL definition of school leadership

To provide a shared conceptual foundation for this mapping, this subsection presents ACSL's definition of school leadership.

School Leadership (the practice)

School leadership is a distributed practice involving multiple actors who collectively guide, support, and improve teaching, learning, and the overall functioning of schools. It extends beyond the head teacher to include teacher leaders, school management committees, students, system-level actors, and other stakeholders who influence the education process. Effective school leadership emerges from the interactions and collaboration of these actors rather than the actions of a single individual.

School leader (the actor)

A school leader is any individual who exercises influence, responsibility, or guidance to support the effective functioning, improvement, and governance of a school or the education system. This includes formal school-based leaders (headteachers, deputy headteachers, teacher leaders), governance actors (school boards or committees), system-level officials (inspectors, district officers, ministry representatives), and other stakeholders (civil society organisations, unions, or coalitions) who contribute to shaping and strengthening school leadership.

1.4. About the mapping exercise

To enhance school leadership and improve educational quality across the continent, it is vital to develop a comprehensive understanding of the School Leadership (SL) knowledge landscape. It reflects the evolving and contextual nature of leadership, shaped by global trends, local realities, and the increasing demand for equity, inclusion, and quality education outcomes (James et al., 2020). A comprehensive mapping of existing school leadership initiatives is therefore essential to inform policies, professional development programmes, and strategic interventions.

The mapping exercise for both continental and national (in-country) is conducted by the ACSL as a starting point for providing needs-based and evidence-informed technical support to strengthen school leadership across Africa. The mapping exercise is fully aligned with ACSL's focus areas¹ and overall approach.

1.4.1. Goal and objectives of the mapping exercise

The primary goal of the mapping initiative is to develop a clear, shared understanding of school leadership systems, frameworks, and innovations in African countries and across Africa. In the research areas, the mapping specifically focuses on identifying key themes, trends, gaps, and methodologies, as well as on understanding how local contexts and evidence shape leadership practices in African schools (Bush & Glover, 2003). The specific objectives for each focus area are shown in Figure 4 below.

Focus Area 1: Mapping of School Leadership Policies To systematically identify policy frameworks, guidelines, and standards , related to school leadership to establish a comprehensive understanding of the policy environment.
Focus Area 2: Mapping of School Leadership professional development To map and analyse school leadership professional development (PD) practices including school leadership PD providers.
Focus Area 3: Mapping of Research and Researchers on School Leadership To identify and assess research, researchers, and research institutions focused on school leadership.
Focus area 4: Mapping of stakeholders in school leadership To identify and understand a diverse range of stakeholders involved in advocacy, education sector coordination and communication in support of school leadership.

Figure 2: Specific objectives of mapping per focus areas.

1.4.2. ACSL Two-pronged approach conceptual model

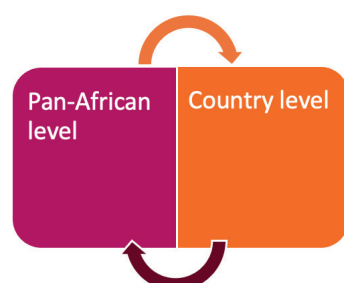


Figure 3: ACSL two-pronged approach

The mapping aligns with the ACSL's two-pronged approach – conceptual model (see Figure 3). At the continental level, the mapping establishes a broad overview of school leadership policies, practices, research, and actors across Africa. This enables the identification of patterns, trends, and innovations that extend beyond national contexts, while also highlighting challenges that are shared across the continent.

¹ ACSL focus areas: 1. Policy Development and Reform 2. Professional Development 3. Research and evidence Generation 4. Communication, Advocacy, and Sector Coordination 5. Gender and Equity

At the country level, the information gathering approach offers diagnostic insights and customised roadmaps to support national reform efforts, ensuring that recommendations are rooted in local realities while also aligned with broader regional priorities and this continues. This continued feedback loop provides diagnostic insights due to its inverse relationship among countries and continental. Consequently, evidence generated at the country level also contributes to pan-African knowledge products, including policy briefs, practice briefs, and evidence briefs.

This conceptual model, in turn, informs and guides country-level policy development, programme design, and implementation, reinforcing a continuous feedback loop between continental learning and national action.

1.4.3. ACSL national-level mapping

National-level mapping is a systematic review and analysis of evidence on school leadership, policies, professional development initiatives, and research produced within a specific country. The exercise focuses on understanding the national ecosystem of school leadership by examining locally generated knowledge, institutional frameworks, and implementation realities.

National-level mapping concentrates on country-specific policies, programmes, research outputs, and actors that shape school leadership within a particular education system.

This approach ensures that contextual realities, national priorities, and locally produced evidence inform the understanding of school leadership systems and the development of relevant research agendas.

1.4.4. ACSL continental mapping

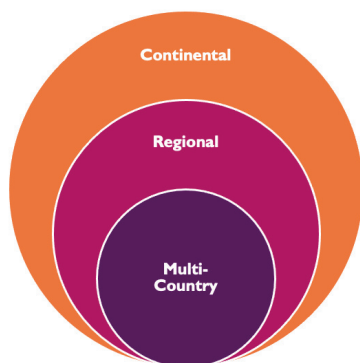


Figure 4: Continental Mapping Scope

The continental mapping forms part of ACSL's broader effort to map policies, practices, and research at continental, regional, and multi-country levels, with the aim of strengthening school leadership support systems across Africa.

Unlike country-level mapping, which focuses on a single nation, continental mapping looks at Africa-wide initiatives. This includes global initiatives involving African countries, regional or sub-continental initiatives, and multi-country initiatives that are neither regional nor continental.

1.4.4.1. Continental (Africa-wide) Initiatives

These initiatives are conceived, coordinated, or endorsed at the African continental level and are specifically designed to strengthen school leadership across the continent. They are Africa-focused and often linked to African Union institutions, continental networks, or pan-African education platforms.

At this level, we also include initiatives designed and led globally, implemented across multiple regions worldwide, including Africa. While their scope is not Africa-specific, it covers Africa.

1.4.4.2. Regional initiatives

Involve sub-continental efforts that bring together countries within Regional Economic Communities (RECs), often through shared policy frameworks, collaborative programmes, or professional development networks.

The main sub-continental blocs /RECs in Africa include:

- ECOWAS – Economic Community of West African States: Covers West Africa (e.g., Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire).
- EAC – East African Community: Covers East Africa (e.g., Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo).
- SADC – Southern African Development Community: Covers Southern Africa (e.g., South Africa, Botswana, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Namibia).
- ECCAS – Economic Community of Central African States: Covers Central Africa (e.g., Cameroon, Gabon, Chad, Congo, DRC, Angola).
- COMESA – Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa: Overlaps with EAC and SADC; focuses on economic integration.
- AMU – Arab Maghreb Union: Covers North Africa (e.g., Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Mauritania).
- IGAD – Intergovernmental Authority on Development: Covers the Horn of Africa (e.g., Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia, Sudan, Kenya, Uganda, South Sudan).
- CEN-SAD – Community of Sahel-Saharan States: Covers Sahel and Saharan regions (e.g., Chad, Mali, Niger, Sudan, Libya).

1.4.4.3. Multi-country initiatives

These refer to activities such as professional development programmes, research and related interventions that operate across two or more African countries without a formal regional or continental mandate. They are typically led by NGOs, donor agencies, universities, or research partnerships.

1.5. Approaches to mapping of school leadership

1.5.1. National-level mapping

National-level mapping is conducted to understand the national school leadership ecosystem within a specific education system. It enables the identification and analysis of policy frameworks, professional development initiatives, key actors and locally generated evidence on school leadership. The process also helps identify evidence gaps and priority areas for research while strengthening dialogue between researchers, policymakers, and practitioners.

1.5.2. Continental mapping

The continental mapping of school leadership provides a comprehensive perspective that extends beyond individual countries. By examining patterns, trends, and innovations across multiple contexts, it captures shared challenges and contextual differences in school leadership policy, practice and research that may be invisible at the national level. This approach facilitates regional collaboration and learning by identifying networks, communities of practice, and pan-African actors who play a pivotal role in shaping school leadership. It also supports evidence-based policy and strategy formulation at both national and regional levels, enabling the design of scalable interventions that draw on successful practices across contexts.

Additionally, continental mapping helps address gaps where country-level research is limited, promoting cross-country learning, the transfer of effective professional development models, and a more harmonised understanding of school leadership systems in Africa. Ultimately, this approach strengthens the evidence base, informs advocacy efforts, and contributes to more coordinated, culturally responsive, and impactful school leadership reforms across the continent.



2. Mapping methodology

This section outlines the methodological approach used to map school leadership in Africa, including policies and frameworks, professional development initiatives, research and researchers, and key actors, networks, and initiatives that support coordination and advocacy.

The mapping was implemented through a unified methodological framework applied across two analytical levels: continental and national. While the same core methods were used, each level applied a distinct analytical lens; continental mapping focused on identifying system-wide patterns and trends, while national mapping provided in-depth, context-specific diagnostics of leadership systems.

2.1 Study methodology.

The mapping adopts a phased, participatory mixed-methods design, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The methodology combined systematic mapping of research evidence, desk-based document review, and primary data collection, including key informant interviews (KIIs) and an online survey targeting relevant stakeholders. These methods were complemented by stakeholder consultation and validation, conducted through a structured validation workshop to enhance the credibility, relevance, and contextual accuracy of the findings.

Overall, this multi-stage approach enabled triangulation of data sources and methods, strengthening the robustness and reliability of the analysis.

Table 1 below illustrates the phased approach and the scope of engagement at each stage of the study.

Table 1: ACSL mapping approach and the scope of engagement

Phase	Data collection methods	Scope of engagement
Phase 1: Desk review & systematic mapping	- Desk-based document review of policy frameworks, programmes, and grey literature - Systematic mapping of research evidence	Systematic mapping of SL policies, PD programmes and research outputs in Africa by Africans Mapping of stakeholders and network on school leadership
Phase 2: Primary data collection	- Key informant interviews (KIIs) with school leadership experts - Online survey targeting continental and regional stakeholders	Engage SL experts (Policy makers, PD providers and researchers) across multiple African countries, including representatives from continental and regional bodies
Phase 3: Validation and stakeholder consultation	Multi-stakeholder validation workshop is held to review and refine findings	Engage stakeholders to validate preliminary mapping findings including policymakers, researchers, and practitioners. These workshops are organized at country and continental level.
Phase 4: Dissemination of Mapping findings	- Findings are disseminated in accessible formats, including full reports, executive summaries, evidence briefs, presentations, and blogs, targeting policymakers, practitioners, development partners, and researchers. - Translation of findings into other languages including French, Swahili and other relevant languages based on country context for inclusivity	Disseminated through various platforms including workshops, webinars ACSL website and digital platforms

2.2 Phase 1: Desk review

The first phase involved a desk review of the literature on school leadership in Africa, drawing on academic and grey sources, policy documents, reports, website information, and programme evaluations. For mapping policies, frameworks, and PD initiatives, a snowballing technique is used to expand the pool of relevant sources. At the country level, [Profiles Enhancing Education Reviews \(PEER\) on school leadership](#), developed by the UNESCO GEM Report team, serve as the entry point for the review, especially for policy and professional development, as they provide a structured overview of national education legislation and policies. At the continental level, the review examines key thematic areas, including regional and continental policy frameworks, guidelines and standards.

On the other hand, the review of school leadership research considered peer-reviewed publications to establish conceptual frameworks, clarify definitions, and identify research gaps following a detailed systematic mapping process, as illustrated below:

a) Database selection for research publications

The mapping exercise utilised school leadership research publications drawn from the African Education Research Database (AERD) and EBSCOHOST databases. The AERD, developed by the Research for Equitable Access and Learning (REAL) Centre at the University of Cambridge in partnership with ESSA, is a collection of over 9,000 education research outputs produced by researchers from 46 sub-Saharan African countries (excluding South Africa). It provides a valuable repository of African-led education research that is often underrepresented in global databases.

This is then complemented by EBSCOHOST to expand the scope of the search and yield school leadership publications that are screened and later analysed.

In addition to the studies identified in the AERD and EBSCOHOST databases, data (research outputs) from recent systematic reviews of evidence on school leadership are compiled and incorporated into the pan-African database of researchers and research on school leadership in Africa. Evidence reviewed and considered thus far includes the work of Hallinger (2018), Bush et al. (2022), and Babalola (2024).

At the country-level mapping, grey literature from local repositories, including university repositories and reports from government, INGOs, and CSOs, was also considered to complement the international databases.

b) Search strategy and protocol for literature review

To ensure a comprehensive literature search, the review begins by identifying relevant keywords, synonyms, and concepts related to school leadership. These search terms were derived from a review of five major systematic evidence reviews in the field, namely, the works by Bush et al. (2022), Kenneth Leithwood; Jingping Sun (2012); Leithwood (2021), Lumban Gaol (2023) and Walker et al., (2012).

The search strategy is guided by six thematic clusters derived from systematic reviews (Bush et al., 2022; Leithwood, 2021; Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Walker et al., 2012):

1. General school leadership concepts.
2. Leadership models and styles.
3. Professional development and leadership roles.
4. Leadership impact on outcomes.
5. Equity, inclusion, and cultural dimensions.
6. School–community linkages.

Using these thematic areas, keywords are developed to construct search strings for identifying school leadership research in Africa. Full search strings were used or shorter versions when searching local repositories. In cases where databases could not support search strings, searches were conducted using single keywords. Table 2 highlights suggested search strings for school leadership research considered.

Table 2: Search strings for school leadership research

Purpose/Themes	Search strings
General Search String	(«school leadership» OR «educational leadership» OR principal* OR «head teacher*» OR «deputy head teacher*» OR «middle leader*» OR «school leader*»)
Leadership Models and Styles	(«leadership model*» OR «leadership style*» OR «transformational leadership» OR «charismatic leadership» OR «distributed leadership» OR «instructional leadership» OR «servant leadership» OR «transactional leadership» OR «paternalistic leadership» OR «top-down leadership» OR «critical educational leadership»)
Professional Development and Roles	(«leadership preparation» OR «continuous professional development» OR «teacher professional development» OR «leadership and staff development» OR «professional practice of superintendent» OR «school leadership development»)
Leadership and Outcomes	(«impact of leadership» OR «school improvement» OR «high-capacity schools» OR «learning outcomes» OR «student outcomes» OR «teacher learning» OR «teacher development» OR «classroom development» OR «school conditions» OR «leadership behaviour»)
Equity, Inclusion, and Culture	(«leadership and equity» OR «social justice leadership» OR «inclusive school culture» OR «culturally responsive leadership» OR «culturally relevant leadership» OR «leadership and gender identity» OR «inclusive» OR «inclusion leadership» OR «values driven leadership» OR «indigenous leadership style» OR «emancipatory leadership»)
School and Community	(«school and community» OR «principal as organizer» OR «school culture» OR «internal administration» OR «building school-government relationships» OR «hierarchically structured collegiality» OR «fund raising»)
For a comprehensive search in databases	(«school leadership» OR «educational leadership» OR principal* OR «head teacher*» OR «deputy head teacher*» OR «middle leader*» OR «school leader*») AND («leadership style*» OR «transformational leadership» OR «instructional leadership» OR «distributed leadership» OR «servant leadership» OR «critical educational leadership») AND («teacher development» OR «student outcomes» OR «school improvement» OR «teacher learning» OR «professional development») AND («equity» OR «social justice» OR «inclusive» OR «culturally responsive leadership» OR «values driven leadership» OR «indigenous leadership style»)

c) Inclusivity Criteria

For the mapping, the scope was limited to research publications produced between 2010 and 2025. The search results include studies conducted by African researchers at the continental and country levels, as well as local researchers who met predefined inclusion criteria and demonstrated methodological and empirical rigour. Figure 5 below illustrates the inclusivity criteria applied to determine which school leadership research outputs were eligible for analysis within the African context.



Figure 5: Inclusion criteria of School Leadership Research Outputs in Africa.

Next to identifying relevant school leadership research outputs, we collected metadata on each of the outputs for an ecosystem analysis.

d) Meta-data Extraction and Synthesis

This involved a structured review of each selected research publication to capture key metadata. The information extracted included the year of publication, authorship, sex of the author, institutional affiliation, focus area, research methodology, DOI/URL, Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) considerations, collaboration patterns, and publication type, among others. This approach ensured that each piece of literature was categorised consistently, enabling meaningful comparisons across multiple dimensions.

Following data extraction, a thematic synthesis approach was employed to analyse the publications' content. This facilitated the identification of key trends, research gaps, and areas of convergence or divergence in the school leadership literature.

2.3 Phase 2: Primary Data Collection

Building on the desk review, which provides a structured overview of documented policies, practices, and research landscape, the primary data-collection phase explores the lived experiences, perceptions, and priorities of key stakeholders. This approach ensured that the mapping captured not only formal evidence but also the realities of implementation and practice. A sequential mixed-methods design was used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data, enabling a comprehensive and participatory understanding of the school leadership ecosystem through the following methods:

- **Surveys:** Online surveys are widely distributed to individual researchers, policymakers, and professional development providers. They collect quantitative and qualitative data on school leadership in Africa.
- **Key Informant Interviews (KIIs):** Semi-structured interviews with selected country-level and pan-African stakeholders, such as policymakers, professional development providers, and other leadership actors, allow for in-depth exploration of survey findings and contextual nuances. KIIs provide space to clarify responses and probe emerging issues.

Tailored instruments: Data collection tools were customised for different stakeholder groups across the country/continent to ensure relevance and depth.

- **Policy makers:** Instruments for national, regional and continental policymakers focused on policy frameworks, strategies, coordination mechanisms, leadership standards, resource mobilisation, gender and inclusion strategies, and the use of evidence to inform regional and national decision-making.
- **Professional development providers:** The tools for professional development providers were designed to capture information on available national, continental, regional, or multi-country initiatives and programmes that support the professional development of school leaders.

- **Researchers:** Instruments for researchers, adapted from Diallo et al. (2024), were used to investigate research priorities, networks, dissemination practices, funding, institutional support, and policy linkages.

Together, these tools offer a holistic understanding of the school leadership ecosystem across various African countries, revealing connections among policy, practice, and research, as well as existing gaps and opportunities to strengthen leadership systems.

Guidance on KII execution: While KIIs serve as guiding tools, flexibility is recommended to ensure the tool captures the local context and allows for natural conversational flow. Key steps included:

- Confirming interview times and locations at least one week in advance.
- Use of a two-person team for interviews: one facilitator and one note-taker, minimising the risk of missing information.
- Holding preparation sessions before interviews and reflection/debrief sessions afterwards to identify key insights and information gaps.
- Maintaining flexibility to accommodate changes arising during fieldwork.
- Language adaptation across different contexts

This approach ensures that primary data collection is systematic, context-sensitive, and aligned with the overall mapping objectives.

2.4 Phase 3: Validation and roadmap development

The findings from the desk review and primary data collection are synthesised into a draft mapping report. A validation workshop with governmental, technical and learning stakeholders is then organised to review and refine the findings, ensuring accuracy, relevance, and contextual fit. During the validation exercise, stakeholders are involved to co-create a national or continental research agenda on school leadership, reflecting shared priorities and evidence gaps identified during the mapping exercise.

This phase also led to the co-creation of a comprehensive roadmap for efforts to strengthen school leadership at the national and continental levels, drawing directly on evidence generated through the mapping process.

As part of ACSL commitment to the roadmap, to support the implementation of this roadmap, the ACSL has a list of technical services including, but not be limited to, developing or reviewing policy frameworks, guidelines, and standards on school leadership, as well as designing and delivering continental exchange and learning trajectories for policymakers, school leadership development providers, and African researchers. Based on this selection, and in consultation with these technical partners, the ACSL develops an ACSL support plan for the partner country.

2.5 Phase 4: Dissemination and knowledge sharing

The final national and continental mapping reports provide an overview of school leadership policies and guidelines, professional development practices, research, key stakeholders, and coordination platforms. They also identify gaps, needs, and opportunities for strengthening school leadership systems. Findings are disseminated in accessible formats, including full reports, executive summaries, evidence briefs, presentations, and blogs, targeting policymakers, practitioners, development partners, and researchers.

Reports are published in English, Kiswahili, French, and Portuguese to maximise reach. Reports are disseminated across the continent through ACSL and partner platforms, among other channels.

2.6 Uniqueness of the ACSL national mapping approach

The national mapping applied the same methodological framework as the continental mapping, but with a deeper analytical emphasis on system functionality, implementation realities, and reform pathways.

While continental mapping prioritised breadth and comparability, national mapping prioritised depth, contextualisation, and actionability, through:

1. Local collaboration and engagement

ACSL works closely with local partners and government stakeholders throughout the mapping process. This ensures that local knowledge, system realities, and contextual nuances are fully reflected in the analysis.

2. Expanded desk review of policy and professional development (PD)

The desk review goes beyond standard document analysis to include:

- Review of existing education policies and PD frameworks
- Analysis of institutional websites and relevant documentation

3. Mapping of key actors and profiles and their contribution within the school leadership ecosystem, Strengthening the local evidence base

In addition to the PEER Profiles, the African Education Research Database (AERD) and other international databases, ACSL identifies and reviews local research repositories. This includes:

- University repositories and locally published studies
- Reports from NGOs, CSOs, and development partners working on school leadership

This approach helps capture locally generated evidence that is often underrepresented in international databases.

3. Conclusion

This document outlines ACSL's approach to mapping school leadership initiatives at both national and continental levels, combining desk reviews, primary data collection, and stakeholder engagement. It details the standardised ACSL mapping methodology, objectives, and phased implementation process, including desk review, evidence collection, validation, and dissemination. The note also describes the continental-level data collection protocol, the design of tailored instruments for diverse stakeholders, and strategies to ensure comprehensive, context-sensitive, and participatory data collection.

By applying a unified methodological framework across two analytical levels, the mapping generated both system-wide insights and context-specific diagnostics. Continental mapping enables the identification of patterns, trends, and gaps across Africa, while national mapping provides a deeper understanding of policy implementation, system functionality, and reform priorities within individual countries.

Through this process, the mapping delivers a harmonised and comparative understanding of school leadership systems across Africa. It strengthens the evidence base for policy and strategy formulation, facilitates cross-country learning and the transfer of effective models, and promotes regional collaboration by identifying networks, communities of practice, and continental actors. Ultimately, the methodology is designed not only to document existing initiatives but also to generate actionable insights that support more coherent, coordinated, and impactful school leadership reforms across the continent.

Importantly, the mapping moves beyond documentation to serve as a decision-support tool that informs policy reform, strengthens leadership development systems, and improves the alignment among leadership, teaching practice, and learning outcomes.

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Associação para o Desenvolvimento da Educação em África

