WORLD BANK GROUP

TARGETS IN THE WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA EDUCATION STRATEGY: BACKGROUND NOTE ON METHODOLOGY

BACKGROUND NOTE

EKUA NUAMA BENTIL
JOAO PEDRO WAGNER DE AZEVEDO
QUENTIN WODON

TARGETS IN THE WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA EDUCATION STRATEGY: BACKGROUND NOTE ON METHODOLOGY

BACKGROUND PAPER FOR THE
WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA EDUCATION STRATEGY

Ekua Nuama Bentil, Joao Pedro Wagner De Azevedo, and Quentin Wodon

May 2022

Contents

Figures

Tables

Abbreviations

AFW	Western and Central Africa Region
DHS	Demographic and Health Surveys
GDP	Gross domestic product
GER	Gross enrollment ratio
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
PASEC	Programme for the Analysis of Education Systems
SACMEQ	The Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time bound
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UIS	UNESCO Institute of Statistics
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

1. Introduction

The vision for the for the West and Central Africa Education Strategy is simple: All girls and boys in the sub-region should arrive at school ready learn, acquire quality learning, and enter the job market with the skills to become productive and fulfilled citizens. Countries in the region have made substantial progress in the three decades since the adoption of the Education for All targets. Net primary school enrollment is at nearly 90 percent today, up from less than 50 percent in the 1990s. More than half (55 percent) of all children of the appropriate age are in secondary enrollment. This is twice the level of a decade ago. However, challenges faced by education systems remains daunting. The West and Central Africa Region (AFW) is still the region of the world with the largest proportion of children who are out of school. Together with weak performance on student assessments for the children who are in school, this led more than eight in ten children to be "learning poor" even before the COVID-19 crisis. In other words, at least eight in ten children cannot not read and understand a simple age-appropriate text by age 10. The COVID-19 crisis is likely to have made the situation worse as learning poverty is likely to have increased further.

Less than one in four children benefit from early childhood education programs, leading many children to start primary school without the basic skills needed to succeed. Many children—boys as well as girls, drop out of school before completing their primary education, and at the secondary level girls continue to lag behind boys in part due to a high prevalence of child marriage and early childbearing. As a result, children in the region are expected to complete only 7.8 years of schooling on average by the age of by 18, but when this is adjusted for the quality of learning, the estimate is at only 4.5 years of schooling. Taking into account other factors affecting human capital as well, children in the region are expected to achieve only 38 percent of their productive potential in adulthood according to the latest estimates of the Human Capital Index.

The constraints leading to poor outcomes are multiple. Many education systems in the region are inefficient in the delivery of schooling and learning, but they are also underfunded. As noted in the strategy, so-called "mega trends" are also affecting outcomes. High levels of extreme poverty make it difficult for parents to afford the out-of-pocket and opportunity costs of schooling, especially when lack of learning makes schooling less likely to be "worth it." The COVID-19 crisis has resulted in a contraction of GDP per capita, leading to a substantial increase in poverty. High rates of population growth contribute to poverty, but they also represent a challenge for governments to be able to provide basic education services to an ever-increasing cohorts of children. Given a population growth rate of about three percentage points per year, the region's population could double by 2050. In some countries, conflicts have led to a large number of schools closing. Climate change will yield further difficulties for families to maintain their livelihood, which could lead to more migration and conflict

While challenges abound, there are also opportunities (World Bank, 2018, 2019, 2020a). There is commitment to improve education outcomes and new technologies can make a real difference by providing impactful tools to serve children as well as teachers. Thanks to a wide range of impact evaluations implemented over the last two decades, we also know quite a bit about what works. A particularly useful report recently published by the World Bank (2020b) provides recommendations for cost-effective approaches to improve learning. Interventions for low- and middle-income countries are classified into four classes: (1) Great buys: the most cost-effective interventions, like providing families with information on education returns and quality; (2) Good buys: other highly cost-effective interventions, such as: structured pedagogy combined with teacher training and learning materials; programs to teach children at the right skill level; and pre-primary education; (3) Promising low-evidence interventions: programs that appear to improve learning cost-effectively, but where more rigorous

evidence is needed, like providing early stimulation to young children and involving communities in school management; and (4) Bad buys: interventions that (as typically implemented) have been shown to be either not effective or not cost-effective; these include investing in computer hardware or other inputs without making complementary changes (like teacher training or better school management) to use those inputs effectively.

By implementing proven interventions and adopting appropriate policies, countries can make substantial progress. The West and Central Africa Education Strategy (World Bank, 2022) provides specific recommendations to that effect. The objective of this background note is to suggest targets for the strategy that could be achieved if progress is made. The strategy includes three targets as follows:

- Target 1: Reduce learning poverty (inability to read and understand a simple text at age 10) from 80 percent in 2020 to 75 percent by 2025 and 66 percent by 2030. Achieving this target would add 11.1 million more literate children by 2025 and 29.7 million more by 2030.

- Target 2: Increase girls' secondary school gross enrollment from 43 percent in 2020 to 47.9 percent by 2025 and 57.2 percent by 2030. This would see 4.6 million more girls in secondary school by 2025 and 12.5 million more by 2030.

- Target 3: Expand access to job-relevant skills training through multiple formal and informal channels by increasing the gross enrollment ratio in tertiary education from 11 percent in 2020 to 14 percent by 2025 and 20 percent by 2030 (adding 3 million more youth by 2025 and 8 million more by 2030); and training 3.7 million more young adults in foundational skills by 2025, and 1 million more youth in digital skills by 2025 (60 percent of whom would obtain better jobs).

This background note provides the assumptions used for the first two targets, which are related respectively to learning poverty and girls' enrollment in secondary schools. The structure of the note is as follows. The next section briefly mentions the basic rationale for setting targets, this is, why targets can be useful. It also notes that targets should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time bound). The following section discusses the target for learning poverty. The last section discusses the target for girls' education. A brief conclusion follows.

2. Rationale for Setting Targets[1]

Setting realistic, quantified development targets is an essential component of a strategy. A target is a value that a specific indicator should attain by a particular date. When countries or donors know that they will be evaluated on the basis of whether or not they will have met specific targets, these targets serve as an incentive mechanism which may affect their behavior in at least three ways: resource mobilization, resource allocation, and evaluation.

- *Resource mobilization:* The setting of targets helps in mobilizing resources (human and financial) in order to achieve specific goals. Targets indicate priorities, and they may serve as catalysts to focus the efforts of the various parties involved in reaching the targets.

- *Resource allocation:* The process of setting targets helps in revealing priorities and allocating resources. Other things being equal, governments and other parties involved will focus their

---

[1] This section is adapted from Christiaensen et al. (2002).

activities on areas where targets have been set rather than on 'targetless' areas. Targets indicate priorities for the allocation of public expenditures. It follows that the larger the number of targets, the weaker their role in setting priorities for resource allocation. Having too many targets erodes the significance of any single target.

- *Performance evaluation:* Targets introduce accountability. They provide benchmarks against which the performance of the responsible actors can be judged. The effectiveness of targets as performance benchmarks depends however on the consequences for the different actors (governments, donors, civil society) of meeting or not meeting targets.

A number of choices must be made when setting targets. One question is whether targets should be set for inputs and outputs, or for outcomes and impacts. Since the West and Central Africa Education Strategy will be judged primarily on its results, it makes sense to define targets at the level of outcomes and impacts. Another question is whether targets should take specific values or ranges of values. For this strategy, point values are used—their main advantage is that they can be more easily communicated. Targets can also be defined in the aggregate (for the region) or they can be disaggregated (for a country or sub-region). Given that this is a regional strategy, the targets have been defined for the region as a whole.

Targets can be defined for the short run or for the longer term. Both types of targets are used for the strategy: one target is to 2025, and the other to 2030, which corresponds to the agenda for the Sustainable Development Goals. It should finally be noted that for targets to serve as an incentive mechanism, they need to be monitored, which is not necessarily easy in the region due to limited data, especially on learning outcomes. Various methods can be used to set targets. Some methods rely on simulations based on the expected outcomes of specific interventions or policies. Data are however missing to do this well for the region. Therefore, we rely instead on simple historical projections, assuming a certain level of progress versus past trends.

3. Target for Learning Poverty

Learning poverty is defined as the share of 10-year-old children not able to read an age-appropriate text. Between 2014 and 2019, learning poverty dropped from 85 percent to 80 percent in AFW, as measured through estimates for countries that participated in the 2014 and/or 2019 PASEC rounds. These baseline learning poverty estimates are population-weighted averages for the sub-region. While the learning poverty levels have improved between the last two PASEC assessments, the rate of progress has been slower than what was expected to meet global targets adopted in 2020, that is countries would progress at the rate of 80th percentile in their region to halve global learning poverty by 2030.

Without accounting for the COVID shock, AFW countries were previously expected to reduce learning poverty by 2.5 percentage points per year, reaching 73 percent learning poverty by 2019 from the pre-COVID baseline of 85 percent. Given new PASEC results, the target to perform at the rate of progress of the 80th percentile of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) was overly ambitious for AFW countries. In reality, the observed rate of progress for the countries was closer to the 60th percentile of SSA. Furthermore, COVID is likely to exacerbate the learning crisis and simulations suggest that the learning poverty rate of AFW could increase from 80 percent (new pre-COVID baseline for 2019) to 83 percent (based on learning poverty simulation methodology proposed by Azevedo (2020) (see Figure 1).

Going forward, we propose three main changes to the learning poverty targets for AFW. First, we move the learning poverty baseline to 2019 (instead of 2014) using the latest Learning Poverty estimates, which build on the recent PASEC 2019 results and more put-to-date schooling deprivation estimates. Second, we adjust the new learning poverty baseline value for the expected effect of COVID in the 2020 school year, which means raising baseline learning poverty by 3 percentage points from 80 to 83 percent. Third, we use a AFW-specific distribution of learning performance to calculate the annualized changes in learning poverty observed between PASEC 2014 and PASEC 2019, rather than using changes in learning poverty for SSA based on SACMEQ data.

The revised target builds on the aspiration that countries will perform at the 70th percentile of the AFW sub-region, instead of the 80th percentile as envisioned previously. In terms of 2024 targets, this means aiming to reduce learning poverty to 76 percent from the current post-COVID baseline of 83 percent. Attaining this target implies increasing the current rate of progress by more than 1.5 times, which while ambitious, may be more feasible for countries in AFW. If we expect that countries would be able to perform at the rate of progress for the 80th percentile, learning poverty could drop to 74 percent by 2024, which would require countries to more than double the recent median rate of progress.

Figure 1. Learning poverty in Central and West Africa (post-COVID)
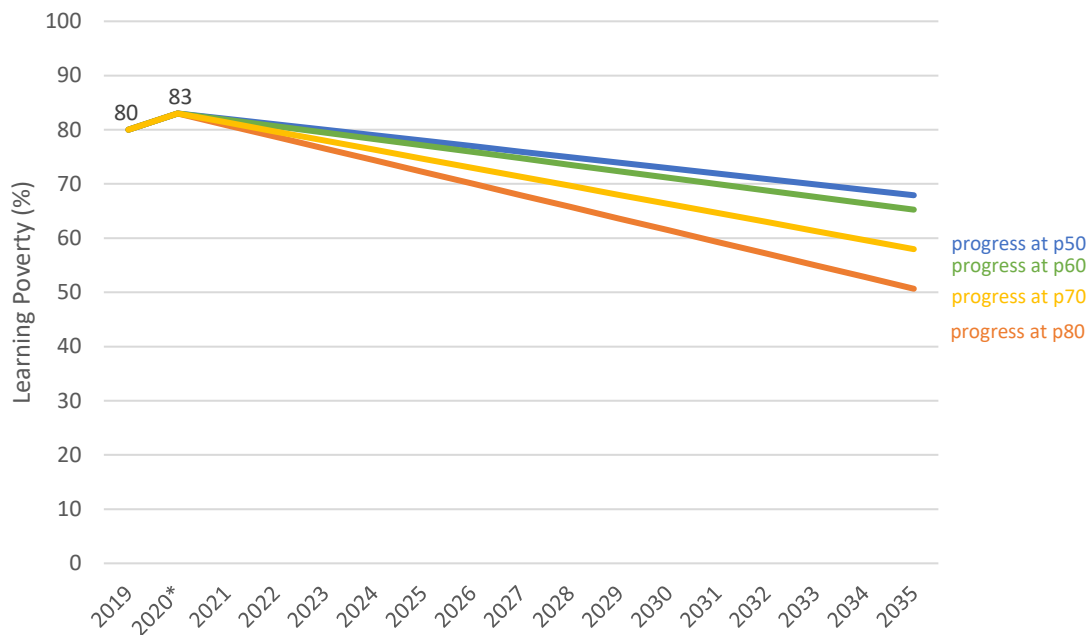
Source: Authors' estimation.
Note: 2020* is the simulation of COVID-19 learning loss from 2019 baseline based on "pessimistic" scenario of school closures and mitigation effectiveness (implying schools are closed for 7 months and the mitigation measures have low levels of effectiveness), which results in an increase of 3 percentage points in 2019 learning poverty.

It should be noted that we have learning data for 33 percent of children in AFW. In particular we do not have data for Nigeria, the largest country in the region. All estimates are based on Learning Poverty data for the countries with learning poverty data (essentially PASEC countries) and the estimates are applied to all countries, implicitly imputing the regional average for the countries with no learning data. Specifically, learning poverty pre-COVID baseline is calculated using the 13 countries in AFW with PASEC

2019 data: Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Cameroon, the Republic of Congo, Gabon, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Chad, and Togo. Simulation of progress from the 2019 baseline is based on 11 PASEC spells between 2014 and 2019 for Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, the Republic of Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Madagascar, Niger, Togo, and Senegal.

It is also important to ensure that the regional target for AFW will not distort incentives for country teams to create national measures of learning poverty by building on assessments data that exists in-country, which may best reflect national objectives and aspirations, as proposed through current ongoing dialog with country teams in the context of the Accelerator program. In terms of monitoring and reporting of learning poverty targets, it will be necessary in 2024 to have the data to do so. There are several possible data sources that could be used to monitor progress against targets:

(i) New PASEC assessment data meant to be collected in 2024, with results likely to come out in 2025, if not earlier.

(ii) New data from UIS/ACER/MILO study on measuring learning losses in four PASEC countries (Burundi, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal), with potentially more countries joining. This study will produce estimates of COVID learning losses that use established pre-COVID baseline estimates of learning to compare against post-COVID learning data, and report progress for SDG 4.1.1b (used for learning poverty). New data collection is expected to start this year.

(iii) New data from GPE Country COVID response studies to measure learning loss. Currently, 10 countries in AFW have a GPE COVID response grant, out of which 4 are managed by the World Bank and have a focus on measuring learning loss (Benin, Ghana, Mali, Togo). This data could potentially be used to measure progress against learning poverty targets especially if the learning loss measures use a pre-COVID baseline and can report progress against SDG 4.1.1b, as planned under the UIS/ACER/MILO study described above.

Finally, the proposed targets are subject to future revisions as we expect a new assessment inclusion window by September 2021 when final regional and global aggregates will be published and as we receive new data, such as (i) new PASEC microdata from the 2019 round; (ii) new learning poverty numbers based on national learning assessments; and (iii) UIS/ACER/MILO data from the study mentioned above to capture COVID-related learning losses.

When considering the number of children affected by learning poverty, even if learning poverty rates decline, there will probably be an increase the number of children who will be learning poor due to population growth. That number is expected to decline only after 2035. Figure 3 provides the results for children age 5 to 14.

Figure 2. Learning poor population age 5–14
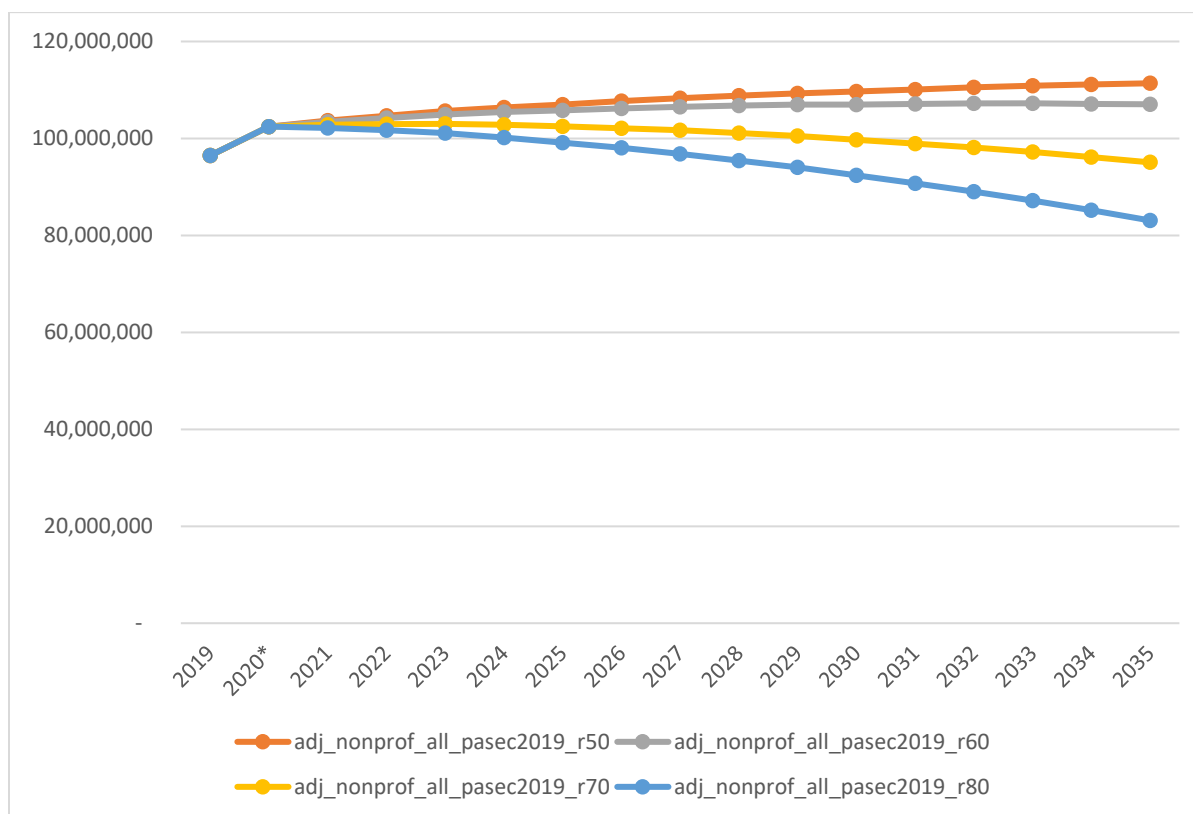
Source: Authors' estimation.

4. Target for Girls' Enrollment

While poor educational outcomes affect boys as well as girls, not educating girls is especially costly. This is because when girls drop out of school, they are more likely to marry or have children at an age when they are not yet ready to do so, physically or emotionally. This leads to a wide range of negative consequences not only for them, but also their children and societies as a whole (Wodon et al., 2018). Annex 1 summarizes some of those negative effects.

To reflect the importance of educating girls, the second target used in the strategy relates to the gross enrollment rate for girls at the secondary level. The baseline enrollment level for the region is based on the latest available data in the World Development Indicators database, which is itself based on data from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics. For some countries, the data pertains to 2019. For others, it pertains to 2018 and in some cases earlier. The weighted average of gross enrollment rates is computed for the region, with weights taking into account the number of girls age 15–19 in each country. The baseline rate is estimated at 41.9 percent in 2019.

From 2019 to 2020, the assumption is that gains in enrollment follow the average gain observed across countries over the last four years with data. All countries are weighted equally for computing the average gain. The average gain for the most recent period across countries is 4.4 percentage points over four years,

so 1.1 points per year. This is applied uniformly to all countries, and the weighted average gross enrollment is then computed, accounting for differences in (student) population growth across countries. The projection for the gross enrollment rate in 2020 for the region is therefore 43.0 percent.

Enrollment is expected to decline in 2021 due to the COVID-19 crisis. UNESCO published an analysis suggesting that in SSA, 3.49 percent of girls may not return to secondary school due to the crisis. For upper secondary school, the estimate is at 4.07 percent. The enrollment-base weighted average for both estimates is 3.68 percent. If 3.68 percent of girls do not return to school and we assume no trend gain, then the enrollment rate drops in all countries by that proportion (approximately, this leads to an average drop of 1.6 points, but the drop depends on the country base level). This drop is applied uniformly to all countries, and the weighted average gross enrollment is then computed, accounting for differences in (student) population growth across countries. In 2021 the gross enrollment rate would be at 41.4 percent.

From 2021 to 2025, countries are expected to improve enrollment rates faster than was the case before the pandemic. Instead of a historical average gain of 4.4 points every four years, the gain is based on the performance of all countries that improved enrollment rates in the last four years of available data. That estimate would yield an average gain of 7.7 points in four years.

However, because of the continuation of the pandemic in 2022, we assume that for the first year there is an improvement in enrollment at only half that speed. Therefore, from the estimate for 2021, we assume for each country an enrollment gain over the next four years of 0.875 x 7.7 = 5.075 points. This is again applied uniformly to all countries, and the weighted average gross enrollment is then computed, accounting for differences in (student) population growth across countries. The calculation leads to an estimated weighted average enrollment rate of 47.9 percent in 2025. Applying the same logic with the full yearly gains until 2030 leads to a target enrollment rate for that year of 57.2 percent. The key results are summarized in Table 1, which in addition provides estimates of the number of girls enrolled and not enrolled. Note that in 2025, still less than half of girls would be enrolled in secondary education. The methodology for these simulations is heavy on assumption and mechanistic, but it gives an idea of what could be achieved under these assumptions.

Table 1. Targets for girls' secondary enrollment

	2019	2020	2021	2025	2030
Gross enrollment rate (%)	41.9%	43.0%	41.4%	47.9%	57.2%
Girls enrolled (million)	14.6	15.5	14.9	20.1	28.0
Girls not enrolled (million)	20.6	20.9	22.6	22.3	21.4

Source: Authors' estimation.

It is important to note that these targets may not be easy to achieve for several reasons. First, an implicit assumption is that the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on enrollment is relatively short-lived, since it is assumed that countries can start making progress as of 2021, and especially as of 2022. The targets were prepared in the first half of 2021 when it was felt that the pandemic might not be very long lasting. Yet the pandemic has proven to be long-lasting, and it could have larger detrimental effects than those assumed here, especially as the worsening of the learning crisis reduces the ability of girls to transition to secondary school. Second, countries are assumed for the next few years and until 2030 to be able to do substantially better than they were before the pandemic. This is no small feat. Third, the large increase in enrollment rates built into the targets implies that an even larger number of girls will be

enrolling in secondary education given population growth. Countries will need to increase the capacity of their school system to absorb more girls (and boys), which in turn will require additional schools to be built, or their capacity to be expanded. This could be difficult to finance under tight budget constraints and high public debt in many countries, especially in a context of rising interest rates. Still another related issue is that expanding the capacity of the education system to accommodate more girls may take some time as schools must be built or expanded, and this requires planning and capacity.

For all those reasons, the targets could be considered as ambitious, especially for the immediate period following the pandemic. The constraints to achieve the targets may be less stringent over the longer term as pandemic-related economic conditions ease. The targets adopted for the West and Central Africa strategy are however substantially less ambitious than those adopted for a separate education strategy recently prepared for the Sahel (World Bank, 2022b). In that strategy, the target for girls' enrollment is to increase the enrollment rate by 12 percentage points, from 31 percent to 43 percent. This target is larger in absolute terms than the targets sketched here, but it is especially ambitious in proportional terms. The target for the Sahel education strategy implies a gain in enrollment rates from the base value by 2025 of almost 40 percent (43/31=1.39), while the target suggested in Table 1 from 2019 to 2025 represents a gain from the base value of the enrollment rate of only 14 percent (47.9/41.9=1.14). Still, in terms of the number of girls to be enrolled, the assumed increase for AFW is still large, at more than a third (20.1/14.6= 1.38). This is far from being negligible in just a few years, especially given the impact of the pandemic.

5. Targets for Skills

This third set of targets focus on post-basic education and training. As elsewhere, AFW's economic transformation hinges on the skills of its workforce and its ability to accelerate the pace toward building an effective national innovation system. The region needs a workforce that can grow and transform its economies while also facilitating recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, navigation of climate change, and greater access to and use of digital technologies. Developing this workforce requires strategic reforms and investments in post-basic education to complement efforts in basic education aimed at reducing learning poverty and widening access, especially for girls at the secondary school level. Expanding equitable access to and strengthening the relevance and quality of the region's skills development system through multiple channels, including formal TVET and higher education, as well as informal and nonformal training options, would not only benefit individuals but also provide AFW countries with a wide range of competent workers to fill jobs at all levels across the economy.

This third set of targets will aim to measure the progress and important skills development outcomes among key demographics (the youth and young adults) and across multiple skilling channels (formal tertiary education, adult literacy programs and short-term digital skills). In selecting the indicators and related targets, it is important to recognize the scarcity of data in the post-basic education sector and the complexities with measuring and monitoring outcomes particularly in the informal and nonformal skilling subsectors. Unlike the lower education levels, no regional or international assessments exist that reliably measures skills competencies of AFW youth and young adults. Even in universities and TVET training centers, such data is scarce. Below, we provide the approach and assumptions for calculating each of the three sub-targets.

The first sub-target measures the gross enrollment ratio (GER) for tertiary education. According to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS), this is defined as the number of students enrolled in tertiary education (both TVET and general higher education), regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the official

school-age population corresponding to the tertiary level of education (the population used is the 5-year age group starting from the official secondary school graduation age). For countries that do not report their tertiary education enrollment data to UIS (such as Nigeria), the authors estimated the GER from data obtained from the national higher education agencies responsible for such data. Although AFW has seen significant increase in access to tertiary education, the region's GER—at 11 percent or about ~4.2 million youth, based on available data)—remains significantly lower than that in other regions. Coverage is also inequitable, and the quality and relevance of academic and training programs has been low. Job creation has not kept up pace with the number of youths graduating from these programs, such that, in some countries, the tertiary educated graduates have among the highest unemployment and underemployment rates. With the short horizon of the strategy (three years), and given the current economic climate and the impact of COVID-19 on the pre-tertiary sector, this period of implementing the strategy will most likely see more interventions that lay the necessary foundations for accelerating the expansion of access to job-relevant tertiary education beyond the strategy (after 2025) more so than realizing a large increase in the regional GER. The authors therefore start from a position where the region would work towards increasing the AFW tertiary education GER average to 20 percent by 2030, which will require a steady determination of all stakeholders. This will be a significant milestone for the region. This would mean that in eight years, at least ~8 million more youth would be enrolled. To calculate this, the authors use the UN population data for the age group 18–23 years old, and also considered population increase for this age group over the period of interest. The authors then suggest, for the next three years of the strategy (leading to 2025), at least 3 million more youth should be enrolled in tertiary education. This target is still ambitious, and it needs to be accompanied by concomitant efforts support the job transitions of these youths.

The second sub-target focuses on the number of young adults that receive foundational skills training. Here, foundational skills refer to functional numeracy and literacy skills needed by illiterate young adults to increase their economic productivity and hence access to better livelihoods. In the Sahel White Paper (World Bank 2022b), which covered a region where illiteracy rates are high across all age groups, focuses on young adults age 15–34. This strategy includes the population in a narrower age interval, those age 25–34, mainly because literacy rates in most non-Sahelian countries are not uniformly high among young adults age 15–34 year-olds, but fall off sharply among the older members of the cohort. The data on literacy rates used in the calculation are from published rates based on recent Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS).[2] These data are disaggregated by gender for defined age groups. The most recent data for the AFW countries were between 2011 and 2019. The authors used data only for countries (18 out of the 22) with literacy rates from 2014 or later. The population-weighted literacy rate for the region was 66.4 percent among young adults age 15–24.

To estimate the 2025 target for the number of young adults to be trained in foundational skills, we made two assumptions: (i) the population weighted literacy rate among those age 15–24 in 2018 for the AFW region was 66.4 percent; and (ii) among those age 15–34 in 2030, their literacy rate in 2018—when they would have been age 18–27—is the same as those age 15–24 in 2018. If the literacy rate of this cohort were to rise by 5 percentage points, by 2025, 3.7 million more of these young adults will have been trained in foundational skills between now and 2025. This target is appropriate in a context where literacy programs for young adults are poorly funded by governments and are currently not yet a ubiquitous feature in the World Bank's education portfolio. A more ambitious target corresponding to a 10 percentage point increase would train 7.4 million more young adults age 25–34 in foundational skills training (are literate) by 2025.

---

2 The DHS Program STATcompiler. http://www.statcompiler.com. Accessed on May 13, 2022.

Table 2. Target for foundational skills training for young adults (using the cohort age 25–34)

DHS survey year (approx.)	~2018
Target year	2025
Target age cohort for young adults	25–34 years
Population-weighted literacy rate for the cohort age 15–24 (and cohort age 18–27) in 2018 (%)	66.4%
Additional number of literate young adults in the cohort age 25–34, if the literacy rate were to rise by 5 percentage points by 2025 (million)	3.7

Finally, for the third sub-target, the authors consider the number of youth (within the cohort age 15–24, especially the vulnerable ones) that receive training in digital skills, where 60 percent obtain better or decent jobs, during the three-year period of the strategy. The definition of "Better Jobs" is similar to what is used in the World Bank's Utilization-Adjusted Human Capital Index. Excluded from "better jobs" are those held by people working "in subsistence own-account/family agriculture, [as] small scale traders, and [as] landless agricultural laborers" (World Bank 2020c). For greater likelihood of achieving this target and improving the possibility of its monitoring, this target will be best achieved through an innovative mass rapid-skilling pilot, leveraging the opportunities of a regional project/initiative that would create a regional mobile-friendly digital platform (and skilling marketplace) for skilling 1 million youth and supporting the placement of at least 600,000 of them in better jobs by 2025. If such a platform can be sustained as a proof of concept, scaled and championed by the private sector, then more youth will benefit from this, even beyond the initial 1 million.

6. Conclusion

This note has provided the rationale for the targets adopted in the West and Central Africa Education Strategy (World Bank, 2022a). The targets refer to learning poverty, girls' enrollment in secondary schools, and the acquisition of skills for youth. Three final remarks may be important to make in conclusion.

First, while the three targets are presented separately, they are in practice related, albeit with a time lag. For example, the target for learning poverty at the primary level matters for the target for girls' enrollment at the secondary level. Indeed, one of the main reasons why girls drop out of school prematurely is the fact that they do not learn enough in primary school. This prevents them from completing their primary education, and transition to secondary school. If learning poverty is reduced, then more girls will be able to pursue their education further. The same applies for the targets related to skills.

Second, even if they may not appear to be, the targets are somewhat ambitious for several reasons that were discussed earlier, but in particular because of the financial implications of the targets in a context of tight budgets as well as substantial population growth in many countries. For example, when a target is adopted to increase enrollment rates, the increase in the number of children or youth who are expected to be enrolled is larger given population growth. Achieving the short-term targets by 2025 may prove to be challenging even if some of the constraints in achieving longer-term targets—that is, by the year 2030—may be less stringent.

Third, ideally, if the data and modelling techniques were available, it would be best to simulate targets based on specific assumptions regarding the reform of education systems, the cost of implementing policies being advocated in the strategy, and the financing being made available within an overall macroeconomic framework. The fact that this is not done here exposes the analysis to critiques. For example, as discussed in a separate background note in this series, support provided by the World Bank to education systems in the region represents only a very small share of public spending for the sector (Wodon et al. 2022). This suggests that most of the financing would need to be provided by the countries themselves. The issue of financing is complex and discussed in the strategy, but it should be emphasized again that the very simple back-of-the-envelope simulations conducted to set targets in this note do not consider these issues. The targets that were adopted in the strategy are therefore essentially aspirational. They give a rough idea of what could be achieved under favorable assumptions but are not based on a thorough analysis and costing of policies and programs that would be needed to reach them.

References

Azevedo, J. P. 2020. "Learning Poverty: Measures and Simulations." Policy Research Working Paper No. 9446. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

Christiaensen, L., C. Scott, and Q. Wodon. 2002. "Development Targets and Costs." In J. Klugman, editor, *A Sourcebook for Poverty Reduction Strategies, Volume 1: Core Techniques and Cross-Cutting Issues*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

Wodon, Q., C. Montenegro, H. Nguyen, and A. Onagoruwa. 2018. *Missed Opportunities: The High Cost of Not Educating Girls*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

Wodon, Q., B. da Cruz Vasconcellos, L. McDonald, and E. Cameron 2022. "Rising World Bank Financing for Education in West and Central Africa: Decisive Breakthrough or Helping Hand?" Background paper for the West and Central Africa Education Strategy. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

World Bank. 2018. *World Development Report 2018: Learning to Realize Education's Promise.* Washington, DC: The World Bank.

———. 2019. *Ending Learning Poverty: What Will It Take?* Washington, DC: The World Bank.

———. 2020a). *Realizing the Future of Learning: From Learning Poverty to Learning for Everyone, Everywhere.* Washington, DC: The World Bank.

———. 2020b. "Cost-effective Approaches to Improve Global Learning: What Does Recent Evidence Tell Us Are "Smart Buys" for Improving Learning in Low- and Middle-Income Countries?" Washington, DC: The World Bank.

———. 2022a. *Western and Central Africa Education Strategy*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

———. 2022b. "Sahel Education White Paper: The Wealth of Today and Tomorrow." Western and Central Africa Education Strategy. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

Annex 1. The Imperative of Investing in Girls' Education

Ensuring the right to education is essential for the enjoyment of human rights in their indivisibility. The benefits from education for human development are especially wide-ranging (see Wodon et al., 2018, for details).

Labor market earnings and poverty reduction. Education is key to escaping poverty. Men and women with primary education (partial or completed) earn only 20–30 percent more on average than those with no education at all. But men and women with secondary education may expect to make almost twice as much as those with no education at all, and those with tertiary education may expect to make three times as much as those with no education. In addition, secondary and tertiary education are often associated with higher labor force participation (especially full-time work for women) and a lower likelihood of unemployment. Since labor earnings are key to avoid poverty, improving education outcomes—both in terms of educational attainment and learning—can reduce poverty dramatically.

Child marriage, fertility, and women's health. Keeping girls in school is one of the best ways to end child marriage and early childbearing. Universal secondary education for girls could virtually eliminate child marriage and reduce early childbearing by three fourths. By reducing child marriage and early childbearing, and providing agency for women, universal secondary education could indirectly reduce fertility rates in many developing countries (Onagoruwa and Wodon, 2018). This, in turn, would reduce population growth, accelerate the demographic transition, and generate a large demographic dividend. Universal secondary education for girls would increase women's health knowledge and their ability to seek care, improve their psychological well-being, and reduce the risk of intimate partner violence.

Child health and nutrition. After controlling for other factors affecting under-five mortality and stunting, children born of educated mothers have lower risks of dying by age five or being stunted. By contrast, children born of very young mothers face a higher risk of dying by age five or being stunted. Thus, better education reduces these risks both directly and indirectly through its impact on early childbearing. By reducing household poverty, universal secondary education for mothers (and fathers) would again help reducing under-five mortality and stunting rates. Finally, children born of educated mothers are more likely to be registered at birth, a key right for children that affects other rights.

Agency, decision-making, and social capital. Better educated men and women tend to have more agency in their lives. Achieving universal secondary education would increase by one tenth women's reported ability to make decisions in their household. Better educated women and men report lower satisfaction rates with basic services, which may reflect better agency through a more realistic assessment of their quality. Educational attainment is also associated with being able to rely on friends when in need, and a stronger ability to engage in altruistic behaviors. This is not because those who are better educated are more altruistic, but because they are in a better position to be able to help others.