

INVESTING IN EDUCATION: A pathway to development

Education is a fundamental human right and plays a central role in enabling children to develop to their full potential, equipping them with the skills necessary to lead a healthy and productive life. It has both a moral argument and an economic imperative. Education enhances individual's earning capacity and employment prospects, fostering economic development and poverty reduction.

And there is a powerful return on investment. It is estimated that one additional year of education per person results, on average, in 6% per capita GDP growthⁱ.

Africa's track record in investing in education

Africa has made impressive strides in education with considerable progress at both primary and secondary levels in recent years, as well as encouraging results in reducing the gender gap in education participation.

In 2000 164 governments resolved to expand learning by adopting the *Dakar Education for All Declaration* which included a target for Africa region of allocating at least 7% of their GDP to education by 2005, and to increase it to 9% by 2010. Since 2000, governments in Africa have increasingly recognised the importance of investing in education, accompanied by increased budgetary allocations to education in past 10 years.

However, few countries have met the Dakar targets and some have made significant cuts to education budgets. The Commission for Africa estimates that there is a shortfall of between \$US 7-8 billion annually to achieve the *Education for All* targets in sub-Saharan Africa;

- Governments in Africa still only spend on average 4% of their GDP on education – well below the Dakar target of 9% by 2010
- Only six countries have met the Dakar commitment to allocate 9% to education - Lesotho, Djibouti, Botswana, Swaziland, Tunisia and Kenya
- Lesotho tops the table with spending on education at 13% of its GDP
- In contrast, the relatively economically well-off Sudan and Equatorial Guinea spent only 0.3% and 1.4% GDP respectively
- Uganda increased its budget for education by nearly two-thirds between 2000-2008, whilst Lesotho, Mali, Mozambique, Rwanda and Senegal raised their education budgets by 53-73% in the same period
- But a number of countries have made budget cuts since 2000 – the Government of Congo (Brazzaville) reduced its education budget by more than 70%, with Equatorial Guinea, Gambia and Mauritania cutting education budgets by about a quarterⁱⁱ.

Funding Primary vs Secondary Education

Most African countries have a young age structure so for many the majority of educational investment is in primary schooling. Improvements in secondary education are vital to help mitigate inequality and foster economic growth, yet public investment in secondary education remains relatively low in Africa.

The imbalance between funding for primary and funding for secondary education must be tackled if the demands of primary school graduates for further education are to be met and Africa's workforce is not to remain entrapped in menial jobs that have very little payoff.

The ACPF Report shows that the priority area of investment for most governments in Africa is primary education;

- Primary education spending consumes on average some 46% of the total education budgets in Africa
- In some countries, such as Burkina Faso and Niger, primary education's share of education spending is as high as two thirds (reflecting the growing school-age population)
- For 31 countries where data is available, an average of only 29% of the national budget was spent on secondary education
- However, there are some countries, such as Angola, Botswana, Cameroon, Congo (Brazzaville) and Mauritius, where a large share of the educational budget (from 41-57%) went to secondary educationⁱⁱⁱ.

Quality of Education vs Quantitative Targets

The quality of the education being provided is crucial as it will ultimately affect competency and either increase or reduce opportunities for employment in higher-income jobs. Yet a preoccupation with achieving quantitative targets – particularly for education participation – has been at the expense of quality.

In this competitive, knowledge-based world, Africa cannot afford to lag behind as the quality of education defines the quality of human capital and determines the later ability of children to compete in an increasingly globalised employment market.

There are various indicators of education quality, from teacher's qualifications and experience, to access to, and use of, instructional materials and learning outcomes.

What African Governments need to do

- Governments should not undermine the quality of learning in their efforts to meet education participation targets
- Governments must invest in secondary education as an integral part of their educational policy and national education budgets
- Governments must tackle issues around girls education as in most countries in Africa girls have a lower completion rate than boys (for example, in Chad the chance of a girl completing primary education is half that of a boy). Special attention needs to be paid to secondary level education for girls
- There is a need to enhance budget efficiency in the sector through complementary initiatives aimed at improving the capacity of implementing agencies, enhancing transparency and ensuring community participation and oversight
- Governments need to address the school attendance among children with disabilities which is currently lower than for non-disabled children (with a difference ranging from 5% in Cameroon to under 2% in Mauritania^{iv}). Governments must strive to reduce the marginalisation these children face in accessing education.

ⁱ Bassanini A and Scarpetta S (2001). *Does Human Capital Matter for Growth in OECD Countries? Evidence from Pooled Mean-Group Estimates*, OECD Economics Department Working Papers, No 282, OECD Publishing, Paris

ⁱⁱ Based on data from UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2010); UNESCO (2009); World Development Indicators (2009); African Economic Outlook (2009)

ⁱⁱⁱ Based on data from UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2009)

^{iv} Based on data from UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) 2008.