

Policy Brief

Economic Community Of West African States (ECOWAS) Reviewing the Region's Progress in Reaching the Goals of the Second Decade of Education for Africa



Introduction

Credited with unusually high rates of economic growth over the last decade against the backdrop of a severe global financial crisis, African countries are touted as the next destination for foreign direct investment and future champions of economic vitality. Growth in the continent's sub-Saharan region is estimated to rise by 5.2 per cent in 2014.

Domestic demand, particularly the rising consumption, investment, and government spending on productive activities have been the main drivers of growth in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The ECOWAS Commission also attributes the discovery of oil and solid mineral resources in some of its Member States as significant to the region's growth rate of 6.4 per cent in 2012 compared to 5.9 per cent in 2011. Nigeria, the sub-region's largest economy, grew by 7¼ per cent in 2011 while Ghana recorded the highest growth rate of 13½ per cent in 2011. Guinea's and Togo's recorded positive GDP growth rates in 2011 would have been higher in the absence of political disturbances and insecurity in the two countries. In contrast, Côte d'Ivoire's economy shrank by close to 5 per cent in 2011 due to political uncertainty arising from the 2010 elections. Benin, on the other hand, is slowly recovering from the devastating flood in 2010, growing by 3 per cent in 2011 up from 2½ per cent in 2010. To mitigate the challenges of conflict and a volatile political setting and address its economic vulnerabilities, the ECOWAS region has to develop diversified interventions to expand opportunities for growth and a skill-base for its youthful population.

Beyond the African Union's soon-ending Second Decade of Education for Africa, education and training continues to resonate with the continental body's 50-year "Agenda 2063" strategy, placing a premium on human capacity development and youth empowerment. This brief explores ECOWAS progress in achieving the goals of the Second Decade, which stretches from 2006 to 2015, to help answer the "what next" question in the post-2015 development agenda.

Scope of the Challenge

Like in other African regions, ECOWAS countries are on different trajectories in socio-economic development due to their heterogeneity. It is clear, however, that consistent actions at the various levels are harmonising and strengthening the region's ability to tackle its challenges. Conflicts and the humanitarian crisis arising from food insecurity has become a regular feature, especially in the Sahel region. The region's inability to foster higher employment, especially for the youth, in the context of more vigorous economic activity, poses a real challenge, with observers attributing much of the civil unrest that plagues some of the countries to social exclusion affecting large fragments of the population. Policymakers are, however, actively seeking remedial solutions. The reaffirmation by the region's leaders, of their strong commitment to the Protocol on the Mechanism for Conflicts Prevention and Resolution and the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance in 2012, is a major step towards peace and regional stability.

On the social front, access to relevant and high quality education and training continues to improve since the inception of Plan in 2006. Challenges persist, however, in the areas of gender equality, supply of qualified teachers, availability of quality education statistics and quality management. This policy brief argues for a reduction in the out of school population, eliminating school dropouts and improving access to higher education levels. The recommendations provided should be underpinned by greater coordination, effective governance and improved reporting.

Key Exports – ECOWAS

- Natural Rubber : Liberia
- Uranium: Niger
- Cocoa: Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire
- Bauxite: Guinea-Conakry, Ghana and Sierra Leone
- Iron Ore: Sierra Leone, Guinea and Nigeria
- Gold: Ghana, Liberia, Guinea-Conakry, Mali, Burkina Faso and Senegal
- Oil & Gas: Nigeria, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana



Key Regional Trends

The ongoing economic transformation in ECOWAS presents enormous potential for the region's population, particularly the youth. A skilled and economically active population can have a significant impact on the fight against corruption, illiteracy, poverty and disease. In terms of supporting youth and sports, the region developed statutes of an ECOWAS Youth Empowerment and Development Fund in 2012 as well as guidelines for its operation. The ECOWAS Youth Employment Action Plan, developed in the same year, defines strategies for increasing youth's access to decent jobs in the region. And the Ministers of Education in ECOWAS adopted a regional manual for the teaching of peace education in October 2012. The number of brilliant but needy girls per country receiving scholarships of excellence in professional and technical education doubled to ten, and even more in some countries, in 2012. Despite this progress, the analysis below signals the unlikelihood of ECOWAS achieving the majority of the Second Decade of Education for Africa's goals.

Gender and Culture

In pursuit of the goal of integrating gender issues in all frameworks and initiatives, AU and the ECOWAS region formed specialized agencies, namely the International Centre for Girls' and Women's Education in Africa (CIEFFA) and the ECOWAS Gender Development Centre (EGDC) respectively. In 2004 through EGDC, a gender policy was developed and adopted. The policy seeks to promote the gender parity principle, strengthen institutional frameworks for the promotion and protection of all human rights for women and girls and actively promote the implementation of legislation to guarantee women's rights in education and other sectors

In terms of ensuring universal access, participation across all the levels of education is increasing, but is still limited and unequal. Enrolment has increased by as much as one fifth in four countries – Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Niger. As of 2012, only five countries had gross enrolment ratios lower than 90 percent. Girls' enrolment in the region remains generally lower than that of boys. Access for girls is improving, however, at a faster rate than it is for boys.

Availability of data and levels of access to the educational system worsen with the rise in educational levels. Progress at the secondary level has been much slower, with only two of the six countries reporting a gross enrolment ratio (GER) higher than 40 per cent in 2012. A huge proportion of those who should be in tertiary institutions are out of education altogether, with all but one of the reporting countries showing a single digit GER in 2012. The ECOWAS region is progressing towards the attainment of gender parity in primary education, with most countries having attained parity or having negligible differences. The highest inequality levels were in Guinea, with a gender parity index (GPI) of 0.84. At secondary level, six countries reported no meaningful improvement in 2012 from the 2006 regional GPI of 0.75.

The region's tertiary education remains a preserve of men; Togo reported highest levels of inequality, with 27 female students for every 100 male students. Guinea, Mali and Niger were marginally better with GPIs ranging from 0.34 to 0.43. There has been negligible improvement in women's participation during the period under review. Efforts to enhance women's access to institutions of tertiary learning have to be doubled. In 2006, the ECOWAS region had 14.4 million children of primary age out of school. From the limited data available, however, there are signs of decline in this group, with eight out of the nine reporting countries showing a reduction over the six-year period; Benin reported a notable decline of 60 percent. Children entering primary school in the region often have a short stay in the schooling system as most are at risk of dropping out before completing primary level. Comprehensive data are not available but among the reporting countries of Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Niger, three out of five primary students make it to the last grade; with Cape Verde being an exception with a survival rate of four out of five learners.

Education Management Information Systems (EMIS)

An important and relatively successful initiative led by the African Union has been the roll-out of a continent wide initiative on EMIS norms and standards, supported by the ADEA Working Group on Education Management and Policy Support. The initiative sets minimum levels of norms and standards to guide countries in improving their EMIS in order to contribute to regional and continental EMIS networking. The process in the ECOWAS region began following an EMIS awareness-raising workshop in Lome in 2010, which identified common challenges. The region conducted an EMIS assessment survey in the same year and identified obstacles such as weak institutional arrangement, inadequate skills and a lack of coordination among the different ministries in charge of education and training involved in the production of education statistics. The ECOWAS norms and standards were developed and adopted in 2011 and was validated by the ECOWAS ministers in charge of education and training in Abuja in October 2012. A capacity-building strategy was developed and validated in 2012 and peer reviews are poised to commence in July 2014.

In 2012, countries recorded school census return rates in excess of 96 percent, although data are limited to public institutions. Data availability in the ECOWAS region is lower than 40 per cent – one of the weakest – for the priority areas of higher and tertiary education, TVET and quality management. Availability worsened across all priority areas during the six-year period under review. The strength of EMIS systems in the region vary; Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Nigeria can be classified as having weak systems in terms of providing data for international reporting, with up to four fifths of the data required not being available. On the extreme end of the spectrum are countries such as Burkina Faso, Cape Verde and Ghana that provided more than 80 per cent of the internationally required data.

Teacher Development

The recognition of the role of teachers has led to the formation of partnerships like the African Union's Pan-African Conference on Teacher Development (PACTED), a multi-stakeholders platform that supports teacher development in Africa. Education Ministers of the African Union in 2012 adopted a roadmap of six key intervention areas for improving teacher quality and supply. PACTED carries the potential to offer a high profile dialogue space where countries can share the knowledge and lessons learned on promising policies and practices to overcome challenges and constraints.

The ECOWAS region has recorded significant levels of success in enhancing teacher supply. By 2012, the number of teachers had almost doubled in Niger, an increase of more than 88 percent in comparison to 2006. Huge gains were also recorded in Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire. Although men continue to outnumber women in the teaching profession, new entrants are still predominantly female. Levels of teacher gender inequality grow with levels of education. For example, 41 per cent of primary teachers in the region were female in 2006, compared to only 25 percent at the secondary level. Pupil-teacher ratios continue to improve. By 2012, teachers in Senegal were attending to up to eight learners less than in 2006; declines of four to five learners per teacher were also recorded in Côte d'Ivoire and Gambia. Burkina Faso reported an increased pupil-teacher ratio of 2.5. Pupil-teacher ratios at secondary level are also on the decline.

Availability of trained teachers at primary level is improving, with five out of six countries reporting a higher percentage of qualified teachers in 2012. Notable is the improvement of 15 percentage points in Senegal and a 13 percentage point increase in Cape Verde. Some member States, however, face challenges with Guinea and Sierra Leone reporting 52 per cent and 54 per cent of their staff, respectively, as not being trained. The situation at the secondary level deteriorates with lower percentages of teachers being trained. Challenges to the supply of qualified teachers include attrition, migration, poor treatment of teachers and low country training capacities. These, coupled with poor remuneration and work conditions, mean that teachers are in vulnerable employment situations and subsequently a state of precariousness.

Higher and Tertiary Education

Continental mechanisms for harmonising qualifications and establishing quality rating of higher education in Africa are far advanced. The Pan African University has been launched, and the first three campuses in Kenya, Nigeria and Cameroon have begun admitting students. Quality mechanisms at the continental level, such as the African Quality Rating Mechanism (AQRM) and the African Quality Assurance Network (AFRIQAN), are making steady progress towards improving quality in higher education. The flagship programme of the Association of African Universities (AAU), AFRIQAN, covers a relatively wide spectrum of African higher education institutions and continues to gather strength. These improvements are

achieved through vehicles such as the Revised Arusha Convention on the harmonization of degrees, grades, diplomas and other qualifications in the Africa region.

Generally, higher education in West Africa has gone through some expansion over the past six years, with increased learner access. One fourth of the 8.6 million students enrolled in tertiary institutions globally in 2006 were in the ECOWAS region. It is also worth mentioning that the highest concentrations of graduates were in Cape Verde, which reported a 166 percent increase between 2006 and 2012. Data from the three reporting countries, however, point to a situation where women's participation in tertiary education remains subdued. Less than one third of tertiary graduates in Burkina Faso and Guinea are female, with Ghana faring slightly better at 39.4 percent. It is evident that the bulk of higher and tertiary education students in the region are studying social sciences, business and law, with more than half of learners in Burkina Faso and Cape Verde, and a third in Niger, enrolled in these fields.





Technical and Vocational Education and Training

The role of skills development programmes is particularly important in African countries with rapidly increasing populations that include a high proportion of young people, or a 'youth bulge'. A third of the 30 million illiterate youths (15–24 years) in Africa are in the ECOWAS region. Young women still constitute 60 per cent of all illiterates in this age group. TVET is a viable response to the challenge of high levels of illiteracy; the provision of skills for employability should take into consideration the diverse realities of learners. The paradigm shift in the delivery of TVET towards a more holistic and inclusive concept of technical and vocational skills development that is more flexible and responsive to labour-market demands is yet to take a firm hold.

TVET programmes and capacity development are a priority for many member states and regional economic communities. A major challenge is establishing a common understanding of the term 'TVET' across countries and agencies. The general trend in the ECOWAS region is one of a growing supply of TVET teachers. For example, TVET teachers at the secondary level in Ghana increased by 281 per cent in the six years under review, while Guinea also recorded strong gains. The teaching profession, however, remains male dominated.

TVET enrolments in the region remain very low; with only 20 per cent of secondary programmes attributed to TVET in Mali in 2012, and the remaining countries having less than 10 per cent of their programmes being TVET. Women generally accounted for a minority of enrolments in TVET. This is possibly fuelled by lower participation rates of girls at the lower levels, higher levels of illiteracy and higher dropout rates. Women's participation in TVET was weakest in Ghana, at 37 per cent, in 2012

The ECOWAS commission indicated in its 2012 annual report that about 1000 TVET personnel benefited from in-country training sessions on the requirements, skills and competencies for the development and revision of TVET curriculum and instructional materials. A number of Member States have subsequently commenced actual revision of their curriculum and instructional materials, using available resources in the region and open source materials and animations on the internet.

The report adds that ECOWAS Ministers of Education adopted a feasibility study report, in 2012, on the establishment of a regional Qualifications Framework (RQF) and National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF) and a roadmap for the revitalisation of TVET in the region.

Curriculum Development, Teaching and Learning Materials

ADEA's Working Group on Non-Formal Education is currently conducting research on endogenous knowledge and know-how and looking at ways to use them as a means of promoting the integration of schools within the community. Related work is being carried out by the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN) on topics such as research into languages spoken in border regions. The ADEA Working Group on Books and Learning Materials is also identifying and disseminating innovative strategies for addressing the continuing book crisis across Africa. Some of the challenges that require attention include the falling culture of reading while technological advancements present opportunities that need to be explored such as the use of e-books.

Efforts are under way in the ECOWAS region to ensure that the curriculum reflects the uniqueness of the regional environment, characterized by ethnic diversity, poverty, the HIV & AIDS pandemic and the challenge of development. During the period under review, various initiatives on curriculum reform were undertaken in Nigeria, Rwanda and Sierra Leone. Provision of adequate teaching and learning materials is essential; the availability of mathematics textbooks varied across countries at primary level. In Burkina Faso and Mali, there were more mathematics textbooks than learners, with a pupil-textbook ratio lower than 1:1. The availability of reading textbooks was also approaching a situation where each learner had their own textbook; in Ghana, however, close to two learners shared a single reading textbook. The next frontier would be to guarantee sufficient numbers of books as well as ensuring that the learning material is appropriate and that the gender dimension permeates all the curriculum development processes.

Quality Management

This priority area registered fewer appropriately aged primary education learners enrolled in the ECOWAS region in 2006, with the figure of 65 per cent falling behind the continental average of 75 per cent. Limited data available for 2012 paints a picture of an increase in the proportion of appropriately aged children at primary level. Challenges remain in Niger with a net enrolment ratio (NER) of 63 per cent. Secondary level NER is significantly lower, with the highest ratio in 2012 reported by Cape Verde. At the regional level, male and female survival rate to the last grade of primary education is the same, although there are huge disparities between the different countries. Learners in Côte d'Ivoire and Gambia have the greatest chance to reach the last grade – four out of every five make it. In Burkina Faso, Mali and Senegal, slightly more than three learners out of every five make it to the last grade of primary education.

The general trend shows improvement in the transition from primary to secondary education, although at a very slow pace. Challenges persist with one out of every two learner's making this transition in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Niger. Cape Verde, Gambia and Ghana reported high transition rates, in excess of 88 per cent. Of concern is the situation in Gambia and Ghana where fewer learners were transitioning to secondary school in 2011 compared to 2006.

Public expenditure on education as a percentage of total government expenditure in the ECOWAS region is varied, ranging from 27 per cent to 8 per cent. The limited data available show a higher allocation to the education sector. Annual public expenditure per primary pupil ranges from USD 82 in Guinea to USD 348 in the Gambia in 2012 in terms of purchasing power parity. The spending increases in tandem with the levels of education; in some cases public expenditure per pupil at primary level is 11 per cent of what is spent on a tertiary student.

Early Childhood Development

At the continental level ADEA's Working Group on Early Childhood Development (WGECD) it has been engaged in activities to influence policies supporting integrated approaches to the development of the young child. It is providing an informal platform to enhance cooperation and collaboration among organizations that are actively engaged in ECD promotion in Africa.

Most ECOWAS member States are increasingly looking to nationalize their facilities for ECD, away from private insti-

tutions, religious groups and individuals. The ECOWAS average annual population growth rate is on the decline but remains high. Fertility rates also remain high in the region, with up to seven children per woman. The demand for ECD is projected to be high. One out of every ten children born alive in Sierra Leone will die before their first birthday. Other countries reporting high infant mortality rates are Guinea-Bissau, with a rate of 94 deaths per 1,000 births, and Mali, with 87 deaths for every 1,000 births. Despite these high figures, the region has made some progress in lowering the infant mortality rate.

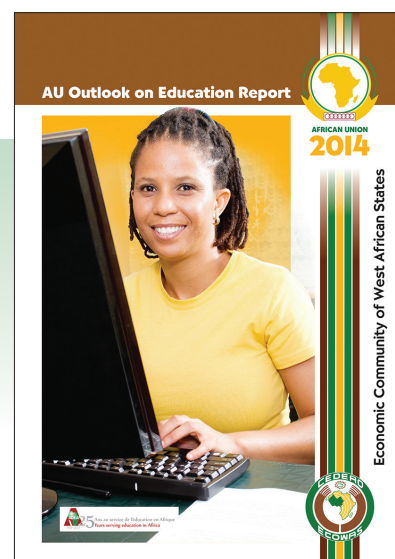
There is strong evidence to suggest that malnutrition exists in most of the ECOWAS countries. In Benin, Liberia, Niger and Sierra Leone, more than two out of every five children under the age of five suffer from moderate or severe stunting. Large sections of the under-five population are also underweight, the problem once again being most acute in Niger, with a figure of 36 percent. In addition, more than one fifth of the children in Benin, Burkina Faso, Nigeria and Sierra Leone are moderately or severely underweight.

Member States have been increasing their focus on ECD but progress is slow. Ghana has a pre-primary level GER in excess of 100 percent. The remainder of the reporting countries had GERs below 20 percent, suggesting that pre-primary education remains the preserve of a few in those countries. The region has achieved gender parity at the pre-primary level. The quality of the ECD systems in various countries is mixed with different repetition rates for grade 1, ranging from 16 percent in Côte d'Ivoire to 0.1 percent in Niger. Repetition rates have been on the decline over the five-year period under review.



Recommendations

- a) Sustain efforts to improve female participation and ensure that curriculum, teaching and learning materials foster a culture of gender equality. Put in place mechanism that promote retention of female learners from the lowest education level to address the challenge of ensuring greater numbers of women reach higher levels of education. Explore alternative means to infuse cultural values and concepts through education, including through using mother tongue or the predominant language for instruction at the foundational years.
- b) Empower education and training stakeholders to engage in and improve the conditions for quality teaching and learning through a data revolution whose foundation lies in developing and strengthening functional national and regional EMIS. Implement regional EMIS Norms and Standards and undertake regular peer reviews to reverse data gaps and ensure availability of quality education data and information for decision making and support to regional, continental and international frameworks.
- c) Countries need to develop a separate comprehensive teacher policy to form the basis for planning strategies, establish a framework for teacher professional development, and enable countries and regions to harmonize qualification frameworks and teacher careers. Institute key reforms on teacher recruitment, training and professional development through career advancement, social protection guarantees, and rights and obligations of contractual teachers. In the long term, phase out the recruitment of untrained teachers and the integration of contractual teachers into the public service. Develop separate teacher policies that improve contractual status, remuneration and conditions of service for teachers.
- d) Science and technology should form part of the core curriculum at all levels of education, including non-formal education and TVET. Increase investment in curriculum reform to promote relevance to labour markets and everyday life and enhance the provision of teaching and learning materials. Also ensure sufficient numbers of books and availability of appropriate learning materials.
- e) Link apprenticeships in the informal sector to formal education, thereby encouraging students to remain in school. Use partnerships between the public and private sectors to encourage employers to accept young people in work placements. Place special focus on the development of entrepreneurial skills in young people. Develop strategies such as continuous management training, mentoring and the provision of financial and credit services to eliminate difficulties young people face in creating and maintaining businesses.
- f) Expand access to higher and tertiary education to address the current low access levels. Institute strategies for attracting girls so as to improve female participation. Strengthen enrolment in areas of engineering, agriculture and mining.. Increase emphasis and funding on research and development, and explore alternative modes of funding means. Strengthened regional quality assurance and accreditation framework to improve comparability and quality, and mutual recognition of academic qualifications.
- g) Step up efforts to nationalize the provision of ECD, limiting reliance on private institutions, religious groups and individuals. Develop national policy frameworks guiding the implementation of ECD activities. In situations where resources are particularly scarce; consider annexing ECD centres to already established networks of basic schools. Improve ECD teacher qualifications and the development of national ECD curricula. Improve child-health services in order to improve the impact and outcomes of investments in ECD.



Please refer to
www.adeanet.org
 for the full report.

ADEA WGEMPS,
 8 Kennilworth Road, Newlands, Harare, Zimbabwe

Tel: +263 4 775 776/9

Brief Produced by ADEA WGEMPS

