



COMMUNIQUE

High-Level Conference to Address the Out-of-School Challenge in West Africa: Research Evidence to Drive Action and Investment

The Africa Union
Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS)
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Global Partnership for Education
IDRC
UNICEF
UNESCO
Ministries of Education and Ministries of Finance, Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Mali and Burkina Faso

Call for Governments in West Africa to institutionalize complementary/ alternative system for reaching out of school children and youth in Africa.

Increased funding to complementary/ alternative education with a focus on Accelerated Education Programming in West Africa including an International Fund for Out of School Children and Youth.

A high-level conference was convened on June 11 and 12, 2024 in Accra, Ghana to consult on “**Tackling the Out of School Challenge in West Africa**” which brought together experts, researchers, government officials from the Ministries of Education, academia and civil society from Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Mali and Burkina Faso. This conference built on the findings from the Accelerated Education Working Group convened in Senegal in 2022. Research and evidence point to the growing numbers of out of school children in the last five years in several countries including Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Mali and Burkina Faso. Delegates from IDRC, UNESCO, UNICEF, Accelerated Education Working Group (AEWG), Governments and civil society who are working on alternative education pathways convened to deliberate on the evidence and plan for a continental strategy to tackle the out of school challenge.

The key findings from the GPE KIX research in West Africa suggests the following:

- The Out of School Populations are increasing with Nigeria over 19 million out of school children, Ghana over 1.2 million out of school children, Burkina Faso with close to 3.5 million, Mali with over 2.3 million OOSC and Sierra Leone over 700,000 out of school children (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2023; UNICEF 2021/22)
- Demand and supply barriers to entry and completion of primary education persist. These include: poverty, socio cultural practices and beliefs along with lack of school infrastructure and trained teachers especially in rural deprived communities. The challenge of ensuring quality and basic reading competencies is another factor pushing

children out of school. All operating within fragile/conflict contexts with limited budget allocation for education.

- A proven cost-effective solution for governments in tackling the out- of- school challenge is to scale up the Accelerated education programming in the region which includes; speed schools, complementary basic education and other educational models which focus on populations of children and youth who have never attended and/or dropped out.

Research on Accelerated Education Programme (AEP) effectiveness and efficiency, supported by GPE/KIX/IDRC¹ in Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone reveal the following:-

- The AEP model reaches the most deprived and extreme poverty areas including fragile, conflict and violent affected zones in several African countries.
- Over 90% of Accelerated education learners (AEPs) transition into upper primary school after they complete the AEP courses (findings from Ghana and Nigeria).
- Learning outcomes are achieved in a shorter time frame compared to the formal system. Often, AEP beneficiaries achieve foundation literacy and numeracy within one year, skipping 4-5 years of primary schooling;
- AEP beneficiaries attain 50% competency levels in reading comprehension compared to their non-AEP counterparts in P3 or P4 classes.
- In the 4-year West Africa longitudinal study findings revealed that AEPs beneficiaries are found to stay and complete primary education due to their higher levels of learning efficiency, confidence and ability;
- AEPs beneficiaries are resilient and aspire to higher levels. Those who transition into Junior secondary school have potential to move to higher levels (e.g. senior high school and technical education) but are deterred due to socio cultural practices and economic means.
- Girls, who are often more vulnerable, and at risk of drop out are positively impacted by AEPs since they have acquired basic foundation literacy/numeracy and life skills education. Exposure to AEPs results in a shift in parental beliefs and stronger negotiation skills among girls in order to protect them from early marriage and teenage pregnancy.
- AEPs are cost effective and efficient. Evidence has shown that governments will save at least one third of the cost of formal primary school per year.

Several governments have begun putting in place institutional arrangements to run the programs with close collaboration with civil society; these include: policies on AEPs and out of school children, curriculum and legislative instruments to create agencies within the Ministry of Education. Some governments in collaboration with the private sector and civil society have developed, approved and tested AEP curriculum for country wide usage, which can be adapted across the continent.

In order for governments to reach the targets under the SDG 4, they will require the following:

1. All governments in the sub region dedicate **at least 7% to 10%** of their basic education budget to tackling the out of school crisis by investing in Accelerated Education Programming.
2. The recognition and full integration of AEP into national and educational system through appropriate policies and legislation to ensure sustainability.
3. Each government develop a road map and action plan for tackling the out of school crisis and policy on Complementary/Alternative and Accelerated Education
4. Countries should also develop and enhance partnerships with research institutions, CSOs and the private sector to support and scale up AEPs.
5. We urge all governments in collaboration with civil society to develop and test AEP curriculum as well as approve for country wide usage.

¹ <https://associatesforchange.org/accelerated-education-programme-idrc/>

6. Governments allocate an adequate amount of their teacher wage bill to complementary and accelerated education facilitators who are working in rural remote areas.
7. Governments in collaboration with education institutions ensuring community AEP facilitators transition onto distance education programs for teaching certification.
8. That communities are supported to start accelerated education programmes in collaboration with Government particularly in rural, remote and fragile areas of West Africa by selecting local facilitators and supported by government resourcing for the provision of community/facilitator training, AEP curriculum/ books and certification.

We are asking for the **international community** to ensure that:

Existing Global funds focused on improving basic education, girls' education and /or foundation learning (e.g. GPE financing) include at least a 10% allocation to complementary and accelerated education programming as a key measure for addressing the out of school challenge.

A **new global fund** under the Accelerated Education Working Group be set up by donors and development partners including private sector actors to ensure that countries can co-finance AEPs with special attention on countries with the highest rates of out of school children. A separate resource envelope should be focused on education in emergency.

Contact

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