

From closed books to open doors – West Africa's literacy challenge



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Acknowledgements

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Cover photo: Fatimata, from the village of Intadeyne in northern Mali, sits with her classmates at Menaka Secondary School. *Ami Vitale / Oxfam*

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Executive summary

The urgency of action

In 2009, the world is faced with a dire economic situation. No one hesitates to call this situation a crisis, most governments have rushed to prioritise it, and, in response, wealthy countries have pledged \$8.4 trillion in bank bailouts.

At the same time, West Africa is also in the grip of another crisis. It is having a devastating impact on economic security, job opportunities, levels of health, and the quality of democracy. It is trapping 80 million West Africans behind closed doors, unable to enjoy the living standards, educational opportunities and democratic power which are their rights. This crisis is not in the headlines, is not new, and is not being tackled with \$8.4 trillion. But it is nevertheless a reality in people's daily lives, and demanding of urgent action. It is the education and literacy crisis in West Africa. In this paper, ANCEFA, Pamoja West Africa, the African Platform for Adult Education, Oxfam International and ActionAid highlight the scale and impact of the literacy gap in West Africa, the region with the lowest literacy rates in the world, and make recommendations for action.

We are launching this paper in 2009, a year in which the Global Week of Action on education focuses on the theme of 'Youth and Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning'. We use the slogan of the Week – 'Open Books Open Doors' – as the theme of this paper. It is also the year of the sixth CONFINTEA conference on adult education, taking place in Brazil. These events invite governments to take more urgent and effective action on education, literacy and lifelong learning. This includes recognising them as fundamental rights, valuing them as key drivers of development, and supporting them with greater focus and investment. Here we present the case and propose a direction for increased action.

The severity of the situation is undeniable. In the introduction to this paper, we draw on recent statistics to show that 65 million young people and adults in West Africa – more than 40% of the population – are unable to read and write. Of these, 40 million are women; less than half of the women aged over 15 in West Africa can read or write. This is both a sign and a cause of women's continuing marginalisation and poverty. Non-literate West Africans, as well as being predominantly women, are on average poorer and often from rural areas: if we are to expand literacy, through both formal and non-formal education, we need to recognise who the non-literate people are. There has been some progress in raising literacy levels since the 1980s – but this has not been fast enough, and has been slower than in many other African countries.

Closed books – factors behind the low literacy levels

The low literacy levels in West Africa are determined both by problems in the formal school system, and by the lack of learning opportunities outside this system. We examine these factors – the reasons why books are kept closed – in chapter 1.

Firstly, not enough children are in school: there are 14 million children of primary-school age out of school in the 11 West African countries for which data is available, more than half of them girls. They are also disproportionately poor and in rural areas: this inequity in access needs to be addressed. The quality of education is also poor: the disastrous lack of trained teachers and literacy facilitators is a key factor in this. We calculate

that there is a gap of more than three quarters of a million trained teachers in West Africa's primary schools. Tackling this quality teacher gap must be an urgent priority for extending the provision and improving the quality of education in West Africa.

There is also the need for comprehensive and coherent policy frameworks to expand literacy and youth and adult education, which should be prioritised within national development plans.

Closed doors – the impact of low literacy levels

The impact of not being literate is far-reaching: for individuals, and for their communities and countries. In chapter 2, we examine these 'closed doors' which are, in turn, kept shut by the closed books. We look at well-being and economic security, the ability to join the digital society, and political participation.

In terms of well-being, education and literacy levels have a dramatic impact on individual income and on national economic growth, on improving health outcomes, and reducing child mortality. In Senegal, Niger, and Nigeria, for example, mortality rates for the children of mothers with secondary education were half or less those for children with uneducated mothers. Equitably provided education and learning opportunities reduce inequality. An equitable education strategy also makes better economic sense – raising average literacy levels is more closely linked to increasing economic growth than increasing the proportion of very highly skilled people.

Moreover, in today's information society, literacy is key to unlocking the opportunities of the digital society. Access to the internet and other information and communication technologies is commonly recognised as an important route out of poverty – for example by allowing farmers and traders better access to market information, or enabling easier transfer of money and credit. West Africa has extremely low internet penetration rates, and although rates of cell phone use are higher, recent studies show that pervasive illiteracy prevents many people – particularly women – from accessing the full development potential of these technologies.

Crucially, improving education and literacy rates are also central to improving governance, democracy and the quality of political engagement. We cite research from West Africa and other African regions showing that higher education levels breed greater respect for democracy. Literacy also enables individuals to engage meaningfully in the political process, claiming their rights and holding governments to account.

Opening doors? – government and donor commitment

Behind many of the immediate obstacles is the failure to focus on and invest in lifelong learning on the scale needed. In chapter 3, we examine the commitment of West Africa's governments and donors to opening the door to literacy.

All African governments have a constitutional commitment to education, and include it in their national development plans. Many have stated that they put a clear priority on education, and there has been some visible progress in expanding education and extending literacy. However, education is often narrowly understood: in some cases, the guarantees are only of formal, childhood education, not of youth and adult literacy, let alone lifelong education more broadly.

Moreover, many activists are concerned that claims of commitment are not matched by actions and effective investment. Financing does not meet West Africa's needs, nor its commitments: no West African government is

meeting the target of spending at least 7% of GDP on education, to which Africa's education ministers agreed a decade ago. Funding for literacy and non-formal education falls far short of the targets established by international organisations. Many countries still lack coordinated or high-profile literacy strategies.

There is also a need for donors to do more: even if government investment is greatly stepped up, the financing gap will still be huge. But donor finance for education in West Africa is insufficient and is largely focused on just three countries out of the 15 in ECOWAS. Currently, there is a focus on primary education: this is important, but given West Africa's youth and adult literacy crisis, donors must be careful not to exclude this from support. Currently, not enough donor finance goes through the public system, even though governments need funds given in this way in order to pay the ongoing training and salary costs involved in tackling the teacher crisis.

Open books & open doors! – recommendations for action

There is action that can be taken now to address this crisis, in recognition of citizens' rights, and the value of education to West Africa's development. In chapter 4, we present recommendations to West Africa's governments, donors, and civil society.

- Firstly, there is a need for **policy coherence and focus**: this includes a recommendation that ECOWAS take up the issue of education and lifelong learning as a priority on which to encourage and monitor national progress, as well as recommending that all West Africa's governments adopt national literacy strategies as central to national development plans.
- Putting these plans into place requires **financing**: donors must step up financing, giving West Africa its fair share of the \$16 billion in external financing required to achieve Education For All, and giving a greater share of funding as budget support.
- Most specifically, governments and donors must support a vigorous effort to dramatically increase the numbers and motivation of **teachers and literacy facilitators**, through increases in recruitment, training and pay, and professionalisation of the status of literacy facilitators.

This is not an easy challenge to deal with: it will take both investment and political will. But achieving the Education For All agenda in West Africa should not be seen as an additional or competing cost to tackling West Africa's development and governance challenges. On the contrary, it must be seen as fundamental to solving them. For just a tiny fraction of the amount now being spent on bailing out banks, tens of millions of West Africans could learn to read and write, opening the door to more healthy, fulfilled, comfortable lives and more equal, successful and stable societies.

Introduction: a picture of literacy in West Africa¹

“Literacy is, finally, the road to human progress.”
Kofi Annan, 1997

Rights denied

All governments and international bodies recognise that education is a fundamental right. Yet literacy levels in West Africa are catastrophically low. Official figures (which may be underestimated) reveal that there are more than 65 million non-literate adults in West Africa, of whom 40 million are women. This is more than 40% of the region’s adult population, and more than 50% of the female adult population. Of the 15 countries that make up the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), three – Ghana, Nigeria, and the tiny island state of Cape Verde – have populations which are at least two thirds literate. Of the rest, only one (Liberia) has recorded literacy rates over 50%, whilst in four – Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea and Niger – fewer than 30% of all adults, and fewer than 20% of women, can read and write.²

These literacy rates are very low, even in comparison to other very poor countries. Of the 10 countries with the lowest recorded adult (15 and over) literacy rates in the world, seven are in West Africa: Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Niger, Sierra Leone, Benin, and Senegal.³ These countries have literacy rates much lower than countries such as Burundi, Malawi, Timor Leste, Nepal and Uganda, where GDP per capita is similar or even lower. Of the seven countries in the world whose GDP per capita is over \$1000 but where literacy rates are below 50%, six are in West Africa (and the seventh is neighbouring Chad).⁴

West Africa has the lowest literacy rates in the world.

This is not to say that these West African countries are not extremely poor, nor to deny that rates of poverty and rates of illiteracy are closely linked. But it does indicate the scale of the challenge in West Africa. This is not a new situation: West Africa is still building its way up from the incredibly low levels of education which persisted right up until the 1990s.⁵ West Africa has had, and still has, particularly daunting challenges to overcome, which must be tackled with particular energy.

We are launching this paper during the Global Week of Action on education in April 2009, which focuses on the theme of ‘Youth and Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning’. We are also launching it in anticipation of the sixth CONFINTEA conference on adult education, taking place in Brazil in May 2009. These events invite governments to take more urgent and effective action on education, literacy and lifelong learning. This includes recognising them as fundamental rights, valuing them as key drivers of development, and supporting them with greater focus and investment.

Slow progress

West African countries overall have been making progress since the 1990s, with literacy rates creeping or even climbing up. This shows in the fact that literacy rates are higher among younger people (aged 15 to 24) than in adults overall (aged 15 to 49). Cape Verde has achieved 97% literacy in young people, and in Nigeria, Ghana and Togo at least three quarters of young people can read and write.

But progress has not been as fast as it might have been: in the West African countries for which the data is available, the rate of improvement in

literacy rates has been less marked than in Malawi, Tanzania and Uganda – all of which had higher literacy rates to start with. Moreover, in the countries with the worst literacy rates (and in Senegal), progress is slowest, with the comparative advantage among young people less marked. This indicates that the formal school system in these countries is not doing its part in educating the younger generation. In Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger still fewer than three in ten young women aged 15 to 24 can read and write. Not one of the nine countries with literacy rates below 50% in 2000-2006 is expected to reach 50% literacy by 2015.⁶

Table 1: Rates and numbers of non-literate young people and adults in West Africa

| | Young people & adults aged 15 to 49 | | | | Young people aged 15 to 24 | | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|
| | Total literacy rate | Male literacy rate | Female literacy rate | Number of non-literate people | Total literacy rate | Male literacy rate | Female literacy rate | Number of non-literate people |
| Benin | 40% | 52% | 27% | 2.96 million | 51% | 63% | 40% | 870,000 |
| Burkina Faso | 26% | 34% | 18% | 5.74 million | 34% | 40% | 28% | 1 million |
| Cape Verde | 83% | 89% | 78% | 54,000 | 97% | 96% | 98% | 4,000 |
| Côte D'Ivoire | 49% | 61% | 39% | 5.54 million | 61% | 71% | 52% | 1.6 million |
| Ghana | 64% | 71% | 57% | 5.05 million | 77% | 79% | 75% | 1.1 million |
| Guinea | 29% | 43% | 18% | 3.62 million | 47% | 59% | 34% | 967,000 |
| Liberia | 54% | 60% | 49% | 865,000 | 70% | 67% | 74% | 212,000 |
| Mali | 23% | 31% | 16% | 4.83 million | 29% | 36% | 22% | 1.7 million |
| Niger | 30% | 44% | 16% | 5.01 million | 38% | 53% | 25% | 1.5 million |
| Nigeria | 71% | 76% | 63% | 23.5 million | 86% | 88% | 84% | 4.2 million |
| Senegal | 42% | 53% | 32% | 4.07 million | 51% | 58% | 43% | 1.2 million |
| Sierra Leone | 37% | 49% | 26% | 2.07 million | 52% | 63% | 42% | 522,000 |
| Togo | 53% | 69% | 38% | 1.71 million | 74% | 84% | 64% | 346,000 |
| West Africa* | 58% | 67% | 49% | 65 million | 71% | 76% | 67% | 16 million |

Meeting the challenge

Tackling the literacy crisis requires serious focus on and investment in both formal education – the school system – and non-formal education like adult literacy programmes and youth training centres. Realising the right to universal education will require a sea change in the scale and quality of West Africa's schools, where still only a minority of students receive even six years of primary education, which is often of poor quality. But focusing on schools alone ignores the vast numbers of young people and adults who have missed out on the formal system, and who still have a right to literacy and to the good health, social and economic opportunities and political participation that literacy can unlock for them. The lack of a dramatic improvement in literacy among young people emphasises both that not enough is being done in schools, and that provision outside school is called for.

40 million adult women in West Africa cannot read or write.

Tackling the challenge effectively also requires recognition of who the non-literate people in West Africa are: they are more likely to be women and more likely to be poor. Often, they live in rural areas; nomadic populations – who are a significant proportion of the population in West Africa, but are often not reached by formal education – are particularly vulnerable to illiteracy.⁷ Strategies to improve education levels and standards and to raise adult literacy levels must be designed to reach out to these excluded groups.



Makata Walett Magalla, aged 20, attends an adult literacy class in Zigberi, Burkina Faso, with one of her two children.

“The literacy classes started in March. I never learned to read and write when I was younger, so this was a second chance. I wanted to learn how to read and write for so many reasons: to read the letters I receive from relatives or friends, to read signs when I am in the town, to know how to count when I’m at the market, to read instructions on medicine bottles. For me, the most rewarding thing about being literate will be the ability to read without someone else’s help.”

Photo: Ami Vitale / Oxfam

1. Closed books: factors behind West Africa's literacy rates

"The most important part of any education is the person standing in front of the classroom. It's time to treat teaching like the profession that it is."
Barack Obama, 2007

1.1 Poor access to formal education

These literacy figures are not surprising when we look at access to education in West Africa. In the 11 West African countries for which official data is available,⁸ there are 14 million children of primary school age who are not at school: nearly 8 million of them are girls. This is a huge proportion of the children missing out on school in Africa: it means that 40% of the total number of children out of school in all the 47 countries of sub-Saharan Africa are in these 11 West African countries. Nigeria – Africa's most populous country – accounts for more than half of this, but the relatively sparsely populated Sahelian countries of Niger and Burkina Faso also have more than a million children out of school each, and Mali has almost that many.⁹

14 million children are out of primary school in West Africa. Nearly 8 million of them are girls.

Moreover, drop-out rates are high: in Benin, Niger, Senegal and Burkina Faso, for example, fewer than 1 in 4 children who start primary school actually complete it,¹⁰ generally, the figures are lower for girls. Lack of trained teachers, materials and infrastructure all impact both on the quality of education, and on attendance rates.

Barriers are particularly high for girls. Perceptions of women's roles and the extremely high number of early marriages in West Africa put obstacles in the way of girls' education.¹¹ Sexual harassment in schools or a lack of separate lavatories for girls also discourage attendance.¹² Poorer children are also less likely to attend school.¹³ Education policies need to address all these issues of inequity in access if they are to achieve universal education.



Children learning to read and write at Zigberi school, Burkina Faso.

Photo: Ami Vitale / Oxfam

1.2 The teacher crisis

Those children who do attend primary school often get little out of it. A crucial factor is that there are far from enough teachers. Seven of the 15 ECOWAS countries report that they have enough primary school teachers

to meet the recommended level of one teacher to every 40 primary school pupils.¹⁴ But this drops to only two countries (Cape Verde and Senegal) if only trained teachers are counted.¹⁵ The headline figures are likely to underestimate the problem, since they do not take into account the fact that teachers are unevenly distributed within countries, that teachers are so badly paid that many take time out of the classroom to supplement their income,¹⁶ and that many countries have unreliable statistics which include non-existent teachers.¹⁷ But even without taking these factors into account, the official figures indicate a big hole in the teaching force. This gets bigger if we are aiming to provide also for the 14 million children currently out of school. To meet the needs of all these children, there was a gap of more than three quarters of a million trained teachers in West Africa in 2006.¹⁸

Table 2: Gap in trained primary school teachers in West Africa, 2006*

| | Primary pupils + children out of school | Trained primary school teachers in schools | Trained primary teachers needed | Trained teacher gap |
|----------------------|---|--|---------------------------------|----------------------|
| Benin | 1.6 million | 16,000 | 40,025 | 24,025 |
| Burkina Faso | 2.6 million | 26,100 | 65,150 | 39,050 |
| Cape Verde | 90,000 | 2,430 | 2,250 | 0 |
| Côte D'Ivoire | 3 million | 46,000 (if all trained) | 74,825 | 28,825 ¹⁹ |
| Gambia | 272,000 | 3,800 | 6,800 | 3,000 |
| Ghana | 4.3 million | 56,050 | 108,325 | 52,275 |
| Guinea | 1.6 million | 19,040 | 41,175 | 22,135 |
| Liberia | 894,000 | 11,200 | 22,350 | 11,150 |
| Mali | 2.4 million | 12,180 | 60,075 | 47,895 |
| Niger | 2.4 million | 25,760 | 59,300 | 33,540 |
| Nigeria | 30.4 million | 299,500 | 759,100 | 459,600 |
| Senegal | 2 million | 38,000 | 49,650 | 11,650 |
| Sierra Leone | 1.3 million | 14,700 | 33,050 | 18,350 |
| Togo | 1.2 million | 10,360 | 30,700 | 20,340 |
| West Africa* | 54 million | 581,120 | 1.35 million | 771,835 |

Source: K. Watkins (2008) EFA Global Monitoring Report 2009, UNESCO; Liberia PRSP 2008-2013, Government of Liberia; Mali Annuaire Scolaire, Government of Mali.²⁰ Excludes Guinea Bissau (no data)

There is a particular lack of female teachers: whilst in Benin and Cape Verde most primary school teachers are women, and in Nigeria there is an even balance, in the rest of West Africa they are in the minority. In two thirds of countries, they make up 30% or less of the primary school teaching force. This has implications for primary education, particularly for girls: studies have shown that girls are more likely to stay in a school which has female teachers, and education statistics from Mali show that retention levels overall are higher when there are women teachers.²¹

West Africa is missing more than 750,000 trained primary school teachers.

Those teachers who are in place have to manage large classes with limited training, few or no materials, and poor pay. Efforts to increase the number of teachers in West African countries have often been at the expense of training and conditions of service. In Mali, for example, the total days of training which primary school teachers have had averages just five days per teacher.²² In Liberia, less than one quarter of teachers in public primary schools are qualified.²³ Pay, status, and the attractiveness of the teaching profession have suffered: it is hard to recruit qualified candidates, and those who do enter teaching are often looking for a route out of the profession.²⁴ A World Bank study in 2007 reported that teaching conditions in Mali, Senegal and Burkina Faso had "deteriorated drastically".²⁵ Serious

investment in recruiting, training and properly paying teachers is needed if education for all is to be anything more than a slogan.

1.3 Language and content of education

Many education coalitions in West Africa also point to the language of instruction in formal education as often being a barrier to meaningful education and literacy. (In some other African countries where literacy levels are higher – such as Malawi, Tanzania and Rwanda, which have literacy levels of 65% or more – national languages are officially used as the language of instruction in at least initial primary education.) In West Africa, the picture is mixed. Many countries use colonial languages (French, Portuguese or English) for all primary education: exceptions include Nigeria (where national languages are in use for the first three years), and Burkina Faso and Togo (which have a mixed language system). Ghana – which, with Nigeria and Cape Verde has one of the highest literacy rates in the sub-region – used national languages for the first three years of primary education until 2003.

In Niger and Mali, where only a minority speak French but it is nonetheless the language of instruction for all education, activists are calling for mother-tongue instruction as an important step in improving both the quality and relevance of education. In Mali, a new curriculum which – among other innovations – involved national languages as the medium of instruction for early primary education was piloted, but without proper teacher training or materials. It was suspended after only two years. Introducing national language teaching requires both a broad debate involving teachers and parents, and well-supported implementation. Youth and adult literacy programmes are more likely to use national languages, or offer a choice or progression between these and either French or English.²⁶

Education at all levels – child, youth and adult – must also be relevant in content as well as in medium of instruction. This is crucial to holding the learner's attention, and also to unlocking the wider benefits of education in their lives.²⁷ Education, from primary level on, should include life-skills which can build understanding of citizenship, of gender equality, and of key health issues such as reproductive health and HIV and AIDS. A number of West African civil society organisations – including One World in Nigeria, IEP in Mali, VIE in Niger, and many others – have successfully piloted education programmes in national language, including life-skills including citizenship education. These experiences should be used as models.

1.4 A lack of opportunities for lifelong learning

For children and adults who miss out on formal schooling – or attend without progressing to meaningful learning – there are limited other options. Not only are the resources allocated to youth and adult literacy extremely limited, but also there is often a gap between national development and education policies and their practical implementation.

An example of this is the payment of literacy facilitators in Mali: the Non-Formal Education policy introduced since 2007 says they should be paid a minimum of 25,000 CFA (€38, or \$50) a month. This is comparable to the government subsidy to community school primary teachers, though still far lower than teachers in publicly run schools. But in practice, it is hardly ever the case that even this basic wage is paid.

This is indicative of broader problems with literacy facilitators, which are similar to those seen with respect to primary school teachers: limited numbers, poor training, and limited motivation to join the profession. For

example, a study of non-formal education in Senegal shows that an additional 1,900 facilitators is needed between 2008 and 2010. A 2005 Global Campaign for Education study of 67 high quality literacy programmes, of which just under half were in Africa, found that 90% of the programmes were paying facilitators less than half the standard wage of primary school teachers – and in around a quarter of cases, it was less than a quarter of the wage.²⁸ In many countries, literacy facilitators are effectively volunteers, with their reward limited to token payments from NGOs, if they are lucky.

At national and regional level, there is a lack of systematic data on the numbers, qualifications and pay of literacy facilitators: this information gap needs to be addressed if the situation is to be improved. A recent survey by the African Platform for Adult Education found that no Africa countries reported a policy for training adult educators.

Governments need to take responsibility for expanding provision of free youth and adult literacy training, with professional facilitators, as part of a focused and well-coordinated national strategy. This must be in consultation with civil society, including non-governmental organisations that currently provide the bulk of services. The Global Campaign for Education has developed a set of international benchmarks for successful youth and adult literacy programmes, which can provide a starting point for debate and development of such strategies.²⁹ Benchmarks include spending, pay and conditions of facilitators, policy coordination, and methods. The severe funding constraints, compared to the scale of the challenge, limits what can be achieved in West Africa. But even within those constraints, much more can be done to provide good quality literacy training, particularly through a focus on trainers. Governments need to prioritise and coordinate these strategies.



Mary N. Kartee teaching at C. W. Brumskine Elementary School in Monrovia, Liberia, using methods learned in recent teacher training.

The education system suffered hugely as a result of Liberia's war. Schools and teacher training institutions closed, teaching materials were looted, school buildings were damaged, students and teachers were displaced from their homes and the remaining teachers stopped being paid.

Since the war, there has been a

major effort to get children back into school: many students are over-age for primary school and suffer the effects of a brutal war in which many fought as child soldiers. The teaching profession was once highly regarded, but since the war it has been a struggle to recruit new teachers or retain existing staff: benefits and conditions are worsening, and many teachers don't get their salaries – just \$50 a month – on time, if at all. The local government education authority in the capital city, Monrovia, is carrying out teacher training programmes with the support of international organisations; some teachers had never had any training before.

“Before the training we used to write lots of notes on the blackboard. Now we use less notes and ask the children to interact, and they learn faster. It makes a difference. The psychology has helped me a lot – to be tolerant and know how to deal with students. Liberian children, because of the war, are 'grown up' children. Many were forced to use a gun and fight. The kids are very hard but I have to be patient. The children face a lot of problems.”

Photo: Aubrey Wade / Oxfam GB

2. Closed doors – the impact of illiteracy in West Africa

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

Nelson Mandela

2.1 A growing divide?

Education and literacy are widely accepted to be not only basic human rights in themselves, but also ‘enabling rights’, in that getting a decent education and being able to read and write enable people to realise many other rights and social goods. These include better health, higher incomes and more secure livelihoods, and greater participation in community and public life.³⁰

This is all the more true given that, at a global level, we live in what is becoming ever more an “information society”. Those who can access and analyse information are considerably better placed to improve their own position, and that of their community.

The flip side of this is that illiteracy closes the door to these benefits: this is true not just for individuals, but also for communities or whole countries with largely uneducated and non-literate populations. The danger for West Africa is that a failure to deal actively and urgently with its illiteracy crisis will contribute to a stark and growing gulf between its citizens (female and male, poor and better-off), between nations, and between the region as a whole and other regions which, whilst still having a huge mountain to climb, are doing comparatively better at educating their populations. Illiteracy is shutting vast swathes of the West African population out of income generation, out of social mobility, out of a development process increasingly driven by information and communications technology, and out of meaningful participation in democracy.

2.2 Economic and social exclusion

The impact of education and literacy on people’s material well-being is dramatic. A wealth of studies has shown the huge social and economic benefits of adults – particularly women – having gone to school as children or received adult education. These benefits are felt by themselves, by their children, and by their families, communities and countries.³¹

Levels of schooling and levels of literacy have a systematic impact both on national income and on individuals’ incomes. Each additional year of school raises individual incomes by, on average, 10%, with the effects being greater in poor countries and for women.³² At the national level, over time, investment in education and skills training is three times as important to economic growth as investment in physical infrastructure.³³ Education is a right, a door to other opportunities and choices, and an investment with real returns for individuals and nations.

Each year of education raises incomes by at least 10%.

Literacy and education levels are also important factors in improving health standards; women’s literacy is particularly important for their children and families. Both skills – being able to read and understand nutritional and health information, for instance on medicine bottles – and empowerment – having the confidence to deal with health professionals and request treatment – play a part in this. The children of educated mothers are more likely to be healthy and better fed, and to survive beyond five years old.³⁴ In Senegal, Niger, and Nigeria, for example, the mortality rates of children of

mothers with secondary education were half or less those of children with uneducated mothers.³⁵ Educated African women are three to five times as likely to know basic information about HIV and AIDS as non-literate women.³⁶

2.3 Inequality

Literacy and education are also strategies to combat inequality – as long as they are provided equitably. If education is to unlock the potential of all individuals, it needs to be available to all. Inequality is deepened by education systems that are not accessible to all: high levels of inequality in educational levels are very closely linked to levels of inequality in income.³⁷ Moreover, this is not just a matter of justice for individuals: there is also evidence that average levels of literacy are a better indicator of a country's economic growth than the proportion of the population with very high literacy scores.³⁸ That is, if West African countries want to raise their economic growth, they are better off focusing on raising the educational levels of their whole populations, rather than on educating a small proportion to a very high standard.

There is still a long way to go in dealing with inequality in educational outcomes – and thus allowing education to tackle inequality. In every West African country, literacy rates for men are higher than for women – this creates a huge barrier to women gaining equal control over assets and decision-making. It is encouraging that the countries doing best in raising literacy levels tend also to be narrowing the gender gap: in Nigeria and Ghana, for example, the literacy gap among young people aged 15 to 24 is just 4 percentage points, and in Cape Verde, young women's literacy rate is higher than that of young men (suggesting perhaps a need to look at boys' education). However, in Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Niger and Sierra Leone, the gender gap in literacy among young people is still huge – 20 percentage points or more – indicating that much more needs to be done to focus strategies on girls' and women's education and unlock literacy for young women as a door to greater equality.³⁹



Miadda Sumo, 19, feeds her baby daughter Patricia during a night school class for women who missed out on primary education, at Quemlin Toto Elementary School, Bong County, Liberia.

Photo: Aubrey Wade / Oxfam GB

2.4 Digital exclusion

A statement from the President of the United Nations ECOSOC to a 2001 conference on the digital divide pointed out that limited access to the internet in most developing countries meant that “the gap between the developed and developing countries is being further aggravated and it holds ominous consequences for the developing countries including increases in poverty, unemployment and under-development levels.” He

went on to point to tension and instability at national and international level as some of these possible 'ominous consequences'.

Access to the internet and other information and communication technologies, on the other hand, is commonly recognised as an important route out of poverty – for example by allowing farmers and traders better access to market information, or enabling easier transfer of money and credit.⁴⁰ Efforts to overcome the digital divide and harness these benefits frequently focus on the provision of and access to hardware. But having the basic literacy skills is also a necessary requirement for broader use of these tools.

Sierra Leone, Niger and Mali have amongst the world's lowest rates of internet use.

Internet penetration is low in West Africa. Only Benin and Togo have rates of internet subscriptions which are above average for low-income countries. Sierra Leone and Niger, meanwhile, have reported levels of two subscriptions per 1,000 people, a level equal to that in Burma. (Only Tajikistan has a lower level.) There is considerable attention paid to the fact that countries with poor civil and political rights records, such as China, Cuba or Uzbekistan, severely limit access to the internet – and thus to the information that citizens can share or find through it. In West Africa (and in many other states), it is poverty and illiteracy that perform this censorship function. In Cuba, for example, it only became legal to buy home computers in May 2008, and the US trade embargo prevents Cubans from accessing the internet via under-sea cables⁴¹: yet even so, the level of internet penetration in 2005 was more than three times that in Sierra Leone, Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali or Guinea.⁴² Of course, lack of infrastructure, electricity and disposable income pose enormous barriers to connecting to the internet for most Africans. But we must not lose sight of the fact that even if these factors were put in place, the lack of basic reading and writing skills would still leave online information and opportunities far out of the reach of most West Africans.



Evelyn Momoh learns to type at the girls' club at RS Caulfield Elementary School, Margibi County, Liberia, on typewriters donated by the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE).

Credit: Aubrey Wade / Oxfam GB

Cellular phones, meanwhile, have much greater penetration in West Africa: in most countries cell phone subscription rates are between six and ten times the rate for landline telephones – and it is 15 times the landline rate in Nigeria.⁴³ Cellular phones are far cheaper than computer hardware, and can be charged up at stands run by cell phone companies or local entrepreneurs. But their use and usefulness in West Africa is limited because most people cannot even send or read simple text messages. A study in Nigeria, for instance, found that poor rural women were hardly using SMS messages – the cheapest feature of the phone – because they were illiterate.⁴⁴ This missed opportunity will become even more glaring as cell phones are increasingly able to access online text information.

These kinds of technologies could play a significant role in empowering women and helping them to establish their own social and business networks. Recent research on ICT use by women in Africa documents women using mobile phones to contact suppliers and clients, send and receive money as credit, and report domestic violence. But a continuing gender gap in literacy not only shuts women off from these opportunities, it risks exacerbating inequalities and women's disempowerment: the same study found that non-literate women were often dependent on their husbands and others to send or receive text messages, and even to make calls on cellular phones.⁴⁵

Civil society movements have often complained that the painful brunt of globalisation is borne by poorer countries and individuals: West African governments must do much more to ensure that a lack of basic literacy skills does not also put some of the benefits of globalisation far out of reach of most of their citizens.

2.5 Political exclusion

If we care about democracy, we have to care about literacy. Literacy is taken by many experts to a pre-condition of meaningful democracy. Literacy and education are the means through which people can exercise their democratic rights, and at the aggregate level, an educated population will show stronger support for democracy as a political system. A recent study of 18 African countries (including six in West Africa⁴⁶) found that education levels were by far the most important factor in determining levels of support for democracy and rejection of non-democratic alternatives.⁴⁷

Literacy is also crucial to individual political empowerment. The widely-used Reflect approach to literacy and social change – promoted in West Africa by the Pamoja West Africa network – is rooted firmly in this understanding of literacy as the basis of inclusion and participation. Literacy is understood as helping ordinary people to play a real and effective part in the economic, social, political and cultural life of their communities.

Political action by non-literate people is still possible: community radio is used to disseminate information, and party symbols (as well as names) are widely used on voter ballots in West Africa. However, in some countries literacy is a formal requirement for standing for elected office – for instance in Sierra Leone, where it therefore rules out almost two thirds of all women. It is clearly a barrier to meaningful understanding of and engagement with government and politics in West Africa.



Girls in West Point, Monrovia, Liberia, read a poster giving information about sexual exploitation and abuse.

Photo: Aubrey Wade / Oxfam GB

Beyond formal participation in elections – whether as a voter or candidate – access to information is also a crucial part of citizens claiming their rights and holding their governments to account. Some West African countries have a constitutional right to freedom of information, though none as yet has freedom of information legislation. The strongest moves towards such legislation are in Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia and Sierra Leone.⁴⁸ However, without a citizenry with the literacy skills to read and understand budgets,

government statements, or media reports, information could be available without being accessible. This goes for many formal measures of governance: elections, audits, institutional structures – whilst necessary – cannot bring about meaningful democracy unless the people are able to get and share information and comment.

This is all the more crucial given the current drive towards decentralisation. This means that it is local authorities in Sierra Leone, Mali, Ghana and other countries across the region who have responsibility for delivering essential services such as education, healthcare, water and sanitation, and basic infrastructure. Yet in many cases even mayors, let alone other representatives, lack the basic literacy and numeracy skills that are the basic tools of planning, fundraising, and reporting.⁴⁹ There is a clear disconnect in driving forward a decentralised, participatory form of governance without ensuring that citizens have even the basic tools to participate. This kind of situation can make it easier for established, feudal and patriarchal power bases to entrench their power and advantage. There is also a danger of exacerbating inequality: if control of services – including education – is devolved to community level without ensuring that all communities have the skills and tools to manage these services, then there is a likelihood that the more poorly educated communities will be left still further behind.

For literacy to enable political engagement, the government must not only ensure that the population can read and write, but also that appropriate written information is available and accessible to them. In Mali, for example, only 1% of the documents in the national library are available in national languages.⁵⁰ Official documents must be produced in languages the people can understand, and not a colonial language which is not understood or read by most.

More broadly, reading and writing skills are fundamental to the full range of 'literacies' which many West African non-governmental organisations and social movements want to support citizens to develop. These include: budget literacy to understand government commitments and spending; rights literacy to understand and claim their constitutional and universal rights; and health literacy to understand health and hygiene practices, and the treatment they can and should receive when sick.



Oumar Ag Watanofane is head of the parents association at Intadeyne School in northern Mali.

"When I was a child, I went to primary school for a week. I used to be ashamed that I couldn't read or write. The adult literacy classes were a second chance that I never dreamed I would get. It was important for me to be literate and numerate – it has an impact on everything I do. When I go to the market to sell or buy animals, for instance, I am able to

negotiate better and know that I'm not being cheated when people count out money to me. And I can now send letters to my relatives. Getting even a basic education has had wider benefits. I have developed my mind, the way I think, and I have more confidence. I can express my point of view. I now feel that I can look at any problems I have and find ways to solve them."

Credit: Ami Vitale / Oxfam

3. Opening doors? – government and donor commitment

“Literacy is a basic right and so the lead responsibility to meet that right has to be with the government. Adult literacy provision cannot, and should not, depend on charity.”

UNESCO, 1996

3.1 Rights to education

Many West African countries have seen strong government statements on education in the last two decades. There has also been some action – which has resulted in visible progress. However, the scale of the challenge demands far more, and many activists are concerned about the continuing gap between politicians’ willingness to talk about the challenge of education and literacy, and the political will to take action on it.

All West African countries enshrine some kind of constitutional right to education, which is usually focused on basic education. In three countries – Gambia, Ghana and Mali – this extends to a constitutional guarantee of free and compulsory education, at least at primary level.⁵¹ Eight countries – Cape Verde, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone – specify constitutional guarantees on literacy, whether as a citizen right or a state duty. This is expressed most strongly in Liberia, in Guinea Bissau (where elimination of literacy is stated to be the “fundamental task” of the state) and in Nigeria and Sierra Leone.⁵² With the exception of Sierra Leone (where the constitution was introduced in 2002, after the end of the civil war), these countries with a constitutional commitment to literacy tend to be those with higher literacy rates – indicating that this statement of political commitment may impact on outcomes.

3.2. Government policy focus

Of course, governments can still prioritise education and literacy without a constitutional right; and, in turn, such rights mean little without efforts to realise them. All West Africa’s national development plans (Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, PRSP, or equivalent) include an element on education. In most cases, it is included subsequent to interventions around increasing private sector capacity, improving the business environment or promoting trade. Whilst this is not formally intended as a statement of priority, it does suggest that education is seen as a secondary means to combat poverty and drive development. Nigeria is arguably one exception in clearly prioritising education.

Literacy does not come out as a high priority across the board. Some national development plans (such as Mali’s – which has the worst literacy statistics in the world) do not mention it at all unless to include literacy rates as an indicator to be measured. Others, such as Benin and Liberia, spell out policies for youth and adult literacy alongside those in formal education. More countries are now adopting Non-Formal Education policies. Benin and Burkina Faso now have a strong policy framework, and Mali – despite leaving literacy out of its PRSP – has put in place a policy since 2007. Such policies should include a real assessment of needs, for instance through a national literacy survey. Plans and policies also have a tendency to be limited in scope, fragmented, or isolated from broader education and development policies: they must be comprehensive, and prioritised within overall national development plans. They can take the International Benchmarks on adult literacy, developed by GCE, as a starting point.

3.2 Government spending

Education costs money. Education tends to be the biggest item in African government budgets, and West Africa is not an exception. However, spending still falls short both of West Africa's needs, and of the spending commitments that African Ministers of Education made a decade ago. In their Regional Framework For Action – agreed as part of the Dakar Framework for Action adopted in 2000 – African ministers stated that their governments should spend 7% of GDP on education by 2005, and 9% by 2010.⁵³ By 2006, no West African government was meeting even the 2005 target. The best performers are Cape Verde, which has the best education and literacy rates and which is spending 6% of GDP; and Ghana, another comparative high performer in education, which is spending 5.5% of GDP on education. Reported spending in other ECOWAS countries ranges between 1.7% of GDP in Guinea, to 5% of GDP in Senegal. The Global Campaign for Education (GCE) also calls on governments to spend 20% of their budgets on education.⁵⁴ Only Senegal is reporting spending that meets this target. All West African governments need to step up.

Table 3: Reported government spending on education, 2006

| | Education spending as a proportion of GDP | Education spending as a proportion of government spending | Adult literacy rate |
|----------------------|---|---|---------------------|
| EFA target | 7 to 9 | 20 | 100% |
| Benin | 4.4 | 17 | 40% |
| Burkina Faso | 4.2 | 15 | 26% |
| Cape Verde | 6.6 | 16 | 83% |
| Côte D'Ivoire | 2.5 | 8 | 49% |
| Ghana | 5.5 | <i>no data</i> | 64% |
| Guinea | 1.7 | <i>no data</i> | 29% |
| Mali | 4.4 | 17 | 23% |
| Niger | 3.3 | 18 | 30% |
| Senegal | 5 | 26 | 42% |
| Sierra Leone | 3.9 | <i>no data</i> | 37% |

Source: data from Watkins K. (2008). No data available for The Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Liberia Nigeria and Togo

Levels of spending on non-formal education and youth and adult literacy are much harder to access, which is in itself an indication of comparatively low levels of official attention for this issue. However, most education coalitions report that less than 1% of government education budgets are devoted to youth and adult literacy – far below the 3% recommended by the international benchmarks for successful literacy developed by GCE.⁵⁵ The government of Mali promised to increase spending to the recommended 3% of the education budget after it hosted an international conference on literacy in late 2007. However, a recent review has revealed that actual expenditure was lower, at 1.4%.⁵⁶ This reinforces the point that commitments must not just be made, but met. Nigeria seems to be doing better, allocating between 0.65% and 8.94% of education budgets to adult education between 1997 and 2006, whilst Burkina Faso has established a special fund for Literacy and Non-Formal Education.⁵⁷

No West African government is meeting the education spending target that African ministers agreed a decade ago.

Meeting the GCE spending target could bring rich returns: we calculate that this kind of spending, sustained over three years, could fund effective literacy training for up to 6.5 million non-literate young people and adults across West Africa.⁵⁸ Sustained over a decade, this could provide effective literacy training for all the young people aged 15 to 24 who today cannot read and write in West Africa.

The impact of devoting this share of spending to education and literacy would be all the greater with expanded government revenues. Debt relief in recent years has lessened the drain on revenues, and is an important source of education financing in West Africa. Still more resources could be available if extractive industries were properly managed and regulated. For example, the gold industry has been booming in Ghana for the last 20 years, yet gold brings in very little in terms of government revenue and development benefits.⁵⁹ Addressing this question of managing extractive industries should be a key part of addressing West African governments' domestic resourcing gap for education.

Meeting GCE spending targets could fund literacy training for all non-literate young West Africans in a decade.

Beyond the issue of the level of spending is the question of allocation and effective use. For instance, given the teacher crisis, are governments investing directly on teachers' and literacy facilitators' training and pay? Is finance effectively reaching schools and youth and adult literacy training centres? Civil society efforts to monitor and assess this are extremely important, and should be supported, not least through governments ensuring their budget and spending cycles are fully open. Civil society budget and expenditure tracking is a key tool for expanding the provision of essential services – but it requires budget transparency.

Expanded literacy is in itself a path to greater accountability over the use of finances: as poor communities become more literate, they are better able to demand investment and monitor whether it is being made.

3.3 Donor support

Even the best efforts of West African governments cannot meet the challenge, and there remains a need for significant external financing. It will be an expensive business to meet the cost of getting 14 million more children into school, provide effective literacy training for up to 65 million young people and adults, train another 750,000 teachers, provide books and materials and make up for the infrastructure deficit. Spending 20% of their total revenue on education – and half of that on primary education – would give most of West Africa's governments less than \$50 per child for the whole year. In fact, even if Liberia or Niger devoted their **entire government budget** to primary education, they would still only have, respectively, \$220 and \$330 per child for the whole year – a tiny figure compared to the \$9,138 spent per child in the US.⁶⁰



Over 5,000 students and teachers march in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, to demand a quality education in October 2006.

Photo: Oxfam

Donor support for the sector is improving – but more is still needed, and it is currently heavily concentrated in just a few countries. Total aid to the education sector in ECOWAS countries from all OECD donors has increased from \$500 million in 2005 to \$1.2 billion in 2007, and the proportion channelled through the public sector went up from 15% to more than 60%. However, the vast proportion of this is accounted for by Nigeria and Ghana (with two of the best-performing education sectors) and Mali

(arguably the worst-performing). When these countries are taken out of the picture, the total education aid to the rest of ECOWAS was just \$500 million in 2007 (up from \$400 million in 2005), and the proportion going through the public sector was 31% (up from 15% in 2005).⁶¹ There is no doubt that Nigeria, Ghana and Mali need at least this level of support – their needs are still greater than the resources available – but equally, other countries need significant investment, and donors need to step up to the plate.

Moreover, just a few donors are investing in education in West Africa at the moment: more than half of the region's aid to education in 2007, and two thirds in 2006, came from four donors: France, Canada, the Netherlands and the UK. This commitment is welcome, but others need to do more.

60% of rich country aid to education in West Africa in 2007 went to just three countries.

Given the teacher crisis outlined above, donors need to be giving aid that can support the priority area of training and paying teachers. This means making money available for the government's core running costs, and making long-term, predictable commitments. Typically, this means giving a significant proportion of aid as either general or sector budget support, with commitments of at least three years. This gives governments the space and flexibility to invest in ongoing core running costs like teacher salaries. The Global Campaign for Education has calculated that teacher salaries typically account for 70 to 90% of education budgets, and yet no more than 17% of donor aid to basic education is available to spend in this way. Donors must increase the proportion of aid given as budget support.⁶²

Donors must be willing to support the whole Education For All (EFA) agenda, including youth and adult literacy, life-skills and vocational training. This is particularly important, given the vast gaps at present in the formal education sector. It is beginning to happen, with the EFA Fast Track Initiative in principle now open to funding adult literacy where governments prioritise this (as happened in Benin and Burkina Faso). Any new funding instrument for education must explicitly support all aspects of EFA.

Donor policies have in fact often themselves been responsible for harming the education sector in West Africa. IMF and World Bank-driven spending reforms in Mali in the 1980s and 1990s, for example, led to a cut of 12% of the teacher workforce.⁶³ More recently, this has taken the form of IMF conditions which limit government spending on wage bills, thus hindering their ability to hire more teachers, or pay teachers better. Between 2003 and 2005, seven West African countries had wage bill conditions in their IMF programmes.⁶⁴ These conditions have all the more force when other donors make their aid dependent on staying 'on track' with an IMF programme – as many do. The IMF needs to stop attaching economic policy conditions to its loans, and other donors need to de-link their aid from IMF programmes.



Fatoumata Tembéli attends an adult literacy class in Douentza, northern Mali.

"These training sessions have brought nothing but good for us... My wish is that more people will become literate because this is the only way out into the light. People have more chances in life when they are literate."

Photo: Crispin Hughes / Oxfam

4. Open books & open doors! Recommendations for action

There has been progress on education and literacy in West Africa since 1990, and West Africa's governments cannot be accused of ignoring the problem entirely. Some governments have clearly done more than others. However, the focus has very often been on access to primary education at the expense of quality education and lifelong learning, and even in formal basic education, progress has not been fast enough. We argue that the focus and investment are still insufficient for the scale and significance of the problem. In 2009, at CONFINTEA VI and in regional and national political and budget processes, we want West Africa's governments and donors display a greater sense of urgency in moving from statements to action to address this burning issue.

National education campaigners and coalitions (many of them members of ANCEFA) and literacy activists and campaigners (many of them members of Pamoja) have nationally-relevant demands of their governments. These include demands about the level, allocation and transparency of education budgets; about policy coherence around child, youth and adult education; about curricula and the use of national languages in education; and about recruitment, training, and rewards of teachers and literacy facilitators. These are the key demands to which West Africa's governments should respond. But, as a minimum, ANCEFA, Pamoja West Africa, the African Platform for Adult Education, Oxfam International and ActionAid are calling on ECOWAS, national governments, donors and civil society in West Africa to take the following steps.

4.1 A strong and coherent policy framework

West African governments should:

- recognise education and youth and adult literacy as key development challenges: prioritise and work with all stakeholders to develop and implement comprehensive, fully costed education plans which include targeted strategies on youth and adult literacy, and reaching girls, women and other excluded groups;
- in order to develop the literacy elements of these, renew national dialogue on literacy, and carry out gender-sensitive national surveys to assess the scale of the problem; the knowledge of practitioners, recommendations of the Africa Platform for Adult Education, and international benchmarks developed by the Global Campaign for Education should be used as a starting point for policy development;⁶⁵
- support a literate environment which recognises the role of national languages: this includes considering use of national languages in primary education, in consultation with civil society; and making government documents available in national languages;
- work with and draw on the expertise of civil society to develop curricula which deliver high quality education, including life-skills and vocational training, and attention to gender equality, citizenship, HIV and AIDS;
- at regional level, through ECOWAS, make collective commitments, establish a regional monitoring mechanism, support progress through information exchange and mutual support, and speak out to donors with a strong and united voice on the need for increased funding of education and literacy to meet the funding gap in West Africa.

Civil society should:

- continue to claim its place in the process of developing, implementing and monitoring government education and literacy policies, and work closely with parliamentarians to do so;

- ensure they are consistent with such policies in their own ways of own working.

4.2 Financing

West African governments should:

- develop costed education sector plans for the whole EFA agenda, which include youth and adult literacy strategies, strategies to tackle girls' and women's education, and sufficient financing to expand recruitment and training of teachers, particularly women;
- allocate, as a minimum, at least 20% of their national budget and at least 6% of GDP to education;
- allocate at least 3% of education budgets to youth and adult literacy;
- ensure that education budgets are transparently set and monitored, with the full engagement of national education and literacy platforms.

Donors should:

- scale up financing for education to fill the real resource gap in education: globally, financing Education For All requires \$16 billion in aid per year,⁶⁶ of which at least \$1 billion is required for youth and adult literacy,⁶⁷
- ensure that all West African countries have sufficient external funds to meet the financing gap in their costed education plans, including youth and adult literacy strategies – no country that is committed to achieving Education For All should fail for lack of resources;
- commit to delivering this aid predictably and more of it as general or sector budget support so that it can support recurrent costs like expansion of teacher recruitment, training and pay;
- not link aid to any conditions that limit teacher recruitment, such as wage bill ceilings.

Civil society should:

- continue to demand investment and aid on the scale and of the kind needed;
- hold governments to account by continuing and increasing their work on tracking education budgets and spending.

4.3 Teachers and literacy facilitators

West African governments should:

- drastically scale up the number of teachers and literacy facilitators through increased recruitment and training, particularly of women teachers in countries where they are under-represented;
- improve pay in order to retain existing teachers and attract well-qualified candidates: education budgets need to allow for teachers to be paid at a level comparable to other professionals and civil servants;
- in the non-formal sector, recognise literacy facilitators as important professionals, by giving formal accreditation, paying them at the same rate as primary school teachers, and providing ongoing training.

Donors should:

- ensure that a greater proportion of their aid is able to be used to fund recurrent costs like training costs and salaries, by delivering it as budget support or through multilateral mechanisms, like the proposed Global Fund for Education, that provide budget support.

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² Data from Watkins K. (2008). Non-literate adults in ECOWAS, 2000-2006, not including Gambia or Guinea Bissau (for which figures are not available): total = 64,976,000; women = 39,885,000

³ The three non-West African countries are Chad, Afghanistan and Ethiopia.

⁴ Data from UNDP (2008). Countries: Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Benin, Senegal and Côte D'Ivoire.

⁵ Data from Watkins K. (2008)

⁶ All data in this paragraph from Watkins K. (2008). Cape Verde, Nigeria, Ghana and Liberia already have more than 50% literacy. There is no data for The Gambia or Guinea Bissau.

⁷ See id21 (2005) 'Literacy', *id21 education highlights*; C. Pearce, S Fourmy, H. Kovach (2009).

⁸ Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo.

⁹ All data in this paragraph drawn from Watkins K. (2008).

¹⁰ Data for Benin, Niger, Senegal from Watkins K. (2008); data for Burkina Faso reported by CCEB, Burkina Faso.

¹¹ Unicef Innocenti Digest (2001) *Early Marriages, Child Spouses*, Unicef

¹² Oxfam (2005) 'Girls' Education in Africa', *Education and Gender Equality Series, Programme Insights*, Oxfam GB

¹³ Watkins K. (2008)

¹⁴ Ibid – the seven countries are: Cape Verde, Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo.

¹⁵ Ibid. C. Pearce, S Fourmy, H. Kovach (2009)

¹⁶ Interview data from Liberia; Watkins K. (2008) reports that teacher absenteeism is 'endemic' in some areas, particularly schools in rural areas, with poor infrastructure, and with poorer students.

¹⁷ See eg BBC News, 'Sierra Leone on 'ghost teacher' hunt', 20 August 2008 (last checked February 2009), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7571903.stm>

¹⁸ Calculated from figures in Watkins K. (2008)

¹⁹ This assumes that 100% of Côte D'Ivoire's teachers are trained, as no data on training levels is available: the real gap is almost certain to be larger.

²⁰ This table combines the number of children in primary school in 2006 (including over-age pupils), plus the number of children of primary school age who were out of school, and calculates the number of teachers needed to achieve the 1:40 ratio recommended by GCE and UNESCO.

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²⁶ Informal surveys by Pamoja West Africa

²⁷ See eg African Platform for Adult Education (2008)

²⁸ Archer D. (2005)

- ²⁹ *ibid.*
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- ³² E. Hanushek, L. Woessman (2007) *The role of education quality in economic growth*, World Bank
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- ⁴¹ See BBC news 'Cuba lifts ban on home computers', May 2008 (last checked February 2009), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7381646.stm>
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- ⁴⁶ Benin, Cape Verde, Ghana, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal
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- ⁴⁸ M. Dimba, 'Africa: the right to information in the continent', Pambazuka News, September 2008
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- ⁵¹ A further three countries (Guinea Bissau, Niger and Senegal) guarantee free basic education in other laws, and in practice it is free in Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. See www.right-to-education.org
- ⁵² Constitutional information sourced from www.right-to-education.org
- ⁵³ 'Education For All: a framework for action in sub-Saharan Africa', adopted by the Regional Conference on Education For All, Johannesburg, 6-10 December 1999, and included in the Dakar Framework For Action on Education For All, agreed by the World Education Forum, April 2000.
- ⁵⁴ GCE (2008) *At the crossroads: which way forward for a global compact on education?*, Global Campaign for Education
- ⁵⁵ The benchmarks are presented in Archer D. (2005)
- ⁵⁶ African Platform for Adult Education (2008)
- ⁵⁷ *ibid*
- ⁵⁸ Based on data for all ECOWAS countries except Guinea Bissau and Sierra Leone, for which data is not available. Uses total revenue figures from most recent (2008 or 2009) IMF PRGF, article IV or HIPC documents. Target education budget is calculated as 20% of revenue, literacy spending as 3% of education budget. Cost of literacy training is taken as the lower end of the \$50-\$100 cost per student calculated by the GCE International Benchmarks for adult literacy, from Archer D. (2005).
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