African Union

Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2026-2035:

A Framework for Action

Foreword

The African Union Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2026 to 2035 (CESA 26–35) is a testament to the unwavering commitment and collaboration of numerous stakeholders dedicated to advancing Africa's Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation agenda. The document reaffirms the basic human right's character of education with its implications on beneficiaries as well as duty bearers. Furthermore, this strategic framework represents a significant step towards enhancing education across the continent, promoting quality and inclusive learning opportunities for all.

Several areas have been emphasized more in this strategy than was the case in the previous CESA. As a few examples, the strategy places a stronger emphasis on the acquisition of skills by learners – from foundational skills to socio-emotional and labor market ready skills. It reaffirms the central role of teachers in improving educational outcomes and identifies school leadership as an important area for investments. It emphasizes education as a life-long process, noting the importance of second chance programs for children and youth who dropped out of school as well as programs for adult literacy. And it notes the essential role of education in dealing with broad challenges, including those related to digitalization and artificial intelligence, greening education, and education in emergencies and the need to prevent conflicts.

This comprehensive strategy marks a pivotal advancement in promoting quality education across the continent, addressing the diverse needs of our populations and fostering sustainable development. The strategy embodies a shared responsibility to transform Africa's education systems into vehicles for equity, innovation, and sustainable development. This achievement is a result of collective efforts, dialogue, and a shared vision. We commend the collaborative efforts of Member States, Regional Economic Communities (RECs), national, regional, and international education experts, development partners, teachers, educators, researchers, youth and civil society organizations including teacher unions, technical and advisory committees, African Union Departments and Agencies, partners in academia and the private sector, and African Union leadership and visionaries. I also want to express our heartfelt appreciation to UNESCO IICBA for its pivotal role in the development of this strategy. The Institute's steadfast support, technical expertise, and dedication have been instrumental in ensuring that CESA 26-35 is informed by high standards of educational research, innovation, and capacity-building practice.

CESA 26-35 not only aims to accelerate progress in educational outcomes but also to empower African youth, promoting skills and knowledge necessary for the challenges of the future. As we move forward with the implementation of CESA 26-35, we look forward to continued collaboration and partnerships to ensure that education remains a pillar of sustainable development, peacebuilding, and prosperity for all Africans. Together, we are building the "Africa We Want".

Thank you all for your unwavering dedication to Africa's future.

H.E. Professor Mohamed Belhocine

Commissioner for Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation - African Union Commission

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF BOXES

Acknowledgments

The African Union's Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2026-2035 (CESA 26-35) follows on a previous strategy for 2016-2025 (CESA 16-25) and a recent review of that strategy. CESA 26-35 was prepared under the leadership of H.E. Professor Mohammed Belhocine, Commissioner for Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (ESTI) at the African Union Commission. Guidance was also provided by Professor Saidou Madougou, Director for ESTI, and Sophia Ashipala, Head of Education. Ms. Ashipala managed the process for the review and preparation of the new CESA. Special thanks are due to Caseley Olabode Stephens at the African Union Commission for his support. Special thanks are also due to coordinators of entities under the ESTI Department that contributed to this work, including Adoumtar Noubatour (Pan-African Institute for Education for Development), Simone Yankey-Ouattara (International Centre for Girls' and Women's Education in Africa), and Professor BolanleIdowu Akeredolu-Ale, Vice-Rector of the Pan-African University.

Consultations for the CESA 16-25 Review and CESA 26-35 took place at multiple events between May and October 2024, including the 11th Annual Conference of the Africa Federation of Teaching Regulatory Authorities (May 2024), the 1st Pan-African Conference on Girls' and Women's Education in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (July 2024), the 2nd Interregional Dialogue on Education and Development in Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa (July 2024), the East and Southern Africa sub-regional consultation for the Global Education Meeting (September 2024), the World Teachers' Day event at the African Union (October 2024) , and several other events and consultations. The draft documents were then reviewed at the meeting of the Specialized Technical Committee of the African Union (November 2024). These various events were typically hybrid (in-person and online) with a combined attendance estimated at over 2,500. Ministries of Education, Regional Economic Communities, Teaching Regulatory Authorities, continental and international organizations, higher education institutions, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders were invited to provide feedback through 12 online surveys. Over 1,700 responses to the surveys were received. Advice for the review of CESA 16-25 and preparation of CESA 26-35 was also received from members of a CESA task force that met three times, including at a hybrid Technical Consultation Meeting attended by over 130 participants in August 2024. Several CESA clusters, including Early Childhood Education and Development and Teacher Development, jointly discussed the drafts. Coordination was ensured with the team managing the parallel process for the preparation of a new African Union Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) strategy.

Professor Saidou Madougou, Director of the Department of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation

Under the guidance of the AU/ESTI leadership, the CESA 16-25 review and CESA 26-35 were drafted and revised based on feedback from the consultations by Quentin Wodon at UNESCO's International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (IICBA). Drafts of the CESA 16-25 review and CESA 26-35 were shared in August 2024 with participants at the Technical Consultation Meeting and respondents to online surveys. Over 75 singe-spaced pages of written comments were received, not including marked-up copies of drafts. Comments were received among others from representatives of the African Curriculum Association, the Africa Federation of Teaching Regulatory Authorities, the Africa Network Campaign on Education for All, the African Association of Universities, the African Union Humanitarian Affairs Division, CESA clusters,

Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst, Edu Gestion, the Flemish Interuniversity Council and Bureau UOS, OBREAL, Plan International, multiple UNESCO Divisions and Category 1 Institutes, UNICEF, and World Vision. Many of these organizations also shared the CESA online surveys with their networks, as did the Africa Early Childhood Network, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Conseil Africain et Malgache pour l'Enseignement Supérieur (CAMES), Education International, the Education Outcome Fund, the mEducation Alliance, UNAIDS, and UNESCO's International Centre for Higher Education Innovation. Special thanks are due to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the European Union, and the Government of Japan for contributing, directly or indirectly, to the analysis and consultations.

ACRONYMS

AA	Action Area
AAU	Association of African Universities
ACA	African Curriculum Association
ACTQF	African Continental Teacher Qualification Framework
ADEA	Association for the Development of Education in Africa
AfECN	Africa Early Childhood Network
AfDB	African Development Bank
AFTRA	Africa Federation of Teaching Regulatory Authorities
AI	Artificial Intelligence
ANCEFA	Africa Network Campaign on Education for All
AQRM	African Quality Rating Mechanism
AU	African Union
AUC	African Union Commission
ADEA	Association for the Development of Education in Africa
AUDA-NEPAD	African Union Development Agency-New Partnership for Africa's Development
AUF	African Unification Front
AU/IPED	African Union/Pan-African Institute for Education for Development
AU/CIEFFA	African Union/International Centre for Girls' and Women's Education in Africa
AU/ESTI	African Union/Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation Department
AU/PAPS	African Union/Political Affairs, Peace, and Security Department
BMGF	Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
CAMES	Conseil Africain et Malgache pour l'Enseignement Supérieur
CAP	Common African Position
CESA 16-25	Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016-2025
CESA 26-35	Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2026-2035
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
DP	Development Partner
ECCAS	Economic Community of Central African States
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECED	Early Childhood Education and Development
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EFA	Education for All
EHW	Education for Health and Well-Being
EMIS	Education Management Information System
ESD	Education for Sustainable Development

EU	European Union
FAWE	Forum for African Women Educationalists
FCDO	United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office
FLN	Foundational Literacy and Numeracy
GCED	Global Citizenship Education
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEMR	Global Education Monitoring Report
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
HAQAA	Harmonization, Quality Assurance and Accreditation in African Higher Education Initiative
HCI	Human Capital Index
HCW	Human Capital Wealth
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HLSC	High-Level Steering Committee
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
MTR	Mid-Term Review
ICHEI	International Centre for Higher Education Innovation
IDRC	International Development Research Center
ILO	International Labour Organisation
KIX	GPE/IDRC Knowledge and Innovation Exchange
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psycho-Social Support
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MoE	Ministry of Education
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NFET	Non-formal Education and Training
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NPCA	NEPAD Partnership and Coordinating Agency
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OOSC	Out of School Children
PACE	Pan African Conference on Education
PAU	Pan-African University
PEER	Profiles Enhancing Education Reviews
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
RACA	Report of Annual Continental Activities
RECs	Regional Economic Community or Communities
RUFORUM	Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture

SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SIFA	Skills Initiative for Africa
SA	Strategic Area
SO	Strategic Objective
STC	Specialized Technical Committee
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
STEAM	Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts, and Mathematics
STISA	Science, Technology, Innovation Strategy for Africa
TaRL	Teaching at the Right Level
TCG	Technical Cooperation Group on the Indicators for SDG 4 - Education 2030
TES	Transforming Education Summit
TSC	Teacher Service Commission
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UIS	UNESCO Institute of Statistics
UIL	UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNESCO IICBA	UNESCO International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa
UNEVOC	UNESCO Vocational Education Center
UNGEI	United Nations Girls' Education Initiative
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VACS	Violence against Children Survey
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
WEF	World Education Forum
WHO	World Health Organization
YES	Youth Employment Strategy

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Education is a basic human right with governments as the main duty bearers. As declared by Heads of State during the African Union (AU) side event for the Transforming Education Summit (TES) held in New York in September 2022, "*Education remains a basic human right as outlined in article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 28 of the Convention on the rights of the child and article 11 of the African charter on the rights and welfare of the child, all of which emphasising the need for State parties to provide free and compulsory basic education*[1]." The Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2026-35 (CESA 26-35) aims to contribute to the realization of this right for all children, youth, and adults in Africa.

Education remains a top priority for Africa. CESA 26-35 expands and updates for the next decade the previous CESA 16-25. Agenda 2063[2] envisions a "*peaceful and prosperous Africa, integrated, led by its own citizens and occupying the place it deserves in the global community and in the knowledge economy.*" A decade ago, the AU's vision for education was laid out in CESA 16-25, expanding on global targets enshrined in the United Nations' Strategic Development Goal 4 (SDG 4)[3]. A review of CESA 16-25 suggests that it had a positive impact, with lessons learned on how to increase this impact further[4]. Education remains a priority today, as noted in the second action plan[5] for Agenda 2063. This strategy incorporates findings from CESA 16-25 review[6] to provide a new framework for action for 2026-35.

The preparation of CESA 26-35 took place from May to September 2024. The process was launched with a consultation at the 11th Annual Conference of the Africa Federation of Teaching Regulatory Authorities. A second consultation was held at the AU's 1st Pan-African Conference on Girls' and Women's Education. The process was also discussed at other events, including the 2nd Interregional Dialogue on Education and Development in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Africa, the East and Southern Africa sub-regional consultation for the Global Education Meeting, and the China-Africa Deans of Education Forum. It is estimated that over 2,500 people participated in these and other events. Two meetings were held with members of the CESA taskforce (Annex) to benefit from comments on the outline for the review and new strategy. A third Technical Consultation Meeting was attended by over 130 participants. A dozen online surveys were launched to gather feedback with over 1,700 respondents providing feedback. Key documents from the AU and other organizations were reviewed to ensure alignment. As next step, the draft CESA 26-35 will be submitted to the AU's Specialized Technical Committee on Education, after which the new strategy (revised as needed) could be approved at the AU Summit of February 2025. The research conducted for the strategy relied on a variety of data sources, including: (i) Relevant documents at the continental, regional, and country level, with a focus on documents from the AU; (ii) The academic and grey literature; (iii) Primary data collection through a dozen online surveys with stakeholders; and (iv) Inputs from discussions with a range of individuals from target groups and AUC staff and leadership.

The strategy is comprised of four parts: (1) A brief investment case; (2) A review of selected challenges; (3) A framework for action; and (4) A discussion on governance, communications, and monitoring. Part I for the investment case considers (i) Human rights, peace and sustainable development, including considerations related to gender, equity, and inclusion; (ii) Health and social benefits; and (iii) Labor market benefits. Part II reviews progress (or the lack thereof) for schooling and learning, as well as the links between both. It also provides a summary of key findings from the CESA 16-25 review. Part III is the core of the strategy. It provides a framework for action with six strategic areas of focus and 20 objectives. Part IV is about governance, communications, and data for monitoring and evaluation (M&E).

Part I makes it clear that investing in education is one of the best investment countries can make. Education is a fundamental human right and crucial for communities and societies to promote peace and sustainable development[7]. In addition, a wealth of data demonstrates the benefits from education. In Africa and globally, human development outcomes, including earnings but also a range of other outcomes related to health and social protection, are driven in large part by education, accounts for about two thirds of the changing wealth of nations, a much larger share than natural or produced capital. The human capital index, another measure, is heavily influenced by educational outcomes based on evidence of high rates of returns to education in labor markets. Apart from higher earnings, education is associated with many other benefits. Additional years of education lead to reduced risks of adult mortality. For example, better

educated girls and women have lower rates of maternal mortality and intimate partner violence, higher knowledge of health issues, and better decision-making ability. Their children are less likely to die by age five or be stunted. Better educated women also have lower total fertility rates, which can help usher a demographic dividend. The analysis shows how education matters for Africa's development, and how according to the metrics used, much more needs to be done to improve educational outcomes.

Part II notes that challenges remain massive. Improving educational outcomes is not easy anywhere, but it is especially hard in Africa. The challenges are massive given low levels of enrollment and completion and insufficient learning when children and youth are in school. Initial conditions, including the limited qualifications of teachers, their (often) low levels of pay, and their high level of stress, are not conducive to great teaching. The fact that many parents are illiterate and may not be able to support their children's learning at home is also an issue. Climate shocks and conflicts also contribute to poor educational outcomes. Compounding these constraints is another major limitation: because such a large share of the population is in age of schooling (whether for basic, TVET, or higher education), and because the cost of providing education is often higher as a share of GDP than is in other countries, countries have difficulties in financing their education systems adequately. This is especially the case today given high levels of debt. Essentially, a lack of investment in education commensurate with population growth and the need to improve quality has resulted in significant gaps in provision for children, young people, and adults. One good news, however, is that the CESA 16-25 review suggests that a new CESA 26-35 could help since CESA 16-25 was thought to be useful by many stakeholders, including Ministries.

Part III provides a framework for action for CESA 26-35 with six strategic areas (SAs) and 20 objectives, including one for implementation and another for monitoring and evaluation. The six SAs are:

- SA1: Resources and enabling environment. This broad SA covers issues from pre-primary to higher education related to funding, governance, infrastructure, curriculum and learning resources, and sector-wide policy, including recognition of the fact that different service providers (public, private, faith-based, others) contribute in important ways to education systems.
- SA2: Teachers, educators, and caregivers. This SA covers issues pertaining to the recruitment, career progression, and professional development of teachers, educators or instructors (e.g., for TVET), and caregivers (e.g., for children under 3 years old) as well as their well-being. This relates to salaries and benefits, but also to leadership and accountability, and to teachers' mental health and motivation.
- SA3: Pre-primary to secondary education, with a focus on early learning and foundational, socio-emotional, and 21st century and labor market skills. This SA focuses on outcomes for learners, recognizing the different types of skills that they need to acquire, as well as the fact that schools should promote health and well-being among students as well as 21st century skills, including for the labor market. The issues matter most for pre-primary to secondary education even if they remain relevant at higher levels.
- SA4: Higher Education and TVET. This SA covers post-secondary education where specific challenges must be met, including links between education, innovation, and economic development.
- SA5: Second chance programs and lifelong learning. This SA covers issues related to second chance programs for children and youth out-of-school, including to promote re-entry into school, and the need to provide lifelong learning opportunities for all.
- SA6: Gender, equity, and inclusion. This key SA emphasizes the need for education systems to serve the entire population, with special attention to be given to gender, equity, and inclusion.
- Cross-cutting themes: Several themes or mega-trends are cross-cutting and need attention, including (i) digitalization and AI; (ii) greening education; and (iii) education in emergencies.

A simple visual aims to facilitate communications around the SAs. Figure ES1 conveys the idea that education systems must be built, like a house or structure. The first two SAs are the foundations, followed by three pillars combined into one strategic area. These pillars relate to the foundational, socio-emotional, and 21st century skills that learners must acquire, especially through pre-primary to secondary education. Those skills also need to be emphasized at higher levels of learning, as well as in second chance programs and lifelong learning, but the period from pre-primary to secondary education is essential. Next come educational opportunities through Higher Education and TVET, and programs for children and youth out of school and for lifelong learning for adults. The roof and outside walls that encompass the whole system

must ensure gender-transformative approaches, equity, and inclusion. Finally, the text at the base of the structure highlights a few critical mega-trends that education systems must adapt and respond to.

Each SA has three objectives, with two additional objectives for implementation and for monitoring and evaluation. The list of objectives is provided in Table ES1. The total of 20 objectives is substantially smaller than the number of Action Areas (AAs) in CESA 16-25 in part to convey prioritization. For each objective, the strategy provides a brief explanation of the importance of the objective and links to guidance related to promising interventions and approaches for achieving the objective. Figure ES2 provides a visualization of the objectives by SAs, with implementation and M&E being at the core for impact (note that issues related to data, monitoring, and evaluation for CESA 26-35 are discussed in Part IV of the strategy).

Figure ES1: Framework for Action for CESA 26-35

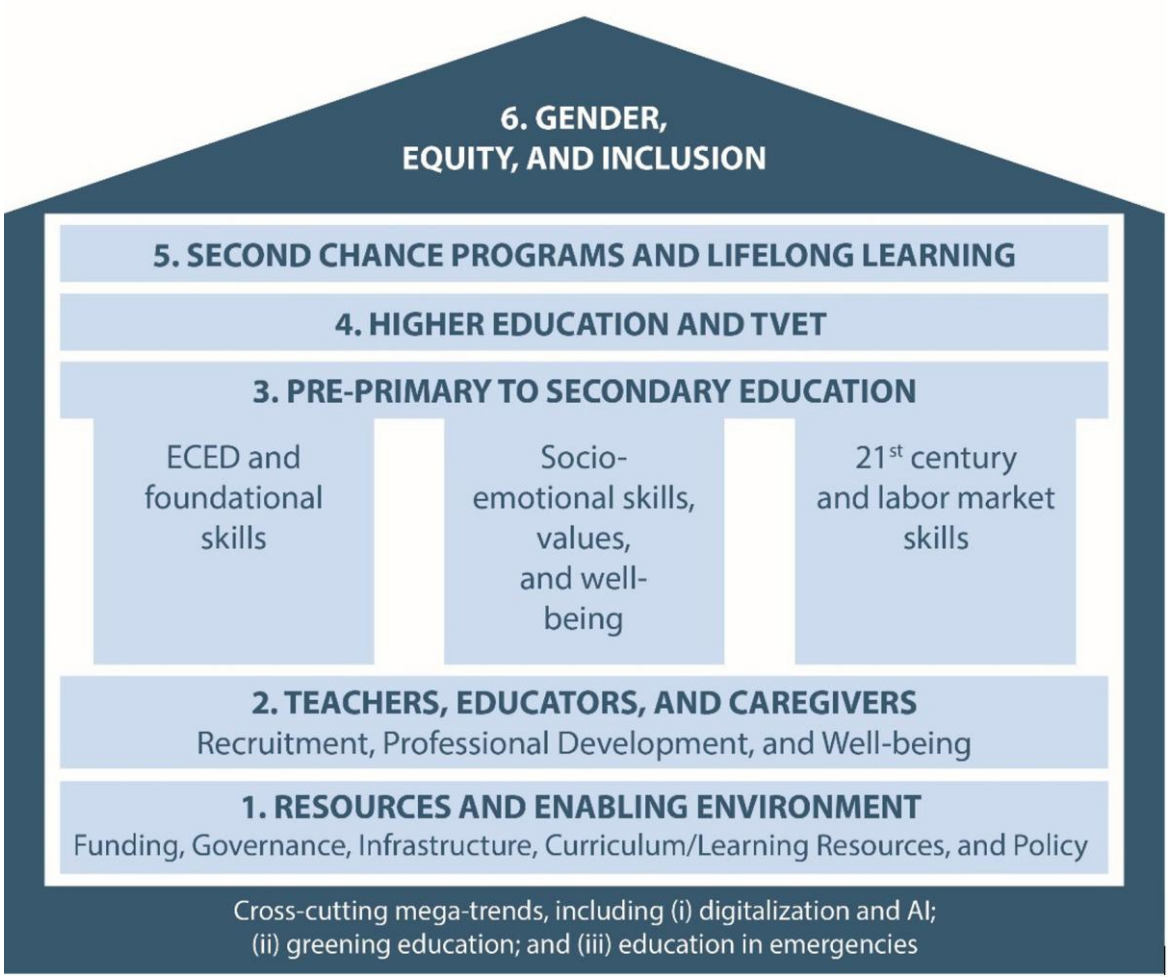
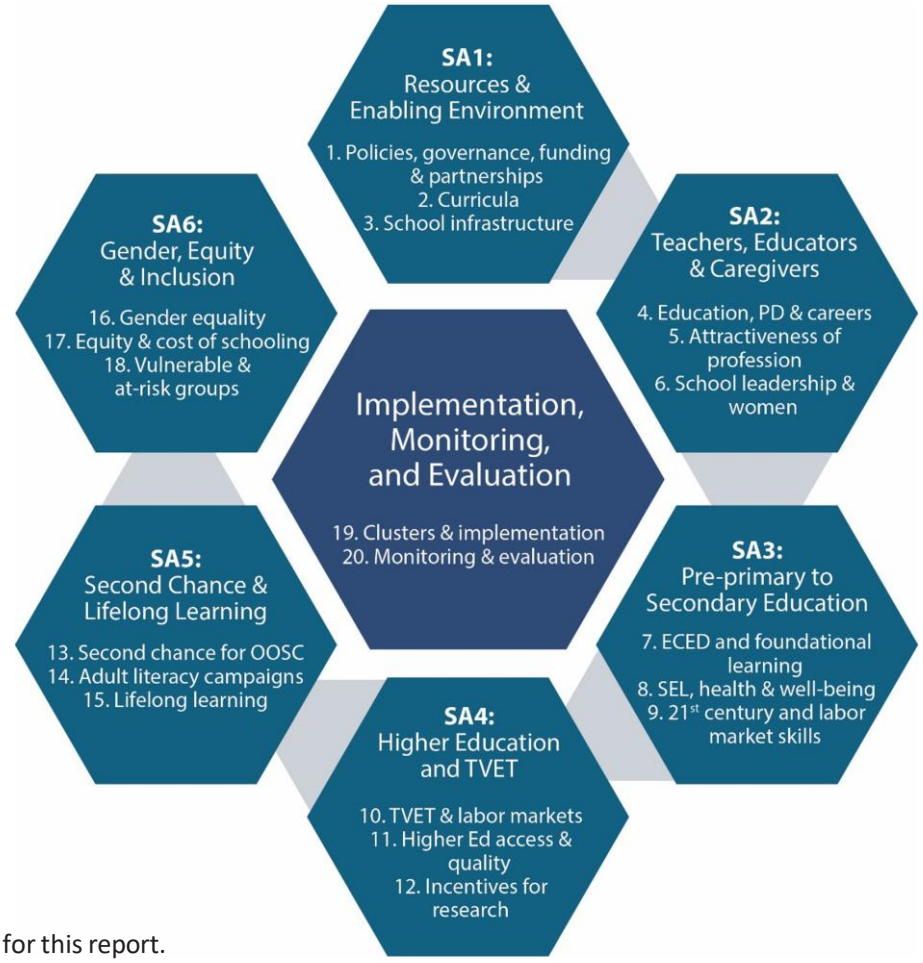


Table ES1: Strategic Areas and Objectives for CESA 26-35

Areas and Objectives
SA1: Resources and Enabling Environment
1. Ensure evidence-based policies, system management, governance, funding, and partnerships
2. Upgrade curricula and teaching and learning resources to reflect current and emerging challenges
3. Expand and upgrade school infrastructure and the learning environment
SA2: Teachers, Educators, and Caregivers
4. Improve teacher policies, education, professional development, and accountability
5. Increase the attractiveness of the teaching profession
6. Invest in school leadership including the share of female leaders where needed
SA3: Pre-Primary to Secondary Education
7. Expand cost-effective approaches to improve ECED and foundational learning
8. Invest in socio-emotional skills and education for health and well-being
9. Promote 21st century and labor market skills, including for ICT/AI and STEAM
SA4: Higher Education and TVET
10. Strengthen links between TVET and labor markets
11. Expand access to and the quality of higher education
12. Provide incentives for research, including in STEAM areas and education
SA5: Second Chance Programs and Lifelong Learning
13. Expand second chance programs for out-of-school children and youth, including for re-entry into school
14. Expand adult literacy campaigns
15. Support lifelong learning
SA6: Gender, Equity, and Inclusion
16. Promote gender equality in and through education
17. Reduce the cost of schooling for equity
18. Ensure inclusiveness for vulnerable and at-risk groups, including in contexts of emergencies
Implementation, Monitoring, and Evaluation
19. Strengthen CESA Clusters and other implementation mechanisms
20. Streamline monitoring and evaluation

Figure ES2: Objectives by Strategic Areas for CESA 26-35

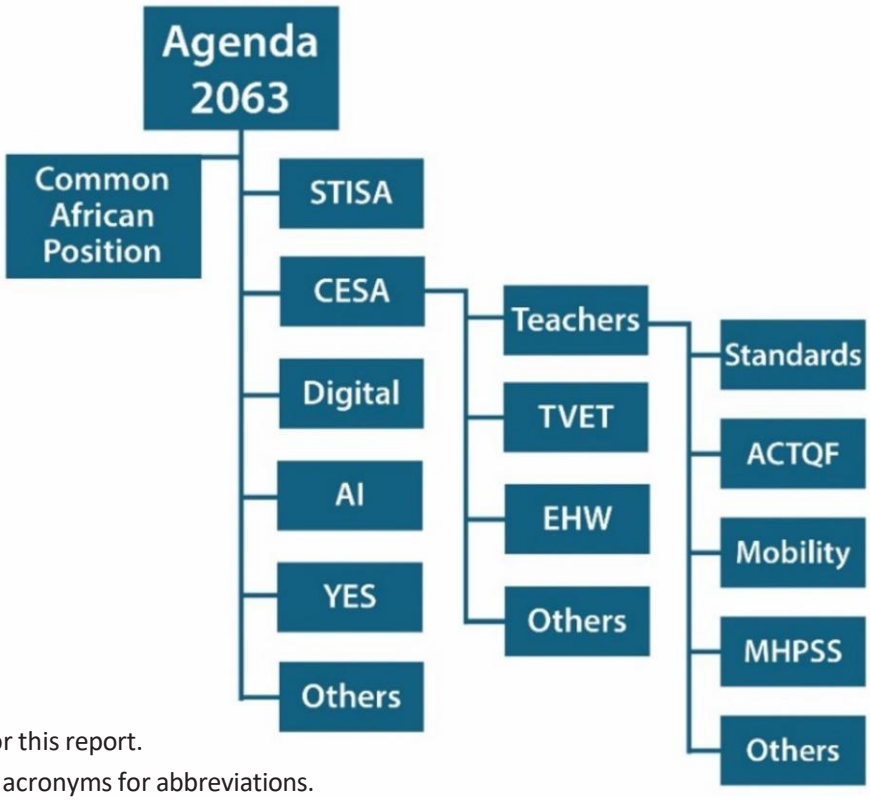


Source: Prepared for this report.

CESA clusters, which proved to be useful as an implementation mechanism, should be strengthened. The cluster mechanism is a useful way to federate AU education partners by areas of focus and expertise. Clusters mostly function today as a way of sharing information and organizing events, but they could play a larger role. For example, the guidance provided in the strategy is based on the context of Africa and the evidence available at the time of writing. This context and the evidence can change, especially over a decade. One of the roles of clusters should be to keep CESA guidance updated and deepen guidance in their thematic area as more knowledge becomes available. Beyond serving as a mechanism for information exchange, clusters should support the generation of new evidence and the mobilization of stakeholders. They need autonomy in their work, but should also be held accountable, including in terms of the roles played by cluster leaders. When clusters are not fulfilling their role or become inactive, steps should be undertaken to engage the leadership and possibly replace leaders. Finding ways to support clusters in resource mobilization matters too, as this is a constraint to effectiveness. Ensuring more collaboration between clusters should also be a priority to reap benefits from synergies (given new strategic areas and objectives in this strategy, and taking into account the performance of existing clusters, a remapping of CESA clusters in line with strategic areas and objectives should be considered).

Beyond CESA 26-35, additional guidance should be generated through other documents, as is already the case in some areas. A good practice in strategies is to not have too many areas of focus, so that there is prioritization. For monitoring, a limited number of objectives is beneficial too. But there is an additional reason for keeping the number of SAs and objectives relatively small: the AU has adopted or is in the process of adopting other strategies and instruments relevant to education. For TVET for example, more detailed recommendations are provided in the TVET strategy prepared separately. The same is true for the recently adopted AU strategy on Education for Health and Well-being (EHW). CESA 26-35 should provide an overarching vision but leave more detailed guidance to other strategies or instruments. As visualized in the case of teachers in Figure ES3, while CESA outlines high-level objectives, more detailed guidance is available in sub-strategies such as the AU strategy on mental health and psycho- social support (MHPSS) for teachers being developed, or instruments like the African Continental Framework of Standards and Competencies for the Teaching Profession, the African Continental Teacher Qualification Framework, and the African Continental Teacher Mobility Protocol. Said differently, it should be acknowledged that not everything that matters for improving educational outcomes can be captured by the SAs and objectives of CESA 26-35, but the framework hopefully ensures focus in the guidance provided, so that other documents can go more in depth in issues that pertain to various sub-sectors or issues.

Figure ES1: Framework for Action for CESA 26-35

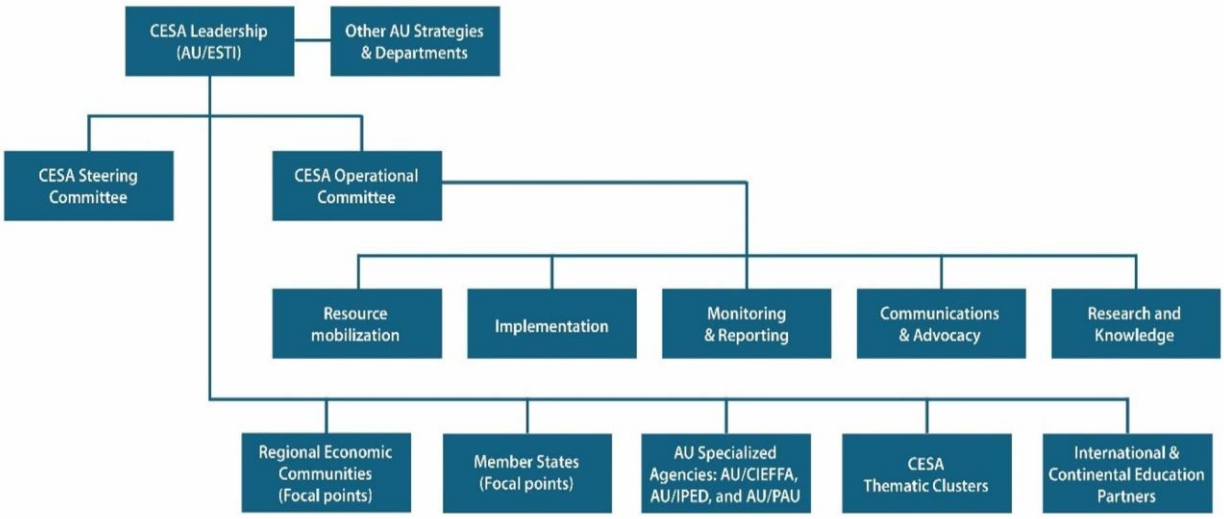


Source: Prepared for this report.

Note: See the list of acronyms for abbreviations.

Finally, Part IV is about governance, communications, and monitoring. CESA 26-35 proposes a simple yet comprehensive governance structure with specific roles for stakeholders. The governance structure is visualized in Figure ES4. It follows guiding principles, as is the case for other AU strategies, including: (i) Country ownership, leadership, and subsidiarity: Member States are responsible for their education systems and thereby for adapting CESA 26-35 to their own context; (ii) Autonomy and accountability: Stakeholders have autonomy in using the guidance provided by CESA 26-35, but with accountability for the CESA implementation team; (iii) Adaptability: CESA is meant to provide guidance that needs to be adapted over time and be flexible enough to adapt to changes in the education landscape of the workplace, so that it remains relevant and effective; and (iv) Advocacy: CESA is a strategy advocating for more and better investments in education. As shown in Figure ES4, key stakeholders include (1) RECs; (2) Member States; (3) AU specialized agencies; (4) CESA clusters, coordinators, and members; and (5) Continental and international partners. Among continental partners, AUDA-NEPAD plays a special role, but other partners include key associations, federations, and networks such as AAU, ACA, ADEA, AfECN, AFTRA, ANAFE, ANCEFA, AUF, AWARD, CAMES, FAWE, and RUFORUM that can use their convening power for facilitating CESA 26-35 implementation. The proposed governance for CESA 26-35 includes a Steering Committee and an Operational Committee that has five sub-committees for: (i) Resource mobilization; (ii) Implementation (events, pilot projects, etc.); (iii) Monitoring and reporting; (iv) Research and knowledge (e.g., production of guidance related to specific CESA 16-35 objectives); and (v) Communications and advocacy.

Figure ES4: Governance Structure for CESA 26-25



The role of the CESA Operational Committee will be key for implementation. Successful implementation will require policy and technical advisory support among others to: (i) Develop and disseminate new tools and methodologies to meet the needs of Member States and RECs; (ii) Carry out applied research on challenges faced by education systems and potential solutions; (iii) Promote and assess pilot initiatives to generate knowledge on good practices and lessons learned; (iv) Serve as a clearinghouse to promote knowledge exchange and dissemination of good practices and lessons learned at the continental level (south-south cooperation, CoPs, web resources, etc.). Through Focal Points in RECs and Ministries of Education in Member States, it will also be essential to record innovations and progress towards CESA implementation at the national and regional levels and assess the overall usefulness of the strategy.

Communications will be important to make CESA 26-35 known among stakeholders once the strategy is adopted and to share challenges and opportunities in its implementation throughout the decade. Outreach will be needed to RECs, Member States, other stakeholders, and the media upon adoption of the strategy. Communications tools to be used for this purpose should include an abridged (simplified) version of the strategy, briefs on key strategic areas, infographics, videos, social media campaigns, press releases, etc. For communications overtime, a CESA newsletter should be created and published twice a year (following meetings of the Operational Committee) to keep stakeholders aware of progress towards implementing CESA 26-35 with an emphasis on innovative interventions piloted by RECs, Member States, and other partners. A biennial or triennial CESA conference should be organized to keep momentum towards implementation and showcase deliverables. Such deliverables should also be

shared widely at other AU and partner events. The success or lack thereof on the communications strategy should be assessed together with the broader assessment of the strategy's implementation through a report produced for the CESA conference. In communications and at events, links between CESA and issues related to other sectors, such as health, nutrition, population, labor, and social protection, should be emphasized to showcase the importance of education for those sectors (inter-ministerial sessions).

A monitoring and evaluation framework will need to be developed. The framework should include at the minimum indicators that will be monitored to assess progress, but it could also, if useful, provide tentative targets and an assessment of the cost of reaching targets, although this would require detailed analytical work. Every year, AU/ESTI should produce a brief annual report on progress towards CESA implementation. A more detailed report would be discussed at biennial or triennial CESA conferences. The AU/ESTI Department should draft implementation action plans and update these plans as needed based on feedback from RECs, Members States, and other stakeholders. A mid-term review should take place, the timing of which would coincide with the horizon for the SDGs, so that in the second part of its decade, CESA 26-35 could be adapted as needed to the new framework that would be adopted post-SDGs. Upon completion of the decade, an evaluation should take place to assess the strategy's outcomes and impact.

The monitoring framework should have a streamlined list of indicators. The focus should be on indicators available under SDG4 monitoring that could reasonably be developed and measured in enough countries, building on already agreed upon initiatives such as those following the Transforming Education Summit. The good news is that by design, data are available for most objectives outlined in the strategy. At the country level, promoting EMIS 2.0, including a shift beyond aggregate data to individual learner data to track student progress, identify learning gaps, and tailor interventions to meet each child's needs, will be key. It will also be important for the AU and Member States to continue to participate in coordination mechanisms related to the SDGs (Global Education Coordination Mechanism) and any subsequent framework. To ensure coherence between the CESA 26-35 and the SDG agenda, the AU should pursue its participation in the SDG4 High-Level Steering Committee (HLSC), including by ensuring that HLSC decisions are implemented at the continental, regional, and country levels.

Conclusion

CESA 26-35 provides a unique opportunity for the AU to support Member States, RECs, and other education stakeholders to improve their educational systems. Improving educational outcomes in Africa is more important than ever. Learning from the experience of CESA 16-25, the AU is well positioned to provide guidance to Member States, RECs, and other education stakeholders on how to meet the challenges of the next decade. This strategy focuses on smaller number of objectives and puts a strong emphasis on the skills that learners need to acquire – including foundational, socio-emotional, and 21st century skills. The strategy outlines frameworks and interventions that build on the rapidly growing evidence base that can be used to inform policy. Through CESA 26-35, the AU aims to provide practical guidance to Member States, RECs, and other education stakeholders towards priority actions for the next decade, acknowledging that this guidance will need to be adapted to their own particular contexts.

As noted in the CESA 16-25 Review, education systems are not sailboats: they cannot change direction easily. They are like tankers. To change direction, beyond strategic vision, careful planning will be needed. Education systems in Africa and globally face headwinds. Funding and other resources are limited. Challenges abound, not only within education systems but also externally with conflicts and climate change being just two examples of external threats. Implications of the fourth industrial revolution for education systems, including the roles to be played by digitalization and AI, are only starting to be understood. Investing in education is one of the best investments countries can make, but to steer a tanker through challenging waters, beyond strategic vision implementation is key. Two points will require special attention. First, as already mentioned, the guidance given in this strategy will need to be adapted over time and across space considering the diversity of Member States the AU serves and their changing needs. Second, implementation will take place in a context in which many African (and non- African) countries face high levels of debt and constrained budgets. Assessing both needs and the cost-effectiveness of alternative interventions to meet these needs based on national and local contexts will be essential to maximize the benefits from investments in education. To transform their education systems, Member States and stakeholders including RECs will need to do more and better with limited resources. This will require prioritization. In the end, this strategy will be useful to the extent that its guidance helps inform domestic policy in Member States, including through Education Sector Planning and Compact Development. For CESA 26-35 to fulfill this role, resource mobilization and adequate implementation will be essential.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a basic human right with governments as the main duty bearers. As declared by Heads of State during the African Union (AU) side event for the Transforming Education Summit (TES) held in New York in September 2022, "*Education remains a basic human right as outlined in article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 28 of the Convention on the rights of the child and article 11 of the African charter on the rights and welfare of the child, all of which emphasizing the need for State parties to provide free and compulsory basic education*[8]." The Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2026-35 (CESA 26-35) aims to contribute to the realization of this right for all children, youth, and adults in Africa.

Education remains a top priority for Africa. The Continental Education Strategy for Africa for 2026-35 (CESA 26-35) expands and updates the previous strategy (CESA 16-25) for the next decade. Agenda 2063[9] envisions a "*peaceful and prosperous Africa, integrated, led by its own citizens and occupying the place it deserves in the global community and in the knowledge economy.*" Almost ten years ago, the AU's vision for education laid out in CESA 16-25, expanding on global targets enshrined in the United Nations' Strategic Development Goal 4 (SDG 4)[10]. A review of CESA 16-25 suggests that it had a positive impact, with lessons learned on how to increase this impact further[11]. As education remains a priority today, this strategy incorporates findings from the CESA 16-25 review[12] to provide a new framework for action for 2026-35, a period which overlaps with the Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan (2024-2033) of Agenda 2063[13]. The plan outlines seven ambitions: Every AU member state attains at least middle-income status; Africa is more integrated and connected; public institutions are more responsive; Africa resolves conflicts amicably; African cultures and values are explicit and promoted; African citizens are more empowered and productive; and Africa is a strong and influential global player. Education contributes to all seven.

Challenges faced by education systems in Africa are unique, but so are opportunities. Progress was achieved under CESA, but in a limited way. The combination of current challenges, initial conditions, and limited funding make it hard to improve educational outcomes in Africa. The period was marked by major crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic and associated school closures with large negative effects on learners[14]. But there is also good news. CESA 16-25 covered a period during which many innovations were implemented at the country, regional, and continental level as well as globally. We know more today than a decade ago how gains can be achieved. We may expect new major innovations to come to fruition in the next 10 years as well. But we may expect new crises to emerge, even if we do not know yet what those may be. One challenge for this strategy will be to be kept up to date as conditions evolve in countries and for the continent, including in relation to demographic trends and the pressure they may create.

CESA 26-35 provides a framework for action that can be adapted by Member States, Regional Economic Communities (RECs), and other education stakeholders to the context they face. The AU does not manage large education programs itself, but it has a major convening power. Through this strategy, its aims to provide guidance on how to improve educational outcomes in Africa. Guidance is provided considering the diversity of countries the AU serves and their varying needs, and the fact that to transform their education systems, Member States and other stakeholders need to do more and better with limited resources. As this will require prioritization, CESA 26-35 is written a bit differently than CESA 16-25. The new strategy has a smaller number of strategic areas and recommendations than CESA 16-25. It also aims to provide more guidance on how recommendations can be implemented and why they are proposed. Finally, the strategy recognizes the need for synergies and complementarity with other strategies and documents of the AU. This includes the AU's new strategies for technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and for science, technology, and innovation, not to mention other relevant strategies[15].

CESA 26-35 is organized in four parts: (1) A brief investment case; (2) A review of selected challenges; (3) A framework for action; and (4) A discussion of governance, monitoring, and communications.

- Part I: Brief investment case. This part makes a brief investment case for investing in education, considering (i) Human rights, peace, and sustainable development; (ii) Labor market benefits; and (iii) Other benefits.

- Part II: Selected challenges. This part briefly reviews progress (or the lack thereof) for schooling and learning, as well as links between both. Trends in education financing are also briefly discussed. Finally, key findings from the CESA 16-25 review informing this strategy are briefly summarized.
- Part III: Framework for action. This part is the core of the strategy. It provides a framework for action with (i) six strategic areas of focus, each with three objectives; and (ii) two more objectives for implementation and M&E. In total, 20 objectives are thus proposed. For each objective a brief discussion is provided on its importance and promising approaches to achieve the objective.
- Part IV: Governance, roles of stakeholders. This last part outlines a simple governance structure for CESA 26-35 and suggests roles for key stakeholders. Making such a governance structure sustainable will require commitment and some level of resource mobilization. Issues related to communications and M&E to assess progress towards the objectives are also discussed.

METHODOLOGY

There is no unique way to write an education strategy for Africa, with various approaches having different potential benefits and drawbacks. A strategy can consist primarily of a set of recommendations without detailed analysis. This is essentially the way CESA 16-25 was written. CESA 16-25 included guiding principles[16] and pillars[17], but at the core, it consisted of 12 strategic objectives (SOs) with associated intermediate-level goals or action areas (AAs) viewed as critical for achieving the SOs. This resulted in 69 AAs or recommendations. The document had the benefit of being relatively short and easy to read, but it did not provide a discussion of the empirical evidence for its recommendations and the potential trade-offs between objectives. The document also may not have conveyed strong priorities, in part because it aimed to be very comprehensive. As another approach, a strategy can be more focused on a few key objectives with more detailed analysis of how to achieve these objectives. This is, in a way, the approach now used by the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) in supporting countries based on a compact with priorities for support. It is also the approach used by the World Bank for its Western and Central Africa Education Strategy[18], a lengthier and more complex document with a series of background notes providing detailed analysis. That strategy provided more guidance for the areas it covered, but it was not as comprehensive as CESA 16-25 in terms of what it covered. Both approaches have potential benefits and drawbacks, and both approaches may serve different purposes or audiences.

CESA 26-35 aims to straddle a middle ground, providing some analysis and outlining a comprehensive framework for action while remaining relatively short as a document. The strategy aims to avoid the risk of going too much into details and losing the big picture, and that of going for the big picture but remaining at the surface so-to-speak with recommendations that may be too generic to be practically useful. Keeping in mind this twin challenge, and the need to keep the document relatively short, five simple principles (ABCDE) were adopted to draft the strategy and trying to make it both thorough and user-friendly (Box 1).

Box 1: ABCDE Principles for Drafting CESA 26-35

Adaptable. The aim is to provide guidance that can be adapted to different contexts, not prescribe ready-made solutions. The needs faced by education systems and constraints to improve outcomes vary. Approaches must be flexible to be helpful in a wide variety of contexts not only for Member States and Regional Economic Communities, but also for other stakeholders, including educational institutions, development partners, civil society organizations, teacher unions, and the private sector.

Brief (relatively). CESA 26-35 aims to be relatively brief, at about 50 pages when professionally formatted. Shorter documents are more likely to be read, especially by policymakers. The strategy does not replace more detailed continental analyses of education in Africa[19]. It is meant to provide a framework for action.

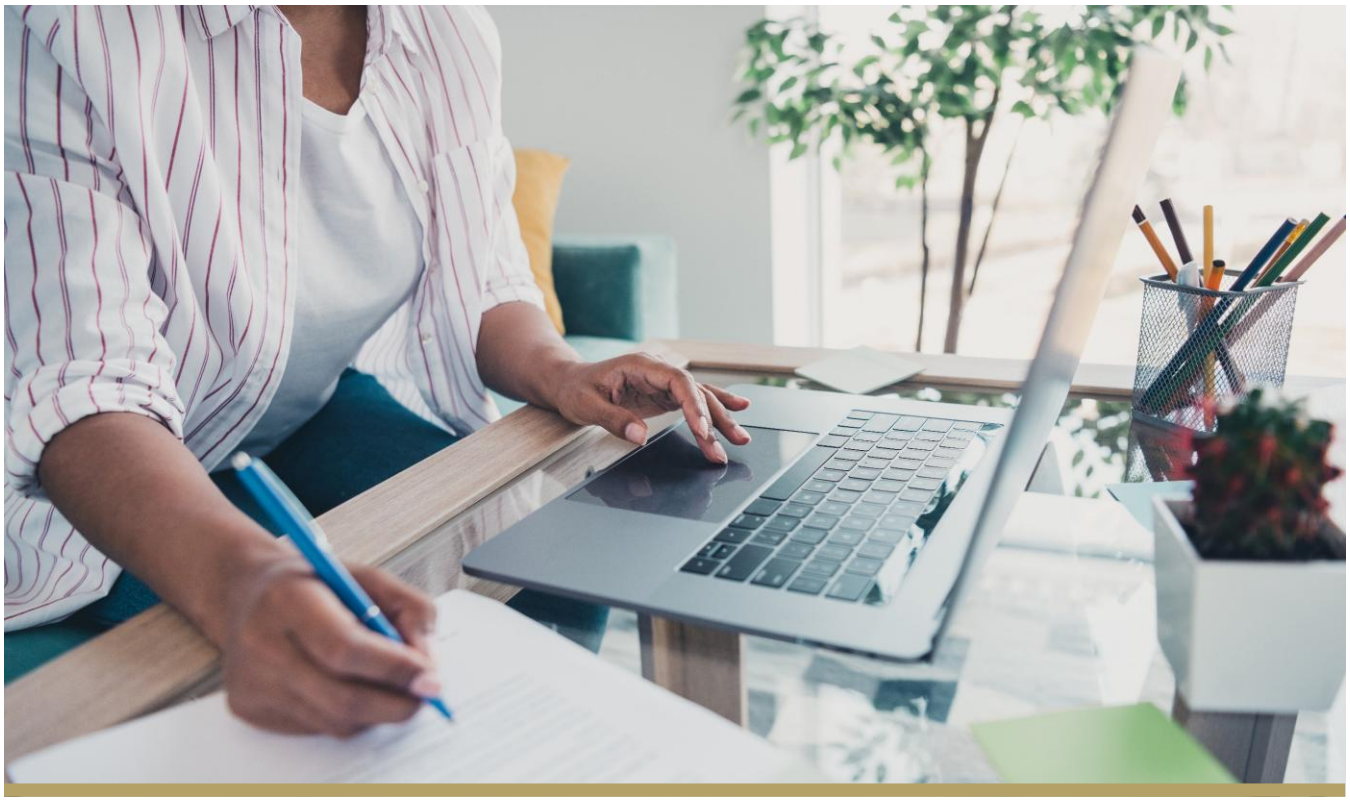
Consultative. The preparation of CESA 26-35 involved multiple consultations and online surveys in English and French to gather feedback from a wide range of stakeholders. Members of a CESA task force with representatives from key organizations provided feedback. Over 2,500 individuals participated.

Documented. CESA 26-35 aims to be well documented, with endnotes and references enabling readers to dig deeper. This is a different style from CESA 16-25, but the hope is that it will be helpful for readers. Collating in one place key resources may perhaps be a key benefit from this work.

Evidence-based. While CESA 16-25 was implicitly evidenced-based, CESA 26-35 is more explicit on the evidence used while being less prescriptive, recognizing that "what works" remains a matter of debate, depends on context, and may also change over time, especially over a decade.

The drafting of CESA 26-35 and of the CESA 16-25 review that informed it took place from May to September 2024. The process was launched with a consultation at the annual conference of the Africa Federation of Teaching Regulatory Authorities (AFTRA). A second consultation was held at the AU's 1st Pan-African Conference on Girls' and Women's Education (PANCOGED). The process was also discussed at other events, including the 2nd Interregional Dialogue on Education and Development in Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa. These events were all hybrid, allowing for participation in person and online. Overall, it is estimated that more than 2,500 individuals participated in these and other events. Two meetings were held with a CESA taskforce to benefit from comments from task force members on plans for drafting the documents[20]. Draft documents for the both the CESA 16-25 review which informs this new strategy and CEA 26-35 were shared at a Technical Consultation Meeting held in Addis Ababa. CESA 26-35 will be discussed at the AU's Specialized Technical Committee on Education planned for November 2024, after which the new strategy (revised as needed) would be approved at the AU Summit of February 2025.

Research for the strategy relied on various data sources, including online surveys with stakeholders. Analysis is based among others on: (i) a review of relevant documents at the continental, regional, and country level, with a particular focus on documents from the AU; (ii) a review of the academic literature and the grey literature emerging among others from international organizations (e.g., UNESCO, UNICEF, ILO, World Bank, AfDB, and others), civil society organizations, and national institutions; (iii) inputs from discussions with individuals from target groups and AUC staff and leadership; and (iv) primary data collection through online surveys for the CESA 16-25 review which informs this new strategy. Specifically, two online surveys were accessible only to pre-selected individuals: the survey for Ministries and RECs, and the survey for CESA cluster members. Nine other surveys were open to any respondents but were in practice targeted towards specific stakeholders through the dissemination mechanisms used to share the surveys. For example, the Teachers Policies survey was targeted to members of the Teacher Professional Development CESA cluster and affiliates from both AFTRA and Education International. All CESA online surveys were available in both English and French with questionnaires approved by the AU's Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation Department (AU/ESTI). Another survey was conducted separately for the TVET strategy review prepared concurrently with the CESA 16-25 review to inform a new TVET strategy. The selected findings from that survey and the new TVET strategy are used in this strategy.



PART I: BRIEF INVESTMENT CASE

Investing in education is one of the best investments countries can make. Education is a human right and is key to promoting peace and sustainable development. But there is also a wealth of data demonstrating the private as opposed to social benefits from education. In Africa and globally, human capital wealth, which is based on earnings and is driven in large part by education, accounts for about two thirds of the changing wealth of nations, a much larger share than natural or produced capital. The human capital index, another measure, is heavily influenced by educational outcomes based on evidence of high rates of returns to education in labor markets. Apart from higher earnings, education is associated with many other benefits, including lower adult mortality[21]. For girls and women, education is associated with lower rates of maternal mortality and intimate partner violence, higher knowledge of health issues, and better decision-making ability. Their children are less likely to die by age five or be stunted. Better educated women also have lower total fertility rates, which can help usher a demographic dividend[22]. This first part of the strategy briefly reviews some of the benefits of education, considering (i) Human rights, peace, and sustainable development; (ii) Labor market benefits; and (iii) Other benefits. Selected recent studies on the cost of inaction (i.e., the cost of not providing adequate educational opportunities) are also mentioned.

Human Rights, Peace, and Sustainable Development

Education is a human right, and it contributes to the ability of individuals to exercise other human rights. While CESA 16-25 did not mention explicitly the right to education or human rights in general, it referred to Agenda 2063 which does refer to human rights. The right to education is enshrined in Article 26 of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights[23], Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child[24] and Article 11 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child[25]. These articles emphasize the need for states to provide free and compulsory basic education, which should include at least one year of pre-primary education. The right to education contributes to the ability of individuals to exercise other human rights, as often argued when pointing to indivisibility of human rights[26]. Importantly, the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent human rights instruments refer to links between education and culture, emphasizing (1) the maintenance of peace and the right for parents to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children; and (2) the importance of morals and traditional values. The right to education is not only about schooling and the acquisition of skills valuable for the labor market: it is also about communities and societies. This was recognized in CESA 16-25, including in its tenth strategic objective on peace education and the prevention and resolution of conflicts. This broader contribution of education to development remains relevant today.

Education is key for peace and sustainable development. According to the Futures of Education report [27], we may be at a unique juncture in history. Sociological, ecological and technological trends are affecting education systems in profound and yet uncertain ways, putting a premium on the ability to adapt. The report calls for a new social contract and stronger global solidarity and international cooperation in education. It also notes that the role of education for peace and sustainable development is crucial. These themes were also at the core of the Transforming Education Summit in New York in 2022[28]. Conflicts have been rising globally and in Africa, and the threat of climate change, while already known when CESA 16-25 was adopted, has become even more pressing today[29]. Education has a unique role to play in promoting social cohesion, peace[30], and sustainable development, including care for the planet. There is also a pressing need to ensure that refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) benefit from education.

Health and Social Benefits

Education is associated with major health and social benefits, including for girls and women. There is a dose-response relationship with all-cause adult mortality, with an average reduction in mortality risk of 1.9% per additional year of education for men and women alike and across socio-demographic index levels[31]. In addition, for girls and women, as well as for their children, education brings additional benefits. A review already published over a decade ago suggested that an additional year of education among women of reproductive age was associated with a 9.5% reduction in infant mortality[32]. More recent

analysis based in part on 27 Demographic and Health Surveys for 22 African countries confirms those findings and suggests additional health and social benefits. Key findings are as follows[33]:

- Child marriage and early childbearing: If all girls completed their secondary education, child marriage could be virtually eliminated, and the risk of early childbearing reduced by two thirds. This matters, given the negative effects of child marriage and early pregnancies not only for girls throughout their lifetime, but also for their families, communities, and societies.
- Fertility rates and population growth: With universal secondary education for girls, fertility rates (the number of children that women have over their lifetime) could be reduced by a third[34], reducing population growth and potentially ushering a demographic dividend (see Box 2).
- Health, nutrition, and well-being: Low educational attainment for women is associated with a lower ability to seek care, a lack of knowledge about health, and higher maternal mortality, among other risks. A lack of education also increases the risk of intimate partner violence. For children, being born of a mother younger than 18 increases the risks of under-five mortality and stunting and lowered developmental potential.
- Agency and decision-making: Low educational attainment for women affects their agency and decision-making ability within the household. Under universal secondary education, an index of women's decision-making ability would increase on average by 15 percent of the base values.
- Social capital: Higher educational attainment is associated with societal benefits. For example, better educated individuals are in a position in life that makes it easier for them to engage in altruistic behaviors such as contributing to charity, volunteered time, or helping strangers[35]. Social capital and the ability to get help when in need may also be affected by educational attainment[36].
- Cost of inaction: Conversely, not investing in education today would lead again in those areas in a high cost of inaction. Better educational opportunities for girls would generate higher welfare and lower poverty as well as budget savings for households, communities, and Member States due to reduced pressure on the delivery of basic services. These savings could in turn be used to improve the quality of the services being provided, including educational services.

Box 2: Reaping the Benefits of the Demographic Dividend

While different definitions of the demographic dividend have been proposed, the term is associated with improvements in standards of living and accelerated economic growth when a country achieves a population structure that is favorable thanks to a reduction in birth (and death) rates that is followed by rapid fertility decline. As a result, the share of the population of working-age individuals may increase sharply for some time, which tends to generate faster economic growth[37]. In addition, with lower dependency ratios, households are better able to support themselves and invest among others in education, nutrition, and health or, more broadly, human development[38]. These investments in turn may lead younger generations to be better educated and more productive in adulthood. This demographic and human capital transition may help reduce poverty rates dramatically. Achieving universal secondary education for girls should help reduce population growth and improve skills levels in countries where fertility rates remain high, thereby helping to usher in the demographic dividend.

Labor Market Benefits

There is also a large literature on the returns to education in labor markets. An example of estimates of labor market returns to education for West African countries is provided in Box 3. More generally, without going into details, data on human capital illustrate both the importance of education and the challenges faced by Africa. Two measures of human capital – the Human Capital Index and Human Capital Wealth, point to the benefits of investments in education, but also to the fact that Africa is not achieving its economic potential in part because of insufficient investments in education. This leads to a high "cost of inaction."

- Human Capital Index (HCI): The HCI aims to measure how productive children, and youth may be in adulthood based on indicators related to education and health. The index is computed with five variables likely to affect future earnings[39]. The value of the index is the ratio of the expected future productivity of today's children and youth to the productivity that they could reach achieve with full education and health. Data are available for 50 African countries. Weighting all countries equally, the average HCI was at 0.42 in 2020 in Africa, suggesting that children and youth may reach in adulthood on average only 42 percent of the earnings they could aspire to with full health and education. Low levels of educational attainment and lack of learning while in school play a very

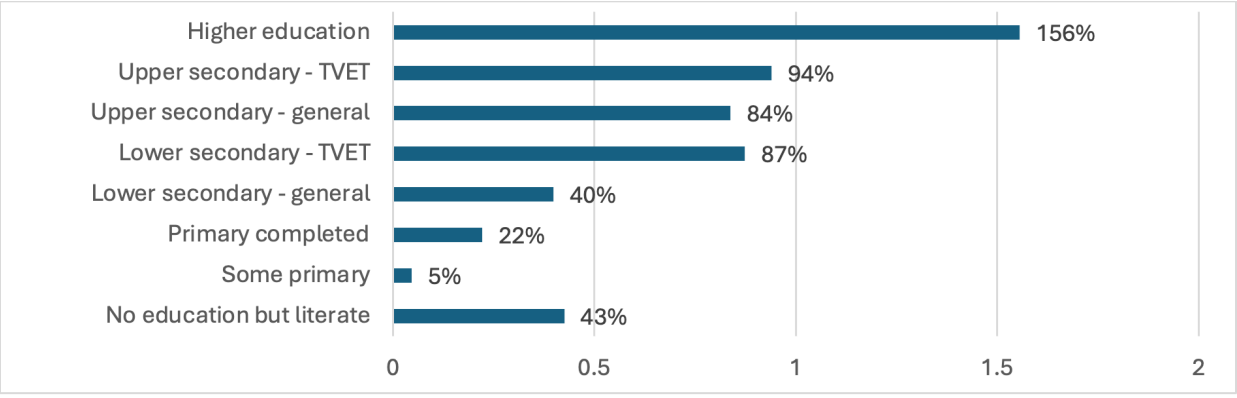
large role in those estimates for the HCI, but this also means that better educational outcomes would lift the HCI up, contributing to a large increase in standards of living[40].

- Human Capital Wealth (HCW): A country's wealth is the assets base that enable it to enjoy future wellbeing, including, but not limited to income and consumption. National wealth can be measured as the sum of: (1) Produced capital, which comes from investments in assets such as factories, equipment, or infrastructure; (2) Natural capital, which consists of assets such as agricultural land and both renewable and nonrenewable natural resources; (3) Human capital, measured as the present value of the future earnings of the labor force; and (4) Net foreign assets[41]. HCW accounts for over 60 percent of national wealth in Africa and globally, with education itself accounting for a large share of HCW. This underscores the importance of education for development. One key challenge, though, is that women have much lower levels of HCW than men, in part because of lower educational attainment, but more so because of lower labor force participation and occupational discrimination or segregation whereby women tend to work in lower productivity sectors. Reducing gender inequality in HCW through education could dramatically increase HCW and total wealth in Africa, thereby boosting the assets base that will enable the continent's future development[42].
- Cost of inaction: All those effects have important implications. As a recent example of estimates of the cost of inaction (i.e., the cost of not improving educational outcomes), a new report estimates the global cost of unmet educational needs by 2030 at US $10 trillion[43]. In sub-Saharan Africa, the cost of children leaving school early and having less than basic skills may represent 19% and 26% of the continent's GDP, respectively. While such estimates depend on assumptions and estimations have limitations, the cost of inaction in education is clearly very high.

Box 3: Labor Market Returns to Educational Attainment and Literacy in West Africa

Estimates of HCW are based on estimates of rates of return using a large database of household surveys. To illustrate gains in earnings associated with education, Figure 1 provides estimates of those gains with various levels of education in nine West African countries using data on wage earnings from the 2018-19 Enquête harmonisée sur les conditions de vie des ménages. A few key findings emerge, which tend also to be observed in other studies and are important for the discussion in this strategy: (1) gains in earnings from primary education are relatively low, possibly because too many children are not learning enough in school, but gains from literacy are higher, suggesting the importance of imparting foundational skills; (2) gains increase at the secondary level, and for this sample broadly similar at the upper secondary level between the general track and TVET; and (3) gains are largest as expected for higher education. Although this is not shown in Figure 1, controlling for educational attainment and experience, women working for a wage earn about a third less than men, illustrating the issue of occupational segregation mentioned above.

Figure 1: Increase in Earnings with Education and Literacy vs. No Education, West Africa (%)



Source: Africa Teachers Report on foundational skills and literacy[44].

PART II: SELECTED CHALLENGES

Improving educational outcomes is not easy anywhere, but it is especially hard in Africa, given the magnitude of the challenges, initial conditions, and limited public financing for education. All countries face challenges in improving their educational outcomes, but the challenges are daunting in Africa where levels of enrollment and completion remain low, and children do not learn enough in school. These outcomes are the results of weak enabling environments, including a lack of adequate policies and governance, shortfalls in budget allocations and execution, and a lack of coordination, all of which lead to supply-side challenges (inadequate physical infrastructure, lack of qualified and motivated teachers, outdated curricula, etc.) When combined with demand-side challenges such as poverty, limited engagement of parents and communities in schools, social norms, and other constraints, the result is limited progress in improving educational outcomes. For teachers, educators, and caregivers, insufficient qualifications, low levels of pay, and high level of stress especially in emergency contexts are not conducive to great teaching and learning. Pressures from climate change and conflicts add to the mix, as does the fact that many parents are illiterate and may not be able to support their children's learning at home. Finally, and importantly, compounding these constraints is another major limitation: because such a large share of the population is in age of schooling and because the cost of providing education is often higher as a share of GDP than in other regions, African countries have difficulties in financing their education systems adequately. This is especially the case today given high levels of debt. These issues are briefly discussed in this section, focusing on (i) schooling; (ii) learning and skills; and (iii) education financing. This is followed by a summary of some of the lessons learned from the CESA 16-25 Review.

Schooling

Progress has been achieved in enrollment and completion rates in the last ten years, but the rate of progress is slow. Table 1 provides completion rates by level for primary, lower secondary (L. Sec.) and Upper secondary (U. Sec.) education (data are not available for higher education completion rates).

- Limited progress: Table 1 suggests limited progress since CESA 16-25 was adopted. Enrollment and completion rates remain low with most countries likely to fall far short of SDG4 targets by 2030. In addition, data over a longer period than provided in Table 1 suggests that the rate of progress may have slowed, with for many indicators less progress in the last decade than before.
- Gender parity: At the aggregate level, parity has been broadly achieved in pre-primary enrollment. Girls have caught up with boys at the primary and lower secondary levels, but less so at higher levels of schooling. In some countries however, including in the Sahel as well as among the poor in many countries, there is still much to do to promote better educational opportunities for girls.
- Enrollment in pre-primary and higher education: Although not shown in the Table, data are also available for enrollment in pre-primary and higher education, with again limited progress (in sub-Saharan Africa for example, less than one in three children are enrolled in pre-primary education, and just one in ten youth of the relevant age group are enrolled in higher education).
- SDG4 benchmarks: More details on the extent to which countries have made progress towards SDG4 benchmarks are available in a scorecard from UIS and the Global Education Monitoring Report team. The latest scorecard was published in 2024, typically using data up to 2022[45].

Table 1: Trends in Completion Rates Since the Adoption of CESA 16-25 by Education Level (%)

	Both sexes			Female			Male		
	Primary	L. Sec.	U. Sec.	Primary	L. Sec.	U. Sec.	Primary	L. Sec.	U. Sec.
Africa									
2016	64.6	45.9	30.2	65.9	45.0	28.8	63.2	46.8	31.6
2022	69.2	50.1	32.5	71.8	50.0	31.5	66.8	50.3	33.4
Central									
2016	54.7	37.7	16.3	56.2	36.3	14.5	53.1	39.2	18.1
2022	59.7	42.8	18.8	63.0	42.8	17.9	56.4	42.9	19.7
Eastern									
2016	55.3	32.9	17.2	59.4	33.5	16.8	51.2	32.3	17.6
2022	59.7	37.2	19.6	65.5	39.4	20.1	54.0	35.0	19.1
Northern									
2016	88.5	70.1	58.3	88.5	72.5	61.5	88.5	67.9	55.1
2022	91.8	75.0	65.0	92.4	78.1	69.2	91.3	72.0	61.0
Southern									
2016	67.7	49.6	25.0	69.4	49.8	25.0	66.0	49.4	24.9
2022	70.7	50.3	25.7	73.4	50.9	26.2	68.0	49.8	25.2
Western									
2016	67.2	50.4	37.8	66.3	46.4	32.8	68.1	54.3	42.7
2022	73.5	56.7	41.2	73.3	52.8	36.5	73.6	60.5	45.8

Source: UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report Team.

Learning and Skills

Most students in school are not learning enough, starting in primary school. Traditional indicators used for measuring progress in educational outcomes used to focus on enrollment rates (for pre-primary and tertiary education) and completion rates (for primary and secondary education). Today, a stronger focus is placed on learning while in school. Estimates for primary education suggest a learning crisis with few students achieving minimum proficiency in math and reading, especially in sub-Saharan Africa (Table 2)[46]. Note that in Northern Africa, Egypt and Morocco take part in grade 4 assessments in reading, but data on student proficiency tends not to be readily available for many countries.

Table 2: Trends in Student Learning in Primary School Since the Adoption of CESA 16-25 (%)

Year	Students in Grade 2 or 3		Students at end of primary	
	Minimum proficiency in math (%)	Minimum proficiency in reading (%)	Minimum proficiency in math (%)	Minimum proficiency in reading (%)
	Sub-Saharan Africa			
2016	50.5	34.9	11.9	30.8
Latest	51.6	36.2	11.2	30.2
Difference	+1.1	+1.3	-0.7	-0.6

Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics. Estimates are pre-COVID since the latest year for available data at the time of writing is 2019. Simulations suggest an increase in learning poverty during the COVID-19 pandemic.

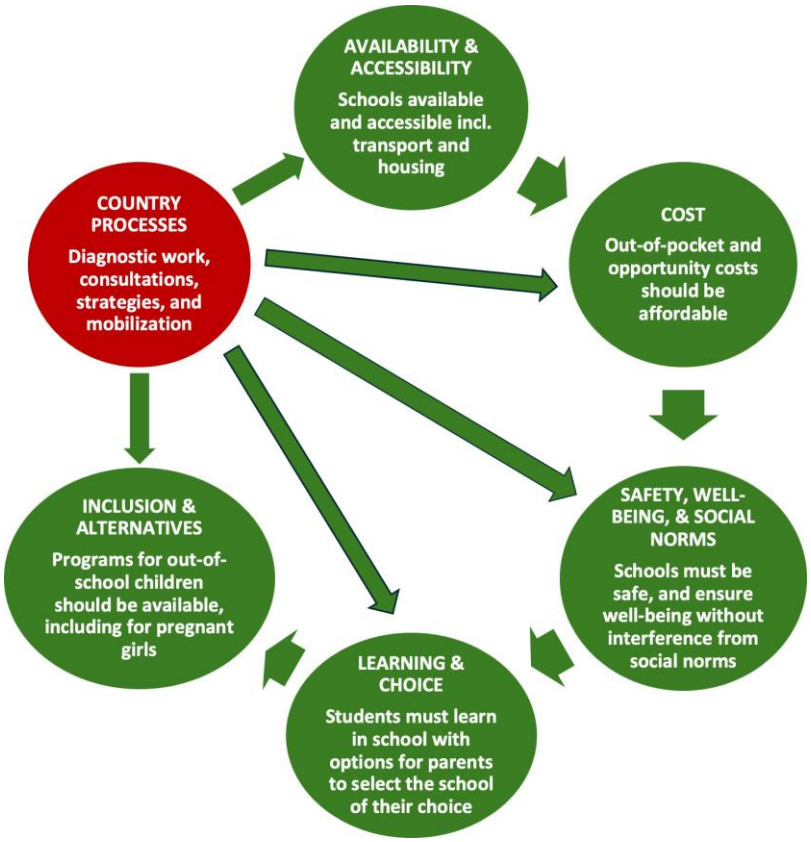
The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to have affected learning further. Using a different measure of learning than the measure reported for reading proficiency in Table 2, it is estimated that up to nine in ten children may be "learning poor" in sub-Saharan Africa, i.e., not able to read and understand a simple text by age 10. The estimates are based on (i) the share of children aged 10 who are out of school, with all those children considered as learning poor; (ii) the share of children who are in school but still not able to read and understand a simple text (those children are "learning deprived")[47]. Globally, almost half of all children in low and middle-income countries were considered learning poor before the COVID-19 pandemic, but in sub-Saharan Africa and low-income countries, learning poverty was much higher. The magnitude of the impact of the pandemic on learning poverty is not yet known, but simulations suggest it may be large[48]. Before the pandemic, the target set by the World Bank in partnership with UN agencies was to reduce learning poverty in half by 2030. That target is unlikely to be achieved[49], with potentially severe implications for the likelihood that children will remain in school (see Box 4).

Lack of learning is a key factor leading students to drop out of school, even if other factors also play a role, including accessibility (be it economic or geographical), social norms, violence in schools, and a lack of relevance of what is taught. While the issues of insufficient schooling and learning are often discussed separately, they are closely linked with lack of learning being a major factor for students to drop out of school. Analysis with household surveys for nine West African countries suggests that at the primary and lower secondary levels, lack of learning is often the main reason for boys and girls alike to drop out of school prematurely[50]. Other factors also play a role, including social norms, especially for adolescent girls, and a perception that schooling may not be beneficial, which may point to the fact that education systems are not ensuring that graduates are labour ready. While the issue of a lack of relevance of what is taught for the labor market may be especially salient for TVET, it also matters for the general education track and higher education. In terms of health and well-being, high rates of violence in schools or on the way to school also contribute to lack of learning and the risk of dropping out. A wide range of other factors also play a role, including lack of accommodation for vulnerable groups, including children with disabilities and children who are refugees or internally displaced and children of nomadic groups. While this is not shown explicitly in Figure 2, the various factors affecting schooling also affect each other. For example, a lack of adequate infrastructure affects learning, the cost of schooling, and even safety.

Box 4: Stylized Factors Affecting Schooling

Figure 2 suggests five conditions or sequential steps needed for children and youth to go to school and learn enough to complete their education: (1) schools must have the capacity to accommodate students and be accessible (including transport and housing services when schools are located far away – noting that limited opportunities for early learning services also contribute to many children entering school while not school-ready); (2) schooling must be affordable given the potential out-of-pocket and opportunity cost of schooling; (3) going to school must be safe and children must be able to thrive in school without hindrance from harmful social norms; (4) children must be able to learn in school; (5) second chance programs must be available for children or youth who dropped out of school; all of these led by (6) appropriate national or subnational processes (e.g., preparing diagnostic studies, organizing national or regional consultations, adopting strategies, and mobilizing financial and other resources) are needed for policies and programs at each stage.

Figure 2: Stylized Factors Affecting Schooling



Source: Africa Teachers Report on girls' education[51].

Beyond a lack of foundational learning, secondary and post-secondary education may not sufficiently prepare youth for the labor market of the future. The challenges are again massive as Africa will account for most of the growth in the working-age population in coming decades. The OECD[52] estimates that the number of Africans that will complete upper secondary or tertiary education will be more than doubled between 2020 and 2040. What types of jobs these youth may have access to is a concern. Manufacturing and other high productivity jobs remain rare, forcing youths to join the informal sector, including the agriculture and retail sectors that are labor-intensive, but also often low productivity. The structural transformation of African economies remains slow, leading some of the best educated to look for work outside of Africa, thereby contributing to brain drain. As the jobs of the future will require digital and other advanced skills, education systems must equip children and youth with those skills. This should include a stronger focus on STEAM education to ensure that youths can harness the technological revolution.

Education Financing

Despite calls for higher investments in education, education financing is falling behind, with unfavorable medium-term prospects due to high debt burdens. There is a strong relationship between a country's level of economic development and its investment in education. While low-income countries spend an average of US$60 per capita on education, the investment is at US$250 in lower-middle income countries, US$900 in upper-middle income countries, and around US$8,000 in high income countries[53]. In many African countries, an additional issue is that budget execution rates are low. As a result, there is broad consensus today that public funding for education should increase in Africa, and so should official development assistance (ODA) and other potential funding even if these resources represent only a small fraction of what governments allocate to education systems. Unfortunately, in Africa public funding for education has decreased in proportional terms rather than increased in recent years, with ODA also not faring well. Table 3 provide data on: (i) Public expenditure on education as a percentage of total government expenditure; and (ii) Public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP. For the median country, expenditure on education declined as a share of total government expenditure since CESA was adopted, while government expenditure on education remained flat as a share of GDP. The values in Table 3 fall short of United Nations recommendations, as discussed in Part III. There is a risk that governments may not be able or willing to increase funding for education in the medium-term due to high levels of debt.

Table 2: Trends in Education Financing Since the Adoption of CESA 16-25 (%)

Indicators	2016	Latest Data
Expenditure on education as share of total government expenditure (%, median country)	16.0	14.5
Government expenditure on education, total (% of GDP)	3.7	3.7

Source: UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report Team. Latest data are for 2021 for Expenditure on education as share of total government expenditure and 2022 for Government expenditure on education as a share of GDP.

Findings from the CESA 16-25 Review

Findings from the CESA 16-25 review inform this strategy, starting with the level of awareness among stakeholders and whether the previous strategy was deemed useful or not by stakeholders. CESA 16-25 awareness among respondents was relatively high, and respondents tended to find the strategy useful, but relatively few used the strategy beyond simply citing it or referring to its objectives. In terms of the assessment of the impact of the strategy in countries or in Africa, it was deemed average. For respondents not aware of the strategy, lack of awareness was an obvious reason for lack of impact, but lack of funding and lack of capacity as well as other reasons were also cited as constraints. Lack of support from RECs, lack of consultation, and lack of capacity were also cited as constraints to the strategy's impact. Of note, respondents found virtually all SOs of the strategy to be important for education in Africa.

Many respondents were aware of CESA clusters and many of their organizations participated in some of their activities, but the cluster mechanism needs strengthening. Respondents in the surveys were asked if they were aware of the CESA clusters and whether to their knowledge their organization had participated in any of the clusters. Most respondents were indeed aware of the clusters, and quite a few participated. This is encouraging. However, many clusters are not currently operating well enough. Based on various indicators, less than half of clusters appear to have been highly operational recently. This assessment is for recent operationality – some clusters that may have been relatively inactive recently

may have been more active and made important contributions in the past. In the same vein, some clusters less active recently may again become more active in the future. Still, this suggests room for improvement. Participants in functioning clusters find them useful, but lack of funding is seen as a key impediment.

CESA 16-25 envisioned a robust monitoring framework, but monitoring progress has been challenging. As mentioned, CESA 16-25 was structured around 12 SOs with 69 intermediate-level goals or AAs that were identified critical elements for achieving the SOs. In principle, indicators should have been available to monitor (most) AAs, but for many AAs this was not the case. For some AAs, even proposing a robust and feasible measure to assess progress over time could be very difficult. AAs were meant to be the basis for operational plans to implement the strategy, but these plans were not drafted or completed. As the strategy included multiple SOs and AAs, M&E required extensive data collection, which proved not feasible. As a result, comprehensive data to assess progress are simply not available. In addition, progress towards CESA implementation was meant to be discussed in the AU Reports of Annual Continental Activities, but this was not done systematically in-depth. A CESA Journal was launched and meant to be published bi-annually, but it was rapidly discontinued. Finally, a mid-term review (MTR) of the M&E framework for CESA 16-25 was long planned but delayed and published only in July 2024. That report has a limited scope for analysis but provides very useful recommendations for monitoring in terms of indicators available.

Finally, substantial work was done by the AU on the SOs of CESA 16-25. The review acknowledges this work but does not aim to assess its impact. On teachers, contributions include the adoption of instruments building on the Global Framework of Professional Teaching Standards, a draft strategy on mental health and psycho-social support for teachers, and the organization of the Continental Best Teacher Award. On learning environments, substantial work was done on school feeding and an Education for Health and Well-Being Strategy was adopted. On ICT, guidance was provided among others through the Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa and the recent Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy, with the creation of the Pan-African Virtual and Electronic University being another important initiative. On knowledge and skills, the AU co-published a Spotlight report series on foundational learning. On gender, it co-published the first Africa Teachers Report on educating girls and the role of teachers and school leaders in doing so. It also launched the #AfricaEducatesHer Campaign and organized a major conference as part of the Year of Education. On adult literacy, the AU worked on digital literacy and media literacy, among others. On STEAM, a recent initiative is the Africa Dialogue Series 2024. On TVET, the AU managed several projects and has been reviewing and updating its strategy. On higher education and research, it is reviewing and updating its Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa, with the Pan-African University being another key project. On education for peace, the AU collaborates with various partners and manages among others the Youth for Peace Africa Program. On data, AU/IPED leads support to Member States in part through the KIX Africa 19 Hub. Finally, on coalitions to improve education systems, the adoption of Education as the theme for the year 2024 was a great opportunity for advocacy.

PART III: FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

CESA 26-35 provides a framework for action, considering the current state of education systems as well as promising approaches to improve educational outcomes and lessons learned from CESA 16-25. As discussed earlier, gains have been limited over the last decade, not only in terms of educational outcomes, but also in the funding available for education. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic played a role, but the challenges are more fundamental. The slow rate of progress should not be attributed to CESA 16-25 since the primary responsibility for improving educational outcomes lies with Member States. But whether at the country, regional, or continental level, slow progress must be acknowledged in this strategy[54]. This being said, as noted among others in the recent Transforming Education Summit, while limited progress has been achieved in the last decade, there are major opportunities to accelerate progress going forward. Suggesting how this could be done is the rationale for this new strategy.

The strategy aims to contribute to AU's vision by identifying strategic areas for investments in education and specific objectives that can be measured over time. The AU vision is "*An integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in global arena.*" The aim of CESA 26-35 is to provide guidance to Member States, RECs, and other education stakeholders towards improving educational outcomes in the next decade, in line with the aspirations of Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 that will continue to inform the strategy for the first half of its timing horizon. The hope is that CESA 26-35 will be helpful to Member States, RECs, and other stakeholders as they develop and implement transformative, relevant, and inclusive education strategies and policies, thereby contributing to economic development in a sustainable way as well as peace and social cohesion. In what follows, a framework for action with six strategic areas (SAs) and a brief discussion for each area.

It should be emphasized however that African countries have diverse development trajectories and therefore diverse needs. For this strategy to remain relatively brief, this cannot be discussed here, but it should be clear that objectives outlined in this strategy may be more or less salient for different countries.

Vision, Framework, and Rationale

The vision adopted in CESA 16-25 remains appropriate for CESA 26-35. As noted in CESA 16- 25, Agenda 2063 envisions a *"peaceful and prosperous Africa, integrated, led by its own citizens and occupying the place it deserves in the global community and in the knowledge economy."* CESA 16-25 was meant to deliver the necessary human capital for the realization of this Vision. The mission of CESA 16-25 was "*Reorienting Africa's education and training systems to meet the knowledge, competencies, skills, innovation and creativity required to nurture African core values and promote sustainable development at the national, sub-regional and continental levels."* This vision remains appropriate for CESA 26-35.

The framework for action for CESA 26-35 consists of six strategic areas (SAs) with three objectives per SA and two more objectives for implementation and for monitoring and evaluation. The SAs are:

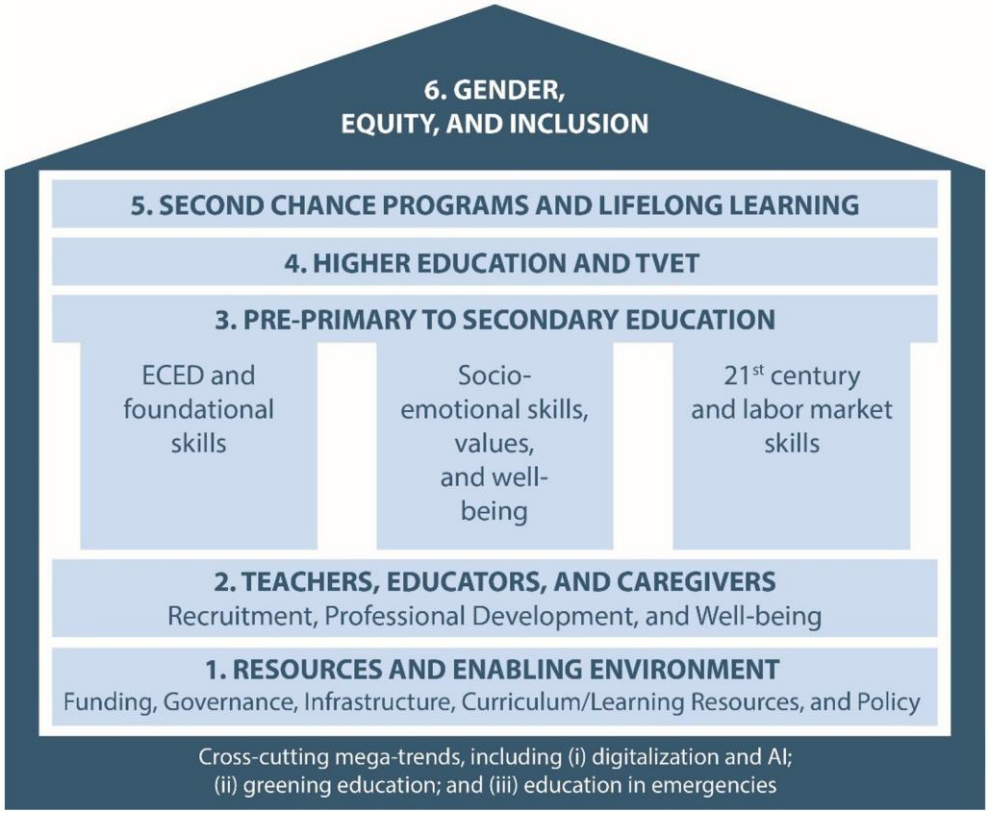
- SA1: Resources and enabling environment. This broad SA covers issues from pre-primary to higher education related to funding, governance, infrastructure, curriculum and learning resources, and sector-wide policy, including a recognition of the fact that different service providers (public, private, faith-based, and others) contribute in important ways to education systems.
- SA2: Teachers, educators, and caregivers. This SA covers issues pertaining to the recruitment, career progression, and professional development of teachers, educators or instructors (e.g., for TVET), and caregivers (e.g., for children under 3 years old) as well as their well-being. This relates to salaries and benefits, but also to leadership and accountability, and to teachers' mental health and motivation.
- SA3: Pre-primary to secondary education, with a focus on early learning and foundational, socio-emotional, and 21st century and labor market skills. This SA focuses on outcomes for learners, recognizing the different types of skills that they need to acquire, as well as the fact that schools should promote health and well-being among students as well as 21st century skills, including

for the labor market. The issues matter most for pre-primary to secondary education even if they remain relevant at higher levels[55].

- SA4: Higher Education and TVET. This SA covers post-secondary education where specific challenges must be met, including links between education, innovation, and economic development.
- SA5: Second chance programs and lifelong learning. This SA covers issues related to second chance programs for children and youth out-of-school, including to promote re-entry into school, and the need to provide lifelong learning opportunities for all.
- SA6: Gender, equity, and inclusion. This key SA emphasizes the need for education systems to serve the entire population, with special attention to be given to gender, equity, and inclusion.
- Cross-cutting themes: Several themes or mega-trends are cross-cutting and need attention, including (i) digitalization and AI; (ii) greening education; and (iii) education in emergencies.

A simple visual aims to facilitate communications around the SAs. Figure 3 conveys the idea that education systems must be built, like a house or structure. The first two SAs are the foundations, followed by three pillars combined into one strategic area. These pillars relate to the foundational, socio-emotional, and 21st century skills that learners must acquire, especially through pre-primary to secondary education. Those skills also need to be emphasized at higher levels of learning, as well as in second chance programs and lifelong learning, but the period from pre-primary to secondary education is essential. Next come educational opportunities through Higher Education and TVET, and programs for children and youth out of school and for lifelong learning for adults. The roof and outside walls that encompass the whole system must ensure gender-transformative approaches, equity, and inclusion. Finally, the text at the base of the structure highlights a few critical mega-trends that education systems must adapt and respond to. Although this is not shown in the visual, it must also be recognized that parents are the first and primary educators of children and must be involved in the decisions regarding the education of their children. Also important is the fact that there are links between the various parts of the visual. For example, higher education is fundamental not only for offering lifelong learning opportunities, but also for training teachers, educators, and caregivers, and as a potential source of innovation for education systems[56].

Figure 3: Framework for Action for CESA 26-35



Source: Prepared for this report.

As mentioned, each SA includes three objectives, with two additional objectives for implementation and for monitoring and evaluation. Table 6 provides the list of objectives by SA and Figure 4 provides a visualization. In terms of their numbers, the 20 objectives could be compared to the 69 AAs in CESA 16-25. The number of objectives under CESA 26-35 is smaller than the number of AAs in CESA 16-25. This is intentional as the number of objectives was capped at 20 to convey prioritization, although what was included in CESA 16-25 is still included in CESA 26-35, albeit at a higher level of aggregation. While it should be acknowledged that not everything that matters for improving educational outcomes can be captured by the SAs and their objectives, the framework hopefully ensures focus in the guidance being provided.

Table 4: Strategic Areas and Objectives for CESA 26-35

Areas and Objectives
SA1: Resources and Enabling Environment
1. Ensure evidence-based policies, system management, governance, funding, and partnerships
2. Upgrade curricula and teaching and learning resources to reflect current and emerging challenges
3. Expand and upgrade school infrastructure and the learning environment
SA2: Teachers, Educators, and Caregivers
4. Improve teacher policies, education, professional development, and accountability
5. Increase the attractiveness of the teaching profession
6. Invest in school leadership including the share of female leaders where needed
SA3: Pre-Primary to Secondary Education
7. Expand cost-effective approaches to improve ECED and foundational learning
8. Invest in socio-emotional skills and education for health and well-being
9. Promote 21st century and labor market skills, including for ICT/AI and STEAM
SA4: Higher Education and TVET
10. Strengthen links between TVET and labor markets
11. Expand access to and the quality of higher education
12. Provide incentives for research, including in STEAM areas and education
SA5: Second Chance Programs and Lifelong Learning
13. Expand second chance programs for out-of-school children and youth, including for re-entry into school
14. Expand adult literacy campaigns
15. Support lifelong learning
SA6: Gender, Equity, and Inclusion
16. Promote gender equality in and through education
17. Reduce the cost of schooling for equity
18. Ensure inclusiveness for vulnerable and at-risk groups, including in contexts of emergencies
Implementation, Monitoring, and Evaluation
19. Strengthen CESA Clusters and other implementation mechanisms
20. Streamline monitoring and evaluation

Source: Prepared for this report.

When implementing the strategy, attention should be paid to promoting talent retention within Africa, ensuring inclusive education systems, and strengthening professional development for teachers and school leaders. While fully endorsing the strategy and recommending its adoption, participants in the 5th specialized technical committee meeting held in November 2024 noted the importance of reducing brain drain in Africa by encouraging talent retention, including through innovative entrepreneurship in the EdTech sector, local opportunities, and an emphasis on the value of African expertise[57] (as considered in SA 3 and SA 4). The experts meeting for the specialized technical committee[58] also stressed the need for the strategy to encourage the inclusion of displaced people and people with disabilities. prioritize inclusive education and equity-focused approaches (as emphasized in SA 6), and ensure that the grant financing architecture facilitates the acquisition of skills for the labor market (as emphasized in SA3). Participants also stressed the role of the private sector in training processes especially for TVET (as emphasized in SA4) competency-based education, and life-long learning (as emphasized in SA5). Finally, participants stressed the importance of continuous professional development for teachers and school leaders (as emphasized in SA2) and the need for collaborations and partnerships for increased investments in education.

Figure 4: Objectives by Strategic Areas for CESA 26-35

Source: Prepared for this report.

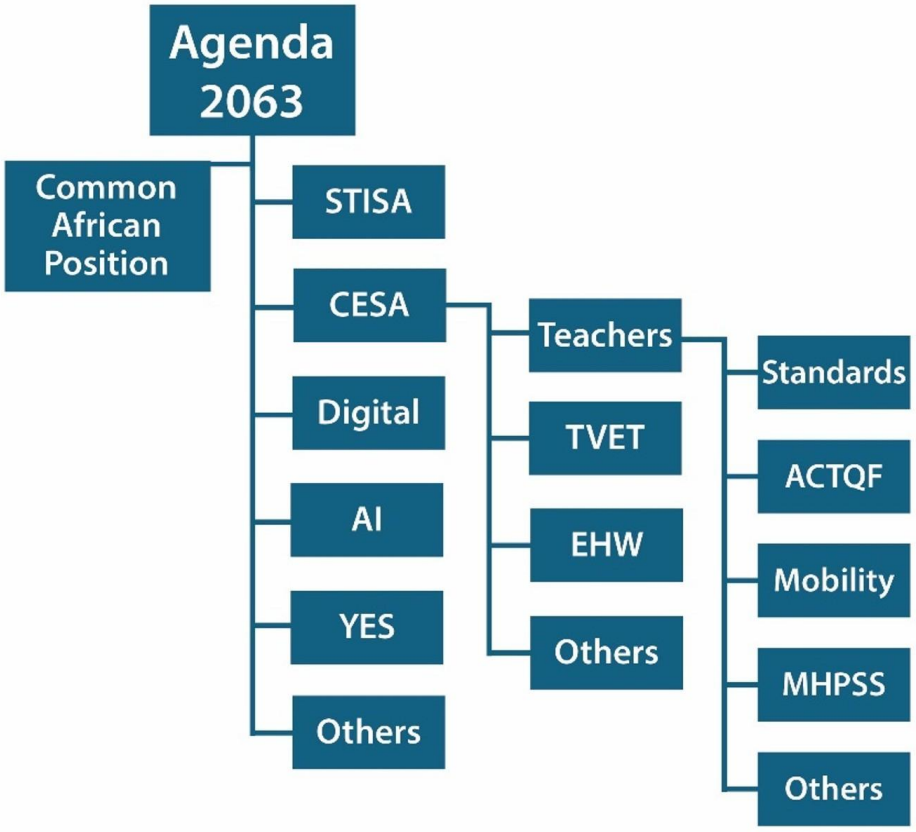
Various considerations led to this framework. Without going into too many details, a few points may be helpful regarding the aims of CESA 26-35, SAs and objectives, implementation, and monitoring:

- Aims of CESA 26-35: As noted in the CESA 16-25 review, there is a difference between strategies providing guidance for multiple stakeholders and strategies implemented by a single organization, in this case the AU. Most of the "action" for improving educational outcomes in Africa is at the country where Member States and other stakeholders create their own strategies or sector plans and implement them. This means that CESA 26-25 must remain at a somewhat broad level, without going too much into the weeds, and provide guidance recognizing that some SAs or objectives may be more relevant for some countries or regions than others. This suggests that CESA 26-35 should not be prescriptive but rather indicative of issues to pay attention to.
- Number of SAs and objectives: A good practice in strategies is to not have too many areas of focus, so that there is prioritization. For monitoring, a limited number of objectives is beneficial too. But there is an additional reason for keeping the number of SAs and objectives small: the AU has adopted or is in the process of adopting other strategies and instruments relevant to education, and some of the strategies it has adopted outside of the Education Sector are relevant for that sector. As illustrated in Figure 5, this is the case for strategies related, among others, to (i) science, technology, and innovation (STISA); (ii) Digital transformation; (iii) Artificial intelligence; and (iv) Youth employment (YES). Within the Education Sector, strategies have also been developed – this is the case among others for TVET and for Education for Health and Well-being. Apart from strategies, the AU has also developed a range of instruments, for example related to teachers. More detailed recommendations can and should be provided in those strategies and instruments, with CESA 16-25 serving as an overarching vision leaving more detailed guidance to other documents.
- Structure of SAs: After foundations (first two SAs), the focus is on basic education, followed by Higher Education and TVET. In many countries different Ministries oversee these sub-sectors. Providing guidance by sub-sector therefore matches the decision-making process. Second chance programs and lifelong learning are combined because they both target individuals not in school.

Finally, for basic education, an emphasis is placed on learning versus simply schooling, noting that children and youth (as well as adults for lifelong learning) need to learn different types of skills. This is why three sets of skills are explicitly highlighted for basic education in the framework.

- Implementation and monitoring: A strategy is only as good as its implementation, accounting for what may work or not in different settings. Monitoring and evaluation also matter to assess progress. One question is whether CESA 26-35 should include targets, estimates of the cost of reaching those targets, and a discussion of potential trade-offs between targets. Strategies aiming to be operationalized often include SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound) targets and their costs, financial or otherwise. This is however beyond the scope of this strategy, especially since implementation will need to be conducted at the level of Member States. CESA 26-35 provides a framework for action, but targets and costs must be set at the country level.

Figure 4: Objectives by Strategic Areas for CESA 26-35



Source: Prepared for this report.

In what follows, a brief discussion is provided for each of the 20 objectives. The aim is to (i) Briefly explain the importance of the objective; and (ii) Provide links to guidance for achieving the objective (links are necessarily selective and indicative only, given that for most objectives there is a large literature). The issue of monitoring progress towards the objectives is discussed in Part IV of the strategy. Importantly, the information and especially the guidance provided for each objective reflects today's knowledge base. This information should be updated as the strategy is being implemented to keep resources up to date.

SA1: Resources and Enabling Environment

Objective #1: Ensure evidence-based policies, governance, funding, and partnerships

Importance: It is hard to overstate the importance of evidence-based policies, funding, governance, and partnerships. Policies are instruments to steer the education system towards better outcomes, from pre-primary to higher education and lifelong learning. But without funding, they cannot be implemented. As African countries are falling short of targets for public spending on education, funding for the sector must be increased, including through innovative financing mechanisms that could allow additional resources to be leveraged[59]. On governance, among other issues, countries must balance autonomy and accountability in the role played by different types of schools (e.g., public, private, faith-based, etc.), so that they can complement each other. Issues of governance also arise in sub-sectors, including for the role of employers

in TVET Councils or how to ensure autonomy and accountability for universities. Regarding partnerships, development partners (DPs), civil society organizations (CSOs), the private sector, communities including traditional and religious leaders, and families all have a role to play towards improving education systems.

Guidance: Guidance on policies for various SAs will be discussed in relationship to those SAs, but at a broader level, an interesting source is the short Partnership Compact Guidelines of GPE since the advice provided therein has broader application as well[60]. Technical guidance for policy analysis is also available[61]. On funding, the latest guidance from the United Nations Secretary-General's High-level Panel on the Teaching Profession[62] calls for governments to allocate at least 6 per cent of gross domestic product and 20 per cent of total government expenditure to education. This may not be easy, given relatively high levels of debt in many countries[63], but recent analysis by UNICEF and the African Union suggests options for increasing education spending[64]. Targets have also been proposed for public education expenditure for various sub-sectors. On governance and partnerships, the role of the private sector in education provision remains disputed, but guidance is available in the Global Education Monitoring Report on non-state actors in education[65]. Guidance is also available for specific sub-sectors, for example for TVET[66]. Across sectors, evidence-based approaches require data. A recent UNESCO Conference on Education Statistics led to a range of decisions that are also relevant for Africa, including on administrative data, teacher data, education expenditure data, learning assessments and skills, household surveys, and other data[67]. At the AU, education data are the focus of the Pan-African Institute for Education for Development's (AU/IPED) which works with Member States on promoting robust and functional Education Management Information Systems (EMIS), and strengthening national capacity to collect, analyze and report on education data.

Objective #2: Upgrade curricula to reflect current and emerging challenges

Importance: Curricula are what is taught, learned, and assessed. They are part of the foundations of education systems. There is a need to upgrade curricula among others to: (i) improve foundational skills to fight learning poverty; (ii) promote socio-emotional skills; and (iii) strengthen labor market and 21st century skills such as communication, creativity and innovation, critical thinking, decision making, problem solving, and teamwork, not to mention more technical skills such as digital literacy or skills related to STEAM. There is also a need to move towards competency-based curricula and make curricula gender-transformative, while ensuring that education promotes peace and global citizenship. Ensuring when feasible that young children are taught in their native language is also a priority. Challenges such as climate change and AI require adaptations to make curricula more endogenous, including for values (e.g., through Ubuntu and other relevant approaches) and history (e.g., with reference to resources from the General History of Africa). How curricula are designed also has implications for the cost of providing education. At the secondary level, some curricula may be too complex, leading to higher costs than needed. At the tertiary level, curriculum reform for Teacher Training Institutions (TTIs) and university-based Schools of Education is a priority, given that they train future teachers, with attention given to the science of learning, practice-oriented training, and efficient feedback loops for testing of new curricula. Finally, there are opportunities to harmonize curriculum development at the regional or continental level, for example for foundational education standards related to literacy and numeracy.

Guidance: For young children, there is a need to ensure developmentally sound approaches to learning including through play[68]. On improving foundational skills to fight learning poverty, guidance is available from a World Bank report[69] that emphasizes cost-effective approaches, including among others structured pedagogy and teaching at the right level (see also Objective #4 below). On competency-based curricula, experiences are available from some of the countries that pioneered the shift[70]. Another promising intervention is teaching in the child's own language in the early grades. On ICT and STEAM, and 21st century skills, guidance will be discussed below. On education for peace and the prevention of violence, various guides have been prepared by teachers[71]. On history, a major reference is the General History of Africa, a long-standing project aiming to reconstruct Africa's history from an African perspective and for which online courses and other pedagogic materials are being developed, targeting students and the general public for lifelong learning perspectives. On climate change, a wide range of new resources are also being developed[72]. As for climate change, resources on integrating AI in the curriculum are growing[73].

Objective #3: Expand and upgrade infrastructure and the learning environment

Importance: Lack of availability and accessibility of decent schools continues to be obstacles to quality education, especially in countries with a rapidly increasing school-age population where pressure from high population growth makes it harder to provide services. There is insufficient investment funding to expand the educational infrastructure at all levels from early childhood to higher education, with funding also often lacking for maintenance and upgrade which reduces buildings' life expectancy. Even when schools are available and located nearby, overcrowded classrooms may affect learning outcomes and lead

to dropout. A lack of WASH facilities is especially detrimental to girls. Many buildings are not accessible to children with disabilities, with safety also being an issue especially in areas prone to climatic and seismic shocks. In conflict-affected areas, how to make schools safer and less prone to attacks is also a major issue. Finally, many schools lack access to ICT equipment and the internet, and sometimes electricity.

Guidance: Historically, requirements for school construction have tended to be over-specified, leading to high costs. Non-competitive practices, corruption, and poor tender processes may also have reduced the efficiency of school construction, suggesting that beyond designs, school construction processes must be looked at. The issue of how to expand the school infrastructure is major, but analytically it has received less attention than other issues. Still, available resources and initiatives include GPE's climate smart education systems initiative[74], a background note on school infrastructure for the World Bank's education strategy for West and Central Africa[75], and frameworks such as the Comprehensive School Safety Framework (CSSF)[76]. On how to use (and not to use) ICT, which proved crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic, evidence is summarized in the Global Education Monitoring Report (GEMR) on technology in education[77]. Guidance provided by other AU strategies is also relevant, including the Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa (2020-2030)[78] and the recent Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy[79]. Sports and play facilities are also critical to promote children's overall well-being, learning, and development.

SA2: Teachers, Educators, and Caregivers

Objective #4: Improve teacher policies, education, and professional development

Importance: The quality of teaching and the training that teachers receive matter for the performance and well-being of students, as well as for other roles that education systems fulfill, including socialization, identity formation, and education to citizenship. Teacher policies are the framework for the recruitment, training, and deployment of new teachers, and the continuous professional development of existing teachers. Work is needed in many countries to better define professional standards and competencies for teachers and link them to clear career stages at all levels from early childhood to higher education. In terms of pre-service education, the qualifications required in many African countries (such as one- or two-year post-secondary degrees for teaching in primary schools) are lower than the bachelor's degree recommended by the African Union, and not all teachers meet those qualifications. Regarding professional development, while experiences differ between countries, the training that teachers get tends to be episodic and not systematic, with major gaps in competencies teachers need. Specific issues also require specific attention, including the lack of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) or STEAM (adding the Arts to STEM) teachers and the need to institutionalize the early learning workforce. Finally, there is a need to make the teaching profession more collaborative, among others through mentorship, teacher support, and peer learning, all of which are associated with better learning. As teachers are in the front line of service delivery, they are a primary source of innovative approaches.

Guidance: Guidance on teacher policies is available among others from UNESCO and the Teacher Task Force[80], the recent Global Report on Teachers[81], the report of the United Nations Secretary-General's High-level Panel on the Teaching Profession[82], a forthcoming Africa Teachers Report on investing in teachers and school leaders in Africa[83] , a World Bank blueprint[84] from a few years ago, and a series of discussion papers under the Knowledge and Innovation Exchange program[85]. Valuable instruments adopted by the AU include the African Continental Framework of Standards and Competencies for the Teaching Profession, the African Continental Teacher Qualification Framework, the African Continental Guidelines for the Teaching Profession, and the African Continental Teacher Mobility Protocol[86], all of which build on the Global Framework of Professional Teaching Standards[87]. The AU is also preparing a strategy on mental health and psycho-social support for teachers. On teacher professional development, guidance is available from the Learning at Scale study[88]. Traditionally, teacher training used to involve gathering teachers for short mostly theoretical training and sending them back to the classroom, hoping this would make a difference. This often does not work. Rather, a common feature of successful programs is to train teachers in practicing new skills using structured pedagogy, with coaches supporting teachers and monitoring progress. Teaching needs to become much more of a collaborative profession. On the professionalization of the early learning workforce, platforms for stakeholder consultations are needed.

Objective #5: Increase the attractiveness of the teaching profession

Importance: The recent Global Teacher Report[89] provides evidence of teacher shortages and notes an increase in recent years in attrition rates, with some young teachers leaving the profession after just a few years. If countries were to reach the SDGs, which would imply 100% enrollment rates at the primary and secondary levels in just a few years, Africa could need 15 million new teachers by 2030. In practice,

the number of teachers needed is much smaller since most countries will not reach SDG4 targets (as disc used earlier, limited progress has been achieved in boosting enrollment rates). Still, the number of teachers needed will remain substantial, and there is also a need to improve the quality of the current teacher force. To recruit new teachers and empower and retain current teachers, governments will need to ensure that the profession is attractive enough, which is not the case today in many countries, including in terms of wages and benefits and working conditions (acknowledging that increasing salaries and benefits is no panacea and has cost implications). In addition, there is a need to find ways to increase the prestige of the profession. In many countries, the profession may not have any more the respect it once commanded. Still another issue is the (lack) of gender balance among teachers with different challenges by level of education and depending on the level of economic development of countries.

Guidance: Many of the references mentioned for the previous objective also discuss issues related to improving the attractiveness of the profession. This may require improving salaries and other benefit (e.g., medical insurance, housing, transport allowance, pensions, etc.), especially for women who often lag men in pay. Data also suggest that many teachers are stressed. Improving school leadership and providing mental health and psycho-social support could also help, the later especially in contexts of emergencies. Incentives may also be needed to ensure that remote and fragile areas have the teachers they need. Importantly, the situation of teachers, educators, and caregivers is not the same across countries. In some countries, teachers and other educators are better paid than other individuals with similar levels of education and experience. In other countries, they are less well paid. Conducting diagnostics is therefore encouraged, considering that changes in teacher pay and benefits have major budget implications. Conducting job satisfaction surveys can help MoEs and Teacher Service Commissions assess the morale of their workforce and what could increase satisfaction and motivation. Implementing Teacher Awards schemes can also be beneficial to signal to teachers and to society at large the value of the profession[90].

Box 5: A Strategy on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support for Teachers

As part of the process for the preparation and approval of CESA 26-35, a Continental Education Strategy on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support for Teachers in Africa (CS-MHPSS) was also approved[91]. The strategy contributed to the CESA 26-35 objective #5 namely increasing the attractiveness of the teaching profession. It provides guidance on how to contribute to better mental health for teachers, building on existing global, regional, and national policies and frameworks related to teacher wellbeing, including WHO and ILO guidance. CS-MHPSS aims to provide a systematic and harmonized approach towards promoting the mental health and well-being of teachers and educators, preventing mental disorders, facilitating care, enhancing the social and emotional wellbeing of educators, and promoting psychosocial support and recovery of those that had significant impacts and challenges.

Objective #6: Invest in school leadership including the share of female leaders

Importance: Quality leadership goes hand in hand with quality schools and better performance for students[92]. School leaders are key to create a positive school climate and culture of peace, tolerance, equity, inclusiveness, cooperation, and hard work. Quality leadership is also associated with improved teacher retention rates, higher levels of teacher job-satisfaction, increased student motivation, and reduced student drop-out rates, and parental involvement in schools among others. Unfortunately, many school leaders in Africa lack leadership skills and have not benefitted from adequate professional development. School leaders are often appointed from a pool of teachers without training to equip them with the skills they need. Gender is another concern. Female school leaders may help reduce stereotypes on women's roles in society and serve as mentors for girls. They also tend to be associated with better learning outcomes for boys and girls alik[93]. Yet in most countries, women account for a small share of school leaders (and teachers at the secondary level), despite staying in the profession longer[94].

Guidance: Guidance on school leadership is limited today for Africa specifically, but should be available soon, including from the next Global Education Monitoring Report that focuses on that topic. In West Africa, a review of professional standards and competencies for teachers and school leaders suggests that programs and policies for school leaders are lacking in comparison to what is in place for teachers and provides recommendations[95]. The work of VVOB Education for Development on an African Centre for School Leadership is another source of guidance[96], including on African concepts of school leadership[97]. There is also an emerging literature on gender in school leadership and promoting women leaders[98].

SA3: Basic Education (Foundational, Socio-emotional, and Labor Market Ready Skills)

Objective #7: Expand cost-effective approaches to improve ECED and foundational learning

Importance: Estimates of learning poverty mentioned earlier suggest that in sub-Sahara Africa, nine in ten 10-year-old children may not be able to read an age-appropriate text[99]. Expanding early childhood education and improving foundational learning in primary school are some of the most important challenges that countries must confront. Lack of learning leads to dropout, and poor preparation for further studies even when children manage to remain in school. Early childhood education and foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) in primary school are key to enable children to learn and engage later with the broader curriculum. FLN is also essential for the acquisition of 21st century skills. There is now a large literature on how to improve learning. Pre-primary education and early stimulation are among the strategies that can help prepare children for primary school – yet as discussed earlier, enrollment in preschools remain very low in Africa and minimum quality standards for service provision grounded in the priorities of families, communities, and governments are often lacking. In primary school, associative studies suggest that being taught in the language used at home, having a female teacher or head of school, and having a teacher who holds a professional diploma or has pre-service training are all associated with better learning while large class sizes are associated with lower performance[100]. Beyond associative studies, experimental or quasi-experimental studies point to cost-effective approaches to improve learning. Guidance on many of those and related issues is available in GPE discussion papers mentioned earlier[101].

Guidance: Ensuring that all children benefit from one year of pre-primary education would be a start. In addition, based on experimental or quasi-experimental studies, recommendations on how to improve learning in a cost-effective way in low- and middle-income contexts are available from the Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel convened by the World Bank and the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO). The mandate of the panel was to provide succinct, usable, and policy-focused recommendations to support decision-making on education investments in low- and middle-income countries. Two reports were produced, with the second report expanding on the first. To provide guidance on what to do, and what not to do, the panel classified interventions to improve learning in the first report into four classes (great buys, good buys, promising interventions but with limited evidence, and bad buys). In the second report, a fifth class of effective but expensive interventions was added[102]. Effective interventions related to teachers include structured pedagogy and teaching at the right level (TaRL). Another useful resource is the Foundational Learning Pack from the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) and Human Capital Africa (HCA)[103]. A range of resources are also available on the Science of Teaching website[104].

Objective #8: Invest in socio-emotional skills and education for health and well-being

Importance: Africa today has 15 countries where attacks on education and military use of schools and universities have been recorded in 2022-2023 and is currently home to 40 million forcibly displaced persons, of which more than half are under the age of 18. Through more frequent and intense weather shocks, climate change also contributes to contexts of emergencies. Education is key to promote peace and sustainable development. In addition, a growing body of research points to the importance of socio-emotional skills or learning (SEL). Physical experiences of stress can have long term negative effects, including on student learning. Learning to manage social and emotional experiences by contrast can improve learning and well-being and improve prospects later in life. In adolescence especially, health and well-being are closely linked to the ability to remain and learn in school. For example, early pregnancies often lead girls to drop out. Violence in school, including gender-based violence, also affects both schooling and learning[105]. Investing in socio-emotional skills, education for health and well-being, and education for peace and sustainable development – and more broadly values, is therefore a key priority.

Guidance: Guidance is available on how to integrate SEL in schools[106] and on transferable skills[107]. The AU Strategy on Education for Health and Well-Being of Young People provides a roadmap for investing in health and well-being through schools[108]. Another resource is the UNESCO-UNICEF-WFP report on school health and nutrition[109]. On preventing violence in schools, guidance is available from the World Health Organization (WHO)[110] and a World Bank estimating the cost of inaction that includes a review of promising interventions[111]. The Safe Schools Declaration is an inter-governmental political commitment to protect students, teachers, schools and universities from attacks on education and the military use of schools. Also relevant is the Comprehensive School Safety Framework (CSSF) last revised in 2022. On education for peace, a guidance note was published following a revision of the 1974 Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development[112]. Also of interest may be a recent study[113] summarizing lessons from projects for the prevention of violent extremism through education.

Objective #9: Promote 21st century and labor market skills, including for ICT/AI and STEAM

Importance: There is wide agreement on the importance of 21st century skills, such as communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving. While the purpose of education goes well beyond preparing students for the labor market, these skills matter for employment, as do digital and STEAM skills. Africa will account for most of the growth in the working-age population in coming decades with the number of youths completing upper secondary or tertiary education likely to double by 2040. Too many of these youths are likely to end up in low productivity jobs, in part because of a lack of 21st century and labor market skills, including skills related to ICT/AI and STEAM that are crucial for development. There is a clear wage premium for STEAM education in labor markets, yet scientific fields are among the areas where there is a lack of skilled manpower on the continent – and a lack of teachers and educators able to teach those subjects. As future jobs will require advanced skills, these skills must be taught, starting at a young age with attention to gender balance since girls and young women remain underrepresented in STEAM fields. Importantly, beyond what can be learned in schools, well-structured work-based training can also help. Investing in 21st century and labor market skills, including for ICT/AI and STEAM, should also help in promoting talent retention within Africa and entrepreneurship in the EdTech sector.

Guidance: Labor market skills can encompass a wide range of domains, including so-called 21st century skills, but a special focus should be placed on ICT/AI skills and STEAM education. There is today a wealth of evidence on how to use (and not to use) ICT, which proved crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic. This evidence is summarized in the recent Global Education Monitoring Report (GEMR) on technology in education[114]. Guidance provided by the AU include the Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa (2020-2030)[115], brief policy guidelines on digitalizing teaching and learning in Africa prepared in response to the COVID-19 pandemic[116], the recent Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy[117], and the Digital Education Strategy and Implementation Plan[118]. On STEAM, a useful recent resource is the policy note prepared for the Africa Dialogue Series 2024 on STEAM Education for the Fourth Industrial Revolution in Africa, with a focus on generating decent jobs for Africa's Youth[119](the Dialogue Series was launched jointly by the United Nations Deputy Secretary-General and the Deputy Chairperson of the AUC). On work-based training schemes, guidance is available from the UNESCO Vocational Education (UNEVOC) network[120].

SA4: Higher Education and TVET

Objective #10: Strengthen links between TVET and labor markets

Importance: In a rapidly changing world of work, strengthening links between TVET and the labor markets is essential. The African Union Commission recently approved a new TVET strategy which identifies skills mismatch as a major challenge, with what is taught not meeting the demand from the labor market[121], in part because a lack of involvement of employed and workers' organizations. Other issues include weak governance and institutional capacity, inadequate financing, and a lack of quality assurance mechanisms. TVET systems are not well equipped to anticipate trends, including emerging needs for training in ICT and AI. TVET centers are concentrated in urban areas and in many fields few women enroll. There is also a lack of qualified trainers, experts, and managers, and limited opportunities for students to get on-the-job experience, including for entrepreneurship. Data on skills supply and demand is lacking to enable systems to adapt among others to digitalization, climate change, demographic shifts, and migration. A greater emphasis is also needed on lifelong learning, non-formal and informal education (including apprenticeships[122]), sector skills councils, recognition of prior learning, skills portability, and knowledge exchange. Finally, there is a need to place an emphasis on inclusion and vulnerable groups for secondary and higher education plus TVET.

Guidance: It is crucial for TVET training centers to effectively utilize information from labor market analysis, curriculum reviews, graduate tracer studies, and private sector engagements to improve the relevance and delivery of the education they provide. The AU is revising its TVET strategy, with recommendations along the following dimensions: (i) Policy, governance and finance; (ii) Quality and inclusion; (iii) Partnerships, knowledge and resource sharing; and (iv) Institutional development, technology and innovation[123]. Useful guidance is available in a recent report by the World Bank, UNESCO, and the ILO, and a separate report by the African Development Bank and the ILO[124]. Also relevant is the recent youth employment strategy of the African Union and ILO[125]. On-going AU programs that may also provide guidance include the Skills Initiative for Africa (SIFA) and its online platform – the Africa Skills Portal for Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship (ASPYEE), Africa Skills Week (ASW), the African Continental Qualifications Framework already mentioned earlier when discussing teachers, and WorldSkills Africa.

Objective #11: Expand access to and the quality of higher education

Importance: Higher education is a key driver of economic and social development. Demand for higher education has been rising: this is the level of schooling in Africa with the largest growth in enrollment in proportion from the base. Growth in enrollment is expected to continue given demographic trends and gains in educational attainment at lower levels. Just 10 African countries are expected to account for three fourths of the expected global growth in the population aged 18-23 from 2015 to 2035. Yet enrollment remains below 10% of the reference age group. Many issues identified for TVET also apply to higher education, including the mismatch between the skills of graduates and the needs of the labor market. Key sectors of the economy face shortages of highly skilled workers. This includes STEAM sectors, agriculture, and energy. Lack of advanced digital skills is also a constraint, with nine in ten business leaders identifying digital skills development as a priority. Finally, access to higher education remains limited for the poor and vulnerable groups[126], and for enrollment in STEAM fields and for leadership position in higher education, representation of women remains too low, constraining opportunities for future growth[127].

Guidance: While there has been less focus on higher education than basic education and TVET in the international community, guidance is available[128]. The AU has endorsed the Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework (PAQAAF) to help ensure transparency, facilitate mobility, and promote exchanges of students and staff with common standards for quality and accreditation and the recognition of degrees. A useful resource has been the Harmonization, Quality Assurance and Accreditation in African Higher Education Initiative (HAQAA). Making higher education more responsive to labor market demand, through ensuring close contact between institutions, policy makers, and private sector federations and actors, is a priority as many graduates find it difficult to obtain employment. Digitalizing higher education – including through hybrid modalities for courses, is a key issue, as is the need to promote more international collaboration, within Africa and globally. Useful lessons have been learned from approaches to encourage and fund Centers of Excellence. Another issue has been the high level of inequality in enrollment in the population (with the poor virtually unable to enroll and other vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities or forcibly displaced people with low access rates), and who manages to complete degrees in time (in many countries time to completion is too long versus the expected time for completion). Still another issue has been gender disparities, including for STEAM related fields, as already discussed. Financing of higher education remains an issue as well in Africa, as in many other parts of the world.

Objective #12: Provide incentives for research, including in STEAM areas and in education

Importance: Research and innovation are key for competitiveness and productivity, and thereby for economic growth[129]. Higher education institutions (HEIs) should conduct on-demand research to inform government policies, yet many HEIs do not have the resources needed to engage meaningfully in research and are therefore, essentially, teaching institutions. A stronger emphasis on innovation is necessary. More HEIs must become agents to promote innovation, with this effort extended to African Academies of Science. The AU's Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan calls for producing 100,000 PhD graduates in 10 years with a target of one fifth in STEAM fields. Stronger links must be established between (1) research, innovation, and industrial development; (2) universities and research institutions in Africa and outside the continent; and (3) higher education, TVET and labor markets, as discussed in the AU's STISA. In addition, while STEAM is a priority, for implementing CESA 26-35, research is also needed in education, including to assess what works to improve educational outcomes at all levels of education. Faculty members in Schools of Education or other Schools and Departments with an interest in education research often do not have the means to carry advanced research. They also typically do not work closely with policymakers. Research on education in Africa remains dominated today by scholars based in the Global North. Providing incentives for research in key areas would be beneficial among others to encourage talent retention, innovation, and entrepreneurship, including in the African EdTech sector, and reduce brain drain.

Guidance: Especially for research and innovation, stronger links must be established between CESA 26-35, and the new strategies being finalized by the AU for TVET and for Science, Technology and Innovation[130]. Various initiatives by partners aim to encourage research on education by African researchers, and provide guidance on how this can be done, especially for links with policy makers[131]. Donors are increasingly focusing on innovation as a key function of HEIs. This trend should be strengthened, especially as African researchers are often the experts who can best contextualize solutions locally. Research should aim for impact not only academically, but also on the ground through socio-economic impact. The AU-EU Innovation agenda advocates for increased capacities for science in general and applied research in particular to ensure societal impact. Support is needed for research management, science communications, and tools and

frameworks to support university assessment in how their research is contributing to the SDGs, as done among others by SADC under the EngageSDG project. Importantly, there is a missed opportunity here in that most faculties of education throughout African universities have graduate students undertaking practitioner or action-research, but this research is not well disseminated. More broadly, data sharing between universities, CSOs, UN agencies, etc., could be strengthened.

SA5: Second Chance Programs and Lifelong Learning

Objective #13: Expand second chance programs for out-of-school children and youth.

Importance: The share of children who are out of school has decreased only marginally over the last decade, with the latest data suggesting that 19.8% of children of primary school age are out of school in sub-Saharan African, down from 21.7% in 2016 (no similar aggregate data are available for northern Africa). The proportions for children of lower and upper secondary school age are even higher, at 31.1% (down from 32.2% over the same period) and 43.2% (down from 46.6%), respectively. Given population growth, the COVID-19 pandemic and associated school closures, and displacement due to conflicts and other shocks, the number of children and youth out of school has been increasing over time. These children and youth need to benefit from second-chance programs, either to enable them to return to school, or to enable them to acquire the skills they need to be successful in the labor market.

Guidance: Accelerated learning programs are typically implemented outside of the formal schooling system. These programs should be inclusive, flexible and accredited. They help students acquire the skills needed either to re-enroll in school or obtain certificates or qualifications that are considered equivalent to what formal schooling would provide. For example, for adolescent girls who dropped out of school, accelerated learning may take place in safe spaces, with teaching of literacy, numeracy, and life skills such as self-advocacy, negotiation, and reproductive health and rights. After a certain time, the girls may be able to return to school, and continue to benefit from support while in school, noting that for young mothers, childcare facilities are also needed for school re-entry. Accelerated learning programs have also proven effective for learners whose education was interrupted due to conflict and forced displacement. These programs can boost return to school, foundational skills, and improve self-advocacy and self-perception. Other programs may focus on providing skills for the labor market, apart from FLN, as needed. Guidance is available on both types of programs from a variety of sources[132].

Objective #14: Expand adult literacy campaigns

Importance: As educational attainment is increasing, albeit slowly, the youth and adult literacy rates are increasing as well, again slowly. According to UIS data, the youth literacy rate among the population aged 15-24 years increased from 87.8% in 2016 to 90.2% in the latest data available for Northern Africa. For sub-Saharan Africa, the youth literacy rate increased from 76.0% to 78.6% over the same period. The adult literacy rates (population aged 15 and above) are lower, with an increase from 71.6% to 74.6% in Northern Africa, and from 65.1% to 68.0% in sub-Saharan Africa. The benefits of literacy for youths and adults are clear, including for labor market earnings, but also in other areas. Literate adults are also better able to support the education of their children, thereby contributing to reduce high rates of learning poverty.

Guidance: Multiple factors affecting program success must be considered when planning adult literacy campaigns. This includes the curriculum to be used (CESA 16-25 emphasized curricula rooted in African culture and values), the use of ICT and other technologies, the range of training options available to adapt to the constraints faced by adults to participate in programs, and the level of post-literacy support. Programs in the native language of learners tend to work better, as is the case for the early grades. In terms of available resources, the series of reports on Global Report on Adult Learning and Education[133] (ALE) provide guidance, as do the Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education[134], a normative guide for ALE in which literacy is embedded. A review from a few years ago on 50 years of promoting literacy may also be useful[135]. The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning's database on effective literacy and numeracy practices contains over 250 examples of practices from 111 countries, including laureates of the UNESCO International Literacy Prizes. An older reference, the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2006: Literacy for Life, remains relevant to understand literacy, including what literacy entails and how to promote it[136].

Objective #15: Support lifelong learning

Importance: Lifelong learning is a new perspective, a fundamental orientation to bring synergy into different age groups (children, youth, adults), levels of education (through synergies between levels), and types of education (formal, non-formal, and informal), as well as spheres and spaces of learning, including families, communities, workplaces, libraries, museums and other online and distance learning

platforms[137]. For adults, data are available on the opportunity to participate in a training during the last year. They suggest that in Africa, typically less than one in five adults get this opportunity. In Europe, the proportion is almost half. Lifelong learning can be provided in formal setting, but most trainings are provided in informal setting, including at work. Although the Higher Education and TVET sectors in Africa mostly provide qualifications through degrees, more could be done to provide short certifications that directly respond to individual's (and firms') needs. This includes approaches to certify micro-credentials and recognize prior learning[138]. Large firms, especially in the IT sector, provide their own micro-credential certifications. It is expected that these certifications will become increasingly important in the next decade for firms to be able to identify workers with the skills required for various positions, and for individuals to signal those skills. Lifelong learning is also key for sustainable development and climate change education.

Guidance: At a broad level, as for adult literacy campaigns, useful references include UNESCO's series of Global Reports on Adult Learning and Education, including the report which focuses on citizenship education[139], and the ILO strategy on lifelong learning[140]. Five reports have been produced so far, with the last report focusing in part on citizenship education. Data and guidance are also available in recent ACQF-II Micro-credentials Survey Report[141]. Resources are also available on the Africa page of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning[142]. Also relevant is the call on the Greening Education Partnership for community learning centres to play a pivotal role in disseminating knowledge about sustainable practices and climate adaptation strategies.

SA6: Gender, Equity, and Inclusion

Objective #16: Promote gender equality in and through education

Importance: Despite some progress, promoting gender equality in and through education remains essential for Africa's development. As mentioned in Part I of this strategy, human capital wealth is by far the largest component of the changing wealth of nations yet is much lower than it could be because of gender differences in earnings between men and women. This is due in part to lower educational attainment for women, but more so because of differences in labor force participation and occupational segregation that are driven in part by social norms. Apart from leading to higher expected earnings in adulthood, educating girls and women has large benefits among others for reducing maternal mortality, under-five mortality and stunting, intimate partner violence, and fertility rates. Within households, women's education is associated with better allocations of resources. Educated women also help for peace, sustainable development, and social cohesion. Finally, while a strong focus is placed in this strategy on ensuring educational opportunities for girls, in a growing number of countries, boys are the ones lagging. Preventing the exclusion and disengagement of boys from education also requires attention.

Guidance: A wide range of resources are available to promote gender equality in and through education, including on the websites of UNESCO[143] and the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI)[144]. A useful discussion is also provided by GPE[145]. Other recent resources include the 1st Africa Teachers Report on educating girls and ending child marriage and the role of teachers and school leaders[146]. On gender-responsive pedagogy (GRP), a key reference is a guide by FAWE[147], for which an eLearning course was recently developed[148]. GRP encourages teachers, whether women or men, to adopt a gender-sensitive approach in their teaching, noting that gender identity is not necessarily a homogeneous construct.

Objective #17: Reduce the cost of schooling

Importance: Education should be free until the completion of secondary school. It is not free today. Many countries continue to charge for fees for secondary education or TVET, and even when publicly provided education is free, households still face a range of out-of-pocket costs. There is also an opportunity cost of schooling, especially for adolescent girls and boys. For young mothers, this includes costs from the lack of provision of childcare services to facilitate re-entry into school. These out-of-pocket and opportunity costs of schooling affect the poor disproportionately, as well as children with disabilities when assistive devices are not available, leading many of those children not to be enrolled in school at all, or to drop out of school prematurely. At the post-secondary level, very few individuals from the lower quintiles of well-being enroll. Reducing these costs could have a major impact in improving equity.

Guidance: Multiple approaches can be used to reduce the cost of schooling. Apart from making basic education free, incentives include providing stipends or scholarships, free school uniforms, or school lunches among others. Reducing the cost of transport to school is also a useful approach when schools are more remote. Some programs provide incentives to complete a cycle, for example to prevent marriage below the age of 18. For post-secondary education including university studies, loans – possibly subsidized under proxy-means testing, are also an option. A key resource is the 1st SDG4/CESA monitoring report

on placing equity at the center of policy[149]. Another resource is a guidance note from GPE[150]. The analysis provided in the Global Education Monitoring Report on inclusion and equity remains relevant[151].

Objective #18: Ensure inclusiveness

Importance: When inclusive education is mentioned, what typically comes to mind first is the fact that children with disabilities must be able to go to school and learn in school, ideally with other children. Disability gaps in education in Africa remain important today, in part due to lack of assistive devices. Other often excluded groups from the education system include refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs)[152], children from pastoralists or nomadic groups, and those from various minority communities, whether in terms of ethnicity, religion, or other aspects of their identity. Ensuring inclusiveness is key to enable all children to go to school and learn and is also beneficial for the children already in schools.

Guidance: All children with disabilities should be able to go to school, even if there is a cost of making this possible. Some programs to support children with disabilities are however low cost, as is the case for school eye health programs which are also relatively easy to implement[153]. Another resource is the United Nations' Toolkit on Disability for Africa[154] and the World Bank's inclusive education resource guide. On improving education systems for refugees, two recent reports look at evidence-based policymaking for refugee education and at a global overview of refugee education data[155]. More broadly, the Global Education Monitoring Report on inclusion and equity already mentioned remains relevant[156].

Implementation, Monitoring, and Evaluation

Objective #19: Strengthen CESA Clusters and other implementation mechanisms

Importance: As noted in the introduction, the AU does not manage large education systems or programs, in comparison to what Member States do. It also has limited staff and financial resources. The AU should "implement" CESA 26-35, but what implementation means is different from what is traditionally understood with a strategy. The aim of CESA 26-35 is to provide guidance for others (Member States especially) to implement, acknowledging the need to adapt the interventions proposed to the budgetary, administrative, political, and socio-cultural context of Member States. Furthermore, this context and the evidence can and will change, especially over a decade which is the time horizon for CESA 26-35. Implementation then should refer at least in part to keeping CESA guidance up to date and deepening the guidance as more evidence of what works to improve educational outcomes becomes available. This should be one of the key roles of CESA clusters, a mechanism that has proven useful for information exchange, the generation of new evidence, and the mobilization of stakeholders, but needs strengthening.

Guidance: The CESA 16-25 suggests that functioning clusters are appreciated by their members (and by the AU), but the performance of clusters has been mixed. The clusters should have autonomy in their work, but they should also be held accountable, including in terms of the roles played by cluster leaders. When clusters are not fulfilling their role or become inactive, which is at the time of writing the case for about half of the clusters, steps should be undertaken to engage the leadership and possibly replace leaders if the current leadership is not sufficiently committed. Clusters should be mandated to submit an annual report on their activities, which some clusters do not at present do. Finding ways to support clusters in resource mobilization is also paramount, as this emerges clearly from the CESA 16-25 review as a constraint to their effectiveness. Ensuring more collaboration between clusters is also a priority, to reap the full benefit from potential synergies. Better communications by clusters could also increase impact.

Objective #20: Streamline monitoring and evaluation

Importance: What gets measured gets done, the adage goes. Without M&E, accountability for implementation is weakened. Lack of M&E also does not permit realignment of priorities as needed. But M&E needs to be based on a framework that can be implemented considering limitations in data collection. There must also be consensus on the indicators to be used, which is easier if indicators used to assess progress towards the objectives of the strategy are already agreed upon for monitoring SDG4. New indicators could be proposed, but after a feasibility study would confirm that they can be collected. In general, it is often better to focus on a few key indicators that try to spread the net too wide.

Guidance: As mentioned in the CESA 16-25 review, at the Pan-African Conference on Education (PACE) in 2018 Member States requested the AU's Pan-African Institute for Education for Development (AU/IPED) and UIS to establish a joint monitoring and reporting mechanism for the CESA and SDG 4 frameworks[157]. Three reports have been published: (i) A report comparing the CESA and SDG 4 frameworks[158]; (ii) A report[159] with an overview of the mapping exercise's conclusions, highlighting indicators available in the UIS global database and others for which measurement methodologies were to be developed; and (iii) A Mid-term Review (MTR) assessment[160] of the monitoring framework for CESA 16-25 published in July

2024. This last report made four key recommendations: (1) Simplify the CESA monitoring framework with only one or two high level indicators per SO area; (2) Implement a time-bound plan of methodological development for selected indicators without agreed methodologies; (3) Promote a virtuous cycle of data use and production, making use for policy of the available data; and (4) Address gaps in the coverage of data to improve coverage rates. These recommendations remain valid for CESA 26-35. In Part IV, a discussion is provided on the indicators that could be used to monitor progress towards objectives.

PART IV: GOVERNANCE, COMMUNICATIONS, AND MONITORING

For implementation, CESA 26-35 will need strong governance, communications, and monitoring frameworks. While CESA 16-25 benefited from a good level of awareness among respondents to online surveys and was perceived as both relevant and useful, its impact in countries was limited, as was its use to inform stakeholder policies and programs. CESA 16-25 included a description of the role of various stakeholders in implementing the strategy. It envisioned engaging the "*widest possible coalition for education, training and STI in Africa.*" The monitoring mechanism was meant to have at its top a team of ten Heads of State and governments who would champion the strategy. Specific roles were assigned to Member States, regional economic communities, and other stakeholders. The need for data collection and analysis to inform decision-making was mentioned, as was the need for action plans and regular reporting. Finally, CESA clusters were created to share initiatives and experiences along thematic lines. In practice however, governance, communications, and monitoring frameworks suffered from limited implementation. Operational plans were not drafted or completed, reporting on outcomes was weak, and the cluster mechanism, while beneficial, did not achieve its full potential. These are all useful lessons to draw upon in considering governance, communications, and monitoring frameworks for CESA 26-35.

Governance

A simple yet comprehensive governance structure is proposed for CESA 26-35. The governance structure is visualized in Figure 6. It follows guiding principles, as is the case for other AU strategies, including: (i) Country ownership, leadership, and subsidiarity: Member States are responsible for their education systems and thereby for adapting CESA 26-35 to their own context; (ii) Autonomy and accountability: Stakeholders have autonomy in using the guidance provided by CESA 26-35, but with accountability for the CESA implementation team; (iii) Adaptability: CESA is meant to provide guidance that needs to be adapted over time and be flexible enough to adapt to changes in the education landscape of the workplace, so that it remains relevant and effective; and (iv) Advocacy: CESA is a strategy to advocate for more and better investments in education. As shown in Figure 6, key stakeholders include (1) RECs; (2) Member States; (3) AU specialized agencies; (4) CESA clusters, coordinators, and members; and (5) Continental and international partners. Among continental partners, AUDA-NEPAD plays a special role, but other partners include key associations, federations, and networks such as AAU, ACA, ADEA, AfECN, AFTRA, ANAFE, ANCEFA, AUF, AWARD, CAMES, FAWE, and RUFORUM that can use their convening power for facilitating CESA 26-35 implementation. The proposed governance for CESA 26-35 includes a Steering Committee and an Operational Committee that has five sub-committees. Key responsibilities are as follows[161]:

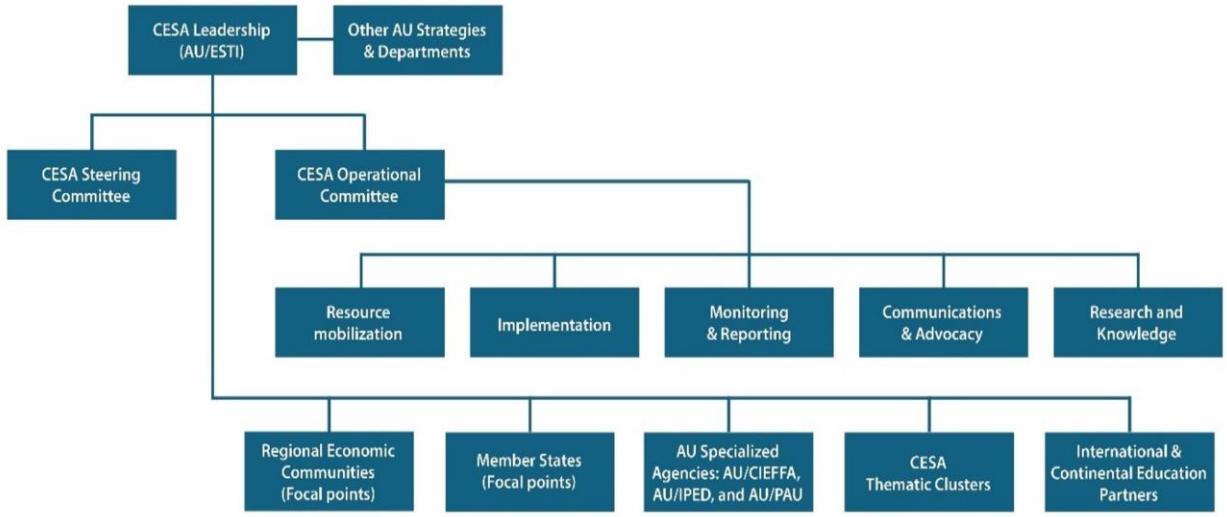
- AU/ESTI Department: The Department is responsible for implementing CESA 26-35 in partnership with RECs, Member States, and other stakeholders. This includes: (i) Providing political leadership in initiating policy processes aimed at addressing specific education issues related to CESA, including through the AU decision-making structures, notably the Specialized Technical Committee on Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation (STC-ESTI), the Permanent Representatives Committee (PRC), the Executive Council and the Assembly of the African Union Heads of States and Governments (AU Summit); (ii) Promoting and advocating the adoption and implementation of CESA 26-35 and STC-ESTI decisions related to education as well as skills development and employment creation; (iii) Encourage high profile stakeholders such as Heads of State, ministers, parliamentarians and other leaders to champion investments in education in Africa, highlighting its importance for economic growth and social development; (iv) Coordinating and hosting continental dialogue platforms and forums for experience sharing and the promotion of education and skills development in Member States; (v) Engaging RECs, Member States, and other stakeholders in jointly coordinating and harmonizing education policies, programs and tools through dialogue; and (vi) Coordinating CESA 26-35 implementation with other strategies, including the TVET strategy and STISA, but also strategies implemented by other Departments.
- Steering Committee: Members of a Steering Committee will be appointed to provide guidance for the implementation of CESA 26-35. The Steering Committee will include (i) Five representatives

of Ministries of Education (Ministers themselves or their delegates), one per region of the African Union; (ii) Two representatives of RECs; (iii) Three representatives from continental and international partners; and (iv) up to five additional members selected based on their expertise. The Committee will be chaired by the AU/ESTI Commissioner. The Committee will meet once a year. Appointments to the Committee will be for a period of two years, on a rotating basis.

- Operational Committee: The Operational Committee will consist of a maximum of 10 members representing different stakeholders, including at least two representatives from CESA Clusters. It will be chaired by the Head of Education in the AU/ESTI Department. Members will be selected based on their expertise and commitment to CESA 26-35 implementation. The Operational Committee will meet twice a year. It may have sub-committees (to which additional experts may be appointed) among others for: (i) Resource mobilization; (ii) Implementation (events, pilot projects, production of guidance related to specific CESA 26-35 objectives, etc.); (iii) Monitoring and reporting; (iv) Research and knowledge; and (v) Communications and advocacy. Appointments to the Operational Committee will be for a period of two years, but renewable.
- RECs: Apart from their representation in the Steering Committee, RECs have the following roles: (i) Providing technical advisory support to Member States to take ownership of CESA 26-35; (ii) Integrating CESA 26-35 objectives within regional priorities and programs; (iii) Encouraging regional and inter-regional networking to share knowledge, tools, and resources for successful adoption and adaptation of CESA 26-35 at the country level; (iv) Enhancing awareness and advocacy of CESA 26-35 among Members States, partners, and stakeholders including educational institutions as well as the private and civil society organizations; and (v) Engaging the AUC, AUDA-NEPAD, and other relevant stakeholders in jointly coordinating and harmonizing education policies and programs in Africa. This may requires strengthening the capacity of RECs to take ownership of the strategy, create or strengthen regional centers of excellence on education, and encourage thematic networking to share experiences and complementarities at the regional level. RECs will nominate a Focal Point who will serve as liaison with the AUC on CESA 26-35 matters.
- Member States: Apart from their representation in the Steering Committee, Member States have similar responsibilities to those of RECs, but within their country. This therefore includes: (i) Promoting national and sub-national ownership of CESA 26-35; (ii) Integrating CESA 26-35 objectives within country priorities and programs as appropriate based on context; (iii) Encouraging national level networking to share knowledge, tools, and resources for successful adoption and adaptation of CESA 26-35 at the country level; (iv) Enhancing awareness and advocacy of CESA 26-35 among country stakeholders including educational institutions, the private, and civil society organizations; and (v) Engaging with relevant stakeholders in jointly coordinating and harmonizing education policies and programs in Africa. As for RECs, this may require strengthening the capacity of Member States to take ownership of the strategy. Member States should also provide feedback on CESA 26-35 so that the strategy can be amended and improved over time. Member States will nominate a Focal Point in each the Ministry or Ministries in charge of their education system who will serve as liaison(s) with the AUC on CESA 26-35 matters.
- AU Specialized Agencies: AU/CIEFFA, AU/IPED, and AU/PAU have a special role in supporting the implementation of CESA 26-35 in their respective areas of expertise, namely girls' and women's education, data and monitoring, and higher education. The agencies are also coordinators or members of CESA clusters. They are encouraged to implement pilot projects under CESA 26-35 and should have representation on a rotating basis in the CESA Operational Committee.
- CESA clusters: CESA clusters, which proved to be useful as an implementation mechanism, should be strengthened. The cluster mechanism is a useful way to federate African Union education partners by areas of focus and expertise. Clusters mostly function today as a way of sharing information and organizing events, but they could play a larger role, including to provide more detailed guidance to RECs and member states in their area of expertise. Beyond serving as a mechanism for information exchange, clusters should support the generation of new evidence and the mobilization of stakeholders. They need autonomy in their work but should also be held accountable. If clusters are not fulfilling their role or become inactive, their leadership should be renewed. They should be encouraged to mobilize resources, as this is a constraint to effectiveness. Ensuring collaboration between clusters should also be a priority to reap benefits from synergies.
- International and continental partners: This category covers a broad range of stakeholders. International partners should support CESA 26-35 through their expertise, projects, and resource mobilization, including with direct support to the AU/ESTI Department. Among continental

partners, AUDA-NEPAD has a special role in (i) coordinating and implementing continental priority projects and pilot initiatives; (ii) providing technical advisory support to African Union Member States and RECs; and (iii) promoting collaboration, possibly through Communities of Practice.

Figure 6: Governance Structure for CESA 26-35



Source: Prepared for this report.

The role of the CESA Operational Committee will be key for implementation. Successful implementation will require policy and technical advisory support among others to: (i) Develop and disseminating new tools and methodologies to meet the needs of Member States and RECs; (ii) Carry out applied research on challenges faced by education systems and potential solutions; (iii) Promote and assess pilot initiatives to generate knowledge on good practices and lessons learned; and (iv) Serve as a clearinghouse to promote knowledge exchange and dissemination of good practices and lessons learned at the continental level (south-south cooperation, CoPs, web resources, etc.). Through Focal Points in RECs and Ministries of Education in Member States, it will also be essential to record innovations and progress towards CESA implementation at the national and regional levels and assess the overall usefulness of the strategy.

Communications

Communications will be key to make CESA 26-35 known among stakeholders once the strategy is adopted and to share challenges and opportunities in its implementation throughout the decade. Several approaches to communications are outlined below, both initially and over time:

- Initial communications: Outreach will be needed to RECs, Member States, other stakeholders, and the media upon adoption of the strategy. Communications tools to be used for this purpose (for CESA 26-35 but also more broadly to advocate towards more and better investments in education) should include an abridged (simplified) version of the strategy, briefs on key strategic areas, infographics, videos, social media campaigns, press releases, etc. Communications products will need to be adapted to various types of stakeholders, including children, youth, and families. A website should be created by AU/ESTI to serve as a repository for all things related to CESA 26-35. Ideally, events should be organized if funding permits in Member States to raise awareness.
- Communications over time: A CESA newsletter should be created and published twice a year (following meetings of the Operational Committee) to keep stakeholders aware of progress towards implementing CESA 26-35 with an emphasis on innovative interventions piloted by RECs, Member States, and other partners. A biennial or triennial CESA conference should be organized to keep momentum towards implementation and showcase deliverables. Such deliverables should also be shared widely at other AU and partner events. The success of lack thereof on the communications strategy should be assessed together with the broader assessment of the strategy's implementation through a report produced for the CESA conference. In communications and at events, links between CESA and issues related to other sectors, such as health, nutrition, population, labor, and social protection, should be emphasized to showcase the importance of education for those sectors. At the conference inter-ministerial sessions could be used for this.

Data, Monitoring, and Evaluation

A monitoring and evaluation framework will need to be developed for CESA 26-35. The framework should include at the minimum the indicators that will be monitored to access progress. It could also, if useful, provide tentative targets and an assessment of the cost of reaching targets, although this would require detailed analytical work. Every year, AU/ESTI should produce a brief annual report on progress towards CESA implementation. A more detailed biennial or triennial report would be discussed at CESA conferences. The AU/ESTI Department should also draft implementation action plans and update these plans as needed based on feedback from RECs, Members States, and other stakeholders. A mid-term review should take place in 2029 or 2030. The timing of this review would coincide with the horizon for the SDGs, so that CESA 26-35 could be adapted for the second half of the decade to the new framework that would be adopted post-SDGs. Upon completion of the decade, a final evaluation should take place to assess the strategy's outcomes and impact. On monitoring, apart from assessing progress towards CESA 26-35 objectives, it will be important to assess if and how the strategy proves useful to RECs, Member States, and other stakeholders in drafting their own sector plans, policies, and regulatory frameworks.

On indicators for monitoring, building on the discussion of the monitoring framework for CESA 16-25 in the CESA 16-25 Review, simple recommendations can be made. The CESA 16-25 monitoring framework proved too complex for implementation. The monitoring framework for CESA 26-35 should have a streamlined list of indicators with a focus on indicators already available under SDG4 monitoring or that could reasonably be developed and measured in enough countries, possibly building on already agreed upon initiatives such as those following the Transforming Education Summit. The good news is that data are available for many of the objectives outlined in the strategy, as explained below (in the discussion below, some suggested indicators should clearly be part of the monitoring framework for CESA 26-35, but others are more tentative and would require further discussion before potential adoption).

- Objective #1: Data are available on public expenditure on education as a percentage of total government expenditure and public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP. In some countries, data on public current expenditure by education level are also available, which is useful to assess and equity in public spending especially when combined with a benefit incidence analysis on who enrolls in public education at various levels. In addition, various initiatives aim to collect data on education policies, including UNESCO's Profiles Enhancing Education Reviews (PEER)[162]. Another example of effort to analyze country policies is the World Bank's Education Policy Dashboard. The Dashboard is comprehensive, but data are available only for a handful of countries.
- Objective #2: Available data are limited to measure progress in upgrading curricula. As part of its monitoring for SDG4, UIS collects data on the extent to which (i) global citizenship education and (ii) education for sustainable development are mainstreamed in teacher education. But data on upgrading curricula in other areas remain scarce, although experience shows that such data can be collected if resources are available to do so[163]. Still, substantial effort would be needed to develop and measure appropriate indicators to be able to measure progress for this objective.
- Objective #3: Estimates across countries of gaps in the number of schools or TTIs and universities needed to serve the population are not available, but data are available on the coverage of basic infrastructure services in schools, especially access to basic drinking water, single-sex sanitation facilities, basic handwashing facilities, and electricity. For girls' education, adequate WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) infrastructure is crucial, with data from the Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) useful to monitor progress[164]. Data are also available for some countries on menstrual health for girls (facilities, knowledge, and materials). Finally, data are available on access to computers and the internet for pedagogical purposes in primary and secondary schools, even if in sub-Saharan Africa coverage remains currently limited.
- Objective #4: UIS collects data on several indicators related to teachers for SDG4 reporting. The indicator with the best country coverage is the proportion of teachers with the required minimum qualifications according to national standards. Other indicators include (1) the extent to which (i) global citizenship education and (ii) education for sustainable development are mainstreamed in teacher education (as mentioned above when discussing objective #2); (2) the average teacher salary relative to other professions requiring a comparable level of qualification; and (3) the percentage of teachers in lower secondary education who received in-service training in the last 12 months by type of training. Yet the coverage of those indicators is patchy in Africa. Efforts could

be undertaken to measure gaps in teachers in specific fields such as STEAM. Measures of the deployment of teachers to rural and remote areas could also be designed using EMIS data.

- Objective #5: As just mentioned, UIS collects data on the average teacher salary relative to other professions requiring a comparable level of qualification, but coverage is patchy. Household and labor force surveys can however be used for this purpose, given that when respondents are asked about their occupation, the surveys often include a response modality for teachers. This can be used to assess not only wage levels, but also other benefits and working hours. The surveys also provide information on the education of teachers which can be compared to EMIS data. Finally, surveys with consumption modules can be used to estimate the share of teachers in poverty.
- Objective #6: Systematic cross-country data on school leadership are lacking. Given the importance of leadership for educational outcomes, this is an important area for investment. Data can be provided among others from EMIS data and household surveys, at least when surveys identify school leaders (this is the case for surveys implemented in nine West African countries by the World Bank with the Weast Africa Economic and Monetary Union). Data on the type of training received by school leaders would also be beneficial, including to showcase innovative approaches. Although this may be more difficult to measure in a systematic way, indicators to identify, develop, validate and promote innovations initiated by teachers, principals, inspectors would be useful.
- Objective #7: For enrollment in pre-primary education, estimates are reported by countries to UIS. UIS also collects data on the share of students in Grade 2 or 3 and at the end of primary school that reach minimum proficiency in math and reading. These estimates are based in part on international student assessments such as PASEC and SEACMEQ. Those datasets have also been used to provide estimates of harmonized learning outcomes across countries, learning poverty, and learning-adjusted years of schooling. This last measure combines the number of years of schooling that students are expected to complete with the amount of learning that takes place in school according to harmonized learning outcomes. On constraints to schooling and learning, household surveys can be used to monitor who enrolls in basic education, and what the out-of-pocket cost of enrolling for parents is. Many surveys also provide information on factors leading children to drop out of school, and whether parents are satisfied with schools or if not, why not. Finally, new modules in MICS surveys are also useful to assess foundational learning.
- Objective #8: Data are currently not systematically available to measure SEL, but tools are being developed. On health and well-being, school-based surveys are available, including (1) the Global School Health Survey (GSHS) which includes mostly low- and middle-income countries (the latest GSHS surveys date back from a decade, but a new round of surveys is being implemented with support from UNESCO's O3 program); (2) the Health Behavior in School-Age Children survey (HBSC) which includes mostly European countries as well as Canada and a few countries from North Africa and the Middle East; and (3) and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) which includes mostly middle and high income countries, such as South Africa (more data may become available in the future through the PISA for development program). Other surveys are implemented in the overall population, including the Violence against Children Survey (VACS) and the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), both of which have been implemented in many African countries. On perceptions of conflict and violence, data are available in the Afrobarometer, although not specifically for education. But the Afrobarometer can be used to assess difficulties in obtaining education services and levels of petty corruption in education and other services[165].
- Objective #9: Systematic data across countries are limited on whether youths acquire the skills they need for the labor market, but some data are available. At the school level, as mentioned above, information is available on access to computers and the internet for pedagogical purposes. For teachers, EMIS data often provide information on the types of trainings that teachers have undertaken, including for digital skills, and some internationally comparable student assessment data also provide that information. Household surveys also now commonly include module asking individuals about ICT skills. UIS maintains data on enrollment in STEAM fields in higher education.
- Objective #10: Data are maintained by UIS and the ILO on several indicators that relate to TVET and youth employment. This includes: (1) The share of students in secondary education enrolled in TVET; and (2) the share of youths and adults who participated in a formal and non-formal education and training over the past 12 months; and (3) The unemployment rates for individuals aged 15-25, including by education level. Additional indicators are discussed in the World Bank, UNESCO, and the ILO report mentioned above. Labor force and especially enterprise surveys can be used to assess the demand for skills in the labor market. At the level of training institutions, it is a good

practice to implement tracer surveys of graduates from TVET institutions.

- Objective #11: Gross enrollment rates in tertiary education by gender are reported by UIS. Data are also available, at least in some countries, on the type of subject studied, including STEAM. Data are also available on other broader indicators, such as the share of GDP invested by countries in research and development (R&D). Household surveys can also be used to monitor who enrolls in higher education and out-of-pocket costs of doing so. As for TVET, labor force and enterprise surveys can be used to assess demand for graduates in the labor market and at the level of HEIs, it is a good practice to implement tracer surveys of graduates to assess labor outcomes for graduates and their feedback on the education they received. Regional initiatives to develop EMIS, including for higher education, should be supported (examples from EAC and SADC exist, and the HAQAA3 initiative for regional higher education data also provides some useful insights).
- Objective #12: Various types of data are available on research and innovation, the share of patents being registered in Africa, staffing in HEIs from national research and higher education databases, African Centers of Excellence established under various initiatives, and initiatives and projects to support competency frameworks for researchers and quality assessment of doctoral schools, doctoral studies, and research. While rankings of higher education institutions are problematic, some of the data these rankings rely on can also be useful. For research specifically in education, especially for empirical assessments of what works to improve educational outcomes, useful databases include the 3ie Development Evidence Portal (DEP)[166], a repository of rigorous evidence on what works in international development, including in education. Also useful is the African Education Research Database[167] hosted by the Faculty of Education at the University of Cambridge which collates research by African scholars on education. These databases might be used to track research trends over time. Other databases (e.g., Scimago, Google Scholar, Scopus) can also be used to monitor research on Africa and by African researchers, including in education.
- Objective #13: Data are maintained by UIS on the share of students of various age groups out of school. Information is also available in many countries, typically from survey data, on young people not in employment, education or training (NEET). Data are however not available across countries on the number of children and youth who benefit from second chance programs, in part because apart from Ministries of Education or other public agencies, many CSOs provide such programs.
- Objective #14: Data are maintained by UIS on the youth and adult literacy rates. Additional data on literacy can be collected from a range of sources, including household surveys (for example, many Demographic and Health Surveys have questions whereby respondents are asked to read a sentence). Data on adult literacy campaigns or public education expenditure on adult literacy are however not available in a systematic way across countries.
- Objective #15: As noted when discussing TVET, indicators reported by UIS include the share of youths and adults who participated in a formal and non-formal education and training over the past 12 months. On micro-credentials, the latest ACQF-II survey collected data on trends in micro-credentials 28 countries. This is an area where more data may become available in the future.
- Objective #16: Data are available since UIS reports estimates of enrollment and completion rates by gender. Data on minimum proficiency in math and reading are also reported by gender. Data tend to be more available however for sub-Saharan Africa than for northern Africa. On gender inequality in earnings, data are regularly available from various sources, including the ILO, the World Economic Forum (WEF), and the World Bank. Another useful database is on legal aspects, including for topics such as child marriage, from the Women, Business and the Law program at the World Bank. New indicators are regularly added to the database.
- Objective #17: A key aim of reductions in the cost of schooling is to make education systems more equitable in terms of whom they serve. Administrative data such as records from EMIS are not well suited to look at equity issues, but household surveys can be used to assess whether the poor and other vulnerable groups have access to various levels of education, and whether out-of-pocket and opportunity costs of schooling are major factors leading to non-enrolment or dropout. The World Inequality Database on Education is also a useful resource for monitoring purposes[168].
- Objective #18: Data on how inclusive education systems are, are not readily available across countries. Administrative EMIS data may include information on children with disabilities and other at-risk groups, but the quality of the data may be variable depending on the country. Household surveys can be used to assess access to education for various groups. When the population share of an excluded group is small, census data may be very useful to provide more reliable statistics than is the case for surveys given small sample sizes in surveys. This is for example the

case when questions on disability follow the guidance of the Washington Group[169]. The issue is however that censuses tend to be implemented only once in a decade.

- Objective #19: Clear metrics should be adopted to measure the performance of clusters and communicated to their members. Some metrics may relate to process, such as the number of meetings held and their attendance, the proper recording of minutes, the need to produce an annual report, etc. Other metrics could be related to outputs, including documents produced or events held, or even programs implemented on the ground. The AU/ESTI leadership should communicate every year its expectations to cluster members, so that the clusters can align their work program to meet the needs of the AU. Broadly, more rigor needs to be brought to clusters not only by cluster leads, but also by the AU/ESTI Department, now that the staffing of the Department is improving, particularly at the leadership levels.
- Objective #20: Monitoring progress under CESA 16-25 was challenging. Apart from lack of data for many indicators in the monitoring framework, AAs were meant to be the basis for operational plans that were not drafted. Progress reports were not prepared regularly, and a CESA Journal meant to be published bi-annually was rapidly discontinued. The mid-term review (MTR) of the M&E framework was long delayed and published only in July 2024 with a limited scope for analysis. Assessment of progress towards CESA 26-35 will need to be more systematic with regular progress reports every few years to be able to recalibrate implementation or the strategy as needed.

Over the past decade significant gaps in reporting on CESA 16-25 occurred, but efforts undertaken to strengthen education data systems in Africa should help for monitoring progress under CESA 26-35. As discussed in the CESA 16-25 Review, monitoring of that strategy was weak with the mid-term report published only in July 2024. At the same time, building blocks were created that should strengthen monitoring for CESA 26-35. Following the Pan-African Conference on Education (PACE) in Nairobi, UIS and AU/IPED have been charged to enhance data reporting in the continent. Recent developments such as the UIS LASER Initiative may help creating a more efficient system for data collection, analysis, and use. EMIS systems have been strengthened in countries with support from the Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX) program. Initiatives such as UNICEF's Data Must Speak have shown how EMIS data could help inform decision-making and strengthen accountability, while GPE's Data Roundtable has promoted broader discussions on the future of education data. Other initiatives such as the MICS-EAGLE project[170], ADEA's role in developing EMIS norms and standards, and efforts from civil society organizations have all contributed to improving education data systems, providing a stronger base for reporting on CESA 26-35.

At the country level, EMIS 2.0 will be key to monitor progress. Beyond what could be monitored across countries under CESA 26-35, countries should set up their own monitoring mechanisms, enabling them to assess the extent to which the policies they adopt are being implemented and are achieving their objectives. In this context, EMIS 2.0 refers to a number of recent development in improving EMIS data, including (i) Shifting beyond aggregate data to individual learner data to track student progress, identify learning gaps, and tailor interventions to meet each child's needs; (ii) Positioning EMIS for equity and learning by collecting data to identify disparities related to socioeconomic status, disability, or geographic location, and integrating data on students' home environments, parental involvement, and poverty levels to inform targeted interventions; (iii) Empowering school management committees and Parent-Teacher Associations to use EMIS data, enabling them to engage with schools directly for citizen engagement and social accountability; and (iv) Decentralizing data management, thereby increasing responsiveness and relevance at the local level. The African Union and its partners should support the transition to EMIS 2.0.

It will also be important for the AU and Member States to continue to participate in coordination mechanisms related to the SDGs and other frameworks. The African Union and its Member States have been actively involved in advancing the global and regional education agendas through their active involvement in the Global Education Coordination Mechanism. They have been instrumental in establishing and participating in the SDG4 High-Level Steering Committee (HLSC) and in regional SDG4 coordination mechanisms in Africa, whose Secretariats are run by UNESCO. To ensure strong coherence between the CESA 26-35 and the SDG4-Education 2030 agenda, the AU should pursue its active participation in the SDG4 HLSC, including by ensuring that the HLSC Decisions are implemented at the continental, regional, and country levels. Implementation and monitoring of CESA 26-35 should leverage existing SDG4 regional coordination mechanisms to mobilize partnerships and achieve strong results.

CONCLUSION

CESA 26-35 provides a unique opportunity for the AU to support Member States, RECs, and other education stakeholders to improve their educational systems. Improving educational outcomes in Africa is more important than ever. Learning from the experience of CESA 16-25, the African Union is well positioned to provide guidance to Member States, RECs, and other education stakeholders on how to meet the challenges of the next decade. This strategy focuses on smaller number of objectives and puts a strong emphasis on the skills that learners need to acquire – including foundational, socio-emotional, and 21st century skills. The strategy outlines frameworks and interventions that build on the rapidly growing evidence base that can be used to inform policy. Through CESA 26-35, the AU aims to providing practical guidance to Member States, RECs, and other education stakeholders towards priority actions for the next decade, acknowledging that this guidance will need to be adapted to their own particular contexts.

As noted in the CESA 16-25 Review, education systems are not sailboats: they cannot change direction easily. They are like tankers. To change direction, beyond strategic vision, careful planning will be needed. Education systems in Africa and globally face headwinds. Funding and other resources are limited. Challenges abound, not only within education systems but also externally with conflicts and climate change being just two examples of external threats. Implications of the fourth industrial revolution for education systems, including the roles to be played by digitalization and AI, are only starting to be understood. Investing in education is one of the best investments countries can make, but to steer a tanker through challenging waters, beyond strategic vision implementation is key. Two points will require special attention. First, as already mentioned, the guidance given in this strategy will need to be adapted over time and across space considering the diversity of Member States the AU serves and their changing needs. Second, implementation will take place in a context in which many African (and non- African) countries face high levels of debt and constrained budgets. Assessing both needs and the cost-effectiveness of alternative interventions to meet these needs based on national and local contexts will be essential to maximize the benefits from investments in education. To transform their education systems, Member States and stakeholders including RECs will need to do more and better with limited resources. This will require prioritization. In the end, this strategy will be useful to the extent that its guidance helps inform domestic policy in Member States, including through Education Sector Planning and Compact Development. For CESA 26-35 to fulfill this role, resource mobilization and adequate implementation will be essential.

ANNEX: MEMBERS OF THE CESA TASK FORCE

This strategy was prepared under the guidance of H.E. Professor Mohammed Belhocine, Commissioner for Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (ESTI) at the African Union Commission. Guidance was also provided by Professor Saidou Madougou, Director for ESTI, and Sophia Ashipala, Head for Education, who managed the process for the Review and preparation of the new CESA. Special thanks are due to Caseley Olabode Stephens at the African Union Commission for his support. The strategy was drafted and revised based on feedback from consultations by Quentin Wodon (UNESCO IICBA). Comments and suggestions were received from many individuals, including members of the CESA Task Force and Drafting Team. Those members included (i) Representatives of RECs; (2) Representatives of Member States; (iii) CESA Cluster coordinators; (iv) Multiple education partners (as noted in the acknowledgments section of the document); (v) Individuals with specific expertise. The task force members are listed in Table A1.

Table A1: Members of the CESA Task Force and Drafting Team

Organization or Country	Representative
AFTRA	Steve Nwokocha
AAU & Higher Education Cluster	Olusola Oyewole
ACA & Curriculum Development Cluster	Gertrude Namubiru
ADEA/AfDB & Education Planning Cluster	Shem Bodo
AfECN & Early Childhood Cluster	Lynette Okengo
AIMS & STEM Education Cluster	Wilfred Ndifon
ANCEFA	Solange Akpo
AU-ACRWC	Catherine Wanjiru Maina
AU/CIEFFA & Girls Education Cluster	Simone Yankey-Ouattara
AUC-PAPS	Sandra Adong Oder & Eyob Assegedew Habtegebriel
AU-IPED	Adoumtar Noubatour
AUDA-NEPAD & TVET Cluster	Unami Dube
Benin	MarcKokou Assogba
Bill & Melinda Gate Foundation	Victoria Egbetayo
Botswana	Tebogo Videlmah Molebatsi
CEN-SAD	Billy Ahmadou
COMESA	Salvator Matata
EAC	Ethel Sirengo
EASF	Vincent Didon
ECCAS	Jean-Jacques Demafouth
ECOWAS	Francis Oke
FAWE	Martha Muhwezi
GeSCI & ICT in Education Cluster	Jerome Moresi
Global Partnership on Education	Joa Keis
Global Transformation Forum	Vivian Atud, Margaret Okore, & Janet Olaitan
IGAD	Maureen Adhiambo Achieng
Life Skills Cluster	Xavier Hospital
Madagascar	Emmanuel Randrianarison
Mar & Tome Foundation	Micaela Margues de Sousa
Mauritius	Kalyani Putty-Rogbeer
NARC	Abdurhman Alhadi
Plan International	Doris Mpoumou
SADC	Jevin Pillay Ponisamy
Save the Children & Peace Education Cluster	Chantal Mutamuriza
Uganda	Pius Achanga
UMA	Amina Selman
UNAIDS & EHW Cluster	Irene Maina
UNESCO	Hambani Masheleni & Abdoulaye Salifou
UNESCO IICBA & Teacher Development Cluster	Quentin Wodon
WFP & School Feeding Cluster	Lydie Kouame
World Vision International	Samuel Norgah
Zambia	Stephen Simukanga

Source: ESTI Department, African Union Commission.

REFERENCES

Association for the Development of Education in Africa and Human Capital Africa (2024). Foundational Learning Starter Pack. Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire: ADEA.

Africa Import-Export Bank (2024). State of Play in Debt Burden 2024: Debt Dynamics and Mounting Vulnerability. Cairo: Africa Import-Export Bank.

African Development Bank and International Labour Organization. 2023. Building Pathways to Sustainable Growth: Strengthening TVET and Productive Sector Linkages in Africa. Geneva and Abidjan: International Labour Organization and African Development Bank.

African Union (1990). African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Addis Ababa: African Union.

African Union (2022). Declaration on Transforming Education in Africa: Transforming Education in Africa: Past, Present and Future - High-Level Side Event at the Margins of the global Transforming Education Summit (TES) and the 77th United Nations General Assembly - New York, Tuesday, 20th September 2022. New York: African Union Commission.

African Union Commission. (2014a). Common African Position on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Addis Ababa: African Union.

African Union Commission (2014b). Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa 2024. Addis Ababa: African Union.

African Union Commission. (2015a). Continental Education Strategy for Education in Africa 2016-2025 (CESA 16-25). Addis Ababa: African Union.

African Union Commission. (2015b). Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want. Addis Ababa: African Union.

African Union Commission. (2015c). Continental Strategy for Technical and Vocational Educational and Training (TVET) to Foster Youth Employment. Addis Ababa: African Union.

African Union Commission (2015d). Continental Strategy for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) to Foster Youth Employment in Africa. Addis Ababa: African Union.

African Union Commission (2018a). Nairobi Declaration and Call for Action on Education: Bridging Continental and Global Education Frameworks for the Africa We Want. Addis Ababa: African Union.

African Union Commission (2018b). Continental Education Strategy for Africa: Indicators Manual. Addis Ababa: African Union.

African Union Commission (2018c). Sustainable School Feeding across the African Union. Addis Ababa: African Union.

African Union Commission (2019a). African Continental Framework of Standards and Competencies for the Teaching Profession. Addis Ababa: African Union.

African Union Commission (2019b). African Continental Teacher Qualification Framework. Addis Ababa: African Union.

African Union Commission (2019c). African Continental Guidelines for the Teaching Profession. Addis Ababa: African Union.

African Union Commission (2019d). African Continental Teacher Mobility Protocol. Addis Ababa: African Union.

African Union Commission. (2020a). The Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa (2020-2030). Addis Ababa: African Union.

African Union Commission. (2020b). Policy Guidelines on Digitizing Teaching and Learning in Africa. Addis Ababa: African Union.

African Union Commission (2020c). Africa Education Innovations Handbook 2020: Building Innovative Education and Training Ecosystems to Create Impact at Scale. Addis Ababa: African Union.

African Union Commission. (2022). Digital Education Strategy and Implementation Plan. Addis Ababa: African Union.

African Union Commission. (2023a). Continental Strategy on Education for Health and Well-being of Young People. Addis Ababa: African Union.

African Union Commission (2023b). African Union Biennial Report on Home-Grown School Feeding (2021-2022). Addis Ababa: African Union.

African Union Commission. (2024a). Review of the Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2015-2025. Addis Ababa: African Union.

African Union Commission. (2024b). Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy: Harnessing AI for Africa's Development and Prosperity. Addis Ababa: African Union.

African Union Commission. (2024d). Youth Employment Strategy. Addis Ababa: African Union Commission.

African Union Commission. (2024e). Agenda 2063: Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan (2024-2033). Addis Ababa: African Union Commission.

African Union Commission. (2024f). Fifth Ordinary Session of the Specialized Technical Committee Meeting on Education, Science and Technology (STC-EST), Report, Ministerial Session , 7th – 8th November 2024. Addis Ababa: African Union Commission.

African Union Commission. (2024g). Fifth Ordinary Session of the Specialized Technical Committee Meeting on Education, Science and Technology (STC-EST), Report, Experts Session, 4th – 5th November 2024. Addis Ababa: African Union Commission.

African Union Commission (2025a). Continental Education Strategy on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support for Teachers in Africa. Addis Ababa: African Union Commission.

African Union and European Commission (2018b). African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ASG-QA). Brussels and Addis Ababa: African Union and European Commission.

African Union and European Commission (2023). The AU-EU Innovation Agenda. Brussels and Addis Ababa: African Union and European Commission.

African Union Commission and FAWE (2016). Gender Equality Strategy for the Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016-25. Addis Ababa: African Union.

African Union and International Labour Organization. (2024). AU-ILO Youth Employment Strategy for Africa (YES-Africa). Addis Ababa: African Union.

African Union Commission and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2024). Africa's Development Dynamics 2024. Addis Ababa: African Union.

Arnhold, N., and R. M. Bassett (2022). Steering Tertiary Education toward Resilient Systems that Deliver for All. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

African Union Commission and UNICEF (2024). Education Spending in Africa: The Impacts of COVID-19 and Possible Recovery Pathways. Addis Ababa: African Union and UNICEF.

Associates for Change, Center for the Study of the Economies of Africa, and Dalan Development Consultants (2022). Accelerated Education Programmes (AEPs) in Addressing the Out-of-School Challenge in West Africa: Towards Achieving Basic Learning, and Skills for Life, Position paper for the UN Transforming Education Summit. Adabraka: Associates for Change.

Azmeraw, E., K. Moritani, E. Mura, and Q. Wodon (2024). Transformative Pedagogy for Peace, Resilience, and the Prevention of Violent Extremism: Lessons from Recent IICBA Projects. Addis Ababa: UNESCO IICBA.

Bahl, A., and A. Dietzen, Eds. (2019). Work-based Learning as a Pathway to Competence-based Education: A UNEVOC Network Contribution. Bonn: UNEVOC.

Bashir, S., M. Lockheed, E. Ninan, and J. Tan. (2018). Facing Forward: Schooling for Learning in Africa. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

Bendini, M. and A. Devercelli. (2022). Quality Early Learning: Nurturing Children's Potential. Washington, DC: World Bank.

Bergmann, J., C. Alban Conto, and M. Brossard (2022). Increasing Women's Representation in School Leadership: A Promising Path Towards Improving Learning. Florence: UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti.

Bush, T., J. Kirezi, R. Ashford, and D. Glover (2022). School Leadership and Gender in Africa: A Systematic Overview. Research in Educational Administration & Leadership 7(4): 680-712.

Bush, T., F. Maringe, D. Glover, J. Peeraer, C. Dusabe Kabanda, and J. Cyiza Kirezic (2024). School Leadership in Africa: A Review of Empirical Research. Journal of Teaching and Learning in Africa, 7(1): 9-22

Canning, D. J., S. R. Jobanputra, and A. S. Yazbeck. (2015). Africa's Demographic Transition: Dividend or Disaster? Africa Development Forum. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

Cyiza Kirezi, J., J. Peeraer, and C. Dusabe Kabanda (2024). Building Consensus on School Leadership for Quality Education in Africa. Journal of Teaching and Learning in Africa, 7(1): 23-41.

Education Commission (2016). The Learning Generation: Investing in Education for a Changing World. New York: Education Commission.

Evans, D., and A. Popova. (2016). What Really Works to Improve Learning in Developing Countries? An Analysis of Divergent Findings in Systematic Reviews, World Bank Research Observer, 31: 242-70.

FAWE. (2018). Gender Responsive Pedagogy: A Toolkit for Teachers and Schools. 2nd edition. Nairobi: Forum for African Women Educationalists, FAWE House.

Gakidou, E., K. Cowling, R. Lozano, C. J. L. Murray, (2010). Increased Educational Attainment and its Effect on Child Mortality in 175 Countries between 1970 and 2009: A Systematic Analysis, The Lancet, 376 (9745): 959-974.

Global Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience in the Education Sector (2022). Comprehensive School Safety Framework 2022-2030 for Child Rights and Resilience in the Education Sector. Paris: GADRRRES.

Global Partnership for Education (2019a). Strengthening Learning Assessment Systems. A Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX) Discussion Paper. Washington, DC: Global Partnership for Education.

Global Partnership for Education (2019b). Improving Teaching and Learning. A Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX) Discussion Paper. Washington, DC: Global Partnership for Education.

Global Partnership for Education (2019c). Strengthening Early Childhood Care and Education. A Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX) Discussion Paper. Washington, DC: Global Partnership for Education.

Global Partnership for Education (2019d). Achieving Gender Equality in and through Education. A Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX) Discussion Paper. Washington, DC: Global Partnership for Education.

Global Partnership for Education (2019e). Meeting the Data Challenge in Education. A Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX) Discussion Paper. Washington, DC: Global Partnership for Education.

Global Partnership for Education (2019f). Leaving no one Behind. A Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX) Discussion Paper. Washington, DC: Global Partnership for Education.

Global Partnership for Education (2023). Climate Smart Education Systems Initiative. Washington, DC: Global Partnership for Education.

Global Partnership for Education (2024). Partnership Compact Guidelines. Washington, DC: Global Partnership for Education.

Harris-Van Keuren, C. (2023). Numeracy at Scale Cost Analysis: A Two-Part Case Study. Research Triangle Park, NC: RTI International.

Hungi, N., and Q. Wodon (2024). Criteria to Consider when Implementing Best Teacher Awards, in Teacher Regulation for Quality and Quantity: Can It Be Done? Proceedings of the 2024 International Federation of Teaching Regulatory Authorities Conference, Brisbane, Australia: IFTRA.

IHME-CHAIN Collaborators. (2024). Effects of education on adult mortality: a global systematic review and meta-analysis. The Lancet Public Health, 9(3): 155–165.

International Commission on the Futures of Education. (2021). Reimagining Our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education. Paris: UNESCO.

International Labour Organization (2023a). Recommendation Concerning Quality Apprenticeships. Geneva: International Labour Organization.

International Labour Organization (2023b). The ILO Strategy on Skills and Lifelong Learning 2030. Geneva: International Labour Organization.

International Labour Organization (2024). United Nations Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession: Recommendations and Summary of Deliberations. Geneva: International Labour Organization.

International Monetary Fund (2024). Regional Economic Outlook: Sub-Saharan Africa – A Tepid and Pricey Recovery. Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund.

International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030. 2019. Teacher Policy Development Guide. Paris: UNESCO.

Lange, G. M., Q. Wodon, and K. Carey. (2018). The Changing Wealth of Nations 2018: Sustainability into the 21st Century. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

Lego Foundation and UNICEF (2018). Learning through Play: Strengthening Learning through Play in Early Childhood Education Programmes. New York: UNICEF.

Leithwood, K., K. S. Louis, S. Anderson, and K. Wahlstrom. (2004). Review of Research: How Leadership Influences Student Learning. University of Minnesota, Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement.

Mai, T. T., H. Rasolonjatovo, S. Theunynck, O. N. Elseed, and M. Dahal (2022). Background Paper on School Infrastructure in the AFW Region. Background Paper for the West and Central Africa Education Strategy. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

Morsi, H. and A. N. Mukasa (2019). Youth Jobs, Skill, and Educational Mismatches in Africa. Working Paper Series No. 326. Abidjan: African Development Bank.

Nayihouba, A., and Q. Wodon. (2022). Abus d'autorité et corruption dans les services de base en Afrique : Introduction au dossier et principaux résultats, Educatio, 12, Article 3.1 : 1-7.

Nwokeocha, S., E. D. Kah, H. Njora, A. Sessay, and Q. Wodon. (2023). West Africa – Investing in Teachers and School Leaders: Professional Standards, Working Conditions, and Teacher Education. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: UNESCO IICBA.

Nwokeocha, S., H. Njora, and Q. Wodon. (2025). Professional Standards and Competencies, Education, and Working Conditions for Teachers in Africa: A Rapid Assessment, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: UNESCO International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa.

Obermeier, A.M. (2023). Conflict Trends in Africa, 1989–2022. PRIO Policy Brief 5. Oslo: PRIO.

OECD. (2024). Africa's Development Dynamics 2024: Skills, Jobs and Productivity. Paris: OECD Publishing.

Organization of African Unity (1981). African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Banjul Charter). Addis Ababa: Organization of African Unity.

Oyewole, O. (2024). Giving Greater Effectiveness to African continental Integration in and through Higher Education: Empowering Universities as Greater Development and Integration Agents. HAQAA3 Policy Brief No. 5. Accra, Ghana: HAQAA3.

PPMI and African Union (2024). ACQF-II Micro-credentials Survey Report. Addis Ababa: African Union. Science

for Africa Foundation (2024). Annual Update 2024. Nairobi: Science for Africa Foundation.

Sen, A. (2004). Elements of a Theory of Human Rights, Philosophy and Public Affairs 32(4): 315-356.

Sen, A. (2005). Human Rights and Capabilities, Journal of Human Development 6(2): 151-166.

Shah, R. and W. Choo (2020). Accelerated Education Evidence Review. Copenhagen: UNHCR.

Smith, E. and Q. Wodon (2025). School Eye Health Programs: An Intervention for Inclusive Education with High Benefit to Cost Ratios. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia:

Stern, J., R. Jordan, Y. Sitabkhan, W. Ralaingita, B. Carrol, K. Betts, M. Jukes, J. Norman, P. Dubeck, J. DeStefano, J. Mejia, L. Bahrawar, C. Cummiskey, N. Jalloh, J. Pamel, and R. Momanyi. (2023). Numeracy at Scale: Final Report. Research Triangle Park, North Carolina: RTI.

The Commonwealth (2022). Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Toolkit: Enhancing ECCE Services for Sustainable Development. London: The Commonwealth Secretariat.

UNESCO (2006). EFA Global Monitoring Report 2006: Literacy for Life. Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO (2014a). Education Sector Analysis Methodological Guidelines - Volume 1: Sector-wide Analysis, with Emphasis on Primary and Secondary Education. Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO (2014b). Education Sector Analysis Methodological Guidelines - Volume 2: Sub-sector Specific Analysis. Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO (2015). Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education. Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO (2017a). The Why, What and How of Competency-based Curriculum Reforms: The Kenyan Experience. Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO (2017b). Reading the Past, Writing the Future: Fifty Years of Promoting Literacy. Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO. (2018). Global Education Monitoring Report 2019: Migration, displacement and education: Building bridges, not walls. Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO. (2020). Global Education Monitoring Report 2020: Inclusion and Education – All Means All. Paris, UNESCO.

UNESCO (2021a). Education Sector Analysis Methodological Guidelines - Volume 3: Thematic Analyses. Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO (2021b). Getting Every School Climate-Ready: How Countries Are Integrating Climate Change Issues in Education. Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO (2022a). Tashkent Declaration and Commitments to Action for Transforming Early Childhood Care and Education. Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO (2022b). K-12 AI Curricula: A Mapping of Government-endorsed AI Curricula. Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO (2023). Global Education Monitoring Report 2023: Technology in Education: A Tool on Whose Terms? Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO (2024a). Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development: An Explainer. Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO (2024b). SDG 4 Scorecard: Progress Report on National Benchmarks in Africa. Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO (2024c). Spotlight on Basic Education Completion and Foundational Learning in Africa, 2024: Learning Counts. Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO (2024d). Peace Education in the 21st Century: An Essential Strategy for Building Lasting Peace. Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO (2024e). Climate Change and Sustainability in Science and Social Science Secondary School Curricula. Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO and African Union. (2023). Education in Africa: Placing Equity at the Heart of Policy. Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO and Education International (2019). Global Framework of Professional Teaching Standards. Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO and International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030 (2024). Global Report on Teachers: Addressing Teacher Shortages and Transforming the Profession. Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and Commonwealth Secretariat (2024). The Price of Inaction: The Global Private, Fiscal and Social Costs of Children and Youth Not Learning. Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO and United Nations (2023). Teaching to Prevent Atrocity Crimes: A Guide for Teachers in Africa. Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO IESALC (2023). The Right to Higher Education in Africa: Briefing Note Compendium. Caracas: UNESCO IESALC.

UNESCO IESALC and UNESCO Office Nairobi and Regional Bureau for Science in Africa (2022). Supporting Women Participation in Higher Education in Eastern Africa: Building Sustainable and Equitable Higher Education systems in Kenya, South Sudan and Uganda. Caracas: UNESCO IESALC.

UNESCO IICBA (2022). Transformative Pedagogy: A Teachers' Guide for Peace and Resilience Building in North Africa. Addis Ababa: UNESCO IICBA.

UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (2020). Embracing a Culture of Lifelong Learning. Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning.

UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (2022a). 5th Global Report on Adult Learning and Education: Citizenship Education: Empowering Adults for Change. Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning.

UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (2022b). Making Lifelong Learning a Reality: A Handbook. Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning.

UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2021a). Continental Overview: Bridging CESA and SDG 4 in Africa. Montreal: UNESCO Institute of Statistics.

UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2021b). Education Baseline in Africa: Expanding the Coverage of CESA Indicators. Montreal: UNESCO Institute of Statistics.

UNESCO Institute for Statistics. (2024a). Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016-2025: Mid-Term Assessment of its Monitoring Framework. Montreal: UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2024b). Conference on Education Data and Statistics: Decisions. Montreal: UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

UNESCO MGIEP (2022). Guidelines for Implementing SEL in Schools. New Delhi: UNESCO MGIEP.

UNESCO and UNHCR (2023a). Paving Pathways for Inclusion: Towards Evidence-based Policy-making for Refugee Education. Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO and UNHCR (2023b). Paving Pathways for Inclusion: A Global Overview of Refugee Education Data. Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO, UNICEF, and World Food Programme (2023). Ready to Learn and Thrive: School Health and Nutrition around the World. Paris: UNESCO.

UNGEI (2018). A Whole School Approach to Prevent School-Related Gender-Based Violence: Minimum Standards and Monitoring Framework. New York: United Nations Girls' Education Initiative.

UN General Assembly (1948). Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Resolution 217 A (III), 10 December, 1948, New York: UN General Assembly.

UNHCR (2023). UNHCR Education Report 2023 – Unlocking Potential: The Right to Education and Opportunity. Copenhagen, Denmark: UNHCR.

UNHCR (2024). Global Trends Report 2023. Copenhagen, Denmark: UNHCR.

UNHCR, UNESCO and UNICEF (2023). Building Inclusive Education Systems for Refugees. Copenhagen: UNHCR.

UNICEF (2019). Global Framework on Transferable Skills. New York: UNICEF.

UNICEF and World Bank (2021). LSCE Measurement Instrument – 8 Life Skills. New York: UNICEF. United

Nations (1989). Convention on the Rights of the Child. New York: United Nations.

United Nations (2017). Toolkit in Disability in Africa – Inclusive Education. New York: United Nations.

United Nations Transforming Education Summit (2022a.) Thematic Action Track 1 on Inclusive, Equitable, Safe and Healthy Schools. Discussion Paper. New York: United Nations Transforming Education Summit.

United Nations Transforming Education Summit (2022b.) Thematic Action Track 2 on Learning and Skills for Life, Work, and Sustainable Development. Discussion Paper. New York: United Nations Transforming Education Summit.

United Nations Transforming Education Summit (2022c.) Thematic Action Track 3 on Teachers, Teaching and the Teaching Profession. Discussion Paper. New York: United Nations Transforming Education Summit.

United Nations Transforming Education Summit (2022d.) Thematic Action Track 4 on Digital Learning and Transformation. Discussion Paper. New York: United Nations Transforming Education Summit.

United Nations Transforming Education Summit (2022e.) Thematic Action Track 5 on Financing of Education. Discussion Paper. New York: United Nations Transforming Education Summit.

United Nations (2024). STEM Education for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) in Africa with a Focus on Generating Decent Jobs for Africa's Youth. New York: United Nations.

Wodon, Q. B. de la Brière, C. Malé, C. Montenegro, H. Nguyen, and A. Onagoruwa (2020). How Large Is the Gender Dividend? Measuring Selected Impacts and Costs of Gender Inequality, Washington, DC: The World Bank.

Wodon, Q., C. Fèvre, C. Malé, A. Nayihouba, and H. Nguyen (2021). Ending Violence in Schools: An Investment Case. Washington, DC: The World Bank, The Global Partnership to End Violence against Children, and Safe to Learn.

Wodon, Q., C. Male, and A. Onagoruwa (2024). Educating Girls and Ending Child Marriage in Africa: Investment Case and the Role of Teachers and School Leaders. IICBA Study No. 2024-2. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: UNESCO International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa.

Wodon, Q., C. Male, A. Nayihouba, and A. Onagoruwa (2025). Foundational Skills and Literacy: Investment Case and the Role of Teachers, Educators, and School Leaders. IICBA Study No. 2024-4. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: UNESCO International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa.

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

World Bank. (2020). Learning Poverty in the Time of COVID-19: A Crisis Within a Crisis. Washington, DC: World Bank.

World Bank (2021a). The Changing Wealth of Nations 2021: Managing Assets for the Future. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

World Bank. (2021b). Sahel Education White Paper: The State of Education in the Sahel. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

World Bank. (2021c). The Inclusive Education Resource Guide. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

World Bank. (2022). Western and Central Africa Education Strategy – From School to Jobs: A Journey for the Young People of Western and Central Africa. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

World Bank. (2023). Cost-effective Approaches to Improve Global Learning - What does Recent Evidence Tell Us are "Smart Buys" for Improving Learning in Low- and Middle-income Countries? Washington, DC: The World Bank.

World Bank, UNESCO, and International LabourOrganization. (2023). Building Better Formal TVET Systems: Principles and Practice in Low- and Middle-Income Countries. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF, FCDO, USAID, and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (2022). The State of Global Learning Poverty: 2022 Update. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

World Economic Forum (2022). Global Gender Gap Report 2022. Geneva: World Economic Forum.

World Food Programme, ECOWAS, and School Meals Coalition (2024). Home-Grown School Feeding in West Africa: A Landscape Analysis. Rome: World Food Programme.

World Health Organization. (2016). INSPIRE: Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children. Geneva: World Health Organization.

World Health Organization (2018). INSPIRE Handbook: Action for implementing the seven strategies for ending violence against children. Geneva: World Health Organization.

World Health Organization. (2019). School-based Violence Prevention: A Practical Handbook. Geneva: World Health Organization.

Wresinski J. (1989). Les plus pauvres, révélateurs de l'indivisibilité des droits de l'homme, in Commission nationale consultative des droits de l'homme, éditeur, Les droits de l'homme en questions, Paris : La Documentation Française.

ENDNOTES

[1] African Union (2022).
[2] African Union Commission (2015b).
[3] African Union Commission (2015a). See also African Union Commission (2014a).
[4] African Union (2024e).
[5] African Union Commission (2024e).
[6] African Union Commission (2024a).
[7] UNESCO (2024a).
[8] African Union (2022).
[9] African Union Commission (2015b).
[10] African Union Commission (2015a). See also African Union Commission (2014a).
[11] African Union (2024e).
[12] African Union Commission (2024a).
[13] African Union Commission (2024e).
[14] Lengthy school closures may not have been ideal as they resulted in significant negative outcomes for children and young people. In future pandemics, the issue of the length of school closures may need to be revisited.
[15] AU strategies recently adopted or in preparation include African Union (2023a, 2024b, 2024c, 2024d). The new science strategy updates a previous strategy (African Union Commission, 2014b), as is the case with the new TVET strategy (African Union Commission, 2015c).
[16] Guiding principles under CESA 16-25 were as follows: 1. Knowledge societies called for by Agenda 2063 are driven by skilled human capital; 2. Holistic, inclusive and equitable education with good conditions for lifelong learning is sine qua non for sustainable development; 3. Good governance, leadership and accountability in education management are paramount; 4. Harmonized education and training systems are essential for the realization of intra-Africa mobility and academic integration through regional cooperation; 5. Quality and relevant education, training and research are core for scientific and technological innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship; and 6. A healthy mind in a healthy body – physically and socio- psychologically – fit and well fed learners.
[17] Pillars under CESA 16-25 were as follows: 1. Strong political will to reform and boost the education and training sector; 2. Peaceful and secure environment; 3. Gender equity, equality and sensitivity throughout the education and training systems; 4. Resource mobilization with emphasis on domestic resources; 5. Strengthen institutional capacity building through (i) Good governance, transparency and accountability and (ii) A coalition of actors to enable a credible participatory and solid partnership between government, civil society and the private sector; 6. Orientation and support at different levels and types of training; 7. The creation and continuous development of a conducive learning environment.
[18] World Bank (2022). See also the strategy developed by the World Bank for the Sahel (World Bank, 2021b).
[19] See for example UNESCO and African Union (2023). This report, first produced in 2023, is planned every two years to analyze progress made towards CESA and SDG4 goals.
[20] The lead author for the CESA review participated in the task force meeting held in August 2024 in Addis Ababa for the African Union's draft TVET strategy review and new draft TVET strategy to share feedback and promote synergies between the process for the new CESA and that for the TVET strategy.
[21] IHME-CHAIN Collaborators (2024).
[22] On an investment case for girls' education in Africa, see Wodon et al. (2024).
[23] Article 26 reads as follows: *"1. Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. 2 Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace; and 3. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children."* See UN General Assembly (1948).
[24] United Nations (1989).
[25] African Union (1990).
[26] See for example Wresinski (1989).
[27] UNESCO (2021a).

[2'] The summit led to policy recommendations along five action tracks: (1) Inclusive, equitable, safe, and healthy schools; (2) Learning and skills for life, work and sustainable development; (3) Teachers, teaching, and the teaching profession; (4) Digital learning and transformation; and (5) Financing education. See United Nations Transforming Education Summit (2022a, 2022b, 2022c, 2022d, 2022e).

[29] In response to the growing threat of climate change, a new Greening Education Partnership was announced at the Transforming Education Summit in New York in 2022.

[30] There has been a sharp rise in conflicts and violent extremism in Africa in recent year. Estimates suggest that the number of conflicts in Africa increased from 34 in 1989 to 104 in 2022, driven mostly by non-state conflicts (Obermeier, 2023). Conflicts and violent extremism can have devastating effects on the population. In several countries, dealing with crime, insecurity, and conflicts have become high priorities for the population according to Afrobarometer data. The risk of conflicts and violent extremism has been (and may continue to be) exacerbated by unprecedented challenges, including pandemics, climate change, social inequalities, and technological revolutions.

[3'] IHME-CHAIN Collaborators (2024).

[32] Gakidou et al. (2010).

[3^]Wodon et al. (2024).

[34] The objective is not to reduce fertility, but to enable women to have the number of children they would like to have, which is more likely to be the case if they have a higher level of educational attainment. Furthermore, as completing secondary education could virtually end child marriage, this would reduce early pregnancies —also leading women to start having children later and this less children over their lifetime.

[35] Research has found that social exclusion decreases the likelihood of prosocial behavior, and this may be one of the channels underlying the correlation between low educational attainment and the measured altruistic behaviors. Another hypothesis is that women with higher levels of education tend to in a better position in life, and thereby are more able to help others.

[3'] One potential explanation is that individuals oken become friends with others from a similar socio-economic background. Therefore, friends of better educated women may have the (financial) ability to help them especially when they are in need, while friends of women with lower levels of educational attainment may not have that ability.

[37] See for example Canning et al. (2015).

[3'] As noted among others by Sen (2004, 2005) under the capability approach, human development is about expanding the richness of human life, rather than simply the economy. The human development approach focuses on people, their opportunities and choices, as illustrated by the Human Development Index and related measures. [39] The five variables are: (1) the survival rate of children past age 5; (2) the expected number of years of education completed by youth; (3) the quality of learning in school; (4) how long workers will remain in the workforce, as proxied by adult survival past 60; and hnally (5) prevention of stunting for young children. See

[40] Based on the literature, the contribution of education to the HCI is estimated using a flat rate of return in labor markets across countries. The assumption is that each learning-adjusted year of education (i.e., each year of schooling adjusted for how much children learn in school) generates an increase in earnings of eight percent.

[41] See Lange et al. (2018) and World Bank (2021a).

[42] See Wodon et al. (2020). On the gender gap in earnings, see also World Economic Forum (2022).

[°3] UNESCO, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and Commonwealth Secretariat (2024).

[4°] Wodon et al. (2025).

[°5] UNESCO (2024b).

[4'] See World Bank et al. (2022). See also Bashir et al. (2018) on Africa.

[47] Formally, among children who are in school, define LD (learning deprivation) as the share of students not proficient in reading. Define OOS as the share of children out of school who are all assumed to be learning deprives. Learning poverty is defined as LP = OOS+[(1—OOS)xLD].

[4'] Azevedo (2020).

[49] World Bank (2020).

['0] Wodon et al. (2024).

[*'] Wodon et al. (2024).

[*2] OECD (2024).

"African Union Commission and UNICEF (2024).

[5°] When strategy documents are overly ambitious, they may steer resources — not only funding but also the attention of policymakers, towards investments that may not be optimal. Similarly, when diagnostics rely on simulations to assess resources needed to reach targets that are known not to be attainable, this may lead to misunderstandings about priorities not reflecting the reality on the ground.
[55] Early learning is generally considered as the period from birth until 8 years.
[56] See for example Oyewole (2024).
[s7] African Union Commission (2024f).
[s] African Union Commission (2024g).
[5'] Innovative financing mechanisms include among others debt swaps and blended finance arrangements, impact bonds, result-based financing, and outcomes funds, among others. See African Union and UNICEF (2024).
[6'] Global Partnership for Education (2024).
[61] See for example the three-volume set of UNESCO with various partners on education sector analysis (UNESCO, 2014a, 2014b, 2021a).
[62] International Labour Organization (2024).
[6^]According to the IMF's latest biannual Regional Economic Outlook for sub-Saharan Africa (IMF 2024), the public debt-to-GDP ratio peaked at 60.1% in 2023. It is expected to fall to 56.8% in 2025. This is a positive development, but debt levels remain high, possibly limiting fiscal space for investments in the social sectors, including education. On debt levels, see also Africa Import-Export Bank (2024).
[6°] African Union Commission and UNICEF (2024).
[6] UNESCO (2023).
[66] For TVET, see World Bank, UNESCO, and ILO (2023).
[67] UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2024b). Conference on Education Data and Statistics: Decisions. See also the GPE KIX guidance note on data challenges in education (GPE, 2019e).
[6'] On learning through play, see Lego Foundation and UNICEF (2018). See also more broadly Black et al. (2017) on nurturing care, Bendini and Devercelli (2022) on early learning, and The Commonwealth (2022) on early childhood care and education. See also the Tashkent Declaration (UNESCO, 2022a).
[6'] World Bank (2023).
[7'] See for example UNESCO (2017a).
[71] See for example UNESCO IICBA (2022) and UNESCO and United Nations (2023).
[72] UNESCO (2024e).
[7^]UNESCO (2022b).
[7°] Global Partnership for Education (2023).
[75] Mai et al (2022).
[76] Global Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience in the Education Sector (2022).
[77] UNESCO (2023).
[7'] African Union Commission (2020a).
[7'] African Union Commission (2024a).
"International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030 (2019).
['1] UNESCO and International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030 (2024). See also Nwokeocha et al. (2023) on West Africa.
['2] International Labour Organization (2024).
['^] Nwokeocha et al. (2025).
['°] Beteille and Evans (2018) suggested five basic principles to recruit and support teachers: (1) Making teaching an attractive profession by improving its status, compensation policies and career progression structures; (2) Promoting meritocratic selection of teachers, followed by a probationary period, to improve the quality of the teaching force; (3) Ensuring pre-service education includes a strong practicum component to ensure teachers are well-equipped to transition and perform effectively in the classroom; (4) Providing continuous support and motivation, in the form of high-quality in-service training and strong school leadership, to allow teachers to continually improve; and (5) Using technology wisely to enhance the ability of teachers to reach every student, factoring their areas of strength and development. The World Bank made tools available to support teachers and principals in improving instruction, including TEACH and COACH.
['5] On learning assessment systems, see GPE (2019a). On improving teaching and learning, see GPE (2019b). On strengthening early childhood care and education, see GPE (2019c).

g[6] African Union Commission (2019a, 2019b, 2019c).

^[7] UNESCO and Education International (2019).

See Stern et al. (2023) on program characteristics and Harris-Van Keuren (2023) on costs. For literacy, 10 characteristics of successful programs were identified: the programs focus on training teachers in modeling and practicing new skills, include structured teachers' guides, have coaches providing structured tools to support teachers, use face-to-face training methods for the initial trainings, use direct-instruction pedagogical methods, ensure that student books are available at a 1:1ratio for all students, use a phonics-based instructional methodology, increase the amount of instructional time in reading lessons, build capacity at a decentralized level, and are designed to align with existing government education plans. For numeracy, 14 characteristics of successful programs were identified: the programs include learning aids for students (e.g., counters, number cards, etc.), have materials aligned to the curriculum, use structured teacher's guides (scripted lessons), include continuous and formative assessment, target instruction to the student level (differentiated instruction or teaching at the right level), focus on developing conceptual understanding, include pair or group work, use concrete materials and resources (manipulatives), rely on coaches who are government staff, include an initial face-to-face training as well as refresher face-to-face training, have teacher training (lowest level in cascade) done by government officers, have Government staff responsible for conducting monitoring, and invest in building capacity at the decentralized level.

"UNESCO and International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030 (2024).

[90] On teacher awards, see the short guidance by Hungi and Wodon (2024).

[9*] African Union Commission (2025a).

[92] The importance of school leaders has long been noted (Leithwood et al., 2004), but it has been conhrmed by more recent work. Unfortunately, many school leaders in Africa lack leadership skills and have not benefitted from professional development to guide their work.

[93] Several explanations could be advanced for the positive effect of female teachers and school leaders on learning outcomes (Wodon et at., 2024a). Female teachers are less likely than male teachers to have a second job, possibly because of responsibilities at home. This may enable them to concentrate more on their teaching. They are also less likely to be poor, possibly because they married individuals with better earnings opportunities given their own social status. Not having to confront the daily pressures and uncertainty associated with poverty may again enable female teachers to concentrate more fully on their job. See also Bergmann et al. (2022).

[94] This leads to lower attrition rates which matters especially given current teacher shortages (UNESCO and International Teacher Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030, 2024).

[9*] Nwokeocha et al. (2023).

[96] See resources available at: https://www.wob.org/en/african-centre-school-leadership.

[97] See Cyiza Kirezi et al. (2024) and XXX.

[9'] Bush et at. (2022, 2024).

[9'] World Bank et al. (2022). See also UNESCO (2024c).

[10°] On school size, the evidence remains mixed, and one needs to be careful about cost implications.

[101] On learning assessment systems, see GPE (2019a). On improving teaching and learning, see GPE (2019b). On strengthening early childhood care and education, see GPE (2019c).

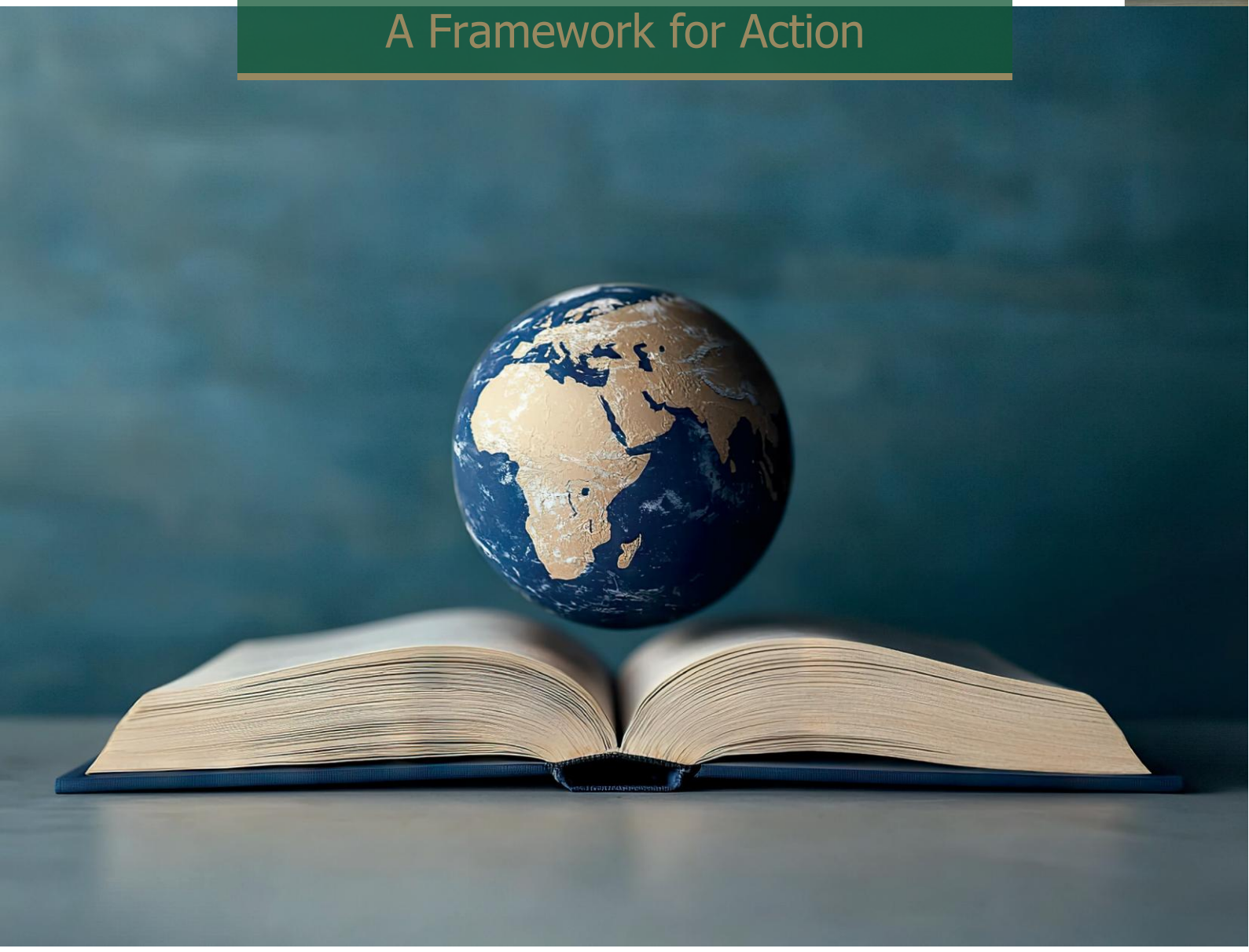
[102] World Bank (2023). Interventions are as follows: (1) Great buys (most cost-effective): Providing information on the benefits, costs, and quality of education; Supporting teachers with structured pedagogy (a package that includes structured lesson plans, learning materials, and ongoing teacher support); Targeting teaching instruction by learning level, not grade (teaching at the right level in or out of school); (2) Good buys (highly cost-effective): Providing parent-directed early childhood stimulation programs (for ages 0 to 36 months); Providing quality pre-primary education (for ages 3 to 5); Reducing travel times to schools; Giving merit-based scholarships to disadvantaged children and youth; Administering school-based mass deworming where worm-load is high; (3) Promising low-evidence interventions (cost-effective, but more rigorous evidence is needed): Using software that allows personalized learning and adapts to the learning level of the child (if hardware is already in schools); Augmenting teaching teams with community-hired staff; Providing mass school-based treatment of specific health conditions; Leveraging mobile phones to support learning; Safeguarding students from violence; Teaching socio-emotional and life skills; Involving communities in school management; Targeting interventions towards girls; (4) Bad buys (not effective or cost-effective as typically implemented): Investing in hardware like laptops, tablets, and computers alone; Providing inputs (textbooks, additional teachers to reduce class size, school buildings, grants, salary increases, and libraries) without addressing other issues; and (5) Effective but expensive buys (relatively expensive way to deliver learning outcomes - these interventions may be appropriate for school systems with larger budgets or to achieve non-education objectives): Transferring cash to improving learning; Feedng in primary schools.

1’^ Association for the Development of Education in Africa and Human Capital Africa (2024).
1’° See https://scienceofteaching.site/.
1’5 Wodon et al. (2021).
1 6 UNESCO MGIEP (2022).
1 7 UNICEF (2019). See also UNICEF and World Bank (2021).
1” African Union Commission (2023a).
1 UNESCO, UNICEF, and World Food Programme (2023).
11’ See World Health Organization (2016, 2018, 2019). See also UNGEI (2018).
111 Wodon et al. (2021).
112 UNESCO (2024d).
11aAzmeraw et al. (2023).
11° UNESCO (2023).
115 African Union Commission (2020a).
116 African Union Commission (2020b).
117 African Union Commission (2024a).
11’ African Union Commission (2022).
11’ United Nations (2024).
12’ Bahl and Dietzen (2019).
121 See for example Morsi and Mukasa (2019).
122 International Labour Organization (2023a).
12aThe new TVET strategy is being finalized. On the previous strategy, see African Union Commission (2015d).
12° See World Bank, UNESCO, and ILO (2023), and African Development Bank and ILO (2023). See also UNESCO (2022).
125 African Union Commission and International Labour Organization (2024).
126 On the right to higher education in Africa, see UNESCO IESALC (2023).
127 UNESCO IESALC and UNESCO Office Nairobi and Regional Bureau for Science in Africa (2022).
12’ Arnhold and Bassett (2022).
12’ On the state of research in Africa, see Science for Africa Foundation (2024).
1^’ African Union Commission (2014a).
1^1 One such program is the Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX) funded by GPE and IDRC.
1^2 See for example Shah and Choo (2020) and Associates for Change et al. (2022).
1^^UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (2022a).
1 ° UNESCO (2015).
1 UNESCO (2017b).
1 6 UNESCO (2006).
1^7 UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (2022b).
1^’ UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (2020). 1^’
UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (2022a). 1°’
International Labour Organization (2023b).
1°1 PPMI and African Union (2024).
1°2 https://www.uil.unesco.org/en/lifelong-learning/africa.
1°^ https://www.unesco.org/en/gender-equality/education.
1°° https://wvvwungei.org/.
1°5 Global Partnership for Education (2019d).
1°6 Wodon et al. (2024).
14^7 FAWE (2018).
1°’ The course was produced by FAWE, UNICEF, and UNESCO IICBA.
1°’ UNESCO and African Union (2023).
15’ Global Partnership for Education (2019f).
1 1 UNESCO (2020).
152 Data from UNHCR (2024) suggest that at the end of 2023, 120 million people were forcibly displaced people, including 43 million refugees. The number of forcibly displaced people has increased every year for the last 12 years, with an increase of 8 percent between 2022 and 2023. On education for refugees, see UNHCR (2023) and UNHCR, UNESCO and UNICEF (2023).
15aSmith and Wodon (2025).
15° United Nations (2017).

*[5^] UNESCO and UNHCR (2023a, 2023b).
*[56] UNESCO (2020).
*[57] African Union Commission (2018a).
*[5'] UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2021a).
*[59] UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2021b).
*[°0] UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2024a).
![6]! On purpose, the governance framework in this section follows a similar structure to what was proposed for CESA 16-25 and the governance framework for the AU's new TVET strategy, but with a few differences.
*'[2] The profiles are at https://educafion-profiles.org/. They cover themes of recent Global Education Monitoring Report, including inclusion, non-state actors, technology, and leadership, as well as other topics related to SDG4 such as financing for equity, climate change communication and education, and comprehensive sexuality education.
*°[3] See for example the data collected to assess where countries stand in integrating climate change in their curricula (UNESCO, 2021b).
*[64] JMP estimates for WASH in schools are based on national EMIS data, censuses and surveys, and secondary sources. Dehnitions on the UNICEF website are as follows: (1) Water: Schools with an improved drinking water source with water available at the time of the questionnaire or survey are classified as having 'basic' service. Schools without water available, but with an improved source are classified as having 'limited' service, and those with unimproved or no water source are classified as having 'no service'; (2) Sanitation: Schools with improved sanitation facilities which are single-sex and usable at the time of the survey or questionnaire are classified as having 'basic' service. Those using improved sanitation facilities which are either not single-sex or not usable are classified as having 'limited' service. However, pre-primary schools without single-sex toilets may still be considered to have 'basic' sanitation service if the toilets are usable. Schools with unimproved or no toilets are classified as having 'no service'; (3) Hygiene: Schools with handwashing facilities with water and soap available at the time of the questionnaire or survey are considered to have 'basic' service. Those with handwashing facilities that have water available at the time of the questionnaire or survey, but no soap, are considered to have 'limited' service, while schools with no facilities or no water available for handwashing are classified as having 'no service'.
*[6'] Nayihouba and Wodon (2022).
*'[6] 3ie Development Evidence Portal | 3ie (3ieimpact.org).
*'[7] African Educafian Research Database | ESSA (essa-africa.org).
![6'] https://www.education-inequalities.org/
*[6'] https://www.washingtongroup-disability.com/resources/methodology/.
*[70] Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys - Education Analysis for Global Learning and Equity.

Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2026-2035:

A Framework for Action



African Union