



TALENT wishes to serve as a forum for:

-> exchanging experience, expertise and knowledge on programmes and interventions (at national or regional level) related to teaching and learning improvement in sub-Saharan African countries;

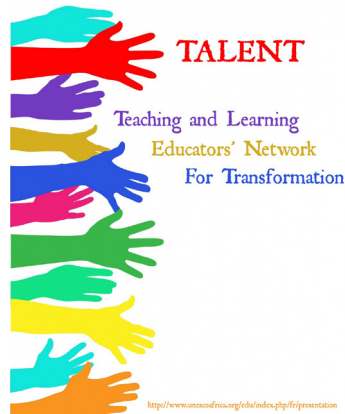
-> promoting research and knowledge generation on those issues to inform policy change;

-> strengthening capacity of countries to address challenges related to curriculum development and implementation, teacher training and pedagogy, learning assessments.



Newsletter #1

From January to June 2020



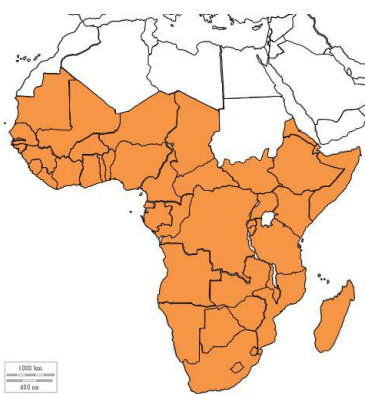
The Teaching and Learning Educators' Network for Transformation (TALENT) is a cross-country platform for networking and information exchange on teaching and learning by establishing a regional network. The network's Secretariat is currently hosted by the UNESCO Regional Office in Dakar and it aims at fostering effective strategies to improve learning with the objective of implementing SDG4 - Education 2030 agenda.



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THE TALENT NETWORK COVERS THE COUNTRIES OF SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA:



Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Tanzania, The Gambia, Togo, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe

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RESPONDING TO THE CHALLENGE OF PEDAGOGICAL CONTINUITY IN THE COVID-19 PERIOD

Impacts of COVID-19

- **Nationwide school closures in West and Central Africa** to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic are impacting **120 million children** across the region, including refugee and forcibly displaced children who are integrated in national education systems.
- These closures are particularly likely **to exacerbate the pre-existent learning inequalities**.
- Their impacts will fall disproportionately **on the poorest countries and most marginalized and vulnerable communities, including the 700.000 refugee and more than 2 million internally displaced children**, especially those living in remote rural areas.
- The **digital divide** will certainly worsen the **education divide**.
- The longer marginalized children are out of school, **the less likely they are to return, especially for girls**.

To ensure the continuity of learning in a protective environment and to prepare for the safe reopening of schools, UNHCR is working with Ministries of Education and education partners to:

- Ensure the inclusion of refugee children in national COVID-19 response plans;
- Support displaced students access to distance education programmes (even in low-tech and no tech contexts using tools such as radio education and paper-based self-instructional materials);
- Enhance health training for teachers;
- Support community awareness-raising activities on COVID-19;
- Upgrading water and sanitation facilities in schools;
- Support catch-up programs to minimize the dropout rates, especially among the most marginalized communities.

UNHCR also works with education partners to ensure that the centrality of protection (with regards to physical health, mental health and continuity of learning) is considered before, during and after the school reopening process.

Finally, as an active member of both regional education coordination groups (the Regional Coordination Group on SDG4-Education 2030 and the Regional Education in Emergencies Working Group), UNHCR is playing a key role in the Nexus approach, collaborating with humanitarian and development partners to provide support to countries in terms of emergency response, resilience and recovery planning. UNHCR also contributes to developing the R-UNSDG Strategic Framework for the Education Emergency Response to COVID-19 in Africa, which aims to provide a concerted regional approach in support of the African Union response to COVID-19 and to support its e-education strategy.

In Chad, refugee students are offering home tutoring sessions to baccalaureate candidates to ensure their readiness when it's time to go back to school.

Credit: Simplice Kpandji,
UNHCR Chad





STRENGTHENING LEARNING IN THE REGION IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19

UNICEF education response to the pandemic in west and central Africa is guided by the 'readiness' agenda of the Global Education Strategy, covering the learning needs of children aged 3 to 18 years old, focusing on countries and children that are affected by the virus, including the most vulnerable and excluded children in the most remote hard to reach areas.

At regional level, UNICEF has played a leadership role since March 2020 at both regional and country levels, supporting a multisectoral and coherent response to children education needs in the 24 countries.

This is mainly consisting into:

- Coordination (EIE clusters and LEG) and partnership for harmonization and fundraising of the sector response: ex in Ghana, non-traditional partnerships established (Mastercard Foundation, community radio stations, Cocoa producers);
- Development and rolling-out of remote and distance learning materials to ensure continuity of education for all: 24 countries have launched Tv and radio programs with UNICEF support as well printing of reviewed homebased learning materials;
- Safe schools re-opening protocols establishment: Ex: Côte d'Ivoire is focusing on Remedial classes, Parenting and leadership programmes, Realtime monitoring integrated in the EMIS, Community mobilization and support for girls' education
- Develop a knowledge management agenda to learn and document good practices on countries education response to the pandemic as well as distance learning programs and tools in countries.

Impacts of COVID-19

- **School closures** put gains made in access to education and learning at risk, especially in West and Central Africa where we have an estimated **41 Million of Out-Of-School Children aged 6-15 years old.**
- Since the beginning of the pandemic, **about 36M children out of 59M affected children targeted by UNICEF** were supported **with a distance/ home-based learning opportunity.**
- 7,820 out of 418,000 schools were implementing Safe School protocols.



Impacts of COVID-19

- Since March 2020, **185 countries and territories have decreed the closure of schools for more than a billion students**, and the need for States **to change learning models has become all the more pressing.**
- The global shift means **Africa must reposition its education ecosystems** as part of this movement for change, in order **to meet the major challenge of ensuring continuity in quality education for all.**

Several governments have turned away from traditional methods of learning so as to preserve educational continuity while limiting the spread of the virus. National strategies for responding to the pandemic have turned towards alternative forms of education, where teachers and students are no longer physically present. All schoolwork is now done at home.

How can distance education and the quality of learning be ensured for all students, including the most vulnerable?

There are numerous possibilities – such as radio, television, printed materials, digital platforms, tablets, and smartphones – but not all offer the same learning opportunities. And, considering the wide range of local realities, to what extent can such channels help students pursue education through distance learning?

To make these choices clearer for public authorities, IIEP-UNESCO Dakar has published a memorandum on “The challenge of monitoring quality in basic distance education” [1]. This publication was produced under the regional programme to support quality management in basic education. It examines various channels in order to determine their relevance, based on educational issues.

The educational offering must adapt to the wide range of local contexts

E-learning via digital platforms, using a computer or smartphone, has been widely covered by the media. There are indeed a number of advantages to this means of education. It provides free and widespread access to educational resources. Content can be viewed live or rebroadcast, giving students the opportunity to work independently. Digital systems are widely popular with students and help maintain educational relationships, even at a distance. However, these tools cannot be effectively used without pre-service training, and require a good quality internet connection.



“Even as ministries of education engage in the development of contingency plans to ensure educational continuity in teaching, 89% of learners in sub-Saharan Africa do not have access to computers at home and, among those who do have access, 82% do not have an internet subscription. The educational offering must therefore take into account the level of internet coverage by geographical area and access to electricity”,

Patrick Nkengne, Senior expert in quality management at IIEP-UNESCO Dakar and co-author of the memorandum.

Beyond digital platforms, other channels have potential advantages for distance education in Africa – notably radio, the most accessible means of communication.

According to UNESCO data, more than 80% of households on the African continent have access to a working radio set. Educational resources for radio are already available in a number of countries, and information can be broadcast in local languages.

One limiting factor, however, is that students, who are often busy with housework, may not tune in to the programme's scheduled broadcast. The same issue applies to television, which has considerable reach in Africa. Most countries have national channels to broadcast educational programmes, but content cannot take into account the grade level of each student. Moreover, television does not allow for teachers and students to interact; students are just spectators and cannot go at their own pace or ask questions.

In the memorandum, IIEP-UNESCO Dakar experts highlight factors for those involved in education to consider in order to ensure the quality of distance education: the relevance of proposed content, coverage of the target audience, and monitored learning. Modes of distance education need to respond to a wide range of local contexts, and must be examined in this light from an early stage.

[1] A second memorandum will report on the mechanisms used by ministries of education in sub-Saharan African countries.



INVESTING IN ICTS IN EDUCATION, A PATH WITH NO RETURN

COVID-19 will have forced African countries to make an unprecedented digital leap, but there was no alternative in the face of such a sudden pandemic. With support from development partners, classroom teaching and learning shifted to digital platforms with teachers and students in their respective households. Many countries have resurrected teaching through radio and television, in combination with digital platforms dedicated to distance learning, including the use of social networks.

This trend will be reinforced in the post-COVID-19 period since countries will have to capitalize on this experience to make school systems more resilient to potential shocks if a palliative would be distance education. Ensuring access to basic services to enable equitable and inclusive distance education will require development policy choices that go beyond the education sector. For example, beyond the development of technopedagogical skills among teachers, access to electricity and connectivity in schools and households requires a national ICT development policy that integrates the education component.

Without an evidence-based and cross-sectoral strategic framework, there is a danger of hasty recourse to equipping schools, to the detriment of human resource development.





Governments will need to be resourceful in their investment choices and channel partner support towards national priorities. In the face of limited resources, courageous choices will have to be made, such as which education cycles should be prioritized?

UIS data show that in sub-Saharan Africa, 85% of learners in formal education are in primary (62%) and secondary (23%) education. They also show a significant number of countries with proportions of primary school teachers who are trained in the use of ICTs for teaching but large proportions of primary schools without electricity connections.



CONDUCTING LEARNING ASSESSMENTS DURING SCHOOL CLOSURES

In response to the health crisis caused by the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, governments around the world have taken drastic measures to safeguard the health of populations. As a result, the world is facing a series of school closures that threaten the continuity of learning. This situation has prompted international organizations to reflect on emergency solutions to mitigate the loss of learning while ensuring the continuity of quality learning.



Given the importance of learning assessments as a key instrument for ensuring equity and quality in education, it is in this context that UNESCO-IICBA, TALENT and ADEA organized two webinars (in English and French) on 6 and 13 May 2020 on the theme “Conducting Learning Assessments during School Closures”, with a view to sharing information on how governments support teachers to continue to assess learning during school closures. In addition, the webinars shared information and experiences on distance learning assessment options used (or that could be used) by primary and secondary school teachers during school closures.

Overall, different experts from UNESCO and sub-Saharan African countries stressed that there is no universal recipe for assessment when schools are closed. While many countries in the region have decided to reopen schools for examination years, formative assessment and support to students through distance education have proven more difficult, especially in the early years. Limited access to the Internet, lack of computer training for teachers, lack of infrastructure for students and teachers are among the common challenges in evaluating distance education.

The role of parents and self-evaluation is an example of some of the solutions and emergency measures employed by countries.



REGIONAL REPORT ABOUT QUALITY ASSURANCE MECHANISMS AND PRACTICES IN THE PRE-SERVICE TRAINING OF PRIMARY/BASIC CYCLE TEACHERS IN BURKINA FASO, MALI, NIGER AND SENEGAL



UNESCO's Multisectoral Regional Office for West Africa (Sahel), CONFEMEN and IFEF have produced a report diagnosing quality assurance mechanisms and practices in the pre-service training of primary and basic education teachers in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Senegal. This regional report was validated during a three-day sharing and validation workshop held in Dakar from 17 to 19 December 2019, which brought together the four countries participating in the study.

This workshop made it possible to identify recommendations and lines of action to support countries in improving pre-service teacher training and developing quality assurance frameworks in primary/basic education.

The report revealed the lack of developed and institutionalized quality assurance mechanisms in primary and basic teacher education in the four countries of the study, although the premises of good quality assurance practices exist in some countries. In addition, the need to design and implement quality assurance systems capable of supporting the qualitative improvement of teacher education was stressed.

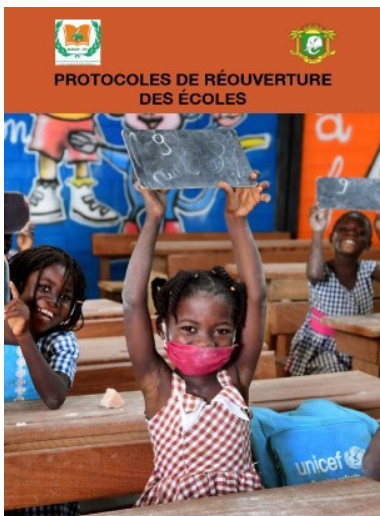
Among the recommendations and avenues for support to countries on quality assurance are the harmonization of teacher training reference frameworks, the establishment of an autonomous system for programme evaluation and the setting up of an autonomous quality assurance system integrating teacher training.

As regards the process of developing the study and establishing quality assurance, the recommendations were to take account of basic education in its entirety (including the pre-school and non-formal sub-sectors) for the next stages of the study, to build the capacities of those involved in pre-service and in-service training in quality assurance, and to support the emergence of a regional unit responsible for supporting and building capacities in quality assurance in teacher training institutions and harmonizing practices at the regional level.





COVID-19 AND PEDAGOGICAL CONTINUITY IN THE COUNTRIES: CONFEMEN AS A FRAMEWORK FOR CONSULTATION BETWEEN THE MINISTERS OF THE FRENCH-SPEAKING AREA



In these times of disruption to the regular functioning of schools due to the Covid-19 pandemic, CONFEMEN continues to carry out its missions. Thus, it has organised two virtual meetings with the Ministers members of its Bureau. The first one was held on the 27th of March and the second one on the 29th of April 2020. In addition to these two meetings, a regional meeting of ministers from African countries was held on the 5th of June 2020. These meetings provided a framework for sharing experiences on the functioning of schools, solutions for educational continuity, the modalities of recovery and, finally, on the prospects for reopening schools in the school year 2020-21.

At the same time, the PASEC team is continuing to finalise PASEC 2019 assessment, in particular through psychometric analysis, data analysis and the drafting of the international and national reports.

All this work should lead to the publication of the results by the end of 2020. In addition, the EQAO continues to roll out its 2020 programming. To this end, three education policy briefs are currently being prepared. They deal with lively issues such as quality assurance of teacher training, the state of implementation of SDG4 in francophone sub-Saharan African countries and digital education.



MAPPING OF LEARNING ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Mapping of Learning Assessment Systems in Sub-Saharan Africa is the title of a recent study coordinated by the Teaching and Learning Educators' Network for Transformation (TALENT).

Learning assessment systems in the region have been increasingly at the centre of the attention of Ministers of education keen to improve their capacity to monitor learning outcomes.

TALENT has just recently completed an analytical mapping of national learning assessment systems in sub-Saharan Africa. The study has three main objectives: identifying countries' strengths and weaknesses in terms of assessing learning outcomes; give an overview of recent trends of the different types of learning assessments in the region; suggest ways to strengthen national learning assessment systems.

The study highlights that different types of learning assessment are increasingly more popular in the region. Among the key findings the progressively more important role of learning assessments as part of the renewed commitment to focus on quality. On the other hand, the use of learning assessment data to strengthen education quality remains weak.





Among the factors blocking the use of data there is lack of dedicated qualified personnel to analyse and translate data into actionable solutions, low priority put on the use of learning assessment data and the risk of political interference. Long times for the production and publication of reports can also be detrimental to the timely use of data.

How to join the TALENT network?

To become official member of TALENT, organisations will need to submit an application letter outlining the fulfilment of the abovementioned criteria and the contribution that the organisation is willing to bring to the group.

In order to become members, interested institutions have to meet the following criteria:

- Mandate of the institution/organisation/association strongly linked to quality of education, specifically assessment, curriculum and/or pedagogy;
- Be legally registered or have a field presence in a country of the West and Central Africa Region;
- Track record of activities in the countries covered;
- Track record of activities linked to teacher training or monitoring of the quality of education in the region;
- Not for profit nature of the applying organization;
- Approval by a simple majority of the Steering Group.

Application to be admitted in the Steering Group:

To be admitted as member of the Steering group an organisation needs to follow the abovementioned process and criteria and fulfil few additional requirements:

- I - Officially commit to contribute (financially, technically or in-kind) to joint activities during the current biennium;
- II - Attend to at least 3 out of 4 quarterly Steering committee meetings over the year.

Admission of a candidate organisation to the Steering group needs to be officially endorsed by the Steering Committee of the SDG4 Regional Coordination Group for West and Central Africa.

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