Education Sector

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Integrating SDG4 in National Education Planning

🔑 Key messages

1. In September 2015 the World adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The fourth SDG focuses on education, uniting a coherent set of interrelated targets to ensure quality education for all and equal learning opportunities throughout life.

2. SDG4 goes beyond a mere expansion of the scope and coverage of the Education for All agenda by placing learning and equity at the core of global education discourse.

3. This requires rethinking education and envisioning a new construct of education around lifelong and life-wide learning, and integrating SDG4 into national education planning.

4. According to a survey conducted by UNESCO in 2016 to gauge the readiness of sub-Saharan African countries for national SDG4 integration: a) important data, policy and capacity gaps need to be addressed in meeting the new vision of quality education and learning for all; b) national planning cycles and effective sector dialogue mechanisms at the country level present important opportunities.

5. Building on existing systems to progressively integrate prioritized SDG4 targets and relevant strategies and indicators into national education sector plans and their M&E frameworks will be of critical importance.

◎ SDG4 Targets

4.1	Quality primary/secondary education for all
4.2	Early childhood & pre-primary education
4.3	Equal access to TVET & higher education
4.4	Relevant skills for work
4.5	Gender equality & equal access for all
4.6	Youth and adult literacy
4.7	Global citizenship
4.a	Safe & inclusive learning environments
4.b	Scholarships for higher education
4.c	Teachers' training and working conditions

1. The nations of the world commit to a holistic universal education agenda

A new transformative and aspirational education development agenda – Education 2030 – reflects the vision of the Incheon Declaration adopted at the World Education Forum in May 2015. In September 2015 when the United Nations General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, it was embraced as SDG4, which calls upon all nations to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Subsequently on the side-lines of UNESCO's 38th General Conference, the Education 2030 Framework for Action was adopted in November 2015.

At the turn of the century, from Jomtien in 1990 to Dakar in 2000, the Education for All (EFA) agenda promoted access to, quality and relevance of basic education through both formal and non-formal means until 2015. The Millennium Development Goals had overshadowed this agenda by narrowly focusing on primary education and gender parity in education. Concurrently, EFA action plans were often developed in parallel to national education planning processes.

In the course of devising and formulating the post-2015 education agenda, EFA platforms were mobilised and leveraged at global and regional levels through a widespread, multi-layered and participative process to influence the global debate on the SDGs, particularly the education goal.

2. Education 2030 - A new vision for Sub-saharan Africa placing lifelong learning at the centre

After the culmination of the EFA and MDG era, there are still over 31 million primary school-aged children and 23 million eligible for junior secondary who are out of school in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) with millions more at risk of dropping out. Rampant youth unemployment and underemployment including of school graduates continues to be a major concern for the growth, stability and wellbeing of the continent. This bleak situation begs the question: are education systems fit for purpose?

The 2030 education vision expands beyond a focus on schooling towards learning: education systems are called upon to leverage all means and modes of formal and alternative learn-

ing to ensure that the diverse learning needs of all children, youth and adults are addressed through multiple and open learning systems and with flexible pathways between them.

In keeping with rapid socio-economic, environmental and demographic changes, the focus on skills development for life and work will require innovative approaches to facilitating the acquisition and validation of foundational and transversal skills and competencies from an early stage and throughout life.

The emphasis on equity and inclusion calls for targeted policies, strategies and resource allocation within education sector plans focusing on girls and disadvantaged populations. Ensuring the quality and relevance of learning and learning outcomes is of paramount importance in the 2030 vision for education. There is call for all-round human development through cultivating and validating a broad range of knowledge, skills and values.

Learning to Live Together (LTLT) in a world where differences and persistent prejudice continue to be a source of conflict is central to achieving the new education vision. The sense of belonging to our common humanity fostered through learning systems that promote responsible and active citizenship in an increasingly globalized world and instil values of collaboration, peace and democracy is encompassed in SDG4. The centrality of education for sustainable development at all learning levels gives rise to valuing the future in the way we address our present challenges, to build more resilient societies.

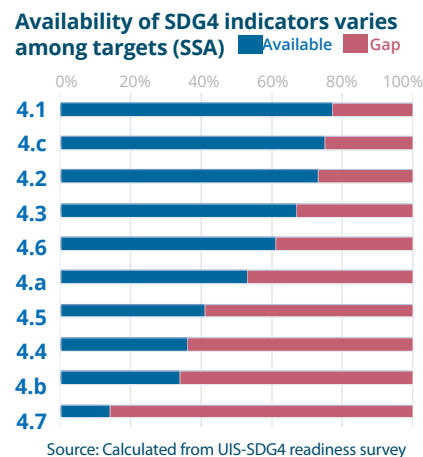## 3. Country trends and challenges: How ready are national education systems?

Recognizing that governments have primary responsibility for Education 2030 commitments, a Regional SDG4-Education 2030 Consultation for West and Central Africa (WCA) in November 2015 gathered ministry of education officials from 25 countries together with other key national and regional education stakeholders, following which the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and the UNESCO Dakar Office jointly conducted a rapid SSA Country Readiness Survey (Feb-May 2016) to:

• Better understand the sector planning context in which countries will integrate SDG4 and identify capacity gaps/support needs;

• Assess availability of data needed for production and monitoring of SDG4 indicators and capacity needs of countries.

3.1 SDG4 targets and indicators are unevenly reflected in education sector planning with important data, policy and capacity gaps to be addressed

Data and indicator availability varies among SDG4 targets:

In assessing national capacities in relation to SDG4 global and thematic indicator sets, while indicators to measure progress towards target 4.1 (universal general education) and 4.c (teachers) are readily available in most countries, the measurement of other targets such as 4.4 (youth and adult skills) and 4.7 (education for peace and sustainable development) need to be strengthened. With regards to country readiness to report disaggregated indicators, survey results indicate that present systems in SSA need to strengthen capacities in producing disaggregated, disability and wealth data and indicators.

Availability of SDG4 indicators varies among targets (SSA) ■ Available ■ Gap

Source: Calculated from UIS-SDG4 readiness survey

**Recommended actions for improving national data availability in SSA:**

• Strengthening and adapting education management information systems (EMIS) to SDG4;
• Developing education modules in household surveys; Improving capacities in production of finance and expenditure data;
• Reporting information on learning assessments;
• Strengthening dialogue among national education statistics actors.

Integration into existing monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks:

Thematic areas such as 'global citizenship' and environmental education are given less attention in current M&E frameworks. WCA and East and Southern Africa (ESA) regions reported similar results, with the exception of non-formal education which figured in 89% of M&E frameworks in WCA versus in only 44% of respondent countries in ESA, and gender equality in education included in 94% of M&E frameworks of WCA countries and in only 63% in ESA. New data requirements will likely drive M&E reforms in many countries.
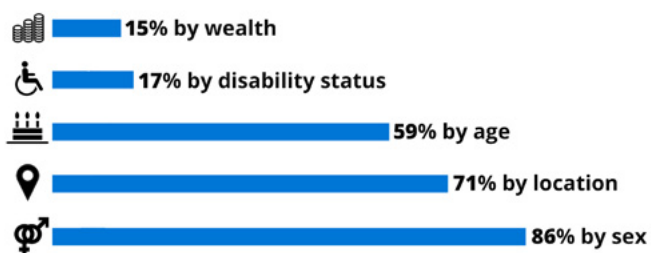
Level of integration of the 2030 agenda in the current plans

Source: UNESCO Dakar-SDG4 readiness survey (41/47 SSA countries)
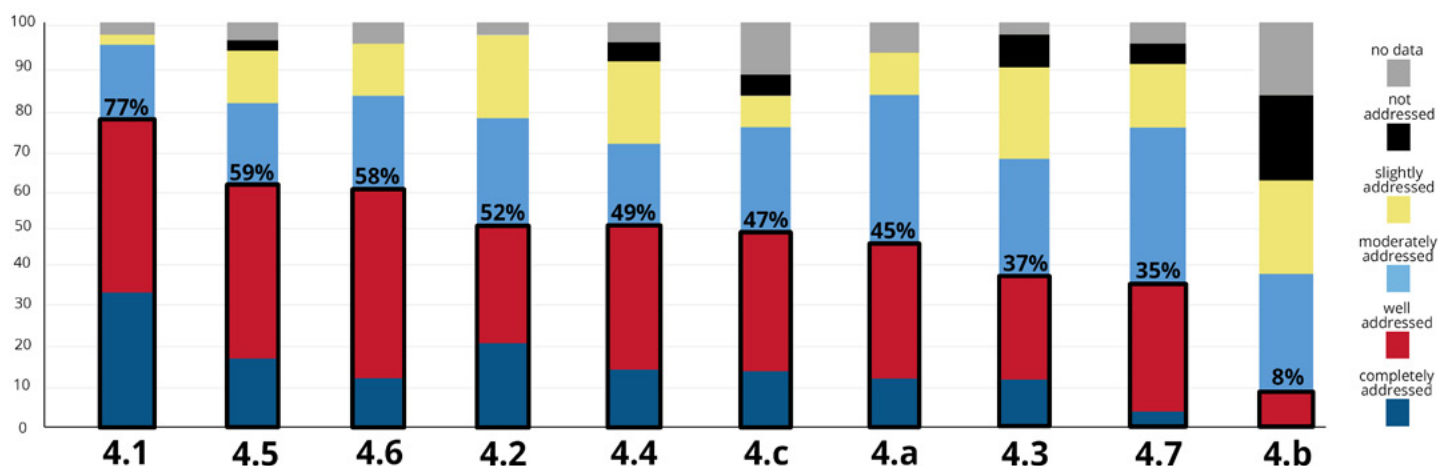
Global SDG4 Education Indicators by type of disaggregation
Source: UIS-SDG4 readiness survey

- 15% by wealth
- 17% by disability status
- 59% by age
- 71% by location
- 86% by sex

Inter-ministerial coordination may pose a challenge: 46% of countries reported having only one ministry dealing with all levels and types of education with the remainder of countries having between 2-4 ministries, with varying patterns from country to country. While in ESA 65% of respondent countries have one ministry in charge of all aspects of education, the figure is only 29% in WCA. This points to possible challenges in ensuring system-wide coherence and inter-ministerial collaboration to develop and implement integrated policies. Even where there is one ministry covering the entire sector, cross-sector collaboration required for SDG4 may still come with important challenges to tackle.

Other challenges cited by respondent countries in integrating SDG4 into sector plans included a) funding the ambitious targets, b) weak capacities in particular of teachers and education managers to respond to diverse learning needs, c) inadequate M&E frameworks to appraise the "qualitative" dimensions of education systems, and d) the need for more technical guidelines, advocacy and communication on the new education agenda and its integration into national policy formulation and implementation.

3.2 Survey results point to opportunities for SDG4 integration

New education sector plans (ESP) are expected to be developed in over one-third of respondent countries during the 2016-2017 period, providing an opportune time for taking SDG4 targets and commitments into account in national education policy and planning cycles. Other countries are taking the opportunity of existing sector policy and plan revisions to integrate SDG4 targets and commitments.

Opportunities for SDG4 reflection in a relatively conducive environment of policy dialogue with active representation of key stakeholders: Almost all countries reported having established mechanisms for consulting and/or coordinating with various stakeholders and the majority perceived them to be effective. The findings also showed that mechanisms are most successful when primary or direct stakeholders (e.g. parents' associations, teachers' unions, and student councils) are actively engaged in dialogues and reviews. Perceived difficulties, especially among "direct" stakeholders were often lack of consensus and the difficulty in identifying appropriate representatives to voice concerns.

4. Integrating SDG4 into Education Sector Plans

Countries may adopt a theory of change approach inspired by the new vision of Education 2030 to define or adjust their national education development goals.

Rethinking education and learning systems will require that new perspectives of Education 2030 be taken into consideration including in conflict-affected and fragile countries.

This must occur at all stages of national education policy and planning cycles, from data collection to systems' analysis and the definition of nationally-contextualized strategies and corresponding indicators. The holistic SDG4 agenda covering all areas of education and learning must be **integrated within national education sector plans** through prioritizing and using a progressive approach centred around the strengthening of national capacities.

A mapping of policies and capacities through concerted and **inclusive sector dialogue** using existing mechanisms such as Local Education Groups, may be conducted in order to analyze current situations, **identify policy options and trade-offs**, and map out the progressive integration of relevant SDG4 targets into ESP and their costed action plans. Some targets are set at the global level (4.1, 4.2, 4.5, 4.6) requiring countries to define nationally-contextualized strategies and benchmarks to reach them. Others are in the form of 'commitments' (4.3, 4.4, 4.7, 4.a, 4.c), for country-level target setting to translate them focusing on a number of policy areas. This process requires serious reflection at country level around the meaning of the new education agenda and presents an opportunity to build on the vision of education and learning systems that are inclusive, relevant, and lifelong. Regional and sub-regional education frameworks, such as the African Union's Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25), should also be taken into consideration.

While some countries may be at the beginning of a new policy and planning cycle, others are still implementing existing ESP. These countries can identify entry points where existing policy, data and capacity can be analysed in light of SDG4 to guide the (re)formulation of policies and strategies, facilitating a re-prioritization exercise and a re-focusing of actions and investments, including of all education stakeholders around a single plan and results framework.

> **Suggested steps for countries in the midst of implementing existing ESP:**
> - Identifying entry points to re-analyse priorities;
> - Updating the situation analysis including analyses of institutional and implementation capacities;
> - Updating and expanding EMIS;
> - Conducting participatory dialogue on policy trade-offs and decisions

Opportune periods include evaluation/preparation of new annual, triennial or medium-term action plans, or during joint sector reviews (JSR), serving not only as M&E and planning stages but as policy and strategy revising instruments. JSR can serve as important platforms for effective and inclusive national policy dialogue, for mutual accountability, for policy adjustements, and planning.

Linking with wider national SDG agenda: The choice of strategies and indicators to adopt and contextualize will vary among countries depending on national contexts, development priorities, and institutional and resource capacities, among others. An integrated approach will be required calling for **more systematic inter-sectoral and intra-governmental collaboration** to respond to areas of sustainable lifestyles and life skills, cultural diversity, health and well-being education, as well as bringing on board other sectors which are critical to the achievement of the education goal

such as labour and environment. Moreover, the centrality of education in contributing to the achievement of all SDGs must be recognized.Strengthened and diversified **multi-stakeholder partnerships** including with governments, civil society organisations, UN and bi/multi-lateral agencies, academia, youth organizations, private sector and foundations among others, all play a key role for effective implementation. Civil society holds a particularly important role in its capacity for social mobilisation, innovation, monitoring and accountability.

> **The Education 2030 agenda requires system-wide planning and governance reforms:**
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> ⊙ Review of legislative frameworks;
> ⊙ Robust resource planning and management pooling together domestic and external resource commitments;
> ⊙ Institutional structures and processes for effective implementation;
> ⊙ Sound national monitoring and accountability systems;
> ⊙ Intra and inter-ministerial coordination.

Monitoring is essential throughout the process: Central to the effective implementation of SDG4-contextualised policies and plans are robust national M&E frameworks. The quality, availability and relevance of existing data to monitor progress towards SDG4 targets and commitments must be assessed, with particular focus on areas that are hard to measure such as equity and the quality and relevance of learning. Countries may also reflect on additional indicators to more comprehensively measure among others the adequacy of learning environments, the relevance of learning outcomes, and the acquisition of adequate skills and values, disaggregated and at sub-national level.

Other important elements include building system-wide EMIS, planning actions to strengthen national capacities and ensuring sustainability of data production, understanding new data source requirements in the context of SDG4, involving various national stakeholders and ensuring coordination among them.

Mobilising resources for adequate education financing, the regular production and reporting of financial data and indicators, and the transparent tracking of all financial flows will help ensure greater equity, more efficient use of resources, more effective planning, and better monitoring of domestic and external commitments towards SDG4. Gathering education financing sources into a common framework, National Education Accounts can be used for better targeting of educational resources and improved policy decisions.

5. Global and regional coordination, monitoring and country support

At the global level, UNESCO was entrusted the role of leading, coordinating, and monitoring the implementation of the SDG4 agenda. The Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report will serve as the global mechanism for monitoring and reporting on SDG4 as well as education-related targets in the other SDGs.

Regional frameworks and coordination mechanisms in support of SDG 4 implementation at country level should build on existing coordination and monitoring mechanisms and processes while being linked to broader SDG coordination mechanisms at national, regional, and global levels, promoting resource mutualisation and cooperation within and across regions. Within SSA, a Regional Coordination Group on SDG4-Education 2030 for West and Central Africa (RCG4-WCA) was established in May 2016 bringing together regional representations of a wide range of intergovernmental, civil society and multilateral organisations supporting education development in WCA to support the contextualising and embedding of Education 2030 in national education planning.

> ◎ **A systematic approach avoiding parallel/ fragmented processes**
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> Integrating SDG4 contextualized targets into education policy/ planning cycles at country level
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> Aligning policy priorities with wider national sustainable development goals
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> Strengthening inclusive and participatory sector dialogue at all stages

A rethinking and new construct of education around lifelong learning

📖 Suggested resources

OECD. (2016). Better Policies for Sustainable Development: A New Framework for Policy Coherence. Paris: OECD.

UNDESA. (2016). Overview of institutional arrangements for implementing the 2030 Agenda at national level. New York: UNDESA.

UNDESA. Smoke, P. and Nixon, H. (2016). Sharing responsibilities and resources among levels of government: localizing the Sustainable Development Goals. New York: UNDESA.

UNDG. (2015). Mainstreaming the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Interim Reference Guide to UN Country Teams.

New York: UNDG.

UNESCO. (2013) Handbook on education policy analysis and planning. Volume 1: Education Policy Analysis. Bangkok: UNESCO

UNESCO. (2016). Rethinking Education and SDG4 Briefing Notes. Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO-UIS (2016). Laying the Foundation to Measure Sustainable Development Goal 4. Montreal: UIS.

United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network. (2015). Getting Started with the Sustainable Development Goals. New York: UNSDSN.