

Africa Teachers Reports Series

Educating Girls and Ending Child Marriage in Africa: Investment Case and the Role of Teachers and School Leaders

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Key Findings

While nine in ten girls complete their primary education and over three in four complete their lower secondary education globally, the proportions remain much lower in sub-Saharan Africa, where just over two-thirds of girls (69 percent versus 73 percent for boys) complete their primary education and four in ten (43 percent versus 46 percent for boys) complete lower secondary education according to the latest available data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (included in the World Development Indicators). More needs to be done to improve educational opportunities for girls in Africa, which would help end child marriage and boost countries' economic development. Gender imbalances in education and beyond (including in occupational choice and more broadly agency) result in part from deep-seated biases and discrimination against women, which percolate to education. It is essential to reduce inequality both in and through education, acknowledging that education has a key role to play in reducing broader gender inequalities in societies. The first part of this study updates and expands for a much larger number of countries a previous investment case on the benefits of educating girls and ending child marriage in Africa, while the second part looks at the role of teachers and school leaders in improving learning outcomes and educational attainment for girls. Topics discussed include the importance of having more female teachers and especially school leaders and adopting gender-sensitive approaches in the classroom such as gender-responsive pedagogy, while also preventing gender-based violence in schools. The study was prepared by a team at UNESCO's International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (IICBA) in partnership with the African Union International Centre for the Education of Girls and Women in Africa (AU/CIEFFA).

Part I: Investment Case

The first part of the study looks at the benefits of educating girls and ending child marriage, building on a previous study at the World Bank, also in collaboration with AU/CIEFFA¹. Educating girls could have large positive impacts on many development outcomes, including (1) earnings and standards of living; (2) child marriage and early childbearing; (3) fertility and population growth; (4) health, nutrition, and well-being; (5) agency and decision-making; and (6) social capital and institutions. Key findings for this study are based on a much larger set of African countries, household surveys, and other data include the following:

- Gains in earnings are substantial especially with a secondary education. Women with primary education earn more than those with no education, but women with secondary education earn more than twice as much. The gains with tertiary education are even larger.
- Each additional year of secondary education could reduce the risk for girls of marrying as a child and having a child before 18. Universal secondary education could virtually end child marriage and reduce early childbearing by up to three-fourths. By contrast, primary education in most countries does not lead to large reductions in child marriage and early childbearing.
- Universal secondary education and ending child marriage could reduce total fertility (the number of children women have over their lifetime) nationally by a third on average across countries, reducing population growth and enabling countries to benefit from the demographic dividend.
- Universal secondary education could also have health benefits, including (i) increasing women's knowledge of HIV/AIDS by one-tenth; (ii) increasing women's decision-making for their own healthcare by a fourth; (iii) reducing under-five mortality by a third; and (iv) reducing under-five stunting by a fifth. Other benefits include among others a reduction in intimate partner violence.
- Universal secondary education could also increase women's decision-making in the household by one-fifth and the likelihood that children would be registered at birth by over a fourth.
- While primary schooling is necessary, it is not sufficient. For most indicators or domains of potential impacts, gains associated with educational attainment tend to be substantial only with secondary education or higher. Secondary education is also needed to help end child marriage.
- Gender inequality, starting with inequality in and through education, is massive, with women accounting for only about a third of lifetime labor market earnings in sub-Saharan Africa. The gap between men and women in human capital wealth (the value today of the future earnings of the labor force) is estimated at US\$ 4.0 trillion in 2018 value. Reducing gender inequality, including through education, could dramatically improve countries' development prospects.
- Overall, while educating girls and ending child marriage is the right thing to do, it is also a smart economic investment. This statement is not new, but

¹ See Wodon, Q., C. Male, C. Montenegro, H. Nguyen, and A. Onagoruwa. 2018. *Educating Girls and Ending Child Marriage: A Priority for Africa*, Washington, DC: The World Bank. The 2018 study was prepared for the African Union Second African Girls' Summit on Ending Child Marriage organized in Ghana. It was also co-sponsored by AU/CIEFFA.

the contribution of the first part of the study is to provide estimates of the benefits of educating and ending child marriage in Africa for a much larger number of countries and with more recent data than done previously.

Part II: Role of Teachers and School Leaders

The second part of the study focuses on the role of teachers and school leaders in educating girls and ending child marriage. The analysis follows a simple argument. To improve girls' education and end child marriage, the literature tends to emphasize economic incentives for adolescent girls to remain in school. This is certainly needed, but we should also note that (1) Lack of foundational learning is a key factor leading to drop-out in primary and lower-secondary school; (2) Teachers and school leaders are key to improving foundational learning, although new approaches are needed for pedagogy in the classroom and for training teachers and school leaders; and (3) Nationally, professional standards and competencies for teachers and school leaders are also required. These three steps in the argument call for investing in teachers and school leaders, especially women, to educate girls and end child marriage. Targeted interventions for adolescent girls are needed, but in many countries they tend to reach only a small share of girls still in school at that age; by contrast, improving foundational learning would benefit a larger share of girls (and boys) and could also make sense from a cost-benefit point of view, leading to higher educational attainment. Part II of this study provides empirical analysis to test the validity of this argument focusing on West Africa, a region with low educational attainment and high rates of child marriage, although findings are likely to also be relevant for other regions. Key findings are as follows:

- According to parental responses to household surveys, lack of learning in school for their children may account for over 40 percent of girls and boys dropping out of primary school (data for 10 francophone countries). It also accounts for more than a third of students dropping out at the lower secondary level. Improving learning could therefore reduce dropout and increase educational attainment substantially for girls and boys alike.
- To improve learning, reviews from impact evaluations and analysis of student assessment data suggest that teachers and school leaders are key. Yet new approaches are needed for professional development, including through structured pedagogy and training emphasizing practice. Teachers must also be better educated: household surveys for 10 francophone

countries suggest that only one-third of teachers in primary schools have a post-secondary diploma.

- Female teachers and especially school leaders improve student learning according to the 2019 round of PASEC and other data. Yet less than a fifth of teachers at the secondary level are women in many countries. The proportion of female school leaders is also low. Better opportunities must be given to women teachers and school leaders, which would bring additional benefits apart from gains in learning as women may serve as role models for girls and also tend to remain in teaching or school leadership for a longer period of time, thus reducing pressures from teacher shortages.
- Better professional standards and competencies frameworks are also needed for teachers and school leaders, including to make the profession more attractive and ensure that teaching and school leadership are gender-sensitive. Many countries have not yet treated teaching as a career and lack clear definitions of competencies needed at different levels. Guidance for Member States is available from the African Union to strengthen the profession.
- Making the teaching profession more attractive may require better wages and benefits in some (but not all) countries, especially for women who often lag behind men in pay. But programs to increase teacher job satisfaction matter too. This includes mental health and psycho-social support for teachers, especially in contexts of emergencies. Teachers must also be trained in gender-responsive pedagogy and the prevention of gender-based violence in schools, so that schools become safer and more welcoming for girls.

Conclusion

Investing in teachers and school leaders is key to promoting educational opportunities for girls and ending child marriage, thereby also reducing gender inequality in and through education. Low educational attainment for girls and child marriage are profoundly detrimental for girls, but also for their children and families, their communities, and societies. Interventions targeting adolescent girls are needed, but so are investments in teachers and school leaders to end the learning crisis that leads to drop-outs, resulting in low educational attainment, a higher prevalence of child marriage, and early childbearing for girls. Increasing investments in girls' education yields large economic and social benefits apart from being the right thing to do. This should start with enhancing foundational learning through better teaching and school leadership, and proven gender-sensitive approaches in and around schools.

Background to the Africa Teachers Reports Series

With support from the European Union under its Regional Teachers Initiative for Africa, the UNESCO International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (UNESCO IICBA) is launching a new Africa Teachers Reports Series with this first report on *Educating Girls and Ending Child Marriage in Africa: Investment Case and the Role of Teachers and School Leaders*. Reports in the Series will be published as IICBA Studies and will be freely available for download on IICBA's website. The reports will have two main objectives: (1) Analyzing issues affecting teachers, school leaders, and learners in Africa; and (2) Exploring the role of teachers and school leaders in improving educational outcomes for learners on the continent.

The reports in the Series will be evidence-based and relatively short (target for core text at 40 to 50 pages plus annexes and endnotes). They will focus on issues of interest to the African Union and its Member States. The aim will be to publish one report per year, although in the first year (2024) more reports may be published in the context of the declaration by the African Union of 2024 as the Year of Education. The specific theme for the year adopted by the African Union is *"Educate an African fit for the 21st Century: Building resilient education systems for increased access to inclusive, lifelong, quality, and relevant learning in Africa."* UNESCO IICBA intends to work closely with the African Union and other African organizations in preparing and disseminating reports in this Series, including through the Teacher Development Cluster for which IICBA serves as a secretariat under the African Union's Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016-25. In preparing the reports, IICBA will also aim to consult and collaborate with other UNESCO teams and Institutes, national and international agencies, civil society organizations, and the International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030 hosted by UNESCO, also known as the Teacher Task Force.

The International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (IICBA), a category 1 UNESCO institute, is based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. It informs education policies, strengthens teacher professional development, and builds capacity in education institutions, including Ministries of Education. Founded in 1999, IICBA is celebrating its 25th anniversary in 2024, which is also the African Union's Year of Education. To provide innovative solutions and scale-up efforts to improve educational outcomes in Africa, IICBA works with a range of partners, including the African Union, UN agencies, other international organizations, development banks, bilateral donors, foundations, teacher organizations, school networks, and non-profits. In 2023, IICBA adopted a new strategic plan with the aim of strengthening research and policy dialogue to inform capacity building. The launch of the Africa Teachers Reports Series is part of that effort.

This first report in the Series is co-published with the African Union International Centre for the Education of Girls and Women in Africa (AU/CIEFFA), a specialized institution of the African Union since 2004. AU/CIEFFA has been established under the Department of Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation at the African Union Commission to coordinate the promotion of girls and women's education in Africa, with a view of achieving their economic, social, and cultural empowerment. The Centre works closely with AU Member States and government, civil society, and international partners to implement its programs and activities and maintains a specific working relationship with UNESCO to ensure a strong partnership in the implementation of its programs. The Centre is based in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.

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