Out-of-School Children and Youth

A CONTEMPORARY VIEW FROM SELECTED AFRICAN COMMONWEALTH COUNTRIES
OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN AND YOUTH:
A Contemporary View from Selected
African Commonwealth Countries
The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is an intergovernmental organisation created by Commonwealth Heads of Government to promote the development and sharing of open learning and distance education knowledge, resources and technologies.

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This report has been prepared collaboratively with input from several individuals. Initially conceptualised by Dr Tony Mays, Education Specialist: Open Schooling, its first draft was prepared by Dr Folake Ruth Aluko. Dr Tony Mays and Mark Manns edited the publication for its final presentation under the guidance of Dr Sanjaya Mishra and in response to two external reviews by Professor Rose Ruto-Korir, Director: Institute of Open Distance Learning at Moi University, Kenya, and Africa Chapter Chair for the Commonwealth Open Schooling Association (COMOSA), and Dr Heroldt V. Murangi, Chief Executive Officer, NAMCOL, Namibia. Lesley Cameron edited the final content of the report and Terry Sunderland undertook the layout and design.

All links were accurate and live at time of writing.

Published by:

COMMONWEALTH of LEARNING

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Contents

1. Introduction and Background ................................................................. 2
  1.1 Open Schooling .............................................................................. 3
  1.2 Purpose of the Study ...................................................................... 4
  1.3 Research Methods .......................................................................... 5
  1.4 Limitations ..................................................................................... 6

2. Analyses of Education and OOSC ......................................................... 9
  2.1 Enrolment and Completion Rates by Level of Education .......... 9
    2.1.1 Pre-primary education ............................................................... 9
    2.1.2 Primary education .................................................................... 11
    2.1.3 Secondary education ................................................................. 13
  2.2 Out-of-School Children ................................................................. 16
  2.3 Not in Education, Employment or Training ............................... 18
  2.4 Other Contextual and Sociocultural Factors ............................... 19
    2.4.1 ICT and Internet use ................................................................. 20
    2.4.2 Early marriage, young mothers and teenage pregnancy ............ 21
    2.4.3 People with disabilities ............................................................ 22
    2.4.4 Marginalised groups ................................................................. 23
  2.5 Findings from the Surveys and Interviews ................................. 24
    2.5.1 Perspectives on OOSC in the African Commonwealth countries 25
    2.5.2 Reasons children may drop out of school ................................. 26
    2.5.3 Economic factors ................................................................. 27
    2.5.4 Sociocultural factors ............................................................... 28
    2.5.5 Disabilities .............................................................................. 28
    2.5.6 Structural factors: Quality and relevance of education ............ 29
    2.5.7 Use of ICTs in learning ............................................................. 30
    2.5.8 The provision of alternative strategies for OOSC ................... 32
    2.5.9 The role of open, distance and flexible learning ...................... 34
  2.6 Conclusion ................................................................................... 35
  2.7 Recommendations ....................................................................... 38

3 Illustrative Country Reports ................................................................. 41
  3.1 Eswatini ......................................................................................... 41
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1.1</td>
<td>Access to education</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.2</td>
<td>ICT in education</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.3</td>
<td>Marginalised populations and people with disabilities</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.4</td>
<td>Climate change and education</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>The Gambia</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.1</td>
<td>ICT in education</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.2</td>
<td>People with disabilities</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.3</td>
<td>Marginalised populations</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.4</td>
<td>Climate change and education</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.1</td>
<td>ICT in education</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.2</td>
<td>Teenage pregnancies</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.3</td>
<td>People with disabilities</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.4</td>
<td>Indigenous languages</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.5</td>
<td>Education for nomadic populations</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.6</td>
<td>Climate change</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Lesotho</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.1</td>
<td>Education: Investment and interventions</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.2</td>
<td>ICT in education</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.3</td>
<td>People with disabilities</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.4</td>
<td>Climate change</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Malawi</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.1</td>
<td>Initiatives to increase access to and success in education</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.2</td>
<td>ICT in education</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.3</td>
<td>People with disabilities</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.4</td>
<td>Albinism</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.5</td>
<td>Climate change</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>Namibia</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6.1</td>
<td>ICT in education</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6.2</td>
<td>People with disabilities</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6.3</td>
<td>Climate change and education</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7.1</td>
<td>Universal basic education (UBE) and OOSC</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7.2</td>
<td>Government initiatives</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tables

Table 1: Data verification, survey and interview respondents ........................................ 6
Table 2: Out-of-school children (gross numbers) .............................................................. 17
Table 3: OOSC rates (%) ................................................................................................ 18
Table 4: Women and girls aged 15–19 with at least one child (%) ................................. 21
Table 5: Seriousness of OOSC in African Commonwealth countries ............................ 25
Table 7: Views on teacher professional development strategies .................................... 30
Table 8: Factors that influence the use of ICT in schools .............................................. 31
Table 9: Availability of second-chance learning opportunities ..................................... 33
Table 10: Areas of need in African Commonwealth countries ........................................ 36
Table 11: Number of people with disabilities in Eswatini (2017) ................................. 43
Table 12: Rate of school attendance ............................................................................ 43

Boxes

Box 1: Open schooling in Namibia .............................................................................. 3
Box 2: Open schooling in Botswana ............................................................................ 4
Figures

Figure 1: Gross enrolment ratio, pre-primary, female learners (%). ..................................10
Figure 2: Gross enrolment ratio, pre-primary, male learners (%). .....................................10
Figure 3: Completion rates, primary, female learners (%). .................................................12
Figure 4: Completion rates, primary, male learners (%). ....................................................12
Figure 5: Gross enrolment ratios, lower-secondary, female learners (%). .......................13
Figure 6: Gross enrolment ratio, lower-secondary, male learners (%). .......................14
Figure 7: Completion rates, lower-secondary, female learners (%). .................................15
Figure 8: Completion rates, lower-secondary, male learners (%) .....................................15
Figure 9: Comparative NEET rates.......................................................................................19
Figure 10: Internet users (% of total population) in Africa Commonwealth countries as of December 2021.................................................................20

List of Abbreviations

COL ............... Commonwealth of Learning
CSO ............... Civil Society Organisation
DALY/s............. Disability-Adjusted Life Year/s
GDP ............... Gross Domestic Product
GER/NER........... Gross/Net Enrolment Rate
ICT ............... Information and Communication Technology
ODeL ............... Open, Distance and e-Learning
ODFL ............. Open, Distance and Flexible Learning
OOSC ............... Out-of-School Children
ILO ............... International Labour Organization
NEET ............... Not in Employment, Education or Training
NGO ............... Non-Governmental Organisation
SDG ............... Sustainable Development Goal
TVET ............... Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UBEC ............... Universal Basic Education Commission
UNESCO ............ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF .............. United Nations Children’s Fund
UNFPA ............... United Nations Population Fund
UIS ............... UNESCO Institute for Statistics
1 Introduction and Background
1. Introduction and Background

In 2020, an estimated 260 million children, adolescents and youth were out of school: approximately 59 million were of primary school age, 62 million of lower-secondary school age and 138 million of upper-secondary school age (Global Education Monitoring Report, 2021; UNESCO Institute for Statistics [UIS], 2019). This represents “one-sixth of the global population of this age group” (UIS, 2019). Furthermore, three-quarters of the primary school–aged children not in school are girls. While girls’ access to education has dramatically improved, and girls have matched or overtaken boys in terms of learning outcomes in reading and mathematics in many countries over the past 25 years, girls and young women, particularly those with intersecting disadvantages — poor, rural and disabled — still face exclusion from education (Global Education Monitoring Report, 2020). In addition, early marriage and pregnancy prevent an additional 10% of adolescent girls globally from continuing their education (Global Education Monitoring Report, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the current crisis in education. At the 35th Ordinary Session of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, Human Rights Watch’s (2020) report showed that in Africa, school closures caused by the pandemic widened existing inequalities, and children who were already most at risk of being excluded from a quality education have been most affected.

Both structural and sociocultural factors are behind these high numbers of out-of-school children (OOSC), and the countries affected need to examine those factors thoroughly and implement context-specific interventions to strengthen the quality of education. Across the world, countries are increasingly turning to open, flexible and distance learning modalities to help them reach those who are most at risk of dropping out or to provide a second chance to those who have already dropped out. For out-of-school youth, open schooling can be an equaliser in the context of educational opportunities (Commonwealth of Learning [COL], 2017).

Education is key to achieving all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Global Education Monitoring Report, 2021). Research shows that “almost every aspect of one’s life, particularly as it relates to socioeconomic rights, is in some way or another connected to the right to education” (Muedini, 2015, p. 7). According to the National Dropout Prevention Centre (2021), “providing the best possible classroom environment from the early childhood years throughout the primary and secondary years is one of the most effective way schools can reduce the number of children who will ultimately drop out” (p. 1). To address the large number of OOSC, countries must do all they can to ensure that quality, relevant and inclusive education opportunities are available to all.
1.1 Open Schooling

Open schooling seeks to circumvent barriers to access to education such as cost, age, competing commitments, disability or other challenges. As such, it uses a range of flexible approaches, based on open and distance learning, to provide structured teaching and learning opportunities. Openness and flexibility, not the physical separation of teacher and learners, are the core features of open schooling (COL, 2017). It has been successfully introduced in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific to complement, or provide an alternative to, the conventional school system. It can be provided by stand-alone, independent distance education institutions, managed as part of the education ministry within a specific directorate, or even be part of a university.

**Box 1: Open schooling in Namibia**

**Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL)**

NAMCOL has provided learning opportunities for adult and out-of-school youth learners through an innovative range of ODL programmes since 1994. It offers both secondary education and tertiary-level programmes. Secondary education programmes are provided for learners who are unable to join formal education or choose to study remotely. These programmes allow the learners to study at their own pace and provide a pathway to lower-secondary or upper-secondary certificates.

On average, more than 25,000 learners join secondary-level programmes at NAMCOL annually. In 2021, 28,268 learners — 62.4% of whom were female — were enrolled (NAMCOL, 2021). NAMCOL accounts for over 10% of enrolment in secondary education in Namibia.

Source: NAMCOL: https://namcol.edu.na/about-us/

Open schooling is one way of building a more resilient education system that has the potential to open the doors of learning to all, even in difficult circumstances such as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic (COL, 2020; Mays & Singh, 2020).

Open and flexible schooling can provide countries with targeted interventions that will directly affect learners (and communities) who have been left behind by providing better access to education opportunities and a higher quality of teaching and learning through relevant curricula to meet the needs of the country. Most importantly, such interventions can maximise the cost-effectiveness of education systems. The findings from a recent study indicate that for every dollar invested in an open schooling initiative, four to five dollars of value were created within a five-year period (COL, 2017). This cost-effectiveness and the flexible nature of open schooling combined enable these interventions to be sustainable in the long-term. Some successful examples of open schooling initiatives in Namibia and Botswana are highlighted in Boxes 1 and 2.

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is currently supporting open schooling initiatives in Botswana, Eswatini, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania and Zambia. This report is designed to help prioritise open
1. Introduction and Background

Schooling activities across all member countries to address the challenge of OOSC, particularly girls, young women and other people who are marginalised, such as people with disabilities.

Box 2: Open schooling in Botswana

Botswana Open University

“To provide quality education, research and community engagement through open and distance learning solutions.”

Botswana Open University’s (BOU) Centre for Open Schooling aims to make education accessible to all Batswana, especially out-of-school youth and adults, using an open and distance learning (ODL) methodology. The school provides flexible learning environments, enabling people to study what is relevant to their needs, at a time and place convenient to them, no matter their age. The Centre for Open Schooling is mandated to increase access to quality education at Junior Certificate (JC) and Botswana General Certificate of Secondary Education (BGCSE) levels. Support for learners is provided via study materials, inductions, tutorials, counselling and the use of multimedia resources.

BOU enrols more than 10,000 learners in its secondary-level programmes annually, and regularly sees similar numbers complete the programmes. In 2020–21, for example, 12,525 learners enrolled and 12,857 learners completed their programmes. Pass rates for the JC and BGCSE in 2021 were 93% and 94%, respectively. BOU proudly reports an 80% employment rate for graduates of all its programmes.


1.2 Purpose of the Study

This report analyses the issues and challenges facing out-of-school children and youth, with a special emphasis on girls and young women, in African Commonwealth countries. The objective was to identify opportunities for strengthening interventions in open schooling and provide valuable insights into the status of out-of-school children and youth in Commonwealth Member States in Africa for education ministries, NGOs/CSOs, funders and education practitioners.

The key objectives were to

- identify challenges that African Commonwealth Member States are facing regarding OOSC and youth in Commonwealth Africa, with a particular focus on out-of-school girls and young mothers
- analyse the use of open, distance and flexible learning (ODFL) to reach out-of-school youth and young mothers
- explore interventions to address the number of OOSC and improve learning opportunities for all
1.3 Research Methods

This study involved all 19 countries in Commonwealth Africa: Botswana, Cameroon, Eswatini, The Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. We adopted a mixed-methods research design — both qualitative and quantitative research instruments were used — and conducted the study in two phases.

Phase 1 comprised an exploratory desktop study of out-of-school children and youth in Commonwealth Africa by reviewing the current state of pre-primary, primary and secondary levels of education; the use of ICT in education; the population of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET); OOSC; teenage pregnancy; learners with disabilities; and other communities that may be marginalised.

Phase 2 involved a survey and data verification request distributed to the Commonwealth of Learning’s 19 country representatives in the African Commonwealth ministries of education (or relevant entity), as well as follow-up interviews with selected country representatives. The purpose of the data verification process was to

- provide all African Commonwealth Member States with an opportunity to verify the desktop data COL collected
- provide COL with any updated data that had become available after the original data were collected
- assist COL in exploring what interventions are needed to support OOSC in African Commonwealth countries

Of the 19 countries, only eight (Eswatini, The Gambia, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, Nigeria and Rwanda) responded to the request for data verification. Three country representatives indicated that the data collected via the desktop research were correct “to a very large extent,” three indicated they were correct “to a large extent” and two gave no response. Seven of the eight countries provided more recent data, and one provided some additional sources. All the data from the eight countries were updated in the final report.¹

As for the survey, 12 responses (representing nine countries) were received from the 19 Member States (see Table 1). Eight were from government parastatals, while four were from public education/training institutions. Only two of the 12 responses came from respondents in rural areas. The respondents worked in the technical and vocational skills development, formal education and non-formal education sectors.

¹ Edited country reports for these eight countries are provided in section 3 of this report.
1. Introduction and Background

Table 1: Data verification, survey and interview respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
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<th>Survey</th>
<th>Interview</th>
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Based on the literature review and responses to the initial survey and data verification, five countries with the greatest OOSC-related needs — Cameroon, Eswatini, Lesotho, Nigeria and Rwanda — were selected for further interviews with country representatives to provide a more in-depth picture of the issues and challenges they face. Four interviews were conducted on Zoom, and one was conducted on WhatsApp due to repeated Internet connectivity challenges. Some of the country representatives participated in the session with their team members.

1.4 Limitations

We have provided select data and information from the countries to help create a more detailed picture. They are not intended to be used to compare countries. The purpose of this publication is to summarise the findings on common key issues that COL might be able to help address. It was not possible to find contemporary data in all the same fields for each country. It should also be noted that the availability of data covering all the indicators varies across countries. The researchers attempted to gather evidence from all African Commonwealth countries, but not all are represented in the final analysis. Not all countries responded to the surveys, and so primary data were collected from just over half of the countries. Furthermore, the data collected are not an exhaustive representation of OOSC-related issues in the selected countries. Detailed country profiles were developed for selected countries (see section 3).
Finally, the interviews were purposefully sampled, based on the survey responses. The total number of respondents to the surveys and interviews was quite low, which limits the generalisability of the conclusions. Nevertheless, the information is a useful resource and provides a starting point for COL and Member States to understand the challenges of, barriers to access to and success in schooling and opportunities moving forward. One option, for example, would be to learn from one another’s most effective practices.
2 Analyses of Education and OOSC
2. Analyses of Education and OOSC

Most Commonwealth countries in Africa have made significant progress in improving access to and success in pre-primary and primary schooling. However, there is still wide variation between countries, and some countries with a large youth population are finding it difficult to provide access to quality schooling opportunities using traditional brick-and-mortar approaches. This challenge is exacerbated where conflict, extreme weather events and natural disasters or other factors, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, result in school closures. Consequently, there are still children of school-going age unable to either access or successfully complete primary schooling. In addition, many countries experience challenges in helping learners make the transition from primary schooling to secondary schooling and from junior-secondary to senior-secondary schooling. This has resulted in large and growing numbers of NEET youth in many countries.

2.1 Enrolment and Completion Rates by Level of Education

2.1.1 PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION

According to UNICEF (2021f), although access to pre-primary education has increased globally, many children still have no access to early education. Research findings have stressed the importance of this level of education for two reasons in particular: it is the foundation for success in all other forms of education, and it can stem the tide of children dropping out of school (Needham & Ülküer, 2020; Pholphirul, 2016). Statistics released by UNICEF (2021b) show that “more than 175 million children – nearly half of all pre-primary-age children globally – are not enrolled in pre-primary education.” The situation is particularly dire for children in the developing world. The following two graphs provide gross enrolment ratios for female and male learners in pre-primary education for African countries in the Commonwealth (where available). The gross enrolment ratio gives the proportion of students enrolled as a percentage of the official expected enrolment at this level.
2. Analyses of Education and OOSC

Figure 1: Gross enrolment ratio, pre-primary, female learners (%).

Source of data: UIS, 2022b. Note: No data were available for Eswatini or Mozambique.

Figure 2: Gross enrolment ratio, pre-primary, male learners (%).

Source of data: UIS, 2022b. Note: No data were available for Eswatini or Mozambique.
As can be seen from Figures 1 and 2, there are relatively low rates of enrolment in pre-primary education (with the notable exception of Ghana, Mauritius, Seychelles and, to a lesser extent, Malawi — all above 80%). Most countries show rates below 50%, with Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Uganda and Zambia all below 25%. This means that many learners may not be optimally prepared for formal schooling at the primary level, which could negatively affect retention and success rates. Some of the particular challenges at this level of education are lack of budgeting and planning specifically for education, lack of infrastructure, lack of well-trained teachers and low education levels among parents (UNICEF, 2021b).

2.1.2 PRIMARY EDUCATION

All Member States reviewed are working towards attaining the SDG 4 – Education 2030 goals (UNICEF, 2021b). Some have implemented free primary education and others have introduced feeding schemes to keep children in school. However, many challenges remain. Mukurunge et al. (2019) highlighted that their efforts to provide quality education are hindered by poor infrastructure, overcrowding, and poor availability and quality of teaching and learning resources.

According to data collected from UIS (2022b), gross enrolment rates (GER) at the primary level are high in most African countries in the Commonwealth. All but one African Commonwealth country reported a GER at or above 100% in the last several years, indicating the enrolment of children older than the typical primary school age, children repeating years or both. The only country reporting significantly below 100% GER at the primary level was Nigeria (86% for female learners and 88% for male learners in 2018).

The data in our study show that while Member States have made massive gains in primary school enrolment, nearly one in three children still do not complete primary school (Evans & Acosta, 2021). This is despite the previous Millennium Development Goal 2 to achieve universal primary education. Figures 3 and 4 show evidence from UIS (2022b) that while many countries have seen slow but sustained improvement in primary school completion rates over time, others have seen a decline in recent years.
Figure 3: Completion rates, primary, female learners (%).

Source of data: UIS, 2022b. Note: No data were available for Seychelles.

Figure 4: Completion rates, primary, male learners (%).

Source of data: UIS, 2022b. Note: No data were available for Seychelles.
With the exception of South Africa, Mauritius and Botswana, most countries in our study cohort have low completion rates at the primary level. In particular, the estimates from UIS indicate that both male and female learners in Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda and Uganda struggle to complete primary education. Further, the other countries still have significant numbers of girls and boys (up to 40%) who do not complete primary school (2020 data). The data also indicate that boys in several countries are less likely than their female counterparts to complete primary education.

Children of primary school age are unlikely to have the necessary literacy, numeracy and study skills required for independent learning, so any intervention needs to make explicit provision for the development of these foundational skills, as well as for support and assessment strategies that bridge school and home environments. Any open schooling intervention targeted at the primary level must consider that many learners may be under-prepared for formal learning and have appropriate bridging interventions in place. Providing access to quality learning resources for learners and guidelines and support for parents and caregivers may be one way in which an open school or open schooling system can help improve retention and success rates in the longer term.

2.1.3 SECONDARY EDUCATION

With primary education completion rates still relatively low, it is not surprising that many learners do not transition from primary to secondary school. Figures 5 and 6 show the trends in enrolment rates in lower-secondary education are much lower than those in primary schooling for most countries.

*Figure 5: Gross enrolment ratios, lower-secondary, female learners (%).*

Source of data: UIS, 2022b. Note: No data were available for Uganda.
As indicated in the graphs, the enrolment level in lower-secondary education varies a great deal across the countries and contrasts sharply with the high levels of enrolment in primary education. Only Mauritius, Seychelles and South Africa report 100% enrolment (for both male and female learners) at this level. At the other end of the scale, Malawi, Nigeria, Rwanda, Mozambique and Tanzania have approximately 50% or lower enrolment (for both male and female learners) at this level.

Source of data: UIS, 2022b. Note: No data were available for Uganda.
Figure 7: Completion rates, lower-secondary, female learners (%).

Source of data: UIS, 2022b. Note: No data were available for Seychelles.

Figure 8: Completion rates, lower-secondary, male learners (%).

Source of data: UIS, 2022b. Note: No data were available for Seychelles.
Most countries have relatively low rates of learners (both male and female) completing lower-secondary education, which indicates that the transition from lower- to senior-secondary education is a second key exit point, after the transition from primary to secondary. Only five countries consistently have more than 50% of boys completing lower-secondary education: Botswana, Kenya, Mauritius, Nigeria and South Africa. Girls seem more likely than boys to complete lower-secondary education in several countries if given the opportunity (e.g., Eswatini, Kenya, Lesotho, Namibia and Rwanda). The relatively low rates of enrolment (i.e., below 70%) and completion (i.e., below 50%) at the secondary level in most countries indicate a need to develop or strengthen existing open schooling interventions at this level, especially in Cameroon, Eswatini, The Gambia, Ghana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

2.2 Out-of-School Children

The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS, 2015) defines out-of-school children as “children of primary or lower secondary school age who are not enrolled in primary or secondary education,” including “a small number of children in pre-primary education and in non-formal education (NFE)” (p. 21). According to Shanker et al. (2015, p. 3), out-of-school children are also categorised as those who have never been to school, despite being of the appropriate age to enrol, and those who dropped out for various reasons.

A 2020 UIS report on progress towards achieving SDG4 indicates that Africa has among the lowest proportions of children achieving minimum proficiency reading levels at the end of primary schooling, the lowest primary completion rates regardless of socio-economic status, the lowest percentage of trained teachers at both primary and secondary level and, perhaps not surprisingly, the lowest proportion of primary schools with access to electricity and drinking water.

UNESCO reports in *Education in Africa* that:

*Over one-fifth of children between the ages of about 6 and 11 are out of school, followed by one-third of youth between the ages of about 12 and 14. According to UIS data, almost 60% of youth between the ages of about 15 and 17 are not in school …*

*Girls’ education is a major priority. Across the region, 9 million girls between the ages of about 6 and 11 will never go to school at all, compared to 6 million boys, according to UIS data. Their disadvantage starts early: 23% of girls are out of primary school compared to 19% of boys. By the time they become adolescents, the exclusion rate for girls is 36% compared to 32% for boys. (UIS, 2022a)*

Data on out-of-school children typically focus on children of primary school–going age who are not in school. Older learners who have not accessed or not completed primary schooling tend to be overlooked in most reporting. One estimate, based on the most recent available data, puts the number of children at the primary school level who are out of school at more than 15 million (see Table 2).
The data currently available for some countries are very dated and may indicate that these countries no longer track such data for various reasons. However, recent data show there are significant numbers of out-of-school children in Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. Cameroon, Mozambique and Nigeria have a significantly higher number of girls than boys out of primary school, while other countries, such as Kenya and Tanzania, show the reverse, indicating the need for targeted interventions for either boys or girls.

Table 3 shows OOSC rates at three levels of education. The figures are disturbing. Nigeria had — and may still have — one of the highest primary school out-of-school rates in the world (34% according to 2010 data from UIS). Many of the countries have primary-level OOSC rates over 10%: Eswatini (15% in 2019), The Gambia (13% in 2021), Kenya (19% in 2012), South Africa (11% in 2019), Tanzania (16% in 2020), Uganda (14% in 2017) and Zambia (15% in 2017) (UIS, 2022b). And at the secondary education level, OOSC rates are even higher. When compounded with the low completion and enrolment rates for secondary-level education, the rates of out-of-school children grow much higher in countries such as Cameroon,
2. Analyses of Education and OOSC

Sierra Leone, Tanzania and Uganda, which have very high rates of OOSC in lower-secondary education, and the problem persists into upper-secondary for even more countries (see Table 3).

Table 3: OOSC rates (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Primary school</th>
<th></th>
<th>Lower-secondary school</th>
<th></th>
<th>Upper-secondary school</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Botswana (2017)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameroon (2019, 2016, 2015)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eswatini (2019, 2015)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Gambia (2021)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana (2020)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesotho (2018, 2016)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malawi (2019)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mauritius (2021)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mozambique (2020)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Namibia (2018)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rwanda (2019)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seychelles (2019)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sierra Leone (2015, 2018)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa (2019)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanzania (2020, 2016)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda (2017)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zambia (2017)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source of data: UIS, 2022b. No data were available for Kenya or Nigeria.

2.3 Not in Education, Employment or Training

The term NEET has been widely adopted in Africa and refers to people who are “not in employment, education or training” (Khuluvhe & Negogogo, 2021). People in this group generally fall into one of two categories: inactive (i.e., not actively seeking employment or education) or unemployed for various reasons. In most Commonwealth Africa Member States, the number of NEETs is quite high — and recent literature suggests that the official figures might be underestimates (Cieslik et al., 2021; stats sa, 2021). In addition, the majority of those classified as NEETs are female (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2022; Lannoy & Gibson, 2019).

As indicated earlier, most education systems lose learners in the transition from primary to secondary school, and then again in the transition from lower- to senior-
secondary. Low transition rates, along with learners who complete secondary schooling with lower grades, lead to large and growing numbers of young people who either cannot access entry-level employment or cannot register for further education and training. Current data on the number of NEETs are presented in Figure 9.

**Figure 9: Comparative NEET rates.**

As indicated in Figure 9, most of the countries in this study have large proportions of youth (particularly female youth) who are not in employment, education or training. In Botswana, Eswatini, The Gambia, Mauritius, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Seychelles, South Africa, Uganda and Zambia in particular, it is vital that efforts are made to bring these young people back into education or training. And in countries that have significantly higher rates of young women (i.e., aged between 18 and 24) not in education and training — Cameroon, The Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia — gender-specific interventions and strategies may be needed. Open schooling providers for young people who are not in education or training should explore more flexible and vocationally oriented programmes to help them develop the skills and competencies they need for the world of work.

### 2.4 Other Contextual and Sociocultural Factors

In addition to setting up open schools or open schooling models to address the issues and challenges identified in terms of enrolment, completion, OOSC and NEET rates, it is also important to understand other contextual and sociocultural factors. The next sections therefore look at the current state of ICT and Internet use and sociocultural issues of inclusion, including teenage pregnancies and early
marriages, provisions for disabled learners and ethnolinguistic minorities, gender equality, and the impact of poverty and socio-economic status.

### 2.4.1 ICT AND INTERNET USE

Reliable access to ICT and the Internet is a crucial factor for successful open, distance and flexible learning strategies. Printing and distributing resources can be an expensive endeavour, particularly for low-income countries. Online resources and materials offer low-cost alternatives to text- and paper-based materials.

Figure 10 reflects the unequal rates of Internet use in African Commonwealth countries as of December 2020 (Miwatts Marketing Group, 2021). Although Internet use is steadily increasing in Commonwealth Member States and is high in some countries (e.g., Kenya), significant challenges remain, particularly the disparity between urban and rural access to ICT services.

*Figure 10: Internet users (% of total population) in African Commonwealth countries as of December 2021.*

While in general mobile phone and Internet use is growing, ICT in education is embryonic in almost all African Commonwealth countries. However, as the country reports in the next section show, governments are making efforts to improve this situation because they now recognise the value of ICT, especially in the context of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic which forced many schools to close. While most sub-Saharan African countries currently have a national plan or policy
around ICT in general (Burns & Santally, 2019), few have successfully implemented their plan (Global Education Monitoring Report, 2021), and many of the plans do not specifically address the use of ICT in education. Other barriers related to ICT and its effective use in education include the lack of electricity, lack of computers, high cost of ICT devices and lack of secure storage for digital devices (Adarkwah, 2021; Boni, 2018; Peprah, 2016; Saka, 2021).

In addition, the research indicates that teachers’ reluctance to change and their lack of skills in ICTs’ pedagogical applications, inadequate education management information systems (EMIS) and overcrowded classes in many schools all make it difficult to effectively implement and use ICT tools in schools (Belle & Seerauj, 2021; Crallet et al., 2016; Kihoza et al., 2016; Nyema & Zulu, 2020). It is reasonable to assume that these factors are why the chalkboard and textbook continue to dominate classroom activities in most public schools. These barriers also limit engagement with open educational resources (OER), which otherwise could be used to reduce costs, increase access, improve quality and support more inclusive practices.

2.4.2 EARLY MARRIAGE, YOUNG MOTHERS AND TEENAGE PREGNANCY

The literature shows that high rates of teenage marriages and teenage pregnancy have a negative effect on the schooling of girls in Commonwealth Africa (Kassa et al., 2018). Globally, an estimated 15% of young women give birth before age 18. For the countries in Commonwealth Africa, that figure is often significantly higher (see Table 4).

Table 4: Women and girls aged 15–19 with at least one child (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Most recent data</th>
<th>Rate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cameroon</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eswatini</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gambia, The</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mozambique</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Namibia</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>10.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rwanda</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanzania</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Early childbearing, or pregnancy and delivery during adolescence, can derail girls’ otherwise healthy physical and emotional development into adulthood and negatively affect their education, livelihoods and health.

In some education systems, teenage girls are not allowed to continue in school after they have given birth. They may never return to school in later years because their age then precludes them from participating in education.

In other places, girls choose to not return to school after they have given birth or are pressured or forced to drop out while they are still pregnant.

Girls can also suffer social consequences if they become pregnant when young and unmarried, including reduced status in the home and community; stigmatisation, rejection and violence by family members, peers and partners; and early and forced marriage. These factors all contribute to the high rate of out-of-school girls in many countries, which in turn can impact their later educational and employment prospects and opportunities.

The high rates of teenage pregnancy and young mothers in most countries combined with the number of female learners who are out of school suggests the need for targeted interventions to develop learning pathways or alternative schooling options to bring these girls back into education. COL is currently exploring this issue in Nigeria, Rwanda and Tanzania.

### 2.4.3 People with Disabilities

Although all the Member States have embraced the Education for All agenda and ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and its Optional Protocol with the introduction of special needs and inclusive education, only a few have put theory into practice in terms of providing inclusive education (e.g., Ghana [International Institute for Educational Planning, 2018]). In addition, data on the accommodations — and their quality — being provided to children with disabilities in several countries are scant.

However, multiple reports (Bunning et al., 2017; JICA and IDCJ, 2015) note that in some regions, children with disabilities are still being discriminated against because of local beliefs and biomedical factors that impede them from being enrolled in school (e.g., in Kenya). A further concern is the proportion of people with disabilities without any formal education living in rural areas. For instance, about 16% of Ugandan children have a disability and most children with disabilities cannot attend school or fail to transition from one educational level to another (World Bank, 2020).

In Rwanda, the 2013/14–2017/18 education sector plan identified key measures to increase the number of children with disabilities enrolled in school. They included adapting the new curriculum for learners with special education needs; training staff, teachers and other stakeholders on disability; assessing school requirements — both infrastructure and curriculum — to accommodate children with special needs; creating and using a database of all learners with special needs (to track enrolment, retention and success of these learners); and providing specialised textbooks to schools. Despite these measures and the ambitious targets set (38,309 children with
disabilities enrolled in schools in 2018), attendance at primary school in Rwanda is still much lower for children with a disability than for children without a disability (57.4%, compared to 97.7% overall enrolment) (Global Education Monitoring Report, 2021).

To take another example, in South Africa, where the under-18 population was approximately 19.7 million in 2018, an estimated 600,000 children with disabilities remain out of school (Human Rights Watch, 2019). These statistics are in line with global research that shows that children with a disability are more likely than children without a disability to be out of the school system or leave school before completing primary or secondary education (UIS, 2017). Additionally, there is a lack of reliable enrolment data specifically about children with disabilities, which prevents subsequent tracking of retention and pass rates and significantly compromises Member States’ ability to guarantee high-quality, inclusive primary and secondary education for people with disabilities (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Other factors might also compromise quality provision for all. For example, even in countries where funding is available, it may be that only a small percentage of children with disabilities receive a disability grant (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, Namibia, 2018, p. 8).

Ineffective planning, inadequate budgeting by governments, and a lack of comprehensive and timely data and statistics are three of the most persistent barriers to children with disabilities accessing education (UNICEF, 2019). Others are the lack of specialist teachers who can teach learners with diverse needs; a school environment that does not accommodate the needs of learners who are deaf, blind or both; and inadequate — in terms of both quality and quantity — instructional materials in other formats such as Braille (Munthali, 2011, p. 11). These factors combined restrict children with disabilities from accessing education, health services and employment and realising their full potential (World Bank, 2020).

2.4.4 MARGINALISED GROUPS

Poverty plays a significant role in escalating the issue of OOSC in African Commonwealth countries. For instance, UNICEF (2021a) reports that many children are affected by monetary and non-monetary poverty in Zambia: an estimated 54.5% of the population lives below the national poverty line; 40.9% of children are exposed to at least three deprivations (e.g., lacking access to nutrition, education, health, water, sanitation, adequate housing); and 36% of children are both financially poor and multidimensionally deprived. Gender inequality, household poverty and the expansion of peri-urban populations are some of the systematic challenges to safeguarding children’s rights.

Although it is not the case in all Member States, language is a complex issue in many parts of Africa. Many countries have multiple ethnolinguistic cultures and communities, but the medium of instruction is limited to one or two official languages. As such, many learners are forced to study in a second language at an early age. This is a significant impediment for young learners, as they fail to learn foundational skills in both their mother tongue and the language of instruction. For
example, in Mozambique, only 17% of the population are proficient in the official language of Portuguese (Burns & Santally, 2019; Global Education Monitoring Report, 2020). However, some countries now recognise their multi-ethnic society and are taking steps to develop the use of marginalised languages. For example, in Kenya, the country’s new curriculum framework recognises Kenya as a multi-ethnic community, and the government approved a new curriculum that will enable learners to learn in one of 18 different languages up to university level (Nyariki, 2020). Elsewhere, South Africa recognises 11 official languages as well as South African Sign Language for official communication purposes.

In some countries, especially patriarchal societies such as The Gambia, girls are still being discriminated against at many levels of society (UNICEF, 2021d). However, in other regions, societal factors may discourage boys from completing school (e.g., in some parts of Nigeria, where more emphasis is placed on wealth at the expense of education, according to one interview participant).

Another marginalised group is children with albinism. In Tanzania and Malawi, for example, these children are hunted down for their body parts because they are believed to bring wealth and good luck (Ngalomba, 2016; Ntetema & Ash, 2013). Although efforts are being made to assist such children by providing them with access to boarding schools as a place of refuge (Kajiru & Mubangizi, 2019), such schools cannot hold many children. In addition, many of these children are suffering from “health problems including disease and serious skin cancer, the absence of education of useful quality or one that accommodates the visual disability of the children with albinism” (Ntetema & Ash, 2013, pp. 3–4).

Nomadic cultures are also adversely affected in countries like Kenya, Lesotho and Nigeria, as learners from these groups are vulnerable to dropping out of education. For example, in Nigeria, the nomadic population numbers 9.4 million people, including 3.1 million school-age children (Hanemann, 2016). According to UNESCO, all the education indicators show nomadic groups at the bottom of the table in national statistics pertaining to enrolment rates, participation in education, classroom performance, gender balance, academic achievement and progression to the next level of education and training. However, some countries with large nomadic populations now have policies that include themes of inclusion, gender and vulnerability within nomadic communities, especially among girls and children with special needs (see, for example, UNESCO, 2021b).

### 2.5 Findings from the Surveys and Interviews

This section reviews the findings from the second part of the research. The findings are drawn from the data verification process and a survey followed by online interviews with COL’s focal points (and any additional staff identified by the key respondents) in the countries with the largest number of out-of-school children who responded to the invitation to participate. Nine countries responded to the survey (Cameroon, Eswatini, Lesotho, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Seychelles, Tanzania and Zambia) and interviews were conducted with participants from five of them (Cameroon, Eswatini, Lesotho, Nigeria and Rwanda).
2.5.1 PERSPECTIVES ON OOSC IN THE AFRICAN COMMONWEALTH COUNTRIES

This section looks at the state of OOSC in the African Commonwealth countries based on a survey conducted for this specific purpose. The first question concerned the seriousness of the challenge at the primary, lower-secondary and upper-secondary school levels. The survey comprised 13 questions, the first six of which were demographic. The other questions addressed issues related to the seriousness of the OOSC challenge, reasons for school dropouts, strategies to prevent dropouts, second-chance learning opportunities available, professional development opportunities for teachers and the potential of ICT.

Table 5: Seriousness of OOSC in African Commonwealth countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Not at all serious</th>
<th>Somewhat serious</th>
<th>Serious</th>
<th>Very serious</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary school age (6–14)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower-/Junior-secondary school age (15–16)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper-secondary school age (17–19)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As indicated in Table 5, most of the respondents indicated that the rate of out-of-school children was either “serious” or “very serious” at the lower- and senior-secondary levels. This is consistent with the data found across all countries earlier (see Table 3) and indicates the need for targeted interventions at the lower-secondary level to improve enrolment, retention, transition and success rates.

During the interviews, respondents were asked to expand on the seriousness of the problems in their countries. In Rwanda, the participant stated,

The problem is serious in terms of when you see the numbers. The numbers in secondary education compared to the numbers in primary education. For example, in primary education we have about 2,500,000 children in schools but when you go to secondary education you will find that we are not more than 700,000. When you compare 700,000 to 2,500,000 you can see the difference is huge and we also wonder where do those children go? We don’t know and that is where my worry is; we don’t know exactly what happened with them.

The participant from Lesotho noted that “the four levels of education (Early Childhood Education, Primary, Lower Secondary, Senior Secondary) show, very serious low enrolment, while the Tertiary completion rate is very low.”

The situation appears to be similar in Eswatini, as explained by one of the participants:

In the primary school, both male and female, we have about 126,548 out-of-school-children, and that is a huge number and that is according to the education sector analysis of 2021 done by Eswatini and the World Bank. And also, when you look at the total enrolment in primary school it is 237,000. Looking at the overall number of out-of-school-children standing at a total of 126,548, it is an indication that it is a serious issue. (Participant 1)
And in Nigeria, the participant noted:

_The children are not transiting at the level required or the number required. For example, if its intake in its entire cohort does not find opportunity at the next level of learning, then it becomes a problem. Not that there are no transitions at all, but it is not as it is expected to be._

### 2.5.2 REASONS CHILDREN MAY DROP OUT OF SCHOOL

Many factors influence the likelihood of children staying in school. To shed more light on these and other possible reasons, the respondents were provided with several options and asked to assess their accuracy. The findings from the survey are presented in Table 6, and are listed from most frequently to least frequently rated as “accurate” by the participants, with “accurate” meaning that they agreed the factor was a reason behind OOSC.

**Table 6: Factors leading to OOSC**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influencing factors</th>
<th>Number of responses rated as “accurate”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cost (e.g., school fees, textbooks, uniforms, etc.)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic hardships (e.g., poverty, employment)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teenage pregnancy</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family responsibilities</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low academic performance</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate identification of at-risk students</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of quality learning resources (textbooks, ICT, classrooms)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School access (e.g., distance from school)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disabilities</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher shortage</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of properly trained teachers</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate government expenditure</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronic illness</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging curriculum</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural disaster</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender bias</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher absenteeism</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural irrelevance of curriculum</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School violence</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender insensitivity of curriculum</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As reflected in Table 6, the major factors mitigating against school completion are thought to be economic (cost and economic hardship) and sociocultural (teenage pregnancies and family responsibilities), followed by structural or system challenges.
(poor academic performance, weak systems for identifying and supporting at-risk learners, and poor-quality resources).

2.5.3 ECONOMIC FACTORS

Low socio-economic status is one of the biggest contributing factors to out-of-school rates. According to the Rwandan participant, much of the problem for out-of-school children is that

parents are poor, they do not have enough income to keep their children in school … [and] others also just wanted their children to help them do home based activities, like field activities, some children went home to support their parents while working in the fields. And also because they didn’t have some income at home, they even went to the street to fetch something for the family to eat.

This was echoed in Nigeria, whose participant noted that “low rural incomes” mean that “the children are supportive of parents in farming communities” and therefore cannot attend school.

This type of economic imbalance between urban and rural areas also affects the provision of education. One participant from Cameroon commented on the urban and rural divide as follows:

You see a classroom in an urban area where you have about 2, 3, 4 teachers in one classroom but elsewhere, you have one teacher for the whole primary school cycle for example. Most of the teachers are concentrated in urban areas.

This type of imbalance significantly hinders those in rural areas from accessing the types of learning opportunities that are available in urban areas.

According to a participant from Eswatini,

Poverty and the economy have actually weakened the economy and the education sector. The last point is on social economy including issues of divorce. Parents have separated due to this pandemic and this has also affected the children such that some of them even if they want to attend formal education, they cannot because of the differences between the parents. (Participant 6)

And the participant from Cameroon added,

Two Anglophone regions, that is the north-west region and the south-west region, they are going through socio-economic crises which have left the whole region socio-economically, socioculturally, … bankrupt. Many schools are not officially going on, those who have the means have sent their children to the other part of Cameroon to manage to go to school. In a society like ours which is mostly agrarian where people live on less than a dollar a day, many of the people are unable to migrate to other parts of Cameroon so that their children can go to school.
2. Analyses of Education and OOSC

2.5.4 SOCIOCULTURAL FACTORS

A major cause of dropout is rooted in sociocultural notions about teenage pregnancies and girls’ family responsibilities. Although most of the respondents did not think that “gender bias” was a significant contributing factor to out-of-school rates, the responses during the interviews indicate that it is a complicated and nuanced situation.

In Cameroon, one participant also explained the seriousness of sociocultural factors:

So out of the 10 regions, three northern regions are heavily affected by the Boko-Haram crises. So mostly they attack schools, so many children don’t go to school especially the girls … girls are looked upon as persons who have to do early marriages following the tradition of these three northern countries.

Similar sociocultural conditions exist in Nigeria, as the participant there noted:

We have also had challenges associated with interpretation of religious norms or laws; we have had gender related issues. We have had communities that will not allow the girl-child go to school for instance. Also, early marriages … in the north about 60% of those girls will be in marriage before the age of 18.

In Rwanda and Eswatini, the participants focused more specifically on the issue of teenage pregnancy. In Rwanda,

teenage pregnancy … is one of the biggest challenges that we have today … [the girls drop out of school] because of shame and also some private schools will say go first and have your baby and afterwards they can come back to school. So that is usually what they do. In general they stop for a while but a while means forever; so it is a serious problem I think.

And in Eswatini,

the teenage pregnancy rate escalated such that the government even issued a statement to the effect that schools were not supposed to expel students because of their pregnancy … unlike before whereby the school will expel a student if she got pregnant.

To address these sociocultural issues, countries may need to strengthen their gender-responsive education and awareness, including making efforts to improve inclusion and gender equality, comprehensive sexuality education and reproductive health and family planning. The respondent from Eswatini noted, “I believe that the situation is also made worse by the fact that there is lack of education on such issues… also the career guidance and counselling has not been maybe that much effective.”

2.5.5 DISABILITIES

Another sociocultural factor that affects out-of-school rates is education systems’ ability to provide inclusive opportunities for learners with a disability. The participants were asked in the interviews about opportunities for learners with disabilities in their countries. The participant from Lesotho responded, “There
are no structures in place to assist children with disabilities.” The participant from Cameroon explained:

*We don’t have special programs to cater for disabilities. However, within the school curriculum, we have an inclusive content to handle those children with special needs but that is in the conventional school curriculum. But for out-of-school-children we don’t have out-of-school programmes, you know it becomes very difficult to say that there are special programmes put in place to cater for this category of learners. So it is quite an issue and this category of persons is not being catered for.*

The Rwandan participant said:

*We know that the problem of disability is there in schools, but the government of Rwanda has tried to create what you would call inclusive education so as to integrate the children with disabilities in formal education. But we know also that it is still a challenge because how do we support them? At the University of Rwanda for example, college of education, we have a school of special needs education. It is there, so it educates people on how to support children with disabilities — especially children with hearing impairment. We have developed and it is very much used. They put in place some assistive technologies for the children with disabilities. But it is not yet generalised in all the schools.*

### 2.5.6 STRUCTURAL FACTORS: QUALITY AND RELEVANCE OF EDUCATION

With respect to structural factors, the participants also raised concerns over the nature and relevance of education being provided in their countries.

In Nigeria, the participant stated that one of the issues is quality learning opportunities. You will find some communities that have schools but the children are not in school. So even if you have access you have got to advocate that education is important especially for parents that are not literate. You could have that supply side — classes are available. There are places that you go to that the government have supplied textbooks that are locked up somewhere. Those are the issues of systems and governance.

In terms of the curriculum, a participant from Cameroon stated:

*The curriculum is too challenging in the sense that our education system has been largely criticised even by local stakeholders as not being very relevant and not preparing the children to meet the needs of the society. Many useless things are being put in the curriculum that is not helping graduates to evolve, progress in life and of course they are many subjects in the school curriculum which makes it very difficult for an average learner to survive. The quantity of material each learner is expected to cover on a daily basis is quite an issue and there are no remedial measures that have been put in place to assist those that are unable to cope in the normal teaching process.* (Participant 2)
While not the biggest contributing factors, a shortage of teachers and a lack of properly trained teachers were identified by about half of the respondents as factors contributing to learners dropping out of school (see Table 5, above). To explore further the importance of teacher quality and professional development, the survey asked the participants to indicate whether their country has strategies in place to help teachers prevent children from exiting schools before they complete their education. Table 7 shows participants’ views on professional development strategies that are in place. It appears that the African Member States train teachers on inclusiveness in education, but rarely assist them with learning about “the use of ICTs in teaching and learning” and the use and development “of sufficient materials to teach students with disabilities.”

### Table 7: Views on teacher professional development strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Development Strategy</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promoting and enabling inclusiveness in education (e.g., gender and disability)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using ICTs in teaching and learning</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing the teachers with sufficient learning materials to teach students with disabilities (e.g., special software for computers, assistive technology, Braille books, etc.)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Effective professional development opportunities enable teachers to enhance the knowledge and skills they need to create quality, relevant, effective and engaging learning environments for all children. One of the biggest factors noted in Table 5 is that at-risk learners were not being identified early enough for educators to intervene before they drop out. Training teachers and educators to give them the skills and tools to identify at-risk youth and to develop and offer remedial learning strategies and opportunities is crucial to address this problem.

### 2.5.7 USE OF ICTS IN LEARNING

Groff (2013) notes that “dramatic advances in educational technology have inspired powerful new ways for learners to engage with all kinds of content and activities in their own self-direct learning experiences” (p. 1). Apart from making teaching and learning more interesting, “ICT-enhanced learning environments facilitate active, collaborative, creative, integrative, and evaluative learning as an advantage over the traditional method” (Amutha, 2020).

Findings from both the survey and the interviews confirm that all the participants agreed that when used effectively, ICTs can create effective learning environments for disadvantaged and marginalised learners. Most participants (10 out of 11) strongly agreed that “the use of ICT enables alternative means of learning for individuals with disabilities.” All 11 “strongly agree” that “ICT helps develop other skills in children,” and nine strongly agreed with the statement that “ICT offers learning opportunities for both boys and girls.”
However, several factors influence the extent of use of ICTs in schools. These range from the availability of ICT resources and physical infrastructure to the skills and competencies required to use these tools effectively. According to Agbo (2015), these factors are often inter-related, hence the need to provide ongoing professional development for teachers “to model the new pedagogies and tools for learning to enhance the teaching-learning process” (p. 71). The survey respondents were asked to rate the extent to which these factors influence ICT use in their country. Table 8 shows that most respondents see all the factors identified as important.

Table 8: Factors that influence the use of ICT in schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>To a small extent</th>
<th>To a large extent</th>
<th>To a very large extent</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The availability of computers for teachers and students</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet connectivity</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ knowledge and skills in using ICTs for instructional purposes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training opportunities for teachers to use ICTs in teaching</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak infrastructure (e.g., electricity, telecommunication, etc.)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of access to the Internet</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the interviews, many of the respondents commented on the state of ICT infrastructure in their country, particularly relating to its use in education. One of the Cameroon participants explained,

*The greatest problem we have is that about 80% majority of our schools doesn’t have access to electricity. … the rate of penetration of ICT in our schools is less than 10%. … I feel it is just about 2% of those schools that have access to internet connections.* (Participant 2)

A participant from Eswatini added,

*I would say that the communication system in Eswatini ranges from telephone lines to mobile cellular, broadcast media and broadband wireless system. What Eswatini government has done is that it has relied mainly on print media during the pandemic … the print media as well as TV and radio for disseminating education for teaching and learning (especially during the lockdown).* (Participant 1)

The participant from Lesotho noted that “there are ICT policies but not for education. The ODL policy has not yet been finalised. The policy will address some of the concerns.” However, they also noted the overall “poor (state of) ICT in education. It doesn’t look promising due to poverty, network issues, and lack of electricity.”
However, the case appears to be a bit different in Nigeria. According to the participant,

*a number of the states are promoting the integration of ICT into their learning space. There are a number of good practices for instance, Edo has what it calls Edo Best where teachers have keyed into the ICT platform and they are deploying that not only for attendance in schools, but also lessons.*

*UBEC has commenced the Smart School project basically providing all the cutting-edge facilities that make for a seamless learning process … engaging available ICT devices and systems both for the teachers and learners; planning to provide the learners with hand devices; learning equipment that programs can be uploaded on and where learners can do self-paced independent learning.*

Regarding Rwanda, the participant noted that the challenge is with individuals’ skills and competencies in using ICTs. They said the issue is “illiteracy in terms of using technology. They ask the children to study, for example using video, some parents because of their level of education is very low, they couldn’t support their children to study at home.”

**2.5.8 THE PROVISION OF ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES FOR OOSC**

The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) defines various second-chance education opportunities as:

*Education specifically targeted at individuals who, for a variety of reasons, never attended school or left school either before completion of the level of education in which they were enrolled or completed the level but wish to enter an education programme or occupation for which they are not yet qualified. Participants are often older than the typical target age group for the given ISCED level programme (but not necessarily adults). Sometimes also referred to as “bridging programmes” or “re-integration programmes.” (UIS, 2022c)*

Several strategies for offering second-chance education were highlighted, including TVET-specific schools/programmes, foundational skills programmes, programmes run by NGOs, community organisations and most importantly, open schools.

The participants were asked to rate whether second-chance learning opportunities/alternative pathways (with some examples) to education are provided to students who cannot complete secondary education in their country, with “Never” indicating no strategies in place and “Always” indicating well-established and maintained strategies in place. Table 9 shows their responses.
Table 9: Availability of second-chance learning opportunities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Second-chance Learning Opportunities</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technical and vocational education training (TVET) in schools</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education and training provided by non-governmental organisations (e.g., Red Cross or faith-based organisations)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community-based education for youth</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundational skills programmes provided by the government (e.g., literacy, numeracy and digital literacy)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open schooling</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only five of the respondents indicated that well-established and well-maintained open schooling initiatives were in place. Overall, the responses indicate significant gaps in the provision of second-chance and alternative education strategies for learners in the African Commonwealth countries. There are some TVET-specific schools and programmes focused on foundational skills, but education provided by NGOs or community-based organisations are less common.

During the interviews, the participants were able to elaborate on the types of programmes that are offered. In Cameroon, the participants noted several different initiatives. First, “there are evening classes for all categories of learners beginning from primary school up to tertiary level. There are evening classes organised for those who are working and during the day they don’t have time to go to school.”

The participants also mentioned efforts from NGOs:

"For children up in the three northern regions of Cameroon … Norwegian Refugee Council has tried to refocus the school curriculum to rebuild content for out-of-school-children so that they can give them accelerated program for them to fit back to mainstream educational system. But all of these have not really gained ground because they are recent strategies."

They also mentioned that they “have private education stakeholders that sometimes organize evening shift classes for those who are unable to attend conventional classes during the day.”

In Eswatini, the participant explained that

"the Batswana initiative that was established in Swaziland, concentrated on just out-of-school girls that had fallen pregnant and they worked in two constituencies in Swaziland where we have 59 constituencies and then most of these girls were out-of-school because of pregnancy, because of poverty, because of AIDS as well, because their parents had died … they were child headed homes so they found themselves having to drop-out of school because of those conditions. There were almost 200 girls that were being educated by Emlalatini through the Batswana initiative."
The participant from Lesotho told the researcher, “There are … 10 Continuing Education Centres that teach Numeracy, Literacy, and tutorials. There are 300 available throughout the country. Government is not expanding it because no money is allocated to you, only promises. The budget is very minimal.”

The participant from Nigeria stated, 

**UBEC has started a program … we call it second-chance education. UBEC is establishing schools, non-formal centres that provide that type of intervention that learners that are beyond the normal age of schooling or are in difficult circumstances can access. UBEC is funding a lot of special intervention, initiative programs especially those that target children that are out-of-school. We have the Alhmajiri programme that is running. We provide an opportunity for the integration of the Quranic type of learning which is key in the northern regions. [We are] introducing elements of literacy and numeracy. Working also with partnership with people that run this non-formal Islamic centres. The UBEC programme is also doing some interventions for communities predominantly that are noted for not allowing girls go to school. We have the girl-child education programme and UBEC too is working in partnership with some of the agencies involved in providing interventions for out-of-school children.**

Lastly, the participant from Rwanda stated,

**We have formal open schooling for inmates when they are jailed, especially young women, the girls, they are taken to schools, we know that they can be re-educated — but in the formal sense of education, we don’t have very well-known system for open schooling.**

**2.5.9 THE ROLE OF OPEN, DISTANCE AND FLEXIBLE LEARNING**

The participants recognised the value open, flexible learning systems provide as alternative and complementary opportunities for out-of-school children and youth. The following excerpts from the interviews highlight the participants’ opinions about opportunities that open, flexible learning systems could offer their country.

The participant from Lesotho said that “flexible learning can play a major role… because it allows children to learn at their time, space etc. it is also a cheaper option.”

According to the Rwanda participant, 

**if we have flexible learning, it means that children… anyone can study from anywhere. … If it was implemented, it could be one of the solutions in terms of supporting especially those who do not have enough means to further their education especially the women. … [open schooling] flexible learning … can open lots of opportunities for anyone to study especially for those who are still young, either to catch up and be re-integrated into the formal education or to study short courses for employability. I think open schooling will be very much a solution to the problem of out of school in Rwanda.**
Finally, one participant from Eswatini highlighted how their country sees the future of learning, and more specifically the role ODL has to play: “the government of Eswatini, in 2020, developed an education e-learning economic recovery plan. … The country has to look for an alternative system of education that includes ODL and remote learning.”

Some African Commonwealth Member States already have open schools or are piloting open schooling models of various kinds (e.g., Botswana, Eswatini, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Tanzania and Zambia). And while the participants in the survey and interviews indicated that their countries have implemented a variety of measures to reach out-of-school youth, not all the countries are actively exploring open, distance or flexible learning strategies. Further, even where alternative pathways into or back into schooling exist, they are not necessarily accessible to, or even known to, the target learners and their families. Efforts concerning both provision and outreach are not always made in a systematic way; often involve a variety of partners, including NGOs, private sector organisations and religious organisations; and can often be ad hoc with limited scope, reach and scale. There is therefore a need for not only more systemic planning and implementation of second-chance education and alternative, flexible learning pathways but also greater community awareness and advocacy.

2.6 Conclusion

OOSC is a multi-layered challenge and it therefore demands a multi-faceted approach to addressing it, as noted by Narayan in her study of this subject in *The Pacific Island Countries of the Commonwealth* (2021). The data presented in this current study highlight that a variety of structural, economic, sociocultural and individual factors affect both the supply and demand of education and hinder the progression of learners and the further development and implementation of universal education in the African Commonwealth. For this study, in addition to gathering information from the public domain, the researchers gave all African Commonwealth Member States an opportunity to elaborate on the challenges they face in delivering universal access to education. A summary of the research objectives and lessons learned follows.

**Research objective #1: Identify challenges that African Commonwealth Member States are facing regarding out-of-school children (OOSC) and youth, with a particular focus on out-of-school girls and young mothers.**

Many of the countries struggle to retain learners through primary school and into secondary school. Preparing learners for success begins much earlier than primary school, and the low enrolment rates in early childhood care and education may explain at least in part the fact that many learners are under-prepared for formal schooling. In addition, poor completion rates in primary education, coupled with a significant drop in enrolment and completion rates in secondary education, indicate that learners may not be adequately equipped with the foundational skills necessary to successfully progress through and complete basic education.
Table 10 gives an overview of the significant needs and challenges facing the education sector in each of the countries of the African Commonwealth. This table is based on the data (both quantitative and qualitative over the two phases of the study) gathered and presented in this report.

**Table 10: Areas of need in African Commonwealth countries**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Pre-primary enrolment</th>
<th>Primary enrolment</th>
<th>Primary completion</th>
<th>Secondary enrolment</th>
<th>Secondary completion</th>
<th>OOSC</th>
<th>NEET</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Botswana</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameroon</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Significant more girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eswatini</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Significant more girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gambia, The</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Significant more boys</td>
<td>Significant more girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>More boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Significant more boys</td>
<td>Significant more girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesotho</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malawi</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Significant more boys</td>
<td>Significant more girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mauritius</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mozambique</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Significant more girls</td>
<td>ND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Namibia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Upper-secondary, significantly more boys</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rwanda</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Upper-secondary</td>
<td></td>
<td>Significant more girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seychelles</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sierra Leone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanzania</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Significant more girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ND</td>
<td></td>
<td>Significant more girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zambia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Significant more girls</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Analysis based on UIS statistics reported elsewhere in this publication, with additional contextual information from surveys and interviews. Enrolment/completion rates: pink = <50%; blue = 50–79%; green = >80%. OOSC and NEET rates: pink = >20%; blue = 10–20%. 
As the table indicates, high rates of OOSC and NEET are significant challenges in almost all the countries, as are enrolment and completion of secondary education. The data show that girls and young women need to be supported to ensure that they have opportunities for accessing and completing learning. Economic reasons continue to be the main significant barrier to staying in school for most learners (e.g., cost of education, opportunity cost of education vs employment), but structural and sociocultural factors also play a significant role. For example, the level of ICT in education is relatively low, and countries need support in terms of physical infrastructure, software and support for teachers in using and adapting ICT in education resources. Lastly, while all the countries report some efforts being made to reach marginalised groups — including girls and young women, ethnolinguistic minorities and learners with disabilities — these are often not fully realised. These findings indicate that governments need to adapt alternative strategies such as open, distance and flexible learning in the formal schooling system to meet the needs of all learners.

Research objective #2: Analyse the use of open, distance and flexible learning (ODFL) to reach out-of-school youth and young mothers.

While limited information was gathered from the participating countries, the findings from this study suggest that at least some African Commonwealth Member States are not making full use of second-chance education, and there is opportunity and potential for ministries of education to invest in open schooling and flexible learning strategies to mitigate the learning crisis. The eight countries involved in Phase 2 of the research indicated that most second-chance education focuses on providing the necessary skills for employment — for example, through technical and vocational education courses — or on providing further support in foundational skills. These programmes are often organised outside the formal education systems, are focused on specific communities or target audiences and are not implemented nation- or system-wide. For those that do not currently have robust open, distance and flexible learning strategies (e.g., Cameroon, Rwanda, Nigeria), ministries of education can make efforts to develop and implement open schools.

Research objective #3: Explore interventions needed to address out-of-school children, especially girls, and improve learning opportunities for all.

Even countries that already have open and flexible learning models in place need to widen the range of curricula options and have more regional education and delivery centres, which could include after-hours use of existing day schools. Other areas of need highlighted by the participants are training of course developers, training of both teachers and learners in open and distance learning, the development of learning materials, ICT infrastructure, and the training of school leaders in open schooling management. All these will require funding, which remains a major stumbling block in expanding open schooling.
In response to the challenges faced by girls and young women, gender-responsive education and programmes need to be expanded. This includes making girls and young women more aware of the opportunities available, providing re-entry to learning and career pathways, and offering counselling for young women and young mothers interested in returning to and continuing their education and subsequently finding employment.

Foundational and life skills development was also highlighted as a need, as many learners who are out of school, or at risk of dropping out, do not have the necessary skills to continue. Open and flexible learning programmes can offer these learners the opportunity to focus on the skills and competencies that they need most (literacy, numeracy, critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, etc.) in order to both progress in education and secure employment.

Lastly, strengthening the skills development sector (vocational training) will enable OOSC (and particularly girls and young women) to improve their livelihoods, which in turn will contribute to sustainable development. Given the large number of NEET youth, as discussed earlier in this report, there is a need to strengthen the provision of technical and vocational training for second-chance or alternative education options. For instance, in Eswatini, open schooling currently focuses only on basic education, but the country could explore ways to expand and incorporate more skills and vocational offerings into it.

2.7 Recommendations

Based on the data collected and the conversations with country representatives in the African Commonwealth, we present the following recommendations for countries of the African Commonwealth. To address the ongoing issue of OOSC, ministries of education and governments should:

• Expand early childhood care and education. This level of education provides the foundation young learners need to improve their chances of succeeding in later stages.

• Develop and support open schooling and alternative learning strategies at primary and secondary levels to mitigate the learning loss of children and youth who are out of school, by creating pathways back into schooling, or who may need additional training and support. This includes developing targeted strategies to reach the most vulnerable groups, including girls and young women, learners with a disability, the rural poor and ethnolinguistic minorities.

• Improve the delivery of foundational skills and life skills, particularly for younger children. A large portion of learners lack minimum proficiency in literacy and numeracy, the building blocks for successful learning at later stages. Appropriate learning pathways need to be developed as children's learning needs evolve. For example, as learners progress through their schooling, the appropriate skills and competencies (critical thinking, creativity, communication) are needed to further
develop their cognitive, socio-emotional and behavioural competencies. Teachers need to be equipped with effective strategies to reach those most in need.

- Strengthen the use of ICT. This includes developing not only the ICT infrastructure but also teachers’ and learners’ skills and competencies in the use of these technologies.

- Promote and expand the use of open educational resources (OER).

COL could help address the challenges of OOSC in the African Commonwealth countries in many ways, but in particular, it could:

- Continue to support quality enhancement and expansion of open schooling in countries where it already exists (e.g., Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria and Zambia).

- Initiate open schooling discussions in countries where there is great need but currently no open schooling engagement (e.g., Cameroon and Uganda).

- Prioritise open schooling interventions at the lower-secondary level, including alternative, more vocationally oriented offerings for the growing number of NEETs in most of the study countries.

- Develop an advocacy and outreach strategy to provide 12 years of schooling for all girls.
3 Illustrative Country Reports

Photo: Gambiaroots 058 by Tjabeljan is available with Creative Commons Attribution Generic 2.0 license on Flickr at https://www.flickr.com/photos/jankruit/5417916085/
3 Illustrative Country Reports

In this section we present example case studies for eight countries that verified the data collected. Similar contextual case studies were also developed for the other 11 countries. Cross-cutting contextual issues explored in the literature were

- access to education
- ICT in education
- learners who are marginalised or have a disability
- climate change and education

3.1 Eswatini

3.1.1 ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Regarding education, one of the ongoing initiatives includes increasing access to basic education through the provision of school infrastructure, teaching and learning materials, and increasing the number of regional inspectorates with the establishment of the office of the Deputy Regional Education Officer in all four regions to assist the Regional Education Officer (Government of the Kingdom of Eswatini, 2021). Others are the introduction of mobile houses for teachers, the expansion of universities’ and colleges’ intake, and the provision of school grants for low-income families to help offset the costs of schooling.

The government’s spending on education has gradually risen from 5.59% of the GDP in 2000 to 7.13% in 2014.

3.1.2 ICT IN EDUCATION

According to a 2021 United Nations Development Programme report (Mlangeni, 2021), ICT in education is currently being supported at the tertiary level. However, Internet access must be considered a universal right of all learners rather than a “nice to have” commodity.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, while students from private schools continued to access learning through digital platforms like Zoom and Google classes, learners from the public schools remained home with no access to educational resources. The Ministry of Education in Eswatini’s key focus has been on learners from both public and private schools scheduled to sit external examinations. Lessons were introduced through radio, TV and YouTube to help those learners prepare. While this is a good and innovative response for the country, many students from poor households still have no access to digital tools, radio or TV.

Eswatini is lagging in the adoption of digital technologies in education, and the focus for the ministry in terms of ICT in education is twofold: ICT as a subject in

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2 A profile of Eswatini can be accessed at https://www.col.org/member-countries/eswatini/
schools and using ICT as a tool for teaching and learning. It was planned that from 2021, ICT would be introduced as a subject in primary schools but there was no information available on whether the plan had yet been implemented.

Nonetheless, if digital technologies are to be adopted in schools, teachers need to be trained in how to use them in the delivery of learning and schools need the appropriate infrastructure. Although most of Eswatini has access to at least one level of telecommunications, the costs of Internet services continue to be prohibitive and lack of investment in hardware infrastructure continues to restrict access, especially in rural areas. Several schools in the rural areas have no electricity, which restricts their options for any type of connectivity.

The government has identified a need for public-private partnerships (PPPs) as it cannot address the current issues alone.

### 3.1.3 MARGINALISED POPULATIONS AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

In 2005, the Constitution of the Kingdom of Eswatini embraced an agenda of education for all children, regardless of their abilities or disabilities (Matsenjwa et al., 2020). The Ministry of Education and Training houses the Special Education Needs Unit with the aim of facilitating access to education for learners with special needs in mainstream education in Eswatini (Ministry of Education & Training, 2021). According to the ministry, the call for Education for All and introduction of free primary education has provided more opportunities for learners with special needs to access school. An increase in the admission of learners with special needs has been observed since 2010. The reform agenda that is being experienced in Eswatini has been influenced by demands to transform schools to embrace inclusive education, thus catering for diverse learners (Nxumalo, 2020). According to Nxumalo, Care and Support for Teaching and Learning (CSTL) or “Inqaba,” (fortress – a safe haven), the Southern Africa Development Community school reform model, has played an important role in the implementation of inclusive school reform in Eswatini. However, much remains to be done to ensure that learners fully and meaningfully participate in the teaching and learning in schools (Ministry of Education & Training, 2021).

Initiatives include the introduction of special needs and inclusive education into teacher training colleges, the procurement of teaching and learning material and the modification of infrastructure in schools to increase access to education for all. Matsenjwa et al. (2020, p. 68) also suggest the provision of in-service training in special education needs for teachers to better prepare them to educate and support all learners, including those with learning disabilities. In addition to this is the implementation of a diverse, comprehensive and multisectoral response, which creates a caring, supportive and inclusive teaching and learning environment in every school (Nxumalo, 2020).

Table 11 (below) is based on the 2017 population and housing census preliminary results.
Table 11: Number of people with disabilities in Eswatini (2017)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of people with disabilities (2017)</th>
<th>176,184,000</th>
<th>16.1% (of the 2017 population)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Live in the rural areas</td>
<td></td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female with disabilities</td>
<td>101,722,000</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male with disabilities</td>
<td>74,462,000</td>
<td>42.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age disaggregate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0–4 years</td>
<td>29,630</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5–9 years</td>
<td>8,975</td>
<td>0–19 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10–14 years</td>
<td>8,795</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15–19 years</td>
<td>8,213</td>
<td>55,613 (31.6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Commenting on the above statistics, Mavundla (2019) asserts that the prevalence of disability in Eswatini is higher than the average in other developing countries (10% of the total population). In addition, the incidence of disability is greatest among children and young people — especially the 0–4 age group — suggesting a strong link between the conditions in which the majority of young children live and the incidence of disability.

Even though the country promotes education as a basic human right and ensures that male and female learners receive equal treatment and benefits at all levels, the integration of people with disabilities into the mainstream education system has not been realised so far. The table below attests to the limited provision of education to people with disabilities.

Table 12: Rate of school attendance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School level</th>
<th>Rate of school attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary school</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary education</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources of data: Central Statistical Office (CSO), 2017; Mavundla, 2019; Ministry of Education & Training, 2021.

3.1.4 CLIMATE CHANGE AND EDUCATION

Eswatini’s economy depends on a climate-sensitive natural resource base like rain-fed, subsistence agriculture, with 80% of farming relying on rain-fed agriculture, which increases the vulnerability status of the country (Ministry of Tourism and Environmental Affairs, 2016).

According to the then Swaziland Economic Policy Analysis and Research Center (2017), the country has been experiencing drought-like conditions since the 1980s, with conditions worsening in the last decade. As a result, there has been a sharp decline in crop-production levels and crop diversity, resulting in major setbacks not only to subsistence and commercial farmers but also to a national economy in which agriculture ranks second only to manufacturing (Afrobarometer, 2018). The El
Niño–induced drought in 2015 and 2016 is estimated to have cost the economy of Eswatini the equivalent of 7.01% of its gross domestic product (GDP) or 18.58% of government expenditure in 2016 (Swaziland Economic Policy Analysis and Research Center, 2017, p. viii). According to the Swaziland Economic Policy Analysis and Research Center report, the drought also diminished the water supply to rural and urban households, and significantly affected the agriculture sector (p. viii).

The government responded by enacting a climate change policy with the support of the National Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan, as well as other policies aimed at achieving sustainable development. Although Eswatini citizens see more severe weather, almost half are not aware of climate change (Afrobarometer, 2018). The government hopes that Eswatini’s climate change policy will achieve its vision through research, education and awareness programmes, implementation of adaptation and migration actions, resource mobilisation, enhanced collaborations and strengthened governance.

3.2 The Gambia

3.2.1 ICT IN EDUCATION

According to the Gambia Investment and Export Promotion Agency ([GIEPA] 2015), The Gambia has a youth population of around 1.85 million with steady growth predicted to continue in the coming years. This population group represents a large market for ICT equipment in education and the development of distance learning software.

The Gambia’s e-Education industry is in its infancy, but recent and ongoing improvements to ICT connectivity and energy reliability are opening the country up as an excellent location for foreign investment.

In 2007, the proposed Gambia National Information and Communication Infrastructure (NICI) Policy and Plans was designed to address the areas where ICT would facilitate the achievement of the Vision 2020 overall objective, including education (Mangesi, 2007).

According to Mangesi, core elements of the ICTs in education policy include

- a network of all educational institutions and a mandatory computer literacy programme in all educational organisations
- continued training of all educators
- the establishment of an ICT training hub

The Department of State for Education is the major implementation agency for the proposed policy.

At the secondary level, the Ministry of Education has a project to provide a computer lab for all state schools in The Gambia. Internet connectivity in schools
has remained a challenge, with only a few schools currently having access. Most of those schools have a connection through a private sector initiative or NGO support. At the primary level, while there is no co-ordinated government initiative for the introduction of ICTs, several initiatives by individuals and NGOs have helped equip some schools with computer labs.

Generally there is a commitment to improve ICTs in education in The Gambia. There are three major obstacles, however: gender bias in access to ICTs, high attrition rate of teachers with ICT skills and heavy reliance on donor support for ICTs in education.

### 3.2.2 PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

UNICEF (2021c) reports that children with disabilities have limited access to education, due to both social norms and structural limitations.

The available data on people with disabilities in The Gambia is out of date because the National Disability Survey was last conducted in 1998. That survey showed 1.6% of the population as having at least one disability, but the 2003 census suggested 2.4%, down to 1.2% in 2013 (Nabaneh, 2019). Although The Gambia ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and its Optional Protocol on 7 July 2015, it did not submit its initial report in 2017 (Nabaneh, 2019).

In The Gambia, people with disabilities have been subjected to discrimination at home, in schools and in offices, which affects their ability to exercise their right to education and employment. The *Persons with Disabilities Act* was passed in 2020, ten years after it was first proposed. Some of the rights that are enshrined in the act include the right to education; the right to healthcare and health services; and the right to transportation and rehabilitation, vocational training and employment. The act also addresses accessibility to both private and public buildings for people with disabilities. Although the Gambia Federation of the Disabled (GFD) plans to raise awareness of the law, it has expressed concern about the implementation of the bill (Xinhuanet, 2021).

### 3.2.3 MARGINALISED POPULATIONS

According to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS, 2021), social norms and values set limits on the education of both boys and girls at community and family levels in The Gambia. Secondary education for girls is compromised largely due to the higher value placed on marriage over education and career development. The role of boys as future family breadwinners also results in some families pushing their teenage boys to embark on the dangerous journey to Europe in search of wealth to provide immediate support to their families.

While focusing on marginalised and excluded children who could not benefit from education services, UNESCO supports the Government of The Gambia through the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education (MoBSE) to achieve the education policy goals (UIS, 2021).
3.2.4 CLIMATE CHANGE AND EDUCATION

The Gambia is ranked among the countries experiencing high exposure and vulnerability to the effects of climate change (Muthee & Duguma, 2021). A recent report by World Agroforestry confirmed that agriculture and tourism (key economic sectors) are the most affected and are susceptible to further degradation (Duguma et al., 2020). The Government of The Gambia has recognised these problems and has begun developing various policies and strategies to enhance the adaptive capacity of the community and economy (Duguma et al., 2020, p. 1). The report recommends that

- diverse tree species must be planted to meet the multiple demands of the people and the ecosystem
- water supply and management must be part of the planning process for the above-mentioned tree planting
- local communities should be made aware of existing policy issues relating to ecosystem-based adaptation (EbA)
- capacity-building sessions should be conducted for personnel to build national, regional and local capacities to ensure that the adaptation process is effective and sustainable (pp. xv-1)

3.3 Kenya

3.3.1 ICT IN EDUCATION

Kenya’s 2006 National Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Strategy for Education and Training encouraged the use of IT in education institutions to improve the quality of teaching and learning (UNESCO, 2021a). This has been further strengthened by its 2013–18 education strategic plan, which includes among its objectives the setting and implementation of comprehensive legal, policy and institutional frameworks for ICT integration in education at all levels and the development of adequate capacity for ICT integration for the entire education sector.

Key opportunities:

- supply of laptops, projectors and printers for use in public primary school
- development of digital content for ICT integration in primary school
- upgrading of TVET (Technical Vocational Education and Training) institution
- training and mentoring of experts in developing sectors like oil, gas, mining for drilling engineers, rig operators, actuarial science students
- partnering with local training organisations to train members of the county governments on devolved government system

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4 A country profile can be accessed at: https://www.col.org/member-countries/kenya/
• working with new devolved governments to improve education infrastructure at county level
• construction of more schools and upgrading of existing ones
• construction of private schools to meet demand
• construction of post-secondary education facilities like colleges and universities
• refurbishment of training centres and institutes, including curriculum development
• professional development training opportunities with various sectors such as financial services, human resource, ICT, etc.
• partnerships with existing organisations to provide a larger variety of courses with international standards/recognition
• opportunity to work with regulatory institutions to ensure all new regulations are in line with the emergence of a new constitution
• introduction of new, innovative courses to meet the global changing market needs and development of new sectors within the economy (Open to Export, 2016)

3.3.2 TEENAGE PREGNANCIES

Initiatives to address the issue of teenage pregnancies include

• a National Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health Policy (ASRH) developed in 2015 (Rutgers and the Government of Kenya, 2017)

• the National Campaign against Teenage Pregnancies, launched on 3 March 2020 (Muturi, 2021)

3.3.3 PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

In Kenya, local beliefs attribute disability to human transgression of social conventions, particularly concerning inappropriate family relations, which invoked a curse; supernatural forces affecting the child; the will of God; unexplained events; and biomedical factors (Bunning et al., 2017). According to Bunning et al., the main challenges associated with education for learners with disabilities related to the burden of caregiving and perceived barriers to inclusion, with stress as a shared by-product.

Kenya’s 2009 Special Needs Education Policy Framework previously provided education for learners with disabilities in special schools, integrated schools and special units within regular schools and targeted specific categories (UNESCO, 2021a).

Recently, inclusive education has progressed to extend education provision for learners and TVET participants with disabilities in regular schools.
3 Illustrative Country Reports

The country’s 2010 Constitution promotes the use and development of Kenyan sign language, Braille and other communication media accessible to people with disabilities (Art. 7).

The education assessment resource centres (EARCs) help to identify and assess the education needs of children with disabilities and identify the most suitable and appropriate education provision and services. This assessment and provision process is backed up by the 2018 Sector Policy for Learners and Trainees with Disabilities (Republic of Kenya Ministry of Education, 2018).

### 3.3.4 INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

Kenya’s 2010 Constitution promotes the development and use of indigenous languages of marginalised groups alongside its official languages (Kiswahili and English). The country’s new curriculum framework recognises Kenya as a multi-ethnic community, and therefore approved multilingualism in the classroom. Kenya has identified six languages classified as extinct, and seven as endangered (Nyariki, 2020). In 2018, the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) approved the development of mother tongue learning materials for four communities: Gikuyu, Kikamba, Dholuo and Ekegusii. Material, including textbooks, in local languages is being developed fully such that learners can choose to study in their preferred language up to university level. The test will be overcoming the challenges of capacity building (e.g., empowering teachers to work in multilingual classrooms) and the printing and distribution of books in local languages.

### 3.3.5 EDUCATION FOR NOMADIC POPULATIONS

The Nomadic Education Policy was enacted in 2010 and was replaced by the 2015 Policy Framework for Nomadic Education. The 2015 policy pays special attention to the themes of inclusion, gender and vulnerability within nomadic communities, especially among girls and children with special needs (UNESCO, 2021a), and was included in the Medium Term Plan of Kenya Vision 2030.

The 2009 Alternative Provision of Basic Education and Training Policy Framework addresses the learning needs of hard-to-reach children and youth (including street children) through alternative primary schools or alternative education centres. The Street Family Rehabilitation Trust Fund also seeks to rehabilitate street children by providing them with special protection, education and psychosocial support (UNESCO, 2021a).

### 3.3.6 CLIMATE CHANGE

According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (2021), Kenya is a leading country in taking action on climate change. It has several national policies dedicated to climate change, including the National Climate Change Action Plan, the National Determined Contribution (NDC) and the National Adaptation Plan (NAP). It also has an Education for Sustainable Development Policy.

Kenya is also actively engaged in multiple international initiatives, such as the NAP-Ag and the NAP Readiness Programme (Enhancing Capacity for Planning
and Effective Implementation of Climate Change Adaptation in Kenya), which is supported by FAO; the NDC Support Programme; and the Low-Emission Climate Resilient Development Project supported by UNDP as well as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the NDC Partnership (UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, 2021).

In Kenya, the education sector offers an untapped opportunity for successful climate change adaptation and mitigation through knowledge and skill acquisitions, and consequently, positive behavioural change (Apollo & Mbah, 2021). This would help individuals to make informed decisions about any actions that could have an effect on the planet and its climate.

3.4 Lesotho

3.4.1 EDUCATION: INVESTMENT AND INTERVENTIONS

Despite the gains that have been made in the primary school sector through Lesotho’s introduction of free primary education in 2000 and its reinforcement by the introduction of free and legally compulsory primary education in 2010, the challenges it confronts include

- disadvantaged children who are out of school, consisting mainly of herd-boys, learners with disabilities, orphans and other vulnerable children
- poor retention rates at primary and secondary levels
- low student learning outcomes/achievements
- poor school governance (Lesotho Council of NGOs, n.d.)

Other related issues identified by UNICEF (2016) include

- accurate, up-to-date, available education data
- quality in both primary education and ECCD
- HIV and AIDS resulting in morbidity, attrition and absenteeism of teachers
- lack of classrooms or infrastructure as a whole — no toilets, no safe water sources
- emergency unpreparedness within the sector — when an emergency strikes, it catches the sector off guard and learning and teaching are affected

Lesotho has therefore set strategic objectives in its Education Sector Strategic Plan for 2016–2026 (Lesotho Ministry of Education and Training, 2016):

- Reform the national curriculum and assessment system to meet the needs of Lesotho.

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5 A country profile can be accessed at: https://www.col.org/member-countries/lesotho/
• Improve access to comprehensive early childhood care and development, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children (Global Partnership for Education [GPE], 2021).

• Increase access to quality free and compulsory lower basic education and quality secondary education.

• Increase access to technical and vocational education.

• Improve strategic information, planning and accountability at all levels of the sector.

3.4.2 ICT IN EDUCATION

While Lesotho does not have an explicit independent national policy on ICTs in education, the government adopted a National ICT Policy in 2005 that contains considerable references to the education sector and implications for it. Lesotho also has an education strategy that mentions the role of ICTs (Isaacs, 2007a, p. 4).

The country has therefore begun to take the necessary steps to promote higher levels of ICT access and usage in its communities and education institutions (ISTAfrica, 2017). The country’s initiatives include

• NEPAD eSchools Demo Project, a multi-country, multi-stakeholder, continental initiative funded by private sector partners that aims to impart ICT skills to young Africans in primary and secondary schools and improve the provision of education in schools through ICT applications and the use of the Internet.

• to provide learners with access to ICT in challenging environments where there is a lack of electricity and computers in schools.

• SchoolNet Lesotho, which has highlighted how the use of ICT can enhance education.

• Lesotho School Technology Innovation Centre (STIC), which is a joint venture between Microsoft, the Government of Lesotho and other non-governmental partners, headquartered at the Lesotho College of Education (LCE) in Maseru. It is focused on the development and research of new educational approaches, classroom solutions and practices to improve 21st-century education and skills development outcomes in Lesotho. To date, 14 LCE lecturers and over 900 local teachers have received teacher development training through the Microsoft Partners in Learning programme. It is envisaged that future training sessions will also be undertaken with school principals.
• Learning Hub Lesotho, launched in May 2014 by Higher Life Foundation Lesotho (an initiative under Econet Telecom Lesotho) to support MDG2: Universal primary education for all by 2015. It is an ongoing project. The hub is available free of charge to students and teachers from 09:00 until 17:00 each day to undertake research and improve their digital skills.

• Laptops to Lesotho Project (L2L) is focused on raising funds to distribute OLPC XO laptops to children in rural Lesotho, provide training, establish a LAN network to facilitate Internet access and translate materials into Sesotho.

• Camara Education provides affordable ICT equipment loaded with educational software and e-learning content together with teacher development training to schools and other educational institutions across Lesotho through its offline School-Connect project (Camara Education, 2021). The project will make it possible for secondary schools to access Information and Communications Technology (ICT).

3.4.3 PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Ever since it was founded, the Lesotho Federation of Organisations of the Disabled (LNFOD) has been advocating for meaningful inclusion of persons with disabilities (Molelengoane, 2017). LNFOD has always argued that the Constitution and other acts of Parliament discriminate against people with disabilities and has even written proposals for amendments to these pieces of legislation but none has yielded results. However, there is hope, as the reform process is underway (Molelengoane, 2017). Among other things, LNFOD is advocating for disability to be a ground of non-discrimination in the Constitution, inclusion of sign language as an official language, self-representation of people with disabilities in Parliament through the election of MPs with disabilities and legal structures that will enable organisations representing or advocating for people with disabilities to litigate on behalf of their members (Molelengoane, 2017).

3.4.4 CLIMATE CHANGE

According to UNDP Climate Change Action (2021), the climatic fluctuations in Lesotho have had serious impacts on the environment, resulting in food shortages, famine, epidemics, invasion by exotic plants and destructive insects, dust bowls and the initiation of down-cutting by rivers. A significant portion (49.2%) of the population in the country lives below the poverty line and does not have sufficient income to prepare and protect themselves from the adverse effects of climate change.

In response to this challenge, Lesotho has developed a National Climate Change Policy Vision with 22 policy statements of pivotal importance that focus on various sectoral adaptations and mitigation interventions (LMS, 2017).
3.5 Malawi

3.5.1 INITIATIVES TO INCREASE ACCESS TO AND SUCCESS IN EDUCATION

The following initiatives were reported by USAID (2021) as its initiatives regarding education in Malawi:

- **Primary school**
  - Reading for All Malawi (REFAM): This activity supported inclusive education as a component of the National Reading Program in Malawi and was implemented by Juarez & Associates. It ran from 6 February 2019 until 11 July 2021 with $2,962,474 funding.
  - National Reading Program Implementation and Expansion (NRPIE): This activity provided technical assistance to the Ministry of Education (MoE) to develop Standards 1-4 Chichewa and English Performance Level Descriptors (PLDs) and reading benchmarks as well as revise Standards 5-8 English and Chichewa curricula. It was implemented by Florida State University and ran from 25 November 2019 to 24 September 2021 with $596,521 funding.
  - YESA Activity (Assess the Learners): This activity helped the MoE to deliver national reading assessments (at national, school and community levels) and to provide remediation in Chichewa and English to Standards 1-4 learners in support of the National Reading Program (NRP). It was implemented by ABT Associates and ran from 22 February 2018 to 21 February 2022 with $15,390,272 funding.

- **Secondary school**
  - Apatseni Mwai Atsikana Aphunzire (AMAA): This activity sought to provide targeted support to adolescent girls and young women in upper-primary and secondary school through life skills education, science and maths instruction, and school construction. It was implemented by Save the Children from 15 December 2018 until 30 September 2021 with $11,199,806 funding.
  - Secondary Education Expansion Development Construction Management Contract (SEED CMC): This activity provided engineering oversight services for construction work under both the SEED Urban and SEED Rural school activities. It was implemented by Tetra Tech and ran from 15 April 2019 until 30 September 2022 with $8,798,853 funding.

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6 A country profile can be accessed at: [https://www.col.org/member-countries/malawi/](https://www.col.org/member-countries/malawi/)
3.5.2 ICT IN EDUCATION

Malawi’s National ICT Policy, developed in 2013, promotes the use of ICT at all school levels to enhance ICT literacy, improve management of education systems and increase access to and quality of education (Saka, 2021). Although Computer Studies was introduced as an examinable subject in the Malawian secondary school curriculum in 2005, it is yet to be implemented in earnest, with only 3% of Malawian students able to access a computer at school in 2015 (Centre for Youth & Development, 2021).

The barriers to wider access include lack of access to electricity, computers, tablets and other devices, supportive ICT infrastructure and secure storage for digital devices (Saka, 2021). According to Saka, other major challenges include lack of Internet connectivity, inadequate teacher capacity and limited opportunities for professional development, and the need for more robust data on the use of ICT in primary and secondary schools to inform decision-making and sector planning. These barriers are more prevalent and more extreme in rural communities (Centre for Youth & Development, 2021).

Despite the challenges, the country’s initiatives have included providing computers and tablets to schools and training for teachers in the use of ICT, with the support of development partners, such as the Centre for Youth & Development (a local developmental NGO) and Digitalization, the future of work and the teaching profession project by the International Labour Organization (Centre for Youth & Development, 2021; Saka, 2021).

3.5.3 PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

According to the 2018 Disability Report by the Malawian Government (Malawi National Statistical Office, 2020b), the country’s disability prevalence rate is 10.4% of the population aged five years and over, with a prevalence rate of 9.7% for male citizens and 11.0% for female citizens. Among people with a disability, 44% have never attended school compared to 18.9% of people without a disability.

Children with disabilities (CwDs) in Malawi disproportionately suffer deprivations in key areas of well-being, especially education, protection and health, which require attention in local and national budgets (UNICEF, 2019). Although there have been gradual changes in how much of the budget the government allocates to matters relating to disability, they are still not enough to meet the needs of this group (UNICEF, 2019). According to UNICEF (2019), effective planning and budgeting on disability is constrained by lack of comprehensive and timely data and statistics.

Learners with disabilities are accepted in mainstream classrooms but they face significant challenges: a lack of specialist teachers who can teach learners with diverse needs; a school environment not suited for learners who are deaf, blind or both; and inadequate instructional materials in formats such as Braille (Munthali, 2011, p. 11).
3.5.4 ALBINISM

Of the total population of 17,563,749 people, 134,636 (0.8%), most of them in rural areas, are living with albinism (Malawi National Statistical Office, 2020a). UNICEF (2019) reports attacks on people with albinism, with significant delays in investigations and prosecution of perpetrators partly due to limited resources available to the police and judiciary.

3.5.5 CLIMATE CHANGE

Based on its Second National Communication to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Malawi produced a Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Action (NAMA) which was submitted in March 2012 (Irish Aid, 2016).

It describes the intention of Malawi to invest in a list of identified mitigation actions, subject to the provision of financial, technological and capacity-building support by developed countries and multilateral and international institutions to Malawi.

As part of its effort to integrate climate change education in Malawi’s primary school curricula, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology produced a publication called *Climate Change Sourcebook for Primary School Teachers* in 2020 (UN Climate Change Learning Partnership, 2020). In addition, in February 2021, the country held an online event to launch the updated version of its National Climate Change Learning Strategy (UN Climate Change Learning Partnership, 2021).

3.6 Namibia

3.6.1 ICT IN EDUCATION

In Namibia, a number of national strategic documents and policies have recognised the need to develop ICT within the education sector (Angula & Mutorwa, n.d.). For example:

- NDP2 “Coordinating with the Ministry of Basic Education, Culture and Sport to introduce Computer Literacy as a compulsory subject in schools”

Consistent with the objectives of Vision 2030 and the Education and Training Sector Improvement Plan (ETSIP), the Namibian Ministry of Education adopted an ICT policy for education in 2003 that was an update of the original policy developed in 1995. It was revised again in 2000 (Isaacs, 2007b).

The Vision focuses on “Integrating ICT education and training into education and training system” (Republic of Namibia, n.d.). The open-ended policy (to avoid its being obsolete) addresses five distinct development areas for the use of ICT:

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7 A country profile can be accessed at: [https://www.col.org/member-countries/namibia/](https://www.col.org/member-countries/namibia/)
• investigation and development of appropriate ICT solutions
• deployment of ICT
• maintenance and support of ICT
• ICT literacy
• ICT integration

Its specific educational goals are to provide clear objectives and basic competencies for learners, students and teachers to achieve key ICT knowledge and skills. In addition, it recognises the benefits of ICT in pre-primary education.

The policy also caters for the following services: maintenance and support, networking, digital library, digital content creation and evaluation, email, security, Web access, training and support for teachers, principals, support staff, trainers and other education stakeholders, improved management systems, curriculum, and monitoring and evaluation of ICT in education.

The government believes ICT represents a major opportunity for girls’ and women’s empowerment. In addition, the policy provides for guidelines and resources to support students/learners and staff with special needs and people with visual, hearing and other physical impairments, and will be consistently reviewed and amended as needed. Furthermore, the curriculum and standards of the basic ICT Literacy Qualification may be freely used by organisations in Namibia and beyond.

The aim of the qualification is to provide an entry-level benchmark for all learners and the national workforce.

3.6.2 PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

The Namibia Population and Housing Census (NPHC) of 2011 (Namibia Statistics Agency [NSA], 2021) found that 3.3% of all children aged 6–19 have a disability. This represents over 21,000 children, of whom only 65% were attending school. The NPHC also found that 79% of all children without disabilities were attending school. Although these are the official figures recorded by the NPHC (2011), it is important to note that Namibia is a developing country that does not have up-to-date data on children with disabilities (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture [MoEAC], 2018, p. 8).

A further concern is the proportion of people with disabilities without any formal education living in rural areas: 82.3% compared to 17.7% in urban areas (NSA, 2016). These statistics are in line with global research which shows that children with disabilities are more likely to be out of the school system or to leave school before completing primary or secondary education (UIS, 2017).

The MoEAC acknowledges that children across the country experience many barriers to participating in education, including systemic, organisational, pedagogical, curriculum-related, environmental, financial, societal, cultural and attitudinal barriers (MoE, 2013, p. iii). It acknowledges that there is a need
for flexible and holistic approaches to budgeting, programme planning and development, and also a need to monitor and evaluate budgets and programmes purposefully with a view to creating and implementing an inclusive education system in Namibia (MoE, 2013; MoEAC, Namibia, 2018, p. 8).

All teachers and principals must ensure that they take responsibility for educating all children, and that learning is indeed occurring. For this reason, consultation, collaboration and communication to establish well-defined roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders must take place. To effectively implement inclusive education, the Sector Policy states that all schools must have access to resources, including specialist support for addressing barriers, and that teachers need to be given advice and support. In addition, the policy highlights the need for a shift in attitude towards difference (MoE, 2013, p. 7).

Namibia is one of the few African countries with a comprehensive and entirely government-driven social protection system (MoEAC, Namibia, 2018, p. 9). The government provides universal basic state grants (pensions) to people from age 60 and to adults who have a disability. Child welfare grants are provided to orphans, vulnerable children and children with disabilities. Additional grants are given to people with disabilities who become parents in order to help with their childcare costs. The coverage of child welfare grants has rapidly expanded over the past decade, and they now benefit some 145,000 children. However, only 17% of children with disabilities are currently receiving a disability grant (MoEAC, Namibia, 2018, p. 8).

3.6.3 CLIMATE CHANGE AND EDUCATION

Seventy per cent of Namibia’s population depends on natural resources to sustain their livelihoods. These are threatened by both climate and non-climate drivers, and rural communities in particular are increasingly vulnerable to these threats (Green Climate Fund, 2021). Namibia was the first country in the SADC region to have a stand-alone National Environmental Education (EE) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Policy (UNESCO, 2020). The policy is designed to support EE and ESD in formal, non-formal and informal education processes across all sectors of Namibian society. UNESCO collaborates with the country through the Sustainability Starts with Teachers (SST) programme to train teachers.

The vision of the National EE and ESD Policy is for an educated and empowered Namibia with environmentally literate people taking responsibility and action for a sustainable future (Ministry of Environment, Forestry & Tourism, 2019, p. 10).

Of the various subjects taught in Namibian schools, Geography is often perceived as one that can make a significant contribution to climate change education (Tshiningayamwe, 2018). However, Tshiningayamwe notes that teachers experience conceptual challenges in integrating this content in their teaching due to their lack of pedagogical content knowledge, lack of professional development support and inadequate quality teaching resources on climate change.
3.7 Nigeria

3.7.1 UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION (UBE) AND OOSC

According to UNICEF (2021e), even though primary education is officially free and compulsory, about 10.5 million of Nigeria’s children aged 5–14 years are not in school. Only 61% of 6–11-year-olds regularly attend primary school and only 35.6% of children aged 36–59 months receive early childhood education. In the north of the country, the picture is even bleaker, with a net attendance rate of 53%. Getting out-of-school children back into education poses a massive challenge.

Ensuring educational provision and attendance in predominantly rural areas and counteracting the impact of insurgency in the north-east present significant challenges. In north-eastern and north-western states, 29% and 35% of Muslim children, respectively, receive Qur’anic education, which does not include basic skills such as literacy and numeracy. In north-eastern Nigeria, 2.8 million children are in need of education-in-emergencies support in three conflict-affected states (Adamawa, Borno and Yobe). In these states, at least 802 schools remain closed and 497 classrooms are listed as destroyed, with another 1,392 damaged but repairable.

Other problems challenging the effective provision of UBE include:

- how to increase enrolment given the scarcity of resources
- data accuracy (e.g., records of the number of children, number of OOSC, retention and pass rates)
- societal attitudes
- financial problems
- inadequate and ineffective implementation strategies (Adeyemi et al., 2012)

3.7.2 GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

UNICEF gave Nigeria a US$15 million COVID-19 support grant. It helped fund the following initiatives, which are based on the Ministry of Education’s COVID-19 response plan to increase access to and success in education:

- A COVID-19 Education Sector Strategic Framework developed by the Federal Ministry of Education on its online portal that enables states to adapt materials and identify strategies: 16 states, representing 63% of schools and nearly 70% of children enrolled in school, have access to this online portal, which enables states to adapt materials and develop specific response strategies.

- The creation of access to diverse remote learning programmes appropriate for each context, through state-level radio- and television-based education programmes, printed take-home activity books, worksheets and assessment cards.

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8 A country profile can be accessed at: https://www.col.org/member-countries/nigeria/
• Safe school operations with psychosocial support, access for children with special needs, provisioning of WASH and hygiene supplies to schools, and back-to-school campaigns.

• Enhanced systemic capacity and preparedness for future crises through capacity building at the state level.

• Prioritisation of children from the most marginalised groups for the distribution of take-home materials and ICT equipment — for example, children from migrant families, children from refugee communities, Almajiris and IDP camps, children living in poverty and children with special needs.

• Strong emphasis on social behavioural mobilisation, including sensitisation on gender-based violence for girls. (Global Partnership for Education [GPE], 2021)

In late March 2020, the UNICEF office in Nigeria received a GPE grant of US$140,000 to support the Ministry of Education with preparing a COVID-19 education strategic framework to ensure continuity of learning. An “opening better” school initiative was developed and implemented to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on the education and well-being of children.

The funding supports

• an online digital platform

• strengthening states’ radio and television education programmes

• printed take-home materials for students: activity books, worksheets and assessment cards

• the provision of psychosocial support for children and teachers and wash and hygiene supplies for schools, and preparation of a comprehensive back-to-school campaign and social mobilisation to initiate safe school reopening; efforts are underway to establish a remote monitoring system to measure the progress in learning and effectiveness of the education delivery system

3.7.3 OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN AND GENDER

Gender, like geography and poverty, is an important factor in school attendance rates. States in the north-east and north-west have female primary net attendance rates of 47.7% and 47.3%, respectively, meaning that more than half of girls are not in school. Attendance rates in northern Nigeria are negatively affected by various factors, including economic barriers and sociocultural norms and practices that discourage attendance in formal education, especially for girls.

3.7.4 ICT IN EDUCATION

In its National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013), the federal government of Nigeria recognises the prominent role of ICTs in the
modern world and commits to integrating ICTs into education provision in Nigeria. To actualise this goal, the policy states that the government will provide basic infrastructure and training to primary schools and their staff (Matthew et al., 2015, p. 65). At the level of basic education, computer education has been made a pre-vocational elective, and the policy recognises the need for infrastructure and training for the integration of ICTs in the school system. It should be noted that although the national policy recognised the importance of ICT from its fourth edition in 2004, this was not the Nigerian government’s first attempt to introduce computer education in schools. In 1988, it enacted a policy on computer education. The plan was to establish pilot schools and introduce computer education first to all secondary and tertiary schools, and then to primary schools. Unfortunately, the project did not really take off beyond the distribution and installation of personal computers in some pilot schools (Matthew et al., 2015, p. 65).

However, computers are not standard classroom tools in more than 90% of Nigerian public schools. This suggests that the chalkboard and textbook continue to dominate classroom activities in most Nigerian schools. In 2010, the Federal Ministry of Education launched an ICT-driven project known as SchoolNet which was intended to equip all schools in Nigeria with computers and communications technologies (Matthew et al., 2015, p. 65).

According to Matthew et al. (2015, p. 67), the challenges facing ICT education in Nigerian schools include

- lack of qualified teachers to teach ICT in schools
- lack of computers
- lack of electricity
- cost of computers in Nigeria
- broken-down computers
- burglary
- lack of Internet or slow connectivity

### 3.7.5 EDUCATION OF NOMADIC POPULATIONS

The nomadic population in Nigeria numbers 9.4 million people, including 3.1 million school-age children (Hanemann, 2016). In line with the 1979 Constitution, the National Commission for Nomadic Education (NCNE) was established in 1989. The NCNE is charged with implementing the Nomadic Education Programme (NEP), which is aimed at providing and widening access to quality basic education for nomadic people in Nigeria, boosting literacy and equipping them with skills and competencies to enhance their well-being and participation in the nation-building process (NCNE, 2021). However, national education systems have generally failed the nomadic communities. All the
education indicators reveal that the nomadic groups are at the bottom of the table in national statistics pertaining to enrolment rates, participation, classroom performance, gender balance, achievement, progression to the next level of education and training (Hanemann, 2016).

In spite of the lofty objectives behind the establishment of nomadic education — since the programme was mainly politically motivated by the then federal government — subsequent governments have not taken serious steps on nomadic education. The following challenges to improvements in nomadic education remain:

- financial constraints
- lack of facilities
- reluctance of the nomadic populations to adopt schooling practices that some felt were disruptive to their culture
- ineffective implementation strategies
- lack of human resources (Adeyemi et al., 2012)

In an attempt to address the persistent challenges, the NCNE started experimenting with the use of radio to provide open and distance education to pastoral nomads in 1992 (Hanemann, 2016). The resulting Interactive Radio Instruction (IRI) experiment has a regular radio programme aimed at mobilising, sensitising and empowering communities through the provision of services for the benefit of nomadic groups.

According to UNESCO, as at 2016, several accomplishments have been achieved:

- Radio listening groups have been established and function in the same way as mobile learning circles.
- Twenty-six episodes of the distance learning programme have been recorded.
- Regular capacity-building workshops on the IRI methodology are offered for all categories of personnel, including teachers.
- Two digital radio recording studios and two e-learning centres have been established.
- The quality of curriculum content delivery has been improved, with an overall improvement in the learning achievements of nomadic schoolchildren and adults.

The NCNE is also working with international partners to boost nomadic education in the country. UNESCO affirms that nomadic education institutions supported by international donors are growing (Hanemann, 2016).

### 3.7.6 PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Although the Nigerian government has formulated policies aimed at giving children with disabilities adequate education (Akinbola, 2010), in 2015, the government
admitted that its current practices were not fully consistent with existing global best practices (Federal Ministry of Education, 2015). Therefore, it launched its National Policy on Special Needs Education that same year.

The country’s 2017 National Policy on Inclusive Education is more inclusive and endorses the UNESCO definition of inclusive education and addresses a long list of vulnerable and marginalised groups (UNESCO, 2021b).

In addition, Target 8 of the policy states that adequate learning materials and assistive devices, including ICT and assistive technologies, need to be designed to meet all learners’ needs (Pinnock, 2020). An example of an innovative approach to achieving this is that the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) social mobilisation departments in parts of Kaduna State have collected data on disabled students’ needs for assistive devices as part of school improvement planning processes.

In 2018, Nigeria adopted the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, giving people with disabilities an unrestricted right to education without discrimination or segregation (Part V, Art. 17.1) and to free education up to secondary school level (Part V, Art. 17.2). In addition, all public schools are required to be inclusive and accessible and to have personnel trained in working with learners with disabilities and adequate facilities (Part V, Art. 18.1) (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2018).

Furthermore, donor-led programmes like DFID’s Teacher Development Project have demonstrated the value of audio equipment and tablets to support students’ English literacy and numeracy learning. The use of Braille and sign language is granted by law. The 2018 Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act regulates the development of communication skills for people with disabilities as part of the primary, secondary and tertiary curricula (Part V, Art. 18.2).

According to the government (Federal Ministry of Education, 2015), the challenges confronting this marginalised group include, for example:

- practitioners who are not formally licensed to operate
- misunderstanding about what inclusive education means
- an absence of comprehensive data, which means the impact of interventions cannot be gauged
- inadequate equipment, material and funding
- misappropriation and misdirection of funds because special needs education services are seen as secondary
- bias, cultural archetypes and negative behaviour patterns towards people with disabilities
- perceptions that special needs education is the remit of voluntary services or humanitarian affairs only
However, the Federal Ministry of Education is moving away from the narrow term “special education” to the more broad-based term “special needs education and rehabilitation services” (Federal Ministry of Education, 2015). Akinbola (2010) notes that policies need the government’s full commitment to turn them into reality and that does not appear to be happening yet.

### 3.7.7 CLIMATE CHANGE

Nigeria’s Climate Change Policy is a strategic policy response to climate change that aims to foster a low-carbon, high-growth economic development path and build a climate-resilient society through the attainment of set targets (Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and Environment, 2021). However, in comparison to some other developing countries, Nigeria lags behind in this sphere of development as the efforts it has made to date have yet to show a significant impact. According to Ogunji (2020), Nigeria has been experiencing significant changes in its climate, resulting in, for example, higher temperatures, irregular rainfall, recurring extreme weather events, drought and desertification, rising sea levels and flooding, land degradation and loss of biodiversity. In 2015, President Buhari committed to the Paris Agreement and presented Nigeria’s Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) with a pledge to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 45% conditionally by 2030 (USAID, n.d.). The current version of the Climate Change Policy Response and Strategy was approved by Nigeria’s president on 2 June 2021 and covers the period 2021–2030 (Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and Environment, 2021).

Eze (2020) notes that some secondary school subjects’ curricula incorporate elements of climate change education that could, if well handled, educate students well on the subject. However, climate change education could be said to be in its infancy, as there is still the need to create more awareness around the subject. Scholars have recommended practical demonstrations in order for children to actively use their acquired knowledge and skills to improve society and other innovative educational approaches (Amanchukwu et al., 2015; Mailumo et al., 2018).

To build on past government initiatives in Nigeria, international organisations, such as USAID (through Power Africa, agricultural Feed the Future initiative interventions, and Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene programming) and UNDP, are collaborating with the government to help it achieve its goals.

### 3.8 Rwanda

#### 3.8.1 ICT IN EDUCATION

Since 2000, Rwanda has gradually increased the growth of its ICT sector through various national policies, plans and initiatives (Mugiraneza, 2021). As a result, the country has made impressive progress in establishing a telecommunications infrastructure and providing telecom services, which generated significant revenue. For example, the telecom sector in Rwanda has generated a total investment

9 A country profile can be accessed at: https://www.col.org/member-countries/rwanda/
of RWF590.4 billion during the period 2001–2015. In the same period, the
government of Rwanda has aggressively implemented many ICT projects and
initiatives to fuel the growth and development of its society and its priority
economic sectors.

As stated in the ICT Education Policy (Ministry of Education, 2016), education
plays a key role in the ongoing social and economic transformation of Rwanda,
while the use of ICT in education is seen as a strategic lever for achieving this
transformation. The ICT Policy complements and implements the SMART
EDUCATION Policy (Ministry of Education, 2016), which is a comprehensive
approach that includes a wide use of existing and new ICT infrastructure and
devices, the development of new digital content aligned with the national
curriculum and teacher capacity building for primary and secondary education
(Education Sector, 2019).

According to UNESCO (Education Sector, 2019), the country’s attention has
shifted from the extensive deployment of laptop devices (One laptop per child
[OLPC], launched in 2009) to advancing adaptive child-centred learning and the
use of ICT-augmented environments to enrich teaching and learning.

However, in Rwandan schools, including TVET colleges, teachers do not have the
appropriate digital content to use with students. The 2019 midterm review and
evaluation of the ICT in education policy found 56.4% of the 40 sampled schools
(both primary and secondary) had access to digital content (online teaching and
learning materials), and 42.3% said that they were not aware of this resource. To
understand the extent to which ICT devices were available in schools, the midterm
evaluation assessed availability through sample questions about the presence of
specific tools. However, the evaluation relied solely on the responses provided
by school head teachers and ICT teachers, with no physical verification or factual
checks. Of those sampled, 44.2% said that they were aware that different ICT
devices were available in their respective schools, while 51.4% reported that they
were not aware of their presence (Mugiraneza, 2021).

3.8.2 PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

The 2013/14–2017/18 education sector plan identified key measures to increase
the number of children with disabilities enrolled in school, such as adapting the new
curriculum for learners with special education needs; training staff, teachers and
other stakeholders on disability; assessing school needs for special needs; creating
and using a database of all learners with special needs; and providing specialised
textbooks to schools. In spite of these measures and the ambitious targets set (38,309
children with disabilities enrolled in schools in 2018), attendance at primary school
is still much lower for children with a disability than for children without a disability
(57.4%, compared to 97.7% overall enrolment) (UNESCO, 2021c).

3.8.3 THE PROJECT INCLUSIVE FUTURES IN RWANDA

According to UNESCO (2021c), the Inclusive Futures in Rwanda project —
financed by the Innovation for Education Fund and the governments of Rwanda
and the United Kingdom and managed by Cambridge Education — has been a forerunner in the field of inclusive education since 2013. It has developed national standards for the education of children with disabilities to provide a framework for quality inclusive education. The project has helped to establish national norms, standards and tools surrounding the policy on inclusive education, to equip classrooms with Braille embossers, and to train national and local educational stakeholders, parents and children to better understand rights to education and the importance of inclusive education. An inclusive education model has also been developed and tested. Along the same lines, the Ministry of Education and UNICEF funded 400 inclusive schools across the country in 2012.

3.8.4 GENDER

The 2008 Girls Education Policy aims to integrate gender issues into national, district and community programmes and plans; to establish a legislative and institutional framework to coordinate and monitor programmes aimed at promoting gender equality in education; and to stimulate collective efforts to eliminate gender disparities in education. The policy is promoting targeted strategies to support girls’ education, like strengthening gender-sensitive and learner-centred methodologies; training teachers in gender issues; regularly revising the education curricula and learning materials from a gender perspective; and strengthening the integration of girls’ education into plans and budgets at all levels.

3.8.5 ETHNIC AND LINGUISTIC GROUPS AND INDIGENOUS GROUPS

To strengthen the learning of Kinyarwanda, English and French, the national languages, language textbooks have been distributed to schools; the number of textbooks distributed is not specified. Articles 35, 40 and 46 of the Law governing the organization and functioning of Nursery, Primary and Secondary Education No. 23 of 2012 state that an order of the minister in charge of education will determine the curriculum, teaching hours and language of instruction in primary, secondary and special schools.

3.8.6 PEOPLE LIVING IN RURAL OR REMOTE AREAS

About 30% of children with disabilities have never attended school, and most of them live in rural areas. Given this background, the education sector plan committed to expanding opportunities to adult literacy programmes and technical and vocational education in rural and remote areas.

3.8.7 POVERTY

The 2013/14–2017/18 education sector plan aimed to improve access to education, from primary level through to secondary education, with a specific focus on addressing the inequalities and disparities that exist throughout the country. The Ministry of Education is also expected to publish a National Policy for Educationally Disadvantaged Learners.
3.8.8 CLIMATE CHANGE

Rwanda has integrated environmental education into its strategies for national sustainable development, such as through its Environmental Education for Sustainable Development (EESD) Strategy which aims to promote public awareness about environmental management and sustainable development in Rwanda (Muhirwa, 2021). The Rwanda Education Board has also embedded environmental topics in every subject taught in K–12 curricula to foster eco-friendly attitudes and environmental literacy in all students. Conservation NGOs also play a crucial role in supporting environmental education in Rwanda through community engagement and supporting young scientists working in conservation research, among other activities.

The Rwanda Environmental Management Agency (REMA) was established in 2005 under the Ministry of Environment and oversees environmental education at the national level through its Department of Environment Education and Mainstreaming. REMA launched the Rwanda Environmental Education for Sustainable Development Strategy (2010–2015) to guide national development in the context of sustainability and runs the Green School programme, which aims to mould young Rwandans as stewards of their natural environment. The agency also began an initiative to deliver strategic, intensive training for schools based on their academic domains (e.g., sciences, social studies, polytechnics, etc.) to help students develop the environmental skills needed for their specific domains.
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References


References


Out-of-School Children and Youth: A Contemporary View from Selected African Commonwealth Countries

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"The strength of the manuscript is the consolidation of the number of OOSC and the challenges related to OOSC initiatives generally across the countries which participated."

Professor Rose Ruto-Korir - Director: Institute of Open Distance Learning Moi University, and Africa Chapter Chair for COMOSA

Overview on the provision of education at the three levels ... shows the exclusion of learners from any form of learning as they progress/transit to the next higher level. The factors contributing to the decline in enrolment at the next level and for learners dropping out of the system indicate that the majority of learners are not academically or socially integrated into the education system. Maybe, as recommended in this study, the strengthening of life skills as a subject from early stages would help learners to fully integrate into the system. This could possibly improve retention and success rates.

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