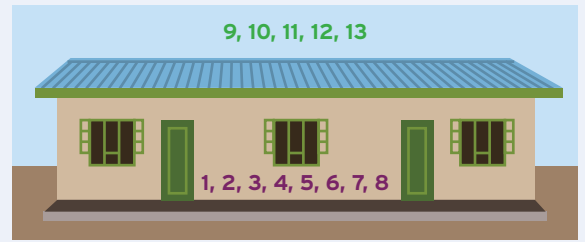


## Policy options for inclusive educational reform in Sub-Saharan Africa



Educational reform inside schools (1-8) and the enabling environment (9-13).

The [World Bank](#) recently emphasised that education will be “the single biggest factor in determining the future cohesion and prosperity of Africa”. Yet a body of evidence showcases the [growing skills deficits and widening inequalities](#) within education systems in the Sub-Saharan region. We must therefore ask what can be done to improve learning outcomes and the skills base in Africa. The following recommendations, based on previous INCLUDE syntheses and a series of expert reports, emerge for building adaptive learning systems which work for every child and foster linkages between the different levels of education, as well as with the [broader development framework](#). Options 1 through 8 pertain to changes within the education system, while options 9 through 13 relate to external factors which support inclusive educational reform.

### 1. Push for early learning and timely enrolment in primary school.

A stronger focus is needed on [pre-school education](#) (especially in basic language, numeracy and cognition) and ensuring that children attend school at the right age in order to close early learning gaps. Recognising that those who start behind, stay behind, special attention should be given to children born into [poor and vulnerable environments](#).

### 2. Continue delivering universal basic education.

Countries achieving near-full enrolment in primary education must maintain this success while allocating resources to lower- and upper-secondary levels to work towards the [SDG4 goal](#) of 12 years of free schooling for all. Countries lagging in primary enrolment are recommended to focus on identifying hard-to-reach individuals and mobilising resources to give all children a [decent learning foundation](#).

### 3. Prioritise [girls' education](#).

Despite comparable primary enrolment rates and test scores, girls still face higher rates of school drop-out (especially in secondary school) due to early marriage, pregnancy and gender-based violence, among other factors. Policies and actors which empower and assist girls to return to and complete school are fundamental to reversing gender gaps in learning outcomes.

### 4. Implement a 'train and retain' approach to teachers.

Thorough planning to recruit, qualify, deploy and [support a growing number of teachers](#) is necessary to reduce class sizes and improve the quality and continuity of skills transfer. [Specific mechanisms](#), such as positive incentives or mandatory placements, can address the severe shortage of skilled teachers in rural areas.

### 5. Update curricula to incorporate [soft, technical and vocational skills](#).

New curricula must be oriented around human capital, diverse and adaptable to changing labour markets to enhance the employment and earnings potential of Africa's youth. Curricula should be [developed in consultation](#) with communities, education experts and the private sector to make reforms demand-driven.

## **6. Increase enrolment in tertiary education.**

Access to skills and knowledge should be based on individual capability and potential, and not on socio-economic status. In addition to allocating school placements to disadvantaged youth, targeted loans and scholarships (by both local and foreign donors) can significantly lower barriers to tertiary education and make access more equal.

## **7. Refine and scale-up alternative forms of TVET learning.**

Many successful pilot programs exist in entrepreneurship, apprenticeships and part-time/online courses which accommodate for learner circumstances and reach young people who cannot pursue traditional routes for higher education. Adjusting, scaling and integrating these initiatives would be more effective and cost-efficient than continually funding new programs.

## **8. Develop more accurate ways of measuring proficiency.**

Assessment tools must go beyond years of schooling and rote learning towards metrics which better reflect student capacity. Given options (4) and (5) to improve the quality of learning, we must find new ways to measure the take-up and outcomes of new skills, for both teachers and students. Assessment tools must go beyond years of schooling and rote learning towards metrics which better reflect student capacity in terms of creativity and critical thinking. These new metrics would yield stronger signals for employers, provide benchmarks for progress and enable targeted interventions for learning.

## **9. Expand and maintain WASH and road infrastructure.**

Baseline standards for health, safety and connectivity need to be met to improve learning environments and accessibility. Investments in rural infrastructure, particularly in electricity, toilets and safe drinking water, should take priority.

## **10. Strengthen social protection for young people before, during and after school.**

Transfers, nutrition, human rights and healthcare play an important role in encouraging school completion, boosting the returns to education and supporting youth after they graduate. Integrated approaches (combining multiple forms of social protection) are shown to be most effective at fostering inclusion by smoothing transitions and preventing deprivation in learning.

## **11. Stimulate growth, structural change and job creation.**

Labour market opportunities can act as pull factors for youth to gain qualifications. Moreover, reducing income poverty through employment channels helps to alleviate household financial constraints on schooling, while aggregate growth raises the overall budget for spending on education.

## **12. Enhance (local) government capacity and institutional coordination.**

Sound regulatory environments are key to enforcing education policies, upholding quality standards and promoting cooperation between stakeholders. Decentralisation of responsibility can yield greater local autonomy, but must be balanced with proper accountability mechanisms, capacity building and communication. In terms of planning, both short- and long-term strategies are needed to increase access to quality education in the face of demographic change, conflict and other competing objectives.

## **13. Improve value-for-money and transparency within education expenditure.**

Budgetary processes must be tracked and evaluated to increase effectiveness and avoid wastage. Spending must be prioritised to achieve social and spatial equity in education; and international spending targets (6% of GDP) must be met as soon as possible. Innovative financial methods, including new private partnerships, are recommended to help meet these objectives.

**Note:** All policy options are relevant to different degrees across Sub-Saharan Africa. Recommendations are not prioritised here, since the appropriate course of action depends on the strength and network of local actors, available resources and relative scale of challenges.