

Anne Kielland, Anne Hatløy, Tone Sommerfelt,  
Tewodros Aragie Kebede and Kathleen M. Jennings

## **Hidden in the numbers: Barriers to girls' education in West Africa**

A scoping study concerning knowledge about trends  
and sub-variations





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# Preface

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This report takes stock of the state of knowledge on gender and education in West Africa. The report, commissioned by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was drafted by a group of Fafo researchers with experience from West Africa, led by Anne Kielland. The authors are responsible for the content and final text.

Oslo, 31 October 2017

Anne Kielland, Anne Hatløy, Tone Sommerfelt, Tewodros A. Kebede and Kathleen M. Jennings

# Summary

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- † The main barriers to girls' education are also barriers to many boys' education.
- † Barriers to the remaining group of out-of-school girls of primary school age are increasingly related to additional vulnerabilities, like disabilities; unstable or poor urban living conditions, including homelessness; being on the move; and being affected by conflict or violence.
- † New global targets including out-of-school secondary school-aged girls make it more important to understand the local alternative costs of schooling, notably linked to a gendered labour market, early marriage and assumed claims on girls related to the religious revival in the area.
- † Some of the main barriers identified in this scoping study affect boys and girls differently. Gendered data is largely missing on some key groups of vulnerable children in West Africa:
  - Education data on child disabilities segregated by functional domains.
  - Education data from new slum areas surrounding the bigger cities in the region.
  - Education data for street child populations in the region.
  - Education data for domestic servants in major cities.
  - Education data for conflict-affected families and children, especially people on the move, and therefore not registered in camps.

# Introduction

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This scoping study aims to take stock of the state of knowledge on gender and education in West Africa. This is pertinent, not only because the situation for girls in the region is precarious, but also because it is rapidly changing.

The state of knowledge challenges some common preconceptions. This study stresses how most education challenges are in fact shared by girls and boys, although certain challenges affect boys and girls differently. In fact, the only obstacle unique to girls is the notion that girls should do other things rather than go to school. In most cases, combinations of different factors interact in the ways they affect the schooling of both girls and boys. Understanding these intersecting vulnerabilities is key to understanding the remaining challenges to girls' education in West Africa.

The analysis presented here also highlights how some common generalizations may not hold. For example, from the quantitative analysis of statistical data, it may easily seem as if urban children collectively are privileged and foster children collectively deprived with regard to education. But a closer look indicates that this is not always the case. Similarly, while child labour and early marriage are often believed to be the causes of girls' dropping out of school, the reverse may be the case, as, for example, when poor schooling quality means that child labour and marriage options trump the option of continued education.

# Background

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**Worldwide, 263 million children are out of school.** The number includes 61 million children of primary school age, 60 million adolescents of lower secondary school age and 142 million youth of upper secondary school age (UNESCO 2016:182). In the era of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the set objective was to achieve universal primary education, while with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the objective is for all children to complete both primary and secondary school. The number of out-of-school children of primary school age rose from 53 to 61 million between 2015 and 2016.

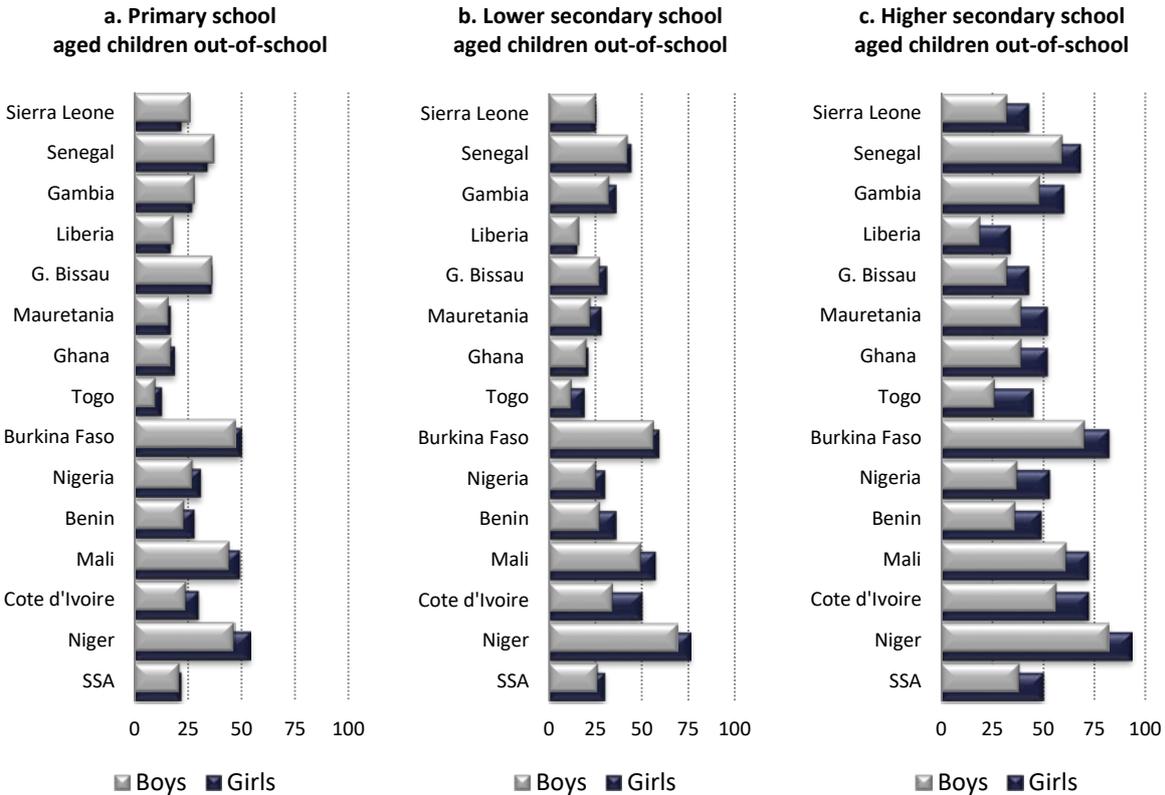
**The composition of the out-of-school children group has also changed with the new goals.** While 22 percent of primary school-aged (PSA) girls in Sub Saharan Africa (SSA) are out of school, the difference is only one percentage point to the 21 percent of primary school-aged boys who are out of school. In low-income countries globally, the difference is also only one percentage point, while there is no gender gap in lower-middle and upper-middle-income countries. However, for lower secondary school-aged (LSSA) children in Sub Saharan Africa, the gender disparity increases to 4 percentage points and for higher secondary school-aged (HSSA) children to 12 percentage points.

**The out-of-school rates in West Africa are higher than on the rest of the African continent.** There are almost 100 million children in the 14 West African countries covered by this study, more than half of them living in Nigeria. One in four school-aged children in Sub Saharan Africa are out-of-school (27 percent), compared to one in three West African children (37 percent). Out of the continent's 75 million out-of-school children, almost half of them, 36 million, live in West Africa (48 percent), 17 million of them in Nigeria alone.

**The gender gap is also larger in West Africa than in Sub Saharan Africa overall.** Among primary school-aged children (the target of the old MDGs) in West Africa, 29 percent of boys and 33 percent of girls are out of school. Among lower secondary school-aged children, 32 percent of boys and 37 percent of girls are out of school, and among higher secondary school-aged children 45 percent of boys and 59 percent of girls are out-of-school, leaving a gender gap of 14 percentage points. For all school-aged children in the region, 33 percent of boys and 40 percent of girls are out-of-school.

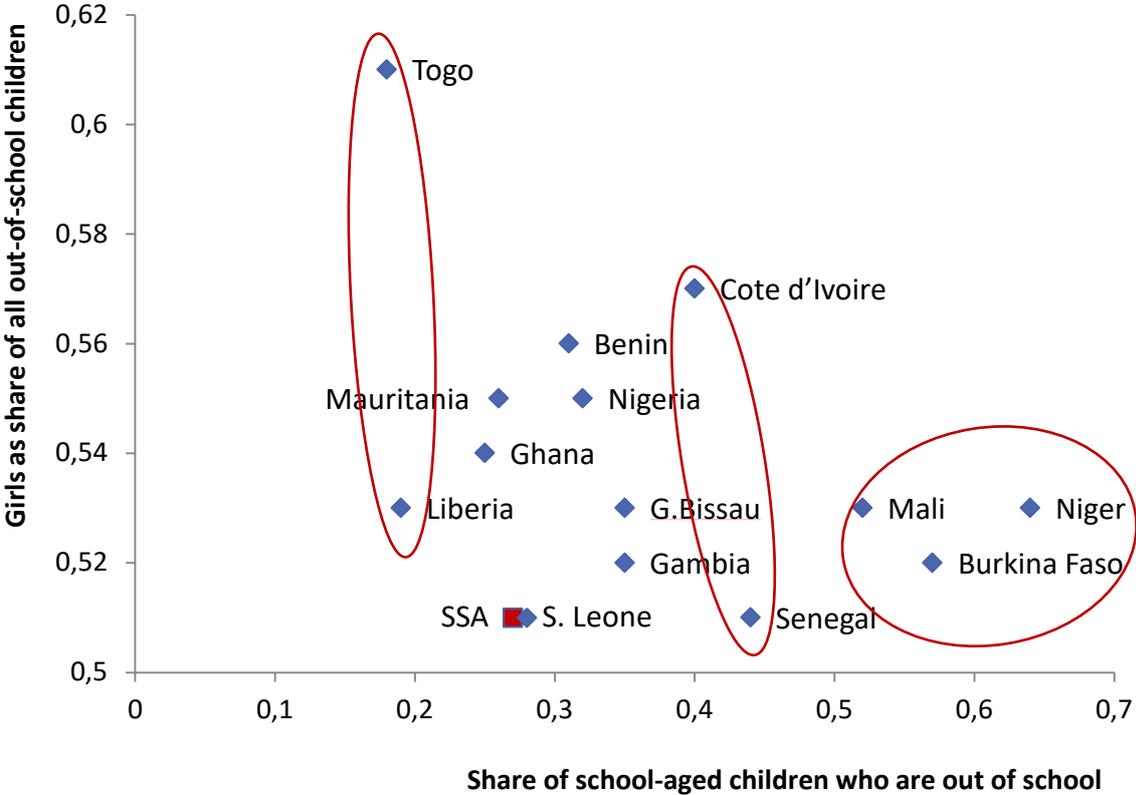
**There is considerable variation between the West African countries,** both in the share of the school-aged population that is out of school, and in gender gaps. There are no clear trends in the changes of the school participation rates and the development of the gender gap over the schooling years; each country has its own individual pattern. We find the highest total shares of out-of-school children in Niger (64 percent), Burkina Faso (57 percent) and Mali (52 percent), followed by Senegal (44 percent). At the other end of the spectrum, Togo (18 percent) and Liberia (19 percent) have the lowest overall rates of out-of-school children. Apart from Nigeria, the highest absolute numbers of out-of-school children are found in Niger (3.8 million) and Burkina Faso (3.3 million), followed by Cote d'Ivoire (2.8 million), Mali (2.6 million) and Senegal (2.0 million).

Figures 1a-c: Out-of-school children at the primary, lower secondary and higher secondary school level (as percent of school-aged children). Source: Global Education Monitoring Report Database (UNESCO 2016)



**The gender gap makes a leap between lower and higher secondary school.** Figure 1 shows the share of children who are out of school in the 14 West African countries and Sub Saharan Africa, ranked by the size of the gender gap in percentage points among primary school-aged children (shown in figure 1a). The darker bars represent the share of girls who are out of school in each country. At first glance, it is evident that the relatively modest gender gaps among primary school-aged children increase substantially with years of schooling, and gaps are especially prominent by the transition from lower to higher secondary school. The figure for primary school-aged children shows that in four countries, more primary school-aged boys than primary school-aged girls are out of school. In Guinea Bissau, an equal share of boys and girls of primary school age are out-of-school, while slightly more girls than boys are out of school in the nine remaining countries. In Niger, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali and Benin, there are substantial differences between boys and girls in terms of schooling. The gender gap, shown by the visibility of the dark background bars, increases somewhat at the lower secondary school level, and becomes even more pronounced at the higher secondary school level, where the dark bars become highly visible. On average, the total West African out-of-school gender gap increases from 3.6 percentage points for primary school-aged children to 5.6 percentage points for LSS children and then to 14.4 percentage point for HSS children. Data from Nigeria slightly increases the West African total gender gaps, but mainly for primary school-aged and lower secondary school-aged children.

Figure 2: Share of out-of-school children among school-aged children, and share of all out-of-school children who are girls in West Africa (SSA – Sub Saharan Africa). Source: Global Education Monitoring Report Database (UNESCO 2016)



**The gender gap does not automatically decrease when coverage increases.** Figure 2 Compares coverage to gender gap, by looking at the total share of out-of-school children among school-aged children versus the share of girls in the out-of-school children group. While one could assume that better access would improve girls’ attendance disproportionately, there seems to be no such easy link. The counter hypothesis could be that when the share of out-of-school children falls, the children who remain out of school have an increasing burden of additional vulnerabilities; and within certain groups of children with additional vulnerabilities, the discrimination against girls sometimes increases. The figure shows that while both Liberia and Togo have relatively few out-of-school children, Liberia has a small gender gap and Togo a big one. Similarly, Senegal and Cote d’Ivoire both have a relatively high share of children out of school. The gender gap in Cote d’Ivoire is fairly high, however, while in Senegal, it is low.

# Common determinants of schooling in aggregate data analysis

The data informing national and regional education strategies is often derived from quantitative analysis of household data sets. The standard regression analysis of factors that may affect the likelihood of a child's participation in school contains a selection of variables that can help document some of the most common hypotheses of why some children go to school and others don't.

Some of the main demand-side variables and their root hypotheses are listed in Table 1.

**Table 1 Demand-side root hypothesis and variables**

<b>Root hypothesis</b>	<b>Variables</b>
Boys are favoured and have a higher schooling probability.	Child's gender
There is a bell-shaped curve relationship between child age and schooling probability as school participation first increases by age and then declines.	Child's age and child's age squared
Biological parents are more altruistic, and living with biological parents improves schooling probability. <sup>1</sup>	Child's biological relationship to household head
The better educated the parents, the higher the schooling probability of the child.	Parental education level
Poverty is a constraint to schooling, and the poorer the household, the lower the schooling probability.	Household consumption, income, household building quality
Living in a city increases schooling probability.	Urban, rural (peri-urban) habitat
Certain cultural features or social practices improve schooling probabilities.	Household main ethnicity, religion, region

Supply-side indicators (Table 2) are also sometimes included in the schooling regression equation.

**Table 2 Supply side root hypothesis and variables**

<b>Root hypothesis</b>	<b>Variables</b>
Access: the further away the school, the lower the schooling probability.	Distance from household to nearest age-appropriate school in km or minutes
School quality: the better the schooling quality, the higher the schooling probability.	E.g. student/teacher ratio, school building quality
Schooling costs: the higher the costs, the lower the schooling probability.	School fees, costs of uniforms, books and other equipment
Alternative costs: the higher the child labour demand/return to child labour, the lower the schooling probability.	Community wealth, community infrastructure level, aggregate land size in the community, production of export crops in a community

This set of variables structures a lot of what we believe to be common knowledge about schooling probabilities. However, a closer scrutiny of most analyses of schooling in the West African region reveals that each variable tends to explain only a small share of the overall variation in schooling. The likely reason is that for each group organized by these variables, there are dissimilar sub-groups that behave differently, affected by a myriad of complexly interrelated contextual issues that the regression cannot grasp.

<sup>1</sup> Hamilton's rule (in brief) postulates that a costly action will be performed if;  $C < R \times B$  where C is the cost to the actor, R the genetic relatedness between the actor and the recipient and B is the benefit to the recipient.

With the right data, regression analysis can enable the researcher to go beyond intuitive assumptions about causes ('It's all poverty', 'It's all culture'). Yet few academic articles in the field, and even fewer general reports, exploit the possibilities offered by a regression approach. Simple *simulations* could help us better understand how different combinations of key causal factors may amplify relative disadvantages. There have been attempts to include supply side factors, but most regression analyses fail to include the most important alternative costs to schooling for particular sub-groups of children or to adequately explain how the most common choices are made, most notably between work, mobility and marriage/childbearing.

The data has not been exploited to its fullest and the result has been the risk that research simply consolidates preconceptions rather than identifying the mix of causes which raise the barriers to education for girls. For example, children work, migrate or marry because their families cannot afford schooling. In fact, our fieldwork indicates that school quality in many places is so poor that both labour and marriage may be perceived as attractive alternatives to schooling, which may appear to some families as a pure waste of time.

Failure to exploit the data to its fullest can contribute to a lack of nuance in policy and the risk that new or emerging challenges go undetected. Policy goals aim to eliminate the statistical variations found between generalised groups of children: for example, goals are defined as 'reducing the gap' between urban and rural children, between biological and foster children, or between boys and girls. For development agencies, this results in low incentives to invest in children living in urban areas, those living with their biological parents, or boys. However, the sources of the barriers to education these children face are often the same as, or connected to, the barriers faced by girls. Targeted research interventions, identified by more effective exploitation of existing data, would enable a better understanding of shared vulnerabilities. This would enable policy to target such vulnerabilities based on knowledge that provides a good understanding of the likely impact of a particular policy or intervention on the genders. Thus the premises for the thematic sections of this study are the following:

1. The difference between boys' and girls' school attendance rates is smaller than people tend to believe, including in West Africa.<sup>2</sup>
2. The main gender-specific obstacle to education is the parental or societal belief that girls should do other things than going to school, or, that if priorities must be made, boys should rank first.
3. Most schooling obstacles are shared by boys and girls alike, including costs, opportunity costs, poor access and school quality, language problems, and religious or anti-establishment sentiments in parents.
4. Other gender-related obstacles, like opportunity costs associated with domestic work, security issues on the way to school, sexual abuse in school and early parenthood, are to some extent shared by boys, although they disproportionately hold girls back.
5. Certain factors also affect boys' schooling disproportionately, like some religious practices (in West Africa, the *talibé* issue)<sup>5</sup> and opportunity costs related to e.g. commercial agricultural labour.
6. In most of the cases where girls are disproportionately deprived of education, we are dealing with intersecting vulnerabilities – that is, some second factor enters and widens the gap between the opportunities offered to boys and to girls.
7. Some common survey variables lump together some very different sub-groups: e.g. a child registered as not the biological child of the household head can be either a privileged migrant student or an orphaned domestic servant.
8. Some key features of vulnerability are not included or under-documented in existing data, like disability or health status of school-aged children.

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<sup>2</sup> The GAPMINDER Foundation's ignorance surveys reveal that only 9 percent of Norwegians and Swedes guessed the correct answer on the question: 'On average, in the world as a whole today, men aged 25-34 have spent 8 years in school. How many years on average have women in the same age group spent in school?' The correct answer is 7 years for women. Almost half of us think it's only 3 years for women – compared to 8 years for men. (Gapminder 2013).

<sup>5</sup> The practice of confiding very young boys with a Quranic tutor in urban areas where the boys beg to survive.

# Barriers to education: beyond current knowledge and assumptions

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The composition of the out-of-school children group is undergoing two important changes:

Firstly, as the number of children who attend primary school is increasing, the remaining out-of-school children are becoming characteristically 'more different' than the mean. For example, while yesterday's main challenge may have been just slightly poorer children, today's challenge is increasingly children with disabilities, trauma or other health issues, children who have relocated to new and perhaps less altruistic families, children in families with strong religious or anti-establishment beliefs, children in violent or conflict settings, and children on the move. Within some of the remaining 'more different' groups of children, girls may or may not be disproportionately or differently disadvantaged.

Secondly, as the group of out-of-school children is operationally broadened to also cover secondary-school-aged children, the out-of-school group gets a higher age average. Children's social and economic roles tend to become more gendered with increasing age. Hence, the alternative costs to their schooling, such as loss of potential income from their work, will in many cases both increase and become more gendered too.

We thus need to change the lens to better zoom in on some of the new groups that will represent a challenge to mainstream schooling in the years to come. The five sections presented below outline five areas relevant to policymaking in the education sector.

## Disability

- † There is no representative data on the prevalence of disabilities in children within different functional domains in West Africa, but existing data indicates a higher prevalence in boys.
- † Child mortality is declining, probably simultaneously increasing the survival rates of children with disabilities, previously assumed to be lower than average.
- † Malnutrition and certain illnesses that could cause disability are on the decline, while traffic injuries in particular are on the rise and about to becoming a major cause of disability in the region.
- † Schooling challenges vary within the group of children living with disabilities, according to core functional domains: seeing, hearing, communication, cognition, walking, and self-care.
- † Existing data indicate that children with disability spend less time in school and often repeat lower levels of school. Girls may be more deprived of schooling, but documentation is poor.
- † There are some indications that visually and physically impaired children are less disadvantaged than hearing impaired and cognitively challenged children.
- † Stigma based in social practices and expectations for boys relative to girls vary with disabilities.
- † Local opportunity costs to schooling for children with disabilities contribute to gendering the challenges related to schooling.
- † Large-scale education sector strategies in poor West African countries typically target the easiest-to-reach out-of-school children first.
- † Special national strategy plans for inclusive education are largely missing, and therefore data on disability is often not requested or available. Missing strategies and data reduces funding allocated to these children.

In the absence of good numbers, there are two main theories about the prevalence of disabilities in children in poor countries like those in West Africa. The first (old) is that mortality rates are higher among children living with a disability, reducing their overall share of the child population. The second is that as child survival rates improve in the region, more children with disabilities are surviving.

Several factors may affect the nature of the disabilities found among surviving children in West Africa, compared to more developed countries: periodic undernutrition, environmental hazards and limited treatment of children with treatable conditions like club foot and cleft palate. In addition, impairments become disabilities when there is little access to basic aid, such as eyeglasses and hearing aids. The number of traffic accidents is becoming a major concern in West Africa, and such accidents are the leading cause of injury among young people in developing countries (WHO 2015). From the available population-based studies, Nigeria reported the highest number of road traffic injury and death rates at 4120 per 100 000 population and 160 per 100 000 population, respectively. The road traffic injury rate is the highest recorded in any single study in Africa. Algeria and Ghana also reported high road traffic injury rates at 700 and 938 per 100 000 population, respectively (Adeloye et al. 2016).

The most extensive documentation of the education of children living with a disability is produced by Plan International and includes around 500 children in four West African countries (Benin, Guinea, Niger and Senegal) (Kuper et al. 2014). The children covered were all part of Plan's sponsorship programme, and thus not a representative sample of children. The study systematically found higher disability rates among boys than among girls, and this was particularly pronounced in Senegal and Niger. It is difficult to know if this has to do with the survival status of disabled girls or the incidence of disability, or is simply the result of selection bias. The study also finds that children with disability have lower school attendance rates, including when adjusted for age and gender (odds ratios varying between 3.3 and 9.2 in West Africa). The four West African countries stand out from the remaining 26 countries in the study by virtue of the fact that no children registered with learning disabilities were attending school. The threshold seemed lowest for children with visual impairments, followed by children with physical disabilities. Children with hearing impairment had high schooling odds while those with communication disabilities were less likely to go to school. These findings echo another regional study claiming that physically disabled children are perceived as more independent than children living with sensory disabilities (Hussain 2013).

In 2009, an 18-country study based on Unicef's multi-indicator cluster surveys looked at the disability screening results in children from the ages of 6 to 9 in and out of school. For eight of the countries, out-of-school children were significantly more likely to score as at 'increased risk for disability'. Yet, in the two West African countries in the study, the trend was the opposite. In Mauritania, there was hardly any difference in disability screening of schoolchildren and out-of-school children in the age group, while in Ghana, the trend was reversed, as 19 percent of schoolchildren scored positive for disability, while only 15 percent of the out-of-school children did (Gottlieb et al. 2009).

The Washington Group on Disability Statistics (WG), which sets the standard for new and consistent disability data, lists only one West African country as having conducted a disability survey following the norm: Togo's 2009 survey of living conditions of people with a disability (Tublu 2009). The survey has a relatively small cluster sample, and people with disabilities were recruited from organisations, and thus it is not representative. The survey covers around 40 children between 6 and 12 years of age (around 80 under 18). The study concludes that in 2009, 35 percent of them were out of school, which is higher than average, but not staggeringly so.

Disability rates globally appear to be higher in boys than in girls, something that would correspond to the overall higher mortality rate of boys globally. The four West African countries covered by Plan's global study indicate the same trend. Although the sample is small, it may be worth noticing that the age-

adjusted odds ratio comparing male to female children with disabilities is higher in Senegal and Niger, while relatively close to 1 in Benin. Niger's gender odds ratio of 1.9 is the highest in the 30-country sample, matching only that of Nepal, perhaps indicating that the poorer the context, the higher the incidence of disabilities in boys relative to girls. The schooling statistics of the study are not gendered.

In the Togo study, schooling statistics are not gendered for the 40 children under 12 years old sampled. Among all respondents of 12 years and above, 20 percent of the men and 30 percent of the women had never been to school, and among those who had been, twice as many men had completed secondary schooling or taken a university degree. While this is perhaps a smaller gender difference than expected, and most likely reflects the gender distribution in the population in that age group in Togo overall, the study does not correct the numbers to account for the age at which the disability occurred. Many of the adult respondents may have become disabled as adults.

It is widely claimed that girls with disabilities are doubly disadvantaged in school (WHO and WB 2011, UNICEF 2013). Some studies indicate that this is the case for some girls, but the evidence is not overwhelming. While many of the obstacles to schooling are the same for girls and boys with disabilities, some social and economic factors contribute to gendering some of them. Two interrelated reasons should be further studied.

First, there is a great variation in how disability is perceived in the different societies in the region. Old convictions that children born with certain disabilities have supernatural properties, either demonic or angelic, still prevail in certain areas, subjecting children to exclusion and violence (PLAN International 2013). The confining of children with certain intellectual disabilities to Voudon temples in Benin has effectively violated their right to inclusion, while infanticide of children with certain disabilities still persists, most recently reported that of children with cerebral palsy in Togo (PLAN International 2013).

Social perceptions also affect expectations for children with disabilities, something that influences their schooling probabilities significantly. Ultimately families will ask, 'Can a child with a disability come to live an independent adult life, and even become a contributor to the parents and their social network?' For many disabled children, the marriage market is restricted, depending on the type and degree of disability. The physical labour market may also become restricted, considerably lowering the opportunity costs of schooling overall for these children compared to children with more options. A disabled man may be more likely to get married than a disabled woman. From a gender perspective, this indicates that the opportunity costs of schooling are even lower for girls with disabilities, as they are not engaged in other labour or caring/reproductive activities that take able-bodied girls away from education.

A systematic and gendered mapping of the barriers to education for children with disabilities in the different functional domains does not exist in West Africa. The existing data stems from small samples, and the indicators applied are inconsistent. In December 2016 DHS launched a new survey module on disabilities developed in collaboration with the Washington Group on Disability Statistics (DHS 2017). The module is optional and must be selected by the host country in order to be included in future national surveys. When included, data will be collected for all persons in the household aged five and older across six functional domains: seeing, hearing, communication, cognition, walking, and self-care. None of the West African countries among the five pilot countries have implemented the module. The survey format still faces some important challenges: sample sizes, even for national household surveys, are not large enough to produce robust inference, especially when segregated by functional domain.

Current scattered research suggests that children with disabilities are disadvantaged in education and that girls with disabilities are even more so. The few numbers that exist do not present evidence that this is indeed the case for all groups of children with disabilities, nor that girls are particularly disfavoured. A reason for this can be that children with certain disabilities, in certain milieus, face lower alternative costs

to schooling than normally developing children. When the possibility of physical labour and marriage is reduced, schooling, especially free schooling, becomes a more attractive option. For example, physically strong children will, by going to school, forego income in areas with e.g. cash crop agricultural production, where good mobility is required. Hearing impaired children may have similar opportunity costs, while visually impaired children may not. In areas where girls living with certain disabilities have a lower chance of getting married, education may come across as a less problematic option.

Including standardised disability modules in regular household surveys may provide some new information about prevalence rates, gender and education. However, statistical inference is impossible in the relatively low sub-samples that can be derived – especially considering there is great variation between disabilities in different functional domains and in the severity of these disabilities. At best, some regional trends can be derived if disability modules are included in a number of West African countries and datasets are merged.

Nevertheless, cross-regional data will likely do little to explain why many girls with disability actually attend school. Qualitative studies on the variation in school attendance among girls (and boys) with disabilities within the standardized functional domains would yield new knowledge to local barriers and constructive input to the policy debate on how to tackle them. Does education help girls with disabilities become independent adults and even important contributors in their social networks? A retrospective study of young adults with disabilities could help shed light on the opportunities provided by education, compared to their alternative paths. Such a study could help shed light on the special benefits certain sub-groups of West African girls who live with a disability could have from schooling and inform a fact-based constructive strategic approach in government strategies.

Learning disabilities are most likely an important cause of dropout. The educational inclusion of children living with intellectual challenges and learning disabilities is understudied in the West African context. Intellectual challenges may or may not be apparent, while learning disabilities are generally not immediately noticeable and therefore go largely undiagnosed. Neurological conditions such as ADHD, autism spectrum disorders and Tourette's syndrome, while prevalent in western countries, are virtually unknown in the West African region. With no facilitation for their inclusion in school, children with these kinds of disabilities probably constitute an important share of the dropout population, especially in lower school grades. While boys are disproportionately affected, girls are globally reported to have higher rates of some of these conditions; girls may more often suffer from attention problems and OCD-type issues, which interfere with their intellectual progression and achievements.

Obstacles to education can be rooted in social expectations, physical barriers, lack of sensory and physical aid, or the preparedness of schools and teachers to teach children with disabilities. Teachers should be consulted in regional studies, to learn how they experience obstacles that prevent enrolment or lead children with disabilities in their classes to repeat a class or drop out. Obstacles gendering poor schooling rates, such as the lack of accessible latrines, should be allocated special attention. Finally, inclusive education for children with disabilities needs to go beyond facilitating access to facilitating learning, recognizing that the pedagogical tools developed for children with disabilities also are valuable in teaching all children.

## Urbanization

- † Urbanization is accelerating in West Africa, especially the Sahel, due to unsustainable rural population growth, natural disasters and conflicts.
- † Poverty and inequality are also increasing rapidly in urban areas.

- † Poor urban children live in the streets and in public places, with impoverished relatives, or as semi-regular household members in other people’s households or workplaces.
- † Alternative costs are heightened for schoolchildren in always-present urban cash-labour markets.
- † Many families also lack trusted, flexible informal support systems, more typical for rural areas, and children provide flexible labour and/or income to households with strong income fluctuation.
- † Low quality private schooling solutions fill the vacuum of public schools.
- † Urban planning for education service delivery to new areas and slums is generally poor, and in cases where it is not prioritized, better data are not requested.
- † Policy actors fear that improved education service provision will further impel migration to cities.

The education strategies of the leading international organizations have for decades focused on delivering education in deprived rural areas, at times at the expense of the urban poor (Kielland 2015). However, this narrow focus may be about to change. Chapter 5 of the Global Education Monitoring Report for 2016 is dedicated to urban education delivery. The report stresses the urgency of regaining the focus on the failure of urban education planning in order to meet the needs of a rapidly growing number of poor urban kids (UNESCO 2016: Chapter 5. Place: Inclusive and sustainable cities). While areas like slum and urban development are assigned to the UN Habitat, the organization’s mandate covers health, water/sanitation and housing issues – not education (Kielland 2015).

West Africa is urbanizing fast, and even in the less urbanized countries in the Sahel, cities now need to prepare for dramatic changes (Moriconi-Ebrard et al. 2016). Ouagadougou and Bamako are projected to have the highest population growth rates of all African cities towards 2030; Niger is fourth in the world in expected urban growth in absolute numbers towards 2050, Nigeria being on top (UN 2015: Table III.3, Moriconi-Ebrard, Harre and Heinrigs 2016). Among the 28 megacities in the world, Lagos is projected to have the highest annual population increase in the world between 2014 and 2030 (UN 2015: Figure IV.9).

Rural migrants are pulled to the cities by the search for new opportunities, like education, but also pushed by unsustainable rural population growth, natural disasters and new conflicts. The increasing gap between the urban rich and poor is already a challenge to education delivery in the new big cities in West Africa. Urban out-of-school children may live in their own destitute households, but also as servants in the households of others, in workplaces, or even in the streets and in public places. Their arrangements may overlap, and many children fluctuate between various situations. While small-scale urbanization is often based on kinship networks, large-scale migrations tend to deplete such networks and instead initiate the formation of slums. The greatest concentrations of classical slums in the region are found in war-torn Sierra Leone and Liberia and around the administrative capitals of Ghana and Nigeria (Sierra Leone: Kroo Bay; Liberia: West Point and Clara Town; Ghana: Agbogboshie and Nima; Nigeria: Makoko, Ilaje, Ajegunle and Shomolu). Moreover, in the most populous cities of the region, the number of impoverished households with few realistic schooling options is an increasing concern (e.g. Lagos, Kano, Ibadan, Abidjan, Accra and the twin cities of Dakar/Thies).

The education challenges of vulnerable urban children are gendered, especially by labour market opportunities (alternative costs) and security concerns. The street-child populations in West Africa are predominantly male, with a few exceptions, notably in Accra (Hatløy and Huser 2005). There are two reasons for this: first, the early evolutionary “stages” of streetism globally tend to be male-dominated, and second, the all-male *talibé* phenomenon in Muslim West African cities crowds out the more typical street child phenomenon seen elsewhere by taking up markets for begging and petty services. However, there are smaller populations of girl street children, especially around markets, in many West African cities. Street girls are less visible in the street picture and can more often seek refuge at night in compounds or homes, sometimes in exchange for labour or sex.

Another reason why boys dominate the street child population is the relative attractiveness of unrelated poor girls in more regularized households (Thorsen 2012). Girls are perceived as less threatening, more obedient and easier to control by urban families in need of a helping hand in the household or household business (*ibid.*). Girls are also at a somewhat higher risk on the street, and have more of an incentive to accept exploitation in a household offering shelter. With the expansion of the definition of out-of-school children to also cover children of secondary school age, the urgency of learning more about girls in situations of domestic service is gaining new relevance in this region.

Children, with or without relatives, may come to urban areas instead of going to school or in order to go to school. Some stay temporarily to make money to continue education back home, others aim to stay and work with another family to finance their own education in the city. Many child migrants prefer vocational training rather than formal education. Girls will typically do domestic work and street vending, while older girls often also work in smaller bars and restaurants.

There are few good assessments of the educational attainments of children living on the streets and in public places in West Africa. Among the few street child censuses that exist are Fafo/Unicef's survey in Dakar and a later partner survey in Thies (UCW 2007). These children are rarely included in regular household surveys, upon which urban statistics are also based. While boys are more visible in the street picture and easier to approach for researchers, street girls are less visible. Children living in workplaces, like at construction sites, or in workshops where some labour and other are apprentices, can be equally hard to identify.

Child domestics or children in some hybrid situation of foster care and servitude are not systematically registered as household members in their employer's household in regular household surveys. Moreover, the markets and living conditions for child domestics are organized differently across West Africa: while child domestics in Porto Novo mostly live in the employer's household, those in Dakar often share a room with other child domestics outside the household in which they work, and thus do not count as household members according to statistical definitions. Child domestic servants are sometimes linked to a specific family, and they sometimes work for multiple employers (Thorsen 2012). Their likelihood for being sampled in a standard household survey is low.

Educationally deprived urban children tend to live in two types of habitats. One is structures that are part of identified city areas and thus census clusters. Such structures can be statistically identified based on universal slum criteria, such as building material, amenities and overcrowding (Kielland 2015). Yet there are other urban households that have a low probability of being sampled by regular household surveys. This can be due to the rapid growth of new urban areas and the conversion of peri-urban and previously rural areas into urban ones. As most national censuses in the countries in West Africa are old, sampling inclusion likelihood falls. If a slum area is sampled for a survey, and habitats re-enumerated, there are still challenges related to rapidly changing and typically non-conventional compositions of household members that make it hard for interviewers to identify clear household boundaries. Slums also come with a high level of transition, since the fear of eviction is ever present for slum dwellers without tenure.

Household data have been underexploited when it comes to studying urban variation and inequalities in schooling and gaining knowledge on how urban poverty is gendered. An education analysis typically distinguishes between urban and rural households but does not segregate within the urban sample. DHS data sets for urban areas can be segregated according the statistical slum criteria defined by UN Habitat, and provide a basis for studying the effects of urban poverty on education, at least for dwellings in older and more established parts of the city. However, slum areas are of particular interest for studying urban child poverty and schooling, and not easily nor sufficiently covered by regular household surveys. Specific,

dynamic slum surveys should be developed to assess the urban education planning needs in the region's fastest growing cities.

Household surveys also insufficiently cover the situation of children in domestic service. Moreover, survey-based analytical work tends to assume that if an out-of-school girl in an urban household is not the daughter of the household head, domestic work prevents her from going to school. This definitional tautology makes it impossible to actually study the school participation of child domestic workers. Simply studying children who live with others than their biological parents would lump together the good students who have been relocated to live closer to a good school, domestic servants, and everything in between. Qualitative work would reveal whether or not these girls typically dropped out of school before coming to the city to look for work, or indeed were hoping to continue school in their new households. The concrete obstacles to her further education would be quite different in the two cases.

If education services are to be provided to children living in the streets and in public places, the numbers and characteristics of the latter need to be mapped. The Unicef census of child beggars in Dakar and Thies in Senegal provides a methodology that can be replicated. Nevertheless, street child surveys systematically miss out on girls, and future approaches need to be adapted to ensure better coverage of girls alternating between living in households and street life.

## Labour, mobility and international migration

- † The SDGs target older children than the MDGs, making work and mobility options more pertinent issues.
- † Most rural, and many urban children combine work and school.
- † Work does not equal exploitation, and some work teaches marketable skills in largely informal economies.
- † Some children work because costs and alternative costs to schooling make it unaffordable.
- † Labour markets are gendered, and so are alternative costs.
- † Many children work or leave because the local schooling quality is so poor.
- † Many, especially rural children, relocate to get closer to a (good) school.
- † Others, some of them kids who already dropped out, leave to find other options.
- † There is often a weak link between school curriculum and labour market opportunities.
- † The choice of labour over schooling may therefore be rational.
- † Children move to work, learn, go to school, seek adventure or some combination of these factors.
- † Some children move specifically to earn money for education or apprenticeship.

As the age group targeted by the SDGs covers many older children, children's work and mobility practices become more important focuses for the study of barriers to education. Older children generally work more, they are more autonomous and independent, and their schooling is more expensive, including in terms of foregone income of labour. Older children and their families have to take the realities of employability more seriously than younger children do. They have to plan for the future and define their role in society and social networks. Some children must stay in school, while others may leave. Some may go to school, while others learn a trade. In societies without institutions of welfare or social security, families build informal social safety nets based on internal diversification of both skills and geographical locations (Kielland 2009, Thorsen and Hashim 2011). Children's own aspirations must therefore constantly be negotiated against the needs of their social networks in this dynamic process.

Education decisions are not made in isolation from these processes. Is a rural child more likely to stay in his or her local community to work in the primary sector? Will he or she need to go to more urban areas to find work, or start to plan and strategize at an early age with the goal of international migration? Or does he or she have good enough intellectual skills to stay in school for many more years, as an investment in a possible future formal sector carrier? The schooling choices of secondary-school aged children are more strongly affected by such future aspirations and prospects. Moreover, the work/continued schooling choice is strongly affected by how well the child has done in school, and if a formal sector career seems unlikely, then the child may as well aim to obtain some more practical skills from work or apprenticeship.

West Africa has some of the world's highest levels of child relocation, leading to a high number of children living with others than their biological parents or in fosterage or workplace arrangements (Hashim and Thorsen 2011:13, Whitehead and Hashim 2005). West Africa also has a high share of children under 18 among international migrants. Children move in search of work opportunities and life experience, as well as formal education. The focus of studies of child movements has often been directed towards the most vulnerable children, such as child soldiers, AIDS orphans, street children, child refugees and children working under exploitative conditions, hence rendering "child mobility" a purely negative phenomenon (cf. discussion in Hashim and Thorsen 2011:13; Whitehead and Hashim 2005). However, mobility is an integral part of many West African livelihood strategies, where cyclical migration in connection with seasonal variation (agricultural activities in the rainy season and commercial activities in the dry season) has made up part of African "cultures of migration" (Hahn and Klute 2007).

The movement of a child can be a family arrangement but also a relatively individual endeavour of the child. When a child relocates to a household within the family's social network, the child's new family is expected to help in educating the child in one way or another and in return gains affection and strengthened social ties and commitments from the child's biological family (Kielland and Gaye 2010, Iuigo-Abanige 1985, Goody 1982). A host family will also count on contributions from the child in terms of help in and around the household. Thus, work and education become intertwined when a child relocates. Children who do well in primary school may move to live with relatives predominantly to have the possibility of attending a secondary school or to move away from a school of very low quality towards a better one. These children work less than children who relocate for other reasons, but they are generally still expected to take part in daily chores, just like other household children.

Labour market demand in West Africa is structured by traditional gender norms. While the youngest children tend to work under the control of women and perform tasks within the female sphere, the older the children get, the more gendered their labour market becomes. Even within agriculture and fishery, where both genders participate, specific tasks are clearly gendered. A set of tasks in and around a labour-demanding African household are, for example, socially assigned to adolescent girls. The number of girls in the appropriate age range determines how much each will have to work. Having many boys in the same age range will not necessarily help, since tasks are not easily fungible between genders. The circulation of boys and girls between households has traditionally served to even out imbalances in the age and gender composition of the household. Put in economic terms, the objective of this kind of movement is to maximize the marginal return of the work performed by each child.

Education has interfered in this traditional scheme, and increasingly, as urban girls have started to go to school, poorer rural girls have moved in to fill their space in the household labour scheme. Mechanization levels are still low in many West African households, and the growing share of the child population going to school has in many cases also led to an increase in the labour demand on the shrinking group of out-of-school children, especially girls, who are generally entrusted with the many typically female tasks of keeping a household running.

With an increase in international migration (trans-Atlantic and European) since the 1980s, many boys engage in both domestic and regional migration to build enough capital to realize their ambitions of international travel. International emigration from West Africa has, to a large extent, been a male phenomenon, whereas young girls and women mainly have migrated within the region. The exception is the mobility of women, mainly from Edu State in Nigeria, who have travelled mainly to be sex workers in the region and later in Europe. Evidence suggests, however, that there are few children in this latter group. With the recent restriction on international migration, especially since 2010, however, we do not have much evidence on changing migration flows among children and youth, on the routes that children follow, or on how migration aspiration may affect the schooling choices of even younger children.

While out-of-school children of primary-school age are increasingly children with special vulnerabilities, the out-of-school children of secondary-school age are more often children who have performed poorly in low-quality schools, repeatedly failed graduation exams, and repeated grades and those who see more potential in investing in the type of practical skills that can be learned through labour. We know little about the factors and social situations that together lead to the decision to leave school and instead focus on learning skills from working. And we know little about how accommodations in school could help these children succeed and progress through secondary school.

A high number of children are constantly on the move throughout the region, and if education is to be provided to these children, their state of frequent mobility must be taken into account. For more than a decade, West African countries have tried to curb the extensive child mobility in the region through law, but with little success. Accepting the persistence and the rationality of the phenomenon, schools now need to make school attendance easier, not more difficult, for children on the move. To do this well, more documentation will be needed. For children moving across borders, one of the barriers to education is identity papers, as the formal requirement for most government schools is birth registration papers. A non-citizen will not automatically have a right to attend school in the country where he or she lives. There have been attempts to give temporary ID cards to children in some regions. How birth registration and national ID papers, or lack thereof, present a hindrance to education in West Africa is an area for further investigation. Will granting temporary ID cards to migrating children increase their access to schools?

Research and documentation is scattered and often follows policy agendas rather than local priorities and needs. From research in Côte d'Ivoire, we know that that an increased focus on education in cocoa-growing areas has led to very high school attendance rates in some places. We know less about how schooling has been influenced in other adjacent areas in the country, where children work in subsistence agriculture or other cash crop production. Has the crop-based prioritization of one area happened at the expense of the cost of other areas?

Mobility, work and education coexist. The discourse around child migration is often linked to the notion of the exploited child. Perhaps for political and media-related purposes, the focus is mainly on those who don't succeed when they move. However, many do succeed. Many mobile children manage to make a better life for themselves, and some also manage to obtain a formal or informal education. We know little about the difference between those who succeed and those who don't, or about how success stories can inform education policy for mobile children and aspiring child migrants.

The new regional and global migration patterns impact education and life-strategy choices. With the changing levels of rainfall in large parts of West Africa since the 1980s, the agricultural season has been shortened by up to one month in many areas. This has led many farmers to switch from cash crops to subsistence crops, thus becoming increasingly dependent on supplementary income from trade; both factors are drivers of migration. Rural economic decline and new restrictions on international migration will most likely also cause changes in migration patterns among children and youth. Therefore,

investigations of the effects of movement on access to education have renewed importance. Working and moving children's access to education should also be investigated in light of access to cell phones and internet.

## Conflict and insecurity

- † While some conflicts in the West African countries have abated somewhat, others are ongoing and even developing, especially in the Sahel countries.
- † The violence in northern Nigeria is spreading into the neighbouring countries around Lake Chad.
- † Globally, refugee children and adolescents are five times more likely to be out of school.
- † Children's schooling is affected by conflict exposure through various mechanisms:
  - Political attention is drawn from human capital investments to security and violence prevention.
  - Public resources are increasingly allocated to security, reducing available funding for human capital investments.
  - While foreign aid may be earmarked for education in conflict-affected areas, public strategies for education in such areas are often missing, leading to low disbursement rates.
  - Conflict and violence leads to household-level trade-offs, often making education less of a priority.
  - Expected returns to education decline during conflict periods.
  - The scheme of opportunity costs of schooling in wartime is different from in peacetime, and vulnerable to the shifting conflict environment.
  - Destruction of school infrastructure as a result of conflict leads to reduced access and a lower level of quality education.
  - Security concerns such as attacks and abduction of children impedes children's school attendance.
  - Teachers are sometimes targeted by attackers.

Children's schooling can be affected by conflict exposure through at least four channels (Shemyakina 2006, Rodriguez and Sánchez Torres 2009). First, when conflict leads to reductions in household resources, tough choices have to be made. Education might become secondary as more immediate needs and trade-offs are made between schooling and child labour or schooling and other household expenditures.

Second, the expected economic return from schooling is likely to decline during conflict. The local economy is damaged, which reduces employment opportunities. In addition, reduced life expectancy makes investing in the education of a child riskier because the probability that the child will die young increases. This further skews the schooling versus child labour trade-off towards the more immediate gains from labour.

Third, the destruction of school infrastructure might result in reduced access to or lower quality of schooling. Deliberate targeting of school facilities is a longstanding practice in conflict (UNESCO 2011:143), and several studies have shown that the quality and availability of school facilities and schooling material, such as textbooks, can affect student attendance and learning outcomes (Glewwe 2002, Glewwe 2011).

Fourth, security concerns, resulting from the danger of harassment, attacks or abduction in or on the way to school, might lead parents to keep their children at home (Shemyakina, 2006:12-13, UNESCO 2011:142-146). In addition to the general dangers associated with traveling through conflict areas, attacks targeting schoolchildren and teachers specifically occur in many conflicts (UNESCO, 2011:143). The kidnapping of 276 female students by Boko Haram during the night of 14/15 April 2014 from the government secondary

school in the town of Chikbok in Borno state in Nigeria was far from a unique incident, but it has become the symbol of such challenges in West Africa.

Some micro-level studies have examined gender-differentiated effects of conflict on schooling. But whether traditional gender roles primarily work against boys or girls appears to be highly context-specific (Buvinic et al 2012). In Colombia and Rwanda, negative effects were found to be most severe for boys (Rodriguez and Sánchez 2009, Akresh and de Walque 2008). Boys may experience a higher labour demand. But an expected higher return to schooling among boys could also tilt resource allocation towards boys' education in situations of economic stress (Buvinic et al 2012). This mirrors findings in studies of the trade-offs families make when under economic shock, which show an adverse impact on schooling for teenage girls in particular (Skoufias and Parker, 2006, Duryea et al 2007). Several of the studies also found the effect to be stronger among youth than younger children (Rodriguez and Sánchez Torres 2009, Shemyakina 2006, Blattman and Annan 2010). This is consistent with the idea of a trade-off between labour and education, which should be particularly pronounced for youth.

Little of the regional research has focused on the fact that many men and adolescent boys leave the family household during times of conflict. In West Africa, fighters are predominantly male, leading to a shift in the roles of other household members. This could increase the labour demand on women and girls, and make schooling more difficult. On the other hand, the opportunity costs of schooling may actually drop in areas where farming and other business requiring relocation become more dangerous. To the extent that more girls stay home, this may again influence their schooling outcomes.

Studies from other areas of Africa confirm that the effects on enrolment and educational attainment are worst for children *directly* affected by conflict, such as children of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and child soldiers. A study comparing the educational, labour-related and psychosocial outcomes of abducted male child and youth soldiers to non-abducted children and youth in conflict zones in Northern Uganda found widespread and persistent economic and educational impacts. Schooling fell by nearly a year, contingent on the length of abduction, skilled employment was halved, and earnings dropped by a third (Blattman and Annan 2010). Given the disparity in effects when looking at direct exposure to conflict versus living in a municipality with conflict, studies using the latter to estimate the impact of conflict should be carefully interpreted (Oyelere and Wharton 2013).

While macro-level indicators such as enrolment levels may be back to normal in few years, the boys and girls that lost out on education during a period of war often do not regain the education they have lost. The longer the war lasts, the larger the cohort of children that grow up with a lower level of education than in previous and subsequent generations. It follows that having entire generations lose out on education represents wasted opportunities, both for the individuals and the country as a whole.

The evidence on the effect of conflict on longer-term educational outcomes after conflict is sparse. Existing literature is primarily focused on the costs during conflict, while few look at the long-term consequences of conflict for education after peace agreements have been signed (Chen et al 2008). One of the few cross-country studies to do so found that primary education enrolment rates in post-conflict countries returned to pre-conflict levels within a few years of the signing of peace agreements (*ibid*).

One of the challenges when examining the relationship between conflict and education has been the lack of reliable and complete education data. Some initiatives attempted to address this by gathering comparative data across countries (Lutz et al 2007; Hegre et al 2009). Generally, education data on the sub-national level are scarce for many conflict countries, and they also do not always allow for comparison across countries. Recent approaches using individual-level survey data to construct regional education data are promising, but limited by the lack of survey data for certain countries and periods (e.g. Østby et al.

2009). This is particularly important in the context of West Africa, where internal displacement due to conflict and other disasters has affected countries such as Mali, Niger and Nigeria.

The effect of conflict is best understood if investigated at the level of the household and individual, rather than aggregated to the district or country level. Recent contributions to a growing micro-level literature find more persistent negative impacts of conflict on individual human capital. The analysis of education and conflict is necessary to appropriately address some of the most central assumptions of the relationship. In particular, the theoretical frameworks of many macro-level cross-national studies build on assumptions of rebel recruitment that cannot be tested in the absence of appropriate micro-level data that can provide information about the actual motivations of conflict actors. While there is a recent and very promising move towards the disaggregation of education and conflict studies, data on individual motivations are difficult and expensive to collect. An additional challenge pertains to drawing conclusions beyond the sample, which is typically restricted to one country. Additional micro-level analyses of more conflict contexts are necessary in order to validate some of the early studies of single countries (Østby and Urdal 2010).

Other areas for future research on education and conflict include assessing the importance of education or a variety of violence and conflict dynamics; collecting data to study how conflict risk is affected by educational content and quality; and emphasizing context-specific and interaction effects such as the role of education in rural and urban settings separately, the interaction of education and labour market, and the role of migration and of the systematic exclusion of groups.

## Religion

- † Islam occupies an increasing part in public space and debate in countries across West Africa.
- † This accentuates debates about the role of religious schools, and the role of religion in public schooling, and raises the issue of religion as a potential entry point for the recruitment of unschooled children and youth.
- † The number of different types of religious schools has multiplied.
- † Some religious schools serve as a supplement to traditional formal schools by combining a religious and a lay curriculum. Others function as an alternative to other schooling and focus narrowly on Arabic and Muslim cultural studies.
- † Religious schools are part of the public school system in some countries, while in others they are in the private sphere and less regulated or fully unregulated.
- † Both boys and girls in West Africa attend religious schools in high numbers, either in addition to non-religious schooling or as an alternative to secular education.
- † Boys are overrepresented in schools that teach only religious subjects and Arabic.
- † Girls may be overrepresented in schools combining formal and religious curricula, but data are not conclusive.
- † Muslim revival encourages women's religious learning, and many more women than before embark on Quranic studies.
- † Religious restrictions on some women's public roles and appearance have relocated women in some areas away from typically female workplaces, including street vending and markets. This move may reduce the opportunity costs of schooling for girls, as the demand on women's cash labour is reduced, but also simultaneously reduce the perceived return to formal education for girls.
- † *Boko Haram* represents an extreme alternative position and is not representative of the wave of religious revival in West Africa.

In parallel to the growth in charismatic milieus in predominantly Christian areas of Africa (including southern Nigeria), religious change in West Africa is often referred to as religious “renewal” or “revival” (Schulz 2003, 2011, 2012 Soares 2005a, 2005b on Mali; Masquelier 2009 on Niger; Janson 2014 on The Gambia). In the case of Muslim West Africa, the increasing presence of religious issues in politics and public debate is also characterized by active engagement against the spread of religious extremism. Many children, both boys and girls, take part in various types of religious education outside the public school system. Young children are expected to learn the Quran, taught mainly in informal settings by local Quranic tutors. While most children in the region proceed to public formal schools, many attend religious schools instead. Religious schools can operate both within the public school system (like in Niger), or fully in the private sphere (like in Senegal and Mali). In the latter case, they may combine some version of the formal curriculum and traditional religious subjects like Arabic and Islamic cultural studies, or they may focus on religious disciplines alone. Many high quality schools that have a religious element (Catholic high schools, Muslim high schools) have curricula on a par with public schools, qualify students for university studies and are often considered the best quality schooling in their countries. The way that the principle of state secularism has been practised since the colonial period prevents these or similar schools from with becoming integrated in the public school system.

Muslim schooling has undergone fundamental changes throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Brenner 2001). Religious education systems will most likely also become a point of contention across Muslim West Africa, as many governments call for i) improvement of quality in all educational facilities, for instance by incorporating (some) religious schools in the formal educational sector (Sommerfelt et al 2012), and ii) an increase in control of religious education in an effort to prevent radicalization and recruitment to extremist groups.

However, there appears to be a mismatch between parental demand and public education service delivery. With regard to both access and content, a market seems to be open for alternative religious schools in a situation with high unemployment among religious teachers educated in Arabic countries. These teachers have not been absorbed into the public school system, partly because the principle of state secularism prohibits religious education in the public school system in many West African countries.

In development discourses on barriers to education, religion has come to complement cultural and traditional gender norms, leaving an impression that Islam encourages patriarchal norms and hence hinders girls’ education. Much in the same way, a traditional anti-colonial scepticism towards the values promoted through the French schooling system were previously seen as anti-establishment positions but are now increasingly interpreted as rooted in religion. The evidence base for this shift is poor. The claimed effects of religious revival on the education sector remain largely undocumented.

The impact of religious revival alone on girls schooling is also unclear. While girls appear to be underrepresented in schools with a strict religious curriculum, it is simultaneously claimed that more girls than boys attend schools that combine formal and religious subjects. If this is indeed the case, the explanation may be that families find this approach to education more attractive or acceptable for girls than the colonial formal schooling model. Mature girls and young women’s participation in more systematic religious education has increased during the past two decades, reflecting that until the 1980s, women were largely excluded from participating in the more scholarly religious domain (cf Schultz 2011:98 on Mali).

Boys are overrepresented among children who attend the Quranic schools that are alternative to (not an addition to) formal schooling. In many West African countries, younger male religious pupils (often referred to as *talibé* from the Arabic *talib* or student) are sometimes accommodated by their teachers and

engage in begging as part of their daily activities. With regard to access to formal schooling, this practice represents a disadvantage for boys, who, due to this, may end up entering school late, or not at all.

It seems to be a generally held assumption in development policy and research that religious revival in West Africa, especially in Muslim contexts, works alongside traditional cultural norms to further enforce patriarchal norms and exacerbate the challenges associated with girls' schooling. This assumption does not build on evidence; to the contrary – as far as we know, boys are overrepresented in the types of schools that do not cover a formal curriculum. Potential links between religious revival and trends in marriage age (early marriage) similarly remain unexplored. In most countries, traditional norms (e.g. regarding marriage) are said to contradict new Muslim influences from Arabic countries, a distinction that hence repeats colonial distinctions (see Soares 2012). We do not know the gender distribution of children that attend schools with non-religious curricula, religious schools in addition to non-religious schooling, and exclusively religious schools – neither at country levels nor regional levels. And the various hypotheses of a gendered distribution between them remain undocumented.

The content of the current curricula in different types of religious schools remain a huge blank spot in research. This applies to the curricula of professional schools that combine religious, Arabic and non-religious education (like the Franco-Arabic schools in former French colonies, Muslim “high schools” in former English colonies, all of which qualify students to higher education) to *madrasas* (that teach Arabic, religious studies and to some extent arithmetic), and purely Quranic schools. Data on informal religious schooling is difficult to access.

More research is needed to distinguish the consequences of traditional practices from the claimed effects of religious revival. This goes for schooling, but also for a range of other gender-related issues of relevance to girls' education, like ideals of virtue, dress code, separation of the genders, marriage age, and expectations of fertility.

There are some data available that can be analysed to document whether participation in religious schooling full time divides families into categorically different types according to attitudes, geographical areas and so forth. These data can be better explored. However, the results of such quantitative data explorations must be modified by the realization that sibling groups are often distributed across different types of schools (religious, non-religious, exclusively religious etc.) according to individual characteristics and potentials. Moreover, in quantitative analysis of household data, the impact of ethnicity or religious affiliation may easily be confounded with access and school related costs, especially when other suitable indicators on the latter is missing.

It has been indicated to us in both Mali and Niger that families find a curriculum that includes religious subjects more appropriate for girls. If this can be documented to be the case, then an important barrier to girls' education may have been revealed. Qualitative studies are needed in order to document this claim, and also to understand how families would like to see schools adapt in this area in order to find them attractive for their daughters.

Finally, children's own agency is increasingly understood and brought in to the research discourse. While families, especially fathers, are traditionally assumed to make schooling decisions on behalf of their children, new research documents how children strategize to influence decisions that concern them (Hashim & Thorsen 2011). One research hypothesis would be that girls may be able to argue their way into school for the purpose of learning more about Islam or Christianity. This argument may be difficult to counter for parents, and can thus be actively applied by girls who would like to attend school and prevent dropout, labour or early marriage. A qualitative research study into the role of religion in girls' schooling should explore how schooling design and curriculum can help build their argument in the household bargaining processes related to girls' outcomes overall.

# Conclusions and identification of knowledge gaps

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- † The main barriers to girls' education are also barriers to many boys' education.
- † Barriers to the remaining group of out-of-school girls of primary-school age are increasingly related to additional vulnerabilities, like disabilities, unstable or poor urban living conditions, including homelessness, being on the move and being affected by conflict or violence.
- † New global targets including out-of-school secondary-school-aged girls make it more important to understand the local alternative costs of schooling, notably linked to a gendered labour market, early marriage and assumed claims on girls related to religious revival in the area.
  
- † Some of the main barriers identified in this scoping study affect boys and girls differently. Gendered data is largely missing on some key groups of vulnerable children in West Africa:
  - education data on child disabilities segregated on functional domains,
  - education data from vast new slum areas surrounding the bigger cities in the region,
  - education data for street child populations in the region,
  - education data for domestic servants in major cities, and
  - education data for conflict-affected families and children, especially people on the move and not registered in camps.
  
- † More thorough analysis of existing statistical data:
  - Many of the statistical associations between background factors and schooling status presented in quantitative research do not prove causality.
  - Sometimes causal directions are the opposite of what is presented: For example, household poverty may induce girls to drop out, although it may also do the opposite by lowering the opportunity costs of schooling (assets like land and livestock increase marginal return to labour).
  - Sometimes household features and schooling outcomes are jointly determined by factors that are not included in statistical models. For example, the statistical association between poor schooling outcomes and girls living in with others than their parents in urban areas may not always be due to lowered household head altruism but to the fact that relocation to an urban household followed and was perhaps produced by the decision to abandon school.
  - Collective categories like "urban" conceal important sub-group variations. For example, when education outcomes seem better in urban than in rural areas, this likely conceals the fact that both the best and the worst education outcomes are found in and around big cities.
  
- † Qualitative research is urgently needed:
  - in its own right to improve understanding of local and sub-group variations, and to
  - inform better interpretations of statistical results, that is to better understand if detected statistical association or correlation is spurious or not, if there are joint determinants, likely sub-group variations affecting causal direction and strength, and if there may be more than one direction of causality.

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# Hidden in the numbers: Barriers to girls' education in West Africa

In this report we take stock of the state of knowledge on gender and education in West Africa. Girls still face many challenges, but their situation is also rapidly changing. We find that the main barriers to girls' education are also barriers to many boys' education. Some of the barriers affect boys and girls differently, but an obstacle unique to girls is the notion that girls should do other things rather than go to school. Barriers are also related to vulnerabilities, like disabilities; unstable or poor urban living conditions, including homelessness; being on the move; and being affected by conflict or violence.

New global targets including out-of-school secondary school-aged girls make it more important to understand the local alternative costs of schooling. These are linked to a gendered labour market, marriage practices and changing claims on girls related to the religious revival in the area.



P.O.Box 2947 Tøyen  
N-0608 Oslo  
[www.fafo.no](http://www.fafo.no)

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