



Position Paper: Accelerated Education Programmes (AEPs) in Addressing the out-of-school challenge in West Africa: towards achieving Basic Learning, and Skills for Life

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Summary of Key points

This position paper is developed for the Governments and UN delegations from Ghana, Sierra Leone and Nigeria. It focusses on the out of school challenge in West Africa and the growing learning gap among the rural and urban poor and between low- and high-income earners. It reviews the Out of School challenge in relation to the social and economic impacts for governments and society at large; and reviews the evidence of Accelerated learning programmes to address this challenge given the persistent supply and demand drivers. These include weak and under resourced formal school systems in the zones of deprivation and the persistent negative practices against particularly girls in these areas. It calls on policy makers to scale up Accelerated Education Programmes (AEPs) and mainstream funding into government budgets in order to meet the basic needs of the poor and marginalized across these countries. It also provides the evidence on the impact, effectiveness and efficiency of these complementary /accelerated education systems by ensuring that adequate funding is available.

Prevalence of out of school children:

- There is high prevalence of out of school children and youth in Ghana (1 million), Nigeria (10.5 million) and Sierra Leone (719,750) (UIS, 2018, 2019).
- Factors that prevent enrolment and completion in formal schools, particularly for girls, include: conflict, socio-cultural norms and economic barriers.

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Accelerated education programmes:

- Accelerated education programmes (AEPs) provide essential complementary and alternative pathways in rural deprived and extreme poverty zones where teachers are unable to accept postings and schools are not fully functioning.
- AEPs have shown better results in relation to learning outcomes, learning efficiency for the poor, helping close gender gaps and empower girls to transition to school in areas where traditional socio cultural norms restrict their school attendance.
- Growing numbers of education innovators including civil society organisations are using AEPs to reach the most marginalized children and families to ensure basic education attainment, livelihood empowerment and reintegration into the formal school system. For example, three education innovators in Ghana (*Afrikids, GILLBT, and School for Life Complementary Basic Education-CBE- programmes*), enrolled over 100,000 out of school children and youth in the Northern, Upper East, Upper West, Savanna and the Northeast regions. Horn of Hope and Korno Borno enrolled over 250,000 children in similar programmes in Northern Nigeria.

Learning outcomes:

- Learning outcomes for AEP learners result in equivalent or better learning outcomes in randomized Early Grade Reading Assessments and Early Grade Math Assessments (EGRA and EGMA) assessments of learners who are integrated into formal systems after completing AEPs.
- The evidence shows that despite having skipped 4-5 years for formal education, one year of AEP is equivalent to 3 years of formal education training at lower primary. AEP learners often out perform their non-AEP counterparts in Math and English.

Cost efficiency:

- **The available evidence suggests that the unit costs of AEP are five times lower than those of formal schooling:** The unit cost of the CBE programme in Ghana is estimated at GHS 598 (US\$ 105.28) for 2019/2020, which is 21.4 per cent lower than projected unit cost of 760.8 (US\$ 133.94) for the regular system. These figures exclude the cost of teacher training in formal education.
- One year of CBE and AEP is equivalent to approximately 3 years or more of primary school which provides a cost saving to government of one third of the cost.
- The real cost saving potential is in scaling up CBE in areas where trained teacher deployment is proving challenging, and a significant cost saving could be made in relation to the government of Ghana (GoG) budget—for instance engaging CBE facilitators is 7% of total CBE costs and is far lower than the cost of trained teacher deployment in the regular sector about 91% of total education expenditure.

Recommendations:

- Expand AEP programmes in areas where trained teachers are unable and unwilling to serve particularly in rural deprived and extreme poverty zones and in conflict areas where schools have closed.
- Sustained funding sources are needed for AEPs to operate effectively ensuring that several cycles of programming are available to address the OOSC challenge in these contexts.
 - Government direct investment to implement and support other non-state actors implement these programmes is necessary.
- Community based teachers hired from localities in deprived rural, extreme poverty and conflict zones are needed to ensure quality education at primary level in West Africa and to



prepare schools for integrating AEP learners into the formal system on completion of the AEP.

- A targeted approach to addressing the OOSC phenomenon in communities and local government/districts is needed. This should prioritize girls and boys living under the poverty line and communities where schools have closed or cannot function due to conflict and the absence of trained teachers.
- Initiate partnerships between Accelerated Education Innovators (AEI), government and the universities and teacher-training institutions to share AEP curriculum, methods, and social interventions. Also, strengthen partnerships to collaborate on implementation strategies, research, teacher-trainee practicums in order to move to scale in areas of most need.

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List of Abbreviations

ABEP	Accelerated Basic Education Programme
AENN	Addressing Education in the Northeast Nigeria (AENN)
AE	Accelerated Education
AEI	Accelerated Education Innovations
AEP	Accelerated Education Programme
AfC	Associates for Change
ALP	Accelerated Learning Programme
CBE	Complementary Basic Education
CGD	Centre for Global Development
DEO	District Education Office
DFID	Department for International Development
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
EAC	Educate A Child
ECR	Education Crisis Response
EFA	Education for All
EGMA	Early Grade Math Assessments
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessments and
ELA	Empowerment and Livelihood of Adolescents
EVD	Ebola Virus Disease
FQSE	Free Quality School Education
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GFP	Girls' Focused Programmes
GILLBT	Ghana Institute of Linguistic, Literacy and Bible Translation
GoG	Government of Ghana
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
IGA	Income-generating activities
IRC	International Rescue Committee
JHS	Junior High School
JSS	Junior Secondary School
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey

MBSSE	Ministry of Basic and Secondary School Education
MoE	Ministry of Education
NPSE	National Primary School Examination
NFLCs	Non-Formal Learning Centres
NGOs	Non-Governmental Association
OOSC	Out of School Children
OOSCY	Out of School Children and Youth
OTL	Opportunity to Learn
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
PWDs	Persons Living with Disabilities
R4D	Research for Development
RISE	Research on Improving Systems of Education
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
SfL	School for Life
SHS	Senior High School
SL	Sierra Leone
SMC	School Management Committee
SEL	Social Emotional Learning
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
SSS	Senior Secondary School
STAGE	Strategic Approaches to Girls Education
TES	Transforming Education Summit
UIS	UNESCO Institute of Statistics
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
USA	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States Dollars



Introduction

This position paper provides evidence of the effectiveness of AEPs over the last decade in addressing the challenges of out-of-school children (OOSC) and youth across West Africa. It explores their pathways to reintegration into the formal system, retention and completion rates along with their future potential.

Section 1 summarises the background and context. Section 2 highlights the evidence on the prevalence of the out-of-school phenomenon across three West African countries – *Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone* – which are focus countries for an on-going IDRC/KIX supported study on *‘improving access to quality education for marginalised children and youth in West Africa’*. *Section 3 highlights the economic and social repercussions of not addressing the challenge of out-of-school children across three countries of focus – Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. Section 4 presents the evidence on the effectiveness and impact of selected AEPs across Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. Section 5 highlights the cost-efficiency of the AE initiatives over the period across Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. Section 6 makes concluding observations about the effectiveness of the AE innovations in providing scalable solutions to improving access to education. The final Section 7 makes some key recommendations for policy and programming.*

Section 1: Background and Context

Little progress has been made towards reducing the global number of out-of-school children, adolescents and youth seven-years into the implementation of the SDGs and the promise to provide universal quality primary and secondary education (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020). Governments across West Africa have over the years committed to key international protocols that re-emphasize access to quality education as a fundamental human right, including goal 4 of the sustainable development goals (SDGs). In addition to these global commitments, several programmes and initiatives have been and continue to be implemented to expand access to education, especially at the basic level, and improve supply and demand factors which restrict entry into formal basic education systems (UNESCO 2010-2018 Global EFA Monitoring reports; Bashir et al., 2018; AfC, 2021).

The scale of the out-of-school population suggests that sub-Sahara African (SSA) countries are far from reaching the SDG 4 Education Targets under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Globally, an estimated 258.4 million of people - children, adolescents and youth are out-of-school (UIS, 2019; Akyeampong et al., 2018). This figure represents one-sixth of the global population. More than one-third (ninety-eight million) out-of-school children live in sub-Saharan Africa with girls as the majority (53%). One out of five children aged 6-11 years, one out of three children aged 12–14 years and three out of five youth aged 15-17 years respectively are out-of-school in Sub-Sahara Africa (UIS, 2020).

Accelerated Education (AE) innovations/ programmes have shown impressive results in relation to completion; transition into formal schools; as well as ensuring foundational learning outcomes; learning efficiency for the poor; school readiness; and gender equity. They provide contextually relevant educational solutions to children who remain out of school and or drop out. Across the West African sub-region, AEPs have been found to be particularly relevant to areas of fragility, rural deprivation, extreme poverty and where teachers are unwilling to serve (Casely-Hayford, 2018). The AE innovations are beginning to provide evidence to governments across Africa that they are cost effective and scalable models to improve access to education for all and ensure equity in quality education for marginalized and hard to reach areas.

This position paper provides evidence of the successes AEPs have had over the last decade in addressing the challenges of out-of-school children (OOSC) and youth across West Africa and their future potential. The evidence here is derived from a comparative study of accelerated education and girls focused programmes in Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, including an extensive mapping study which covered over 150 communities characterized by extreme poverty and rural deprivation in the three countries; a meta-analysis which reviewed most literature available on the scale of the OOSC challenge in West Africa; and an extensive literature review in each country on the effectiveness and efficiency of solutions being proposed to address the challenge. Using quantitative and qualitative research methods, data gathering centered on exploring the 5 dimensions² of out of school children by gender, age and location. Data were collected on barriers to education; effectiveness and impact of AEPs in relation to completion; integration or transitioning of graduates into the formal education system; and learning outcomes.

Section 2: Numbers of Out of School Children & Youth across West Africa

The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS, 2019) estimates that one out of five children between the ages of about six and 11 in sub-Saharan African are out of school. One out of three youth aged about 12 to 14 are out of school. Alarming is the fact that about 60% of youth aged about 15 to 17 are not in school. The most marginalized, particularly girls, are most at risk, including forcibly displaced children and young people, orphans and children with disabilities. With each missed school year, there is greater likelihood that these children will be unable to return to formal education, resulting in heightened risks to their protection and future prospects (Ananga E., 2011; Casely-Hayford et al., 2017).

This section of the paper highlights the evidence on the prevalence of the out-of-school phenomenon across three West African countries – *Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone* – which are focus countries for an on-going study on *‘improving access to quality education for marginalised children and youth in West Africa’*.

Ghana:

MICS data estimates that over 7-10% of primary aged children in Ghana are out of school based (UNICEF 2017/18) but the recent Ghana census data from the Ghana Statistics Service suggests that this number is much higher. According to 2019 statistics from UIS, about one million Ghanaian children aged 5-16 years are out of school. Of this number, an estimated 265,188 are of primary school going age. This is similar to the estimates provided by the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS, 2017/18). In total, the MICS estimates the primary out-of-school numbers to be 283,000 children of primary school-age (Figure 1).

² Dimension 1: Children not attending an early childhood education programme or primary education

Dimension 2: Children of primary school age who are not in primary or secondary school

Dimension 3: Children of junior secondary school age who are not in primary or secondary school

Dimension 4: Children who are in primary school but at risk of dropping out (overage by 2 or more years)

Dimension 5: Children who are in junior secondary school but at risk of dropping out (overage by 2 or more years)

A slightly higher proportion of males (7.4%) dropped out at the primary level as compared to females (6.4%), although fewer females enrolled in school to begin with. At the Senior High school level, however, it is important to note that a higher proportion of females (29%) are out of school compared to males (21.3%).

The MICS data also shows that out-of-school rates for rural children are slightly higher than the national average, while the rates for urban children are slightly lower. The 2021 census data presents a gloomier picture - indicating that about 60% of children aged 3-years and older are out of school (*attended in the past and never attended*). Females account for 62.2% of this out of school population while males account for 58.8%.

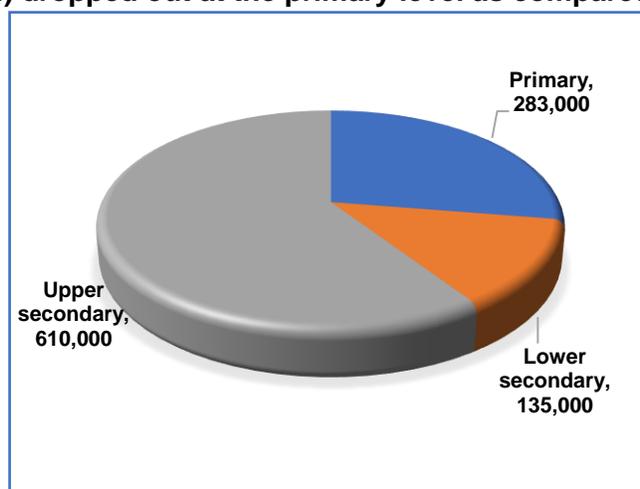


Figure 1: Out-of school children and youth
Source: Ghana Education Fact Sheets, MICS (2017/18)

A recent mapping study conducted by Associates for Change (AfC, 2022) as part of the GPE supported IDRC study on ‘improving access to quality education for marginalized children in West Africa’, found that the out of school population aged 4 to 17 (KG – SHS) stood at 33.8% (983) out of a population of 2,907 children aged 4-17. The results further show that the incidence of out of school is highest among children aged 6-11 years (primary level), implying a little over double of the out of school proportion of the figure reported by MICS. The differences suggest that the COVID pandemic, increasing levels of extreme poverty and conflict could be key drivers of this increase not to mention the supply challenges regarding the posting of trained teachers and the provision of basic school infrastructure and textbook availability.

Nigeria:

The out-of-school situation in Nigeria has been a topic of concern as the country has the highest number of out-of-school children in the world, including sub-Saharan Africa – with approximately 10.5 million, even though primary and junior secondary education is free and compulsory. According to a UNICEF study, “one in every five of the world’s out-of-school children is in Nigeria (UNICEF warns of Nigerian education crisis as world celebrates International Day of Education and Covid-19 concerns, (2022).” In the Northern part of Nigeria, there are significantly more OOSC than in other parts of the country: the net attendance rate is 53 percent, and this is attributed to various factors such as conflict, socio-cultural norms, economic barriers, etc. Some of these factors reduce the level of attendance in formal schools, especially for girls. In the North-Eastern and North-Western regions of the country, the female primary school net attendance is 47.7 percent and 47.3 percent, respectively (UNICEF, 2022). These figures are low compared to other regions of Nigeria.

Results from the out-of-school mapping study conducted in parts of Nigeria in 2022 (Figure 2) show that about 46% of children aged 4-17 years in Nigeria are out of school (*never attended and dropped out*) with a higher concentration of the OOSC numbers within ages 6-11 (primary level). Having such a high proportion of OOSC makes the call for action imperative.

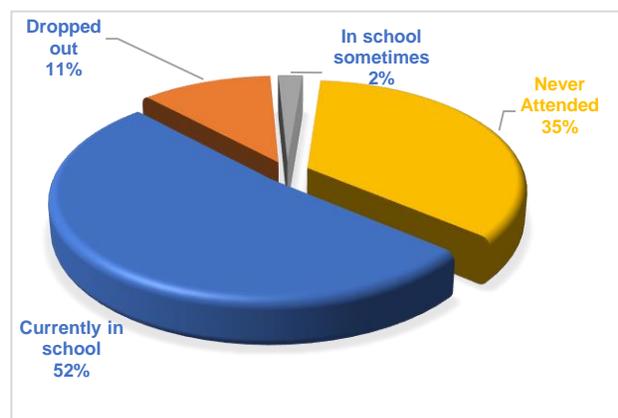


Figure 2: Education status of children in Nigeria
Source: Household Survey Data, OOSCY Mapping (CSEA, 2022)

Sierra Leone:

In Sierra Leone the evidence shows that the numbers of OOSC are growing as a result of both demand and supply barriers persisting and not being tackled over the last decade. The OOSC challenge is particularly evident in rural and extreme poverty zones of the country. At primary school level, more boys than girls are OOSC each year, while the opposite is true at the secondary school level. The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS, 2018) estimated the out-of-school numbers at 719,750 in Sierra Leone in 2018 (Figure 3). The most recent MICS data (2017) estimates the out-of-school proportion at 18% of children aged 6 to 11 (Primary level), 19% of those aged 12 to 14 (Junior Secondary level), and 36% of those aged 15 to 18 (Senior Secondary level). In the two younger age groups, more boys than girls were not in school, and there was a significant difference between urban and rural areas with rural areas facing far higher proportions of OOSC. In terms of OOSC, there is a balance between boys and girls in junior secondary school, while the IDRC supported research suggests that it somewhat favours females.

Access of adolescent girls to education:

Far fewer women than men in Sierra Leone have some secondary education. Key causes of girls dropping out of school include pregnancy and early marriage and negative socio-cultural practices and beliefs including a preference for boys' educational investment.

Just 19.2% of women (versus 32.3% of men) in Sierra Leone have some secondary education (UNDP 2019).³ According to UIS, although more than 90% of adolescent girls are enrolled in primary school, only 38% are enrolled in secondary school. The latest Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) for the country reports that 44% of girls are married before the age of 18, and 21% of girls begin childbearing by the age of 19. The average age of marriage of women is 16 while for men it is 31 (Stats SL., 2020).⁴

Lack of education is both a cause and consequence of adolescent childbearing and child marriage. It also restricts girls' employment options, often limiting them to low pay and low status occupations in agriculture or the informal sector. Financial insecurity and a lack of economic empowerment increases girls' financial dependence on men, leaving them more vulnerable to forced or transactional sex, which is yet another driver of early pregnancy and marriage. A review

³ UNDP (2019) Sierra Leone National Human Development Report 2019

⁴ Reference: (Stats SL, 2020). Full: Statistics Sierra Leone (Stats SL) and ICF. 2020. Sierra Leone Demographic and Health Survey 2019. Freetown, Sierra Leone, and Rockville, Maryland, USA: Stats SL and ICF.

of child marriage conducted for Save the Children (Branksy, 2017),⁵ found that girls are forced to have sex for “a bewildering range of reasons related to their distance from critical survival assets, including access to water, housing and transport, income generation activities, ID cards, birth certificates and other official documentation, friendship networks and social capital.” Many girls also face pressure to exchange sex for school fees, good grades or class promotion. Transactional sex is often endorsed by a girls’ family who see it as a daughter’s responsibility to support the household.

Evidence from the OOSC mapping study conducted as part of the of the larger IDRC West Africa AEP study confirms the increasing OOSCY numbers in Sierra Leone. **The results indicate that about one-fifth of children (22.2%) aged 4-17 years in the country are currently out of school (dropped out of school or never attended). This figure depicts a slightly higher number of OOSC as compared to that reported by the Multiple Indicator Cluster Study (2017 MICS).** The MICS findings suggest that there are growing numbers of out of school children in Sierra Leone by level of schooling (see below figure 3).

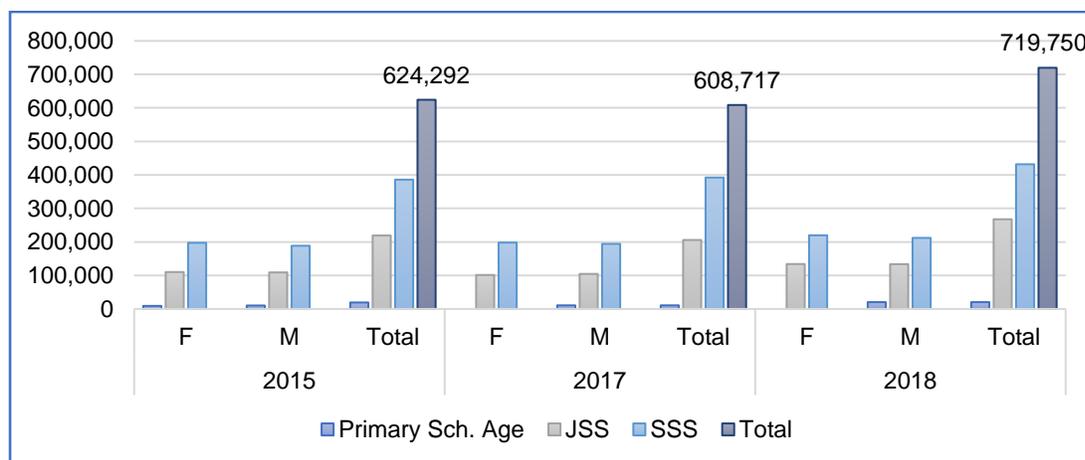


Figure 3: Education status of children
Source: Dalan Consult (2022) Sierra Leone, Household Survey Data, OOSCY Mapping ;UIS (2018)

The OOSC situation in Sierra Leone according to MICS 2017 is significant, rising at each transition stage. It reports that 18% of all primary-aged children, 19% of JSS-aged children, and 36% of SSS-aged children are out of school, with rural communities having the highest proportion of OOSC. The study also reveals that educational progression is stunted, with children older than their class, 45% of JSS-aged children attending primary school, and only 36% attending JSS, a situation which could result in further dropouts. The ASC report 2018 reveals that there was 34% average increase in national school enrolment across all school levels from June 2018 to June 2019 due to the free quality school education (FQSE). Even though this is remarkable in terms of access to education –the learning crisis persists and must be addressed in order to transform education systems and change the poverty context in which OOSC children are growing.

Some of the key reasons for the higher numbers of OOSC children relate to the deepening of poverty in the areas of high incidence and the growing risk to girls of teenage pregnancy which is of course linked to poverty and intergenerational family breakdown and parental neglect.

⁵. Branksy, Rosa (2017). Sierra Leone Child Marriage: Desk Review Conducted for Save the Children

Section 3: The Social and Economic Cost of not Addressing the OOSC Challenge in West Africa

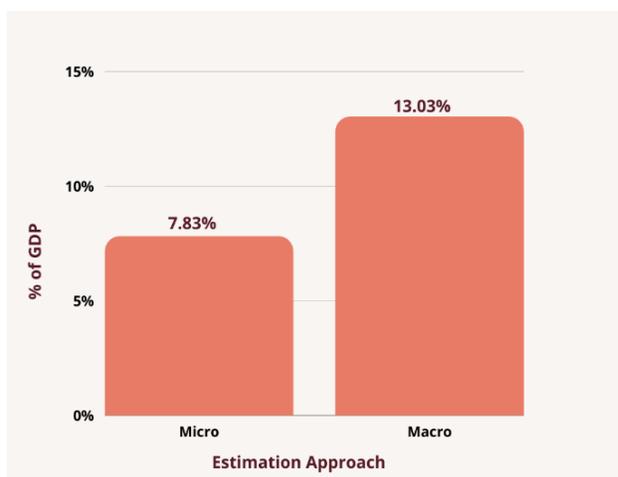
The OOSC challenge imposes enormous economic and social costs on individuals, their families, governments and the larger society by depriving countries of an educated labour force, limiting young people from reaching their full potential and attracting higher risk among the youthful population who are out of work and unable to meet their life goals and expectations. In the cases of Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Ghana, there is evidence that youth who do not complete basic education are left without livelihood and jobs to propel them into a life of decent work. Their low skill sets and lack of confidence lead them to high-risk behavior and engagement with groups including militant groups who provide them with identity and meaning in their lives.

OOSC Impact on Nigeria:

OOSC imposes enormous economic costs on individuals and society at large particularly in the long run. In the short run, OOSC contributes modestly to the economy through participation in farming and non-farm activities that generate an immediate household income stream. However,

Table 4: Estimated cost of OOSCY in Nigeria

Basically, education increases lifetime income and expands labour market potentials of an individual.



the economic costs are compounded, over time, with the loss of productivity.

Additionally, an educated workforce is crucial to technological innovation and structural transformation (Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2004).

Putting a number on productivity loss due to high numbers of OOSC is difficult given uncertainty about income paths. However, Milan & Burnet (2014) have provided some estimates on the economic costs⁶

Using both macro and micro economic analysis, the estimated economic costs of OOSC are shown in Figure 4.⁷ In simple terms, the estimates indicate what a

hypothetical child drawn from the population would have contributed to the national output if he/she was educated up to basic education level. Irrespective of the approach, the **economic costs of OOSC are huge in the Nigerian economy**. If we take the conservative estimate from the micro approach, OOSC costs the economy about 7.83% of the GDP per annum. This amounts to about USD 40 billion (current US\$). Given that the number of OOSC in Nigeria since 2013 has been on the rise, and GDP figures for Nigeria are relatively lower (current US\$ 432 billion), but these estimates can be argued to be higher in the context of current realities.

⁶ Their approach attempts to answer the question: "If all of today's children that do not complete primary school actually do complete basic education; how much higher GDP will be in Nigeria when that cohort of children enters the labor market in ten years, relative to a counterfactual in which those OOSC never completed primary education.

⁷ The estimates arrived at by the macro approach is higher than the micro approach because it captures some of the positive externalities that come with primary education, rather than only direct private income gains (Milan & Burnett, 2014).

The costs of not educating OOSC significantly outweigh the investments for providing universal primary education, and that for some countries these costs exceed the value of an average year of economic growth. This is based on findings from the Educate a Child (EAC) Institute in collaboration with Results for Development (R4D) which published a second report on the costs of not providing universal primary education to individuals across twenty nations, including Ghana, in 2013.

Sierra Leone social and educational impact:

“Enrolling out-of-school children (OOSC) is not only a moral obligation but a productive investment. Countries, regardless of the seriousness of their OOSC challenges, suffer a far greater loss from maintaining OOSC than they would from increasing public spending to enroll those children in primary school⁸” (UNESCO, 2014). The Centre for Global Development⁹ reports that education is able to transform people from poverty into prosperity and lists improved health, better salaries and economic growth as some of the benefits that may accrue to individuals and nations. It adds that educating girls leads to healthy families and communities. Whereas obtaining universal primary education is good, Grant, C. (2017) suggests that it is insufficient to support poor countries to develop and points out that “only broad-based secondary education and universal primary education is likely to give poor countries the human capital boost necessary to bring large segments of the population out of poverty”¹⁰.

Studies from across the three countries indicate evidence of youth joblessness, unemployment and disaffection. According to the Centre for Global Development “In many poor countries, with each additional year of schooling, people earn 10% higher wages. These earnings, in turn, contribute to national economic growth”. The implication is that for each child that is out of school, the nation is losing potential revenue, since education is an important driver of development. O’Neill, R. reports that low literacy rates in Sierra Leone perpetuate poverty and affect employment¹¹. She cites a World Bank (2012) report, that about 92% of people employed in Sierra Leone were working in vulnerable employment because of their low levels of education. Whereas the percentage of people who are in vulnerable employment might not be the same at this time, it goes without saying that if the OOSC situation is not tackled, Sierra Leone will have a significant percentage of its workforce in “vulnerable employment”. The wider the gap in economic well-being of its citizens the more the country loses out in development.

More recent work by the RISE (2022) is pointing to the growing differentials created by the Learning crisis. Learning trajectory work indicates that countries like Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone need to focus on ensuring foundational learning skills are achieved among their children and pre youth (5-17) years of age. The learning trajectory work also indicates that the main focus for governments must be on addressing the quality dimension of their primary education pathways in order to both address the OOSC problem, prevent drop out and assure learning outcomes. In contexts of extreme poverty, conflict and rural deprivation, this is becoming even more challenging. The next section provides some low-cost solutions to tackling the crisis.

⁸ UNESCO and Results for Development Institute (R4D), Cited in Kathleen A. Martins (2015). UNESCO warns of economic consequences of rising number of out-of-school youths

⁹ <https://www.cgdev.org>

¹⁰ Grant, C. (2017). The Contribution of Education to Economic Growth. K4D Helpdesk Report. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies.

¹¹ Perpetuating a Vicious Cycle: The Causes and Effects of Poorly Educated Children in Sierra Leone. Rebecca O’Neill, Global Majority E-Journal, Vol. 5, No. 1 (June 2014), pp. 44-56

Section 4: Evidence on the impact and effectiveness of Accelerated Education (AEP) programmes in Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone

Accelerated Education Programmes (AEPs) are providing evidence to governments across Africa that cost effective and immediate solutions can be found and require scaling in order to contribute significantly to improving access, equity and ensure learning outcomes at basic education levels. Accelerated Education programmes are providing contextually relevant educational solutions to children and youth who remain out of school and/or drop out. These are particularly relevant to areas of fragility, extreme poverty and in locations where teachers are unwilling to serve across the West African sub-region (Casely-Hayford, 2018). The AEPs that specifically target girls, such as the Complementary Basic Education (CBE¹²) Programme in Ghana and the ELA programme in Sierra Leone have positive impacts on reducing early marriage, and adolescent pregnancy.

This section highlights the evidence on the effectiveness and impact of selected AEPs across Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone.

Ghana: Performance and effectiveness of the AEPs

A growing body of evidence suggests that AEP models have huge potential to raise learning outcomes and provide a viable learning pathway for children and youth in deprived rural, extreme poverty and conflict zones in Africa. For instance, several civic actors in Ghana including: School for Life, Afrikids, Pronet, Action Aid, World Education and GILLBT have taken steps to address out-of-school challenge in these areas through the implementation and helping governments go to scale on these. These programmes reveal access, equity and learning efficiency results which demonstrate that they are the best alternatives for underserved children. Thus, the Ministry of Education (MoE) in Ghana adopted the CBE programme, which is a government-led AEP, to provide a fully “free” educational pathway and reduce the burden to vulnerable care givers (such as grandparents, female-headed households, child-headed households and widows) of the cost of education (Casely-Hayford et al., 2017).

The evidence for example, shows that in contexts where economic deprivation denies children the right to education, CBE provides necessary teaching and learning resources to help marginalised children learn under flexible arrangements. This affords them the opportunity to participate in education and still support their households, either on the farm or through other economic activities. Thus, many boys and girls living in marginalized and low-income households have had access to basic literacy and numeracy training through the CBE programme, subsequently transitioning into the mainstream school system. The evidence also suggests that the CBE programme has opened school doors to many students previously underserved, most of whom subsequently transitioned into the formal school system and even progressed to higher levels (Casely-Hayford et al., 2018).

¹² In Ghana, the complementary basic education (CBE) is an example of an evidence-based innovation. The CBE program was developed as an accelerated learning program targeting out of school children (OOSC) between 8 to 14 years of who had never been in school or dropped out of primary school. Using their mother tongue as the language of instruction, children are taught to develop numeracy, literacy and basic life skills over a 9-month period. Upon completion of the program, graduates are expected to transition into upper primary class level – usually primary class three or four (Robinson, Arkorful, & Essuman, 2017).

CBE program implemented by state and non-state actors:

Since the introduction of the Ghana School for Life (SfL) model in 1995, the CBE programme has contributed significantly to improving access to education for disadvantaged OOSC. It has been implemented mainly in Northern Ghana (Northern, Upper East and Upper West regions), providing opportunities for OOSC to undergo a fast-track programme for nine months and subsequently integrates (8-14 year olds) into the formal education system. The CBE Programme established very good results throughout its implementation from 1995 through to 2020. It was able to achieve, and even in some cases exceed, its outputs, outcomes and impact indicators. The project had a total of 533,352 learners enrolled of which over 90% of the learners transitioned into the formal education system. This comprises 290,037 learners under the GoG/FCDO/USAID funded period of 2012-2020; 93,315 under Plan Ghana REACH Project from 2015-2020; and 150,000 by School for Life under USAID and DANIDA support between 1995 and 2012. Transition rates of CBE graduates moved from 84% in 2012/2013 to 95% in 2016/2017 for all CBE participants.

Other on-going interventions such as the Strategic Approaches to Girls Education (STAGE) project, had over 16,794 girls' enrolment, targets of 8,025 girls for the formal track and 8,769 for the non-formal track learners (both programmes implemented CBE). The programme as of March 2021 had a successful transition rate of 69.5% of the total girls into the formal track enrolment.

Scale, enrolment and completion levels of AEPs:

Overall, three of the AEP Education Innovators in Ghana have had impressive results (*AfriKids, GILLBT, and School for Life CBE programmes*), enrolled a total of 90,984, representing 31.4% out of the 290,037 OOSC in the Northern, Upper East, Upper West, Savanna and the North East regions¹³. Out of these, the three EIs successfully transitioned 80,211 (81.2%) of their total AEP enrolment into the formal system --often at P3 and P 4 levels. AfriKids transitioned 15,929 (91.6%) of their total enrolment of 16,657 into the formal school, with most learners integrated into Primary 3 between 2013 and 2021. AfriKids again took part in the STAGE programme by enrolling 4,011 girls in the formal track and transitioned 3,142 (78.3%) into the formal school system. The non-formal track had an enrolment of 533 with 513 (96.2%) of the learners completing training. School for Life also enrolled a total of 60,344 and transitioned a total of 51,819 (85.9%) between 2010 and 2018. GILLBT transitioned 12,463 (89.1%) out of a total enrolment of 13,983.

▪ *Performance of Education Innovators (EIs)*

AfriKids implemented part of the STAGE programme by enrolling 4,011 girls in the formal track and transitioned 3,142 (78.3%) into the formal school system. The non-formal track had an enrolment of 533 with 513 (96.2%) of the learners completing training. School for Life also enrolled a total of 60,344 and transitioned a total of 51,819 (85.9%) between 2010 and 2018. GILLBT transitioned 12,463 (89.1%) out of a total enrolment of 13,983. (See Tables 1-3 in annex)

Current midline data from the Strategic Approaches to Girls Education (STAGE) programme suggests that girls who enter AEPs are less likely to fall victim to early marriage and also have alternative education pathways which can prevent them from falling victim to teenage pregnancy and relationships with older men.

Learning outcomes among CBE and Non-CBE students:

¹³ Districts of Talensi, Nabdam, Bongo, Bawku, Pusiga, Karaga, Gushiegu, Saboba, Yendi, Central Gonja, Mion, Sagnarigu, Savelugu, Wa West, Mamprugu Moagduri, Tolon, Kumbungu and Bunkpurugu Nansuan

The evidence on AEPs supporting significant quality learning is strong in the area of literacy and numeracy skills. It suggests overall improvement among OOSCY compared to government school students in the same grade and/or age.

Though CBE children showed higher mean percent scores for basic, advanced and overall scores at endline, non-CBE children showed marginally greater progress over the course of the school year in all three instances (see table below). Only in advanced local language assessments, however, was this change significant. For English, whilst baseline component scores were comparable, both endline and progress results for CBE children in basic, advanced and overall scores were **higher**, with advanced and overall scores showing statistically significant gains. For numeracy, this same pattern was observed. Whereas baseline results for all three component scores did not differ, CBE children outperformed non-CBE children in endline results and change scores, with advanced and overall numeracy scores showing statistically significant differences.

Learning outcomes among AEP learners and Non-AEP learners in Ghana

Component Scores	CBE			Non-CBE		
	Baseline mean percent score (%)	Endline mean percent score (%)	Change in score (% points)	Baseline mean percent score (%)	Endline mean percent score (%)	Change in score (%points)
Local language						
Basic local language	19.5	46.2	26.7	14.3	43.0	28.7
Advanced local language	26.2	57.7	31.5	18.4	53.3	34.9*
Overall local language	26.0	55.7	29.6	20.2	51.9	31.7
English						
Basic English	24.6	55.4	30.8	22.6	51.9	29.3
Advanced English	30.4	66.0	35.6*	31.8	64.1	32.2
Overall English	29.7	63.0	33.3*	29.9	60.1	30.2
Numeracy						
Basic Numeracy	46.2	76.4	30.2	45.1	73.3	28.2
Advanced Numeracy	42.6	75.8	33.2*	42.7	72.7	30.0
Overall Numeracy	45.0	76.2	31.2*	44.2	73.1	28.8

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Source: Department for International Development (2019).

▪ **Effectiveness of the strategies of the AEP:**

The AEP strategies have been effective in providing basic literacy and numeracy as well as life skills for disadvantaged children in hard-to-reach communities to help integrate them into the formal school system.

Among other factors, is the huge contribution the AEP have made to the gross enrolment rate of 119.9 percent through the integration of graduates of the AEP into the formal school system particularly in zones which are normally considered ‘deprived and hard to reach’¹⁴. Many parents and community members in the Northern, Upper East and Upper West regions indicated their preference for the CBE programme over the formal school because they believed children are able to read in a shorter period compared to those enrolled in the formal school system¹⁵. This is largely a result of the use of local language in teaching and learning on the CBE programme which makes it easier to transfer basic literacy skills to learning to read in English. It is also evident that the STAGE project (AEP focussed on Girls) has contributed to the reduction in the proportion of

¹⁴ CBE Management Unit Progress Report 2017

¹⁵ Crown Agents (2018). Parental and Learner Choice Study

formal school learners who engaged in work during school period from 8% at baseline to 4.3% at midline in 2021.

Parental and Student Views of AEPs:

Most of the AEP learners transitioned to formal school, and parents were happy with the AEP practice of teaching in teaching the local language. They attested that this helped the children to understand what was being taught. Voices of some of the parents and AEP students are highlighted below:

Box: Voices of parents and students about the AEP

“There was a great impact because it made them acquire the skills of reading and writing and so when they were transitioned to formal school, they had things easy for them” (SMC/PTA member, Karaga District, Northern Region)

“It has helped me to read and write and speak English” (AEP learner)

“They made me motivated to learn to read and write. I felt comfortable to learn and asking questions because of the use of local language.” (FGD with AEP Graduates, Kumbungu District, Northern Region)

“It made it easy for most of those who were not enrolled in the formal school to transition into the regular education system” (School Management Committee SMC, Kumbungu, Northern)

“Yes, it has improved on the reading ability of the children and through the programme, some of the pupils are provided with free uniform, books and bags” (Headteacher, Nwogu AME Zion Prim. School, Kumbungu District, Northern Region)

“The children picked up quickly as they were taught in the local language and were able to perform well when they transitioned” (SMC/PTA member, Yendi District, Northern Region)

“It has helped them to be enrolled in the normal school. It has helped the children by supplying them reading and writing material. It has reduced the burden on parents by providing uniforms, bags and sandals for girls. It has provided girls with bicycle for moving from home to the school” (SMC/PTA member, Saboba District, Northern Region)

Impact and outcomes of Girls focused programming models--STAGE programmes:

Girls Focused Programmes have been visible and led to a significant increase in the number of girls who have enrolled in school, bridged the gap between boys and girls in education, and reduced the incidence of child marriage.

The data shows that a large proportion of children enrolled in the AfriKids STAGE programme were transitioned into the formal education system (88%) after the programme. The programme met 99% of its targets. Four out of five STAGE graduates were able to successfully move into the formal education system. Further, it was found that the programme exceeded its informal cohort targets, with coverage of 103% while around 96% of participants successfully completed the informal training. Also, the results indicated that a UNICEF initiative enrolled about 197 females who were already in the formal education in Saboba.

Enrolment levels for Girls focused programmes

Girls Focused Program	Target		Achieved		Transitioned/completed	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Formal (Afrikids)	4050	89	4011	88	3142	86
Informal (Afrikids)	520	11	533	12	513	14
Formal (UNICEF Prog. Saboba) ¹⁶			197	100	197	100
Total	4570	100	4741	100	3852	100%

Source: District level data, Saboba, 2022.

The results show that a third (29.7%) of STAGE graduates were placed in P-3 and most students who transitioned to P-3 were between the ages of 6 and 11. Although some pupils were put in junior high school, the numbers were insignificant; 4.6 percent were placed in JHS 1 and 0.4% in JHS 2.

Transition from STAGE to formal school

STAGE	6-11 years		12-14 years		15-17 years		Total	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
P3	560	39.4	526	30.5	-	-	1086	29.7
P4	404	28.5	484	28.1	-	-	888	24.3
P5	229	16.1	269	15.6	-	-	498	13.6
P6	203	14.3	357	20.7	-	-	560	15.3
JHS 1	24	1.7	79	4.6	-	-	103	2.8
JHS2	-	-	7	0.4	-	-	7	0.2
Apprenticeship	-	-	-	-	513	100	513	14
Total	1420	100	1722	100	513	14	3655	100

Source: Programme data, STAGE Project, 2022.

Impact/achievements:

The introduction of AEs and Girls Focused Programmes (GFPs) helped to tackle several of the education access constraints faced by girls in the rural and deprived societies. Prior to the introduction of GFPs, the incidence of child marriage was on the rise because parents did not value academic education for their girl children and believed that their proper place was in the home, where she was raised to serve her future husband. Following the implementation of Afrikids' STAGE Project, which targeted out of school girls, there has been a significant change in the lives of girls in these communities. The STAGE project s enabled out of school children, particularly girls who had dropped out of school, to go back into the formal education system or acquire a skill in catering, dressmaking, soap making, beadmaking or hairdressing.

Not only has the STAGE project helped girls to access relevant education on their terms, it has also empowered them to know their rights and has enlightened parents on the importance of girl-child education. Some SMCs/PTAs confirmed that activities of Girls Focused Programmes have been visible and led to a significant increase in the number of girls who have enrolled in school, bridged the gap between boys and girls in education, and reduced the incidence of child marriage.

¹⁶ Empowering Adolescent Girls, Embracing Gender Equality, Advancing Girls' Lower Secondary Education in Ghana (2019-2022)

These are the voices of some parents concerning the presence and impact of Girls Focused Programmes:

Achievement/impact of AEPs and girls focused programmes

“... It has reduced early marriage and teenage pregnancy” (SMC Member, Gushegu District, Northern Region)

“...It has helped the children to learn about the dangers of teenage pregnancy and early marriages” (PTA Member, Karaga District, Northern Region)

“A lot girls transitioned from the programme to the formal system and that helped to prevent child marriages” (SMC/PTA member, Talensi District, Upper East Region)

“...A lot of female learners have been transitioned into formal school under this programme” (Chief/Elder, Saboba District, Northern Region)

“The programme made it possible for many girls to transition into the formal education system” (SMC/PTA, Talensi District, Upper East Region)

“The CBE programme reached more girls than boys and so, the gender gap in education access has significantly reduced” (SMC/PTA, Kumbungu District, Northern Region)

Nigeria:

This section of the paper assesses selected AEPs that have been implemented in Nigeria. These include: The Education Crisis Response Project (ECR), Accelerated Learning Programme and Addressing Education in Northeast Nigeria (AENN).

The Education Crisis Response (ECR) Project:

The Education Crisis response project demonstrated gender equality could be achieved by creating learning centres for girls and PWDs in areas of fragility and conflict using AEP models to provide an alternative education pathway. The ECR project was implemented by Creative Associates international between 2014 and 2017. It evidences the effectiveness of AEP in providing education access to OOSC as it reached OOSCY in up to 5 states of the northeast Nigeria where formal education has been under attack by anti-western education insurgents. It was launched in three states at the start including Adamawa, Bauchi and Gombe in 2014. Yobe was reached in 2015 and finally Borno in 2016. Although this was not a girls-focused programme, it demonstrated gender equity and social inclusion: 55% of its total enrolment was made up of girls. Also, specialised learning centres were created for girls and People with Disabilities (PWD). The programme reached 80, 341 internally displaced children aged 6 to 17 of which 43, 944 were girls.

The Education Crisis Response project provided nine months of basic literacy lessons and employability skills to 22,238 (10,321 males, 11,917 female) adolescent girls and boys affected by conflict in low-cost, relevant and marketable skills identified and prioritized in the five project states¹⁷ (USAID, 2017, p.12).

¹⁷ This included making perfumed ointments and creams, liquid soap, air fresheners, knitting, dyeing, tailoring, beads, leatherwork, body decoration (henna & dyes), vegetable oil extraction, mobile phone repairs, hairdressing, and shoemaking

By the end of the project, 30,154 (12,365 males, 17,789 female) certified completers of the program were mainstreamed with the support of the State Agencies for Mass Education/Adult and Non-Formal Education Agencies in Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe and Yobe states. (USAID, 2017, p.18). 1107 community-based learning facilitators and 9313 formal school-teachers were recruited and trained to deliver the instructions using the participatory pedagogy for AEPs. All of these done within the tenets of best practices as defined by the ten principles of AEP¹⁸ resulted in some gains in the reduction of the OOSC numbers.

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) Accelerated Learning Programme

The AEP introduced by the IRC was a model programme in helping children who had never attended or dropped out of school learn foundational skills of reading, writing and numeracy-- some of Nigeria's hard to reach areas. The Non formal learning centres for children (NFLCs) filled a crucial gap and accounted for some of the immediate, pressing needs of school-aged children growing up in crisis and conflict settings and helped prepare them for entry or re-entry into the formal school system. The International Rescue Committee (IRC) and Creative Associates International worked together to provide OOSCs with an Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP) at community-based Non-Formal Learning Centres (NFLCs). The project, which was a follow on the ECR project in order to sustain the gains on the latter, was funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) between 2017 and 2020 as an Education-in-Emergency programme to support literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional skills. In terms of reach. The programme targeted OOSC age 9-14 years in 10 local government areas of Yobe (3) and Borno (7) state, who have never attended school or been out of school for more than two years (IRC, 2019). The IRC-ALP was a 9-month cycle programme; the beneficiaries attended three-hour sessions per day, three times per week, to learn the basic literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional skills they need to successfully transition into formal schools.

To uphold the programme quality, learning facilitators (LFs) were trained and equipped with content knowledge and the educational skills to teach foundational literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional skills. The professional development opportunities for LFs provided by the program included: face-to-face training, on-going peer support in the form of monthly Teaching Learning Circles (TLC) and on-site coaching visits by qualified teachers, and supervisors from state ministries of education. The program created 400 non-formal learning centres (NFLC) in the two states of the intervention and served over 34,000 OOSC within the target age cohort. During the third cohort, the program provided services to 14,097 children, of which 13,528 (8,354 females; 5,174 male) graduated in December 2020. This enrolment ratio further strengthened the campaign for girls' education.

Addressing Education in the Northeast (AENN) Project:

The success of previous AEPs in Northeast Nigeria has attracted more funders such as the European Union (EU) on the EU Early Recovery Project (2019-2021)¹⁹. This effort led to the development of the government approved curriculum, implementation guidelines and teachers' guide for the Accelerated Basic Education Programme (ABEP) in Nigeria. Currently, the USAID funds an on-going AEP known as Opportunity to Learn (OTL).

¹⁸ The Ten principles of AEPs are guided by the Accelerated Educations' Working group principles of best practice in AEPs.

¹⁹ An AEP intervention implemented by a consortium of International Non-governmental Organisations led by PLAN International.

The Addressing Education in the Northeast Nigeria (AENN) project commenced in 2018 and spanned through till 2021. This expansion and scaling of AEP interventions in Nigeria's Northeast was attributable to the extent of damage done to the education system due to conflict and crisis in the northeast. Funded by USAID, AENN targeted the immediate basic education needs of internally displaced children (6-15) and their host communities between the in 8 local government areas of Borno and Yobe state. In Borno state, the AENN was implemented in Maiduguri Metropolitan Council, Jere, Monguno, Hawul, and Dikwa. In Yobe state, the AENN was implemented in Damaturu, Potiskum, and Bade Local Government area. In total, the programme reached 150 communities across these local governments.

Within the NFLCs, AENN used a condensed curriculum that is aligned to the formal curriculum and is divided into two levels (Basic Literacy, which is equivalent to primary 1-3, and post-Literacy, which is equivalent to primary 4-6 according to the national non-formal education policy. Students attending the NFLC Basic Literacy program received classes 4 times per week for 2 hours and 15 minutes per day for about nine months (although due to time constraints the first cohort was completed in seven months). Each day, learners participated in 45-minute lessons for literacy, math, and social emotional learning (SEL). After completing the Basic Literacy program, learners either transitioned into formal schools at grade 4 or continued into the two-year post-Literacy program. After completing the post-Literacy programme, learners were mainstreamed into formal schools at grade 7 (junior secondary school). Again, as a proof of the effectiveness of getting OOSCY back to school, by March 2020, AENN mainstreamed 12, 868 cohort one learners (6,664 males, 6204 females) into formal schools in Borno and Yobe States. Also, among the cohort 1 learners, 8,640 (4,384 males, 4,256 females) adolescent learners transitioned into the post-literacy programme offered by the activity (USAID 2020) into the mainstream. The number represents 73% of the 29,504 learners (13,795 males, 15,709 females) who completed the basic literacy programme in 588 NFLCs. AENN was finalizing the mainstreaming of the remaining 27% of NFLC completers before schools were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic (USAID, 2020, p.17). Subsequent transitioning was done on the completion of other cohorts whose account is yet to be released by the implementer.

While these interventions evidently extend education access to OOSCY and result in mainstreaming of OOSC in Nigeria, the scale of this impact relative to the magnitude of the OOSC numbers would remain nationally unappreciable without devoted government ownership of the innovation with funding commitment. A more detailed summary of the local providers to the AENN programme are contained in the annex to the report. Annex 2.

Sierra Leone:

Sierra Leone's Accelerated Education programmes demonstrate that they help to increase and improve transition and completion rates of children who are considered at high risk of drop out. The experience also shows that once they learn within the AEP system the exam performance of girls was considerably better than that of boys. Two examples of AEPs in Sierra Leone are presented below: a pilot AEP implemented in Pujehun by Save the Children Sierra Leone; and a girls focused programme implemented by BRAC.

The Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education in Sierra Leone's goal of leaving no child behind can be achieved and supported by AEP being scaled up in strategic zones of Sierra Leone. The findings show that **494** students (**69%**), of the **552** students who attempted the government-sponsored NPSE passed the exams and entered formal education demonstrates the impact that AEPs can have in rural deprived and extreme poverty zones of SL. Additionally, there

was a rise in the number of people who were re/enrolled in school and were reintegrated. The evaluation results demonstrate AEP's strong impact in providing high-quality education to the district's most vulnerable groups, despite the challenges in project implementation.

Save the Children: Pilot Accelerated Education Programme (AEP) in Pujehun District

Save the Children (SC) SL launched a four-year Pilot Accelerated Education Programme (AEP) from 2016 to 2020. The project was rolled out across six communities in the Pujehun District. The beneficiary communities included Zimmi, Jendema, Gbondapi, Potoru, Massam, and Bumpeh. Beneficiaries/ participants of the SCF SL Pujehun AEP were enrolled in three levels (a condensed version of the six-year primary school curriculum): Level 1 (grades 1&2), Level 2 (grades 3&4), and Level 3 (grades 5&6). In order to transition into secondary school, the "students" enrolled in level 3 were encouraged to complete the NPSE exams.

AEP Beneficiaries Breakdown

YEAR	LEVELS			TOTAL	NPSE	TRANSITION	LEVEL REPEATERS			DROP OUT
	1	2	3				1	2	3	
2016/2017	628	92	0	720	N/A	N/A	447	21	0	0
2017/2018	444	202	71	717	71	58	311	13	13	3
2018/2019	137	320	202	659	202	188	0		14	0
2019/2020	0	137	334	471	279	248	0		31	55
2020/2021			168							

Source: Final Evaluation Report for the AEP, Save the Children International

AEP Transitioned Students

TOTAL NPSE	TOTAL TRANSITION	TOTAL ABSCOND	Total IN LEVEL 3	GRAND TOTAL
552	494	55	168	717

Source: Final Evaluation Report for the AEP, Save the Children International

Impact on Transition: In 2018, 82% of beneficiaries who took the NPSE during the academic year 2017/2018 passed with an average score of 259/500 from the AEP. The students moved on to the formal education at the junior secondary level²⁰. The first group of 71 students (42 boys and 29 girls) who took the NPSE enrolled in secondary schools in the district.

In 2019 the programme saw 197 students (109 girls and 88 boys) sit the NPSE and pass with a 95% success rate. The pass rates for the various AEP settlements in the district are shown in Figure 3. With the communities of **Zimmi**, **Gbondapi**, and **Massam** recording 100% passes, a 13% rise in pass rates compared to 2018 can be seen. With the exception of **Zimmi**, it is important to note that all the students at the other centers who received the best scores were girls, further demonstrating the ability of AEPs to empower girls. (Sierra Leone Policy Brief on the Effectiveness of AEPs, 2022). The results show that once girls enter the AEP programming, they work hard to attain high learning results and further their opportunities.

²⁰ Save the Children AEP Sierra Leone

Accelerated Education Project (AEP) National Primary School Examination Results 2019

Community	Best grade	Average score	Pass rate (%)	Remarks
Zimmi	311	292	100	Pass
Gbondapi	301	286	100	Pass
Massam	279	270	100	Pass
Jendema	292	292	92	Pass
Potoru	291	248	66	Pass
Bumpeh	281	242	82	Pass

Source: Save the Children Sierra Leone

Similarly, the final group of AEP students took the NPSE exams in 2020. As indicated in Figure 4, 279 students (132 girls and 147 boys) took the tests, with an 88% pass rate. In Gbondapi, there was a 100% pass rate, with three females receiving the highest scores in their AEP centers. 47 students received scores of 300 or higher, which is a respectable result.

The Sierra Leone Policy Brief (2022) on the Effectiveness of AEPs reveals that: The Pujehun AEP has helped more AEP students access junior secondary school even though, the pass rate for AEP students fell from 95% in 2019 to 88% in 2020, partly as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The majority of AEP students are mothers and older children who frequently contribute to family income, hence, the limitation of travel and closure of local weekly markets significantly impact their sources of revenue to support their families, resulting in them returning late to write the NPSE exams.

Other Key results from SL that are measures of effectiveness comprise the following:

- They had an 82% pass rate in the 2018 National Primary School Examination (NPSE)
- Normal 6-year primary curriculum condensed into 3 levels/ cycles
- Volunteer community-based teachers have independently enrolled in distance education to obtain full teaching certificates;
- AEP committees in each community are dedicated, mobilized, and active, in one case acting to prevent child marriage
- Community & Ministry of Basic and Secondary School Education (MBSSE)/DEO/local council ownership is very high
- Class hours are suitable for older learners
- Youth were involved in planning the initiative
- Monitoring tools for the project were developed and are available
- Completed version of AEP step-by-step curriculum.

Girls Empowerment Models: Effectiveness of the Empowerment and Livelihoods for Adolescents (ELA) innovation in Sierra Leone

Given the crisis of girl's education in West Africa and the endemic problems of teenage pregnancy, poverty and negative socio-cultural practices which restrict girls entrance, retention and completion at schools—**safe spaces for girls have become a best practice strategy for countries striving to protect the next generation of girls. A key result of the AE innovation was a significant reduction in the number of unmarried pregnancies in part due to the life skills the girls acquired during the program.** The safe space model includes: a place where girls can obtain support, information on health and reproductive issues, and vocational training.

These models were particularly important during and after the Ebola crisis in SL and were made available to roughly **16,160** adolescent girls as part of the intervention.

ELA is an AEP-style initiative that BRAC-Sierra Leone launched in the country. The ELA programme was implemented in 5 districts in both the North and South of the country. The programme ran over 2012 and 2021, with several phases hosting a specific number of girls with funding from various NGOs. The programme aimed to give teenage girls a safe environment, improve their understanding of sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and behavior, enhance their access to income-generating activities (IGA) through training and financial support, and to boost adolescent girls' engagement in family and societal decision-making.

ELA Impact—the transformative gender empowerment dimensions: A random control trial of the ELA programme conducted during the EVD crisis found that safe spaces successfully alleviated the risks of unmarried pregnancy and consequential school drop-out posed to girls by disease containment measures. School enrolment rates fell by 16 per cent in the communities hardest hit by EVD but only by 8 per cent in communities with safe spaces. Pregnancy among unmarried girls also fell in communities with active safe spaces (Bandiera et al., 2019). The ELA approach is centered on giving the girls access to safe environments where they may engage with peers of their own age and learn about SRH through the life skills component, financial literacy training, and livelihood training. The hope is that by combining these approaches, girls will be given the knowledge and ability to help them get through the challenging time of puberty, and eventually become empowered members of society.

Effectiveness of the ELA Programme

Teenage girls in Sierra Leone were among the worst affected by the Ebola epidemic, but those in the ELA programme exhibited significant resistance to many of the shocks triggered by the outbreak. A key result of the AE innovation was a significant reduction in the number of unmarried pregnancies in part due to the life skills the girls acquired during the program. In ELA clubs, both older and younger ELA girls spent an average of 3 hours per week together with their peers and skilled mentors. Additionally, the program reduced the rise in unprotected sex by 43%, helping to lower the number of unintended pregnancies. In addition, girls under the programme were able to increase their use of contraceptives thereby helping to prevent unwanted pregnancies

The human capital development, which is essential for future employment chances, was protected by the clubs. Young girls in high-disruption areas saw an approximate 73% loss in literacy abilities (99% in numeracy), but this was more than offset by the fact that they spent 10 hours per week more in school and almost 5 hours less on household chores. ELA clubs helped older learners make up 93% of the numeracy abilities they had lost. The teenagers had to abandon their studies because of Ebola and search for income generating activities (IGA). Fewer younger girls had unmarried pregnancies because of their involvement in the ELA clubs, which allowed them to finish their education and made re-enrolling in school simpler. ELA girls, regardless of their age, were also better able to balance school and income generating activities. IGA attendance by 9.5 percentage points (pp) for younger girls and by 5.1 pp for older girls. While Older girls doubled their participation in credit or finance networks an, younger girls increased their business networks by 46%.

Examples of successful scaling up: Speed School Model (Burkina Faso and Mali)²¹

The Speed School model/program in Burkina Faso and Mali (and Niger) has been consistently scaling up over the last five years. Existing evidence has shown that graduates of the Speed School model have a 90% efficiency rate of being eligible for transfer into the formal education system.

Two randomized control trials have demonstrated effectiveness and efficiency within their programme and with proven impact which could be scaled up further by Government and civil society to widen access to education particularly in fragile areas (FaFo impact evaluation 2018). The Speed School model supported/developed by Stromme Foundation offers education to out-of-school children (OOSC) between the ages of 8-12 over a period of 9 months with the goal of ensuring that learners read and write and then transition to primary school after the 9-month speed school program. With a curriculum designed to cover the first three years of primary education and an average class size of 25 students, children transition into grade 4 of formal primary school system like the CBE programme in Ghana.

Section 5: Cost Efficiency of the AEPs Programmes

The evidence base is growing in relation to cost effectiveness of AEPs. The Ghana data suggests that the **cost of running AEP programmes can be at least one third the cost of lower primary school education (KG to P3) and yield better learning outcomes**. Studies over the years have tried to measure how cost-efficient accelerated education models are – in providing value for money in terms of reaching out-of-school children (OOSC) in rural and hard-to-reach areas (Crown Agents, 2015; Shah & Choo, 2020). This section of the paper highlights the cost-efficiency of the AE initiatives over the period across Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone.

Ghana:

The results of a recent cost-efficiency analysis – comparing the cost of training an out-of-school child through the Complementary Basic Education (CBE programme compared to the cost of formal schooling in Ghana showed the CBE programme was cost-efficient (Associates for Change, 2022). The key findings from the analysis included the following:

- Current unit cost in the CBE programme is estimated at GHS 598 (US\$ 105.28) for 2019/2020, which is 21.4 per cent lower than projected unit cost of 760.8 (US\$ 133.94) for the regular system. Yet, these figures exclude the cost of teacher training in formal education.
- Progress in learning outcomes made by children during the CBE programme are substantial often equivalent to 4 years of schooling in one year of AEP, particularly in foundational mother tongue literacy and numeracy;
- Once students make the transition from the CBE programme into the formal schools, children in the CBE programme achieve comparable learning outcomes to that of children in formal schools. In some cases, CBE graduates are found to be more competent and confident;
- Regarding equity, the CBE programme is considered effective in bridging the gender gap in terms of completion of the programme and successful transition into formal schools;
- In addition, a year of CBE is equivalent to 2.4 grades of formal schooling, suggesting that for every CBE transitioned child, the government saves more than twice the current unit cost per student promoted to grade 3 in the formal system. This means that CBE could be twice as cost-efficient as the formal system;

²¹ These country programmes were not part of the iDRC supported AEP study across West Africa but are very relevant

- Yet, there is a cost saving potential in upscaling and transitioning CBE to the government of Ghana (GOG) budget, as the cost of engaging CBE facilitators (7% of total CBE costs) is far lower than the cost of trained teacher deployment in the regular sector (about 91% of total education expenditure).

Nigeria:

There is very limited evidence on the cost and cost-efficiency of AEPs in Nigeria to date. However, a recent study by Ferrans et.al, (2019) provides some level of evidence on the cost of training out-of-school children through the accelerated education programme. The results of the study show that on average, the AEP programme cost 66 GBP per child, or 85 USD (2018 rates), for seven months of exposure. The cost (*shared and direct cost*) was estimated using an ingredients-based approach for the programme beneficiaries. The direct costs included inputs necessary to run AEP and non-formal learning centers with the shared cost comprising country-level overhead such as Human Resource, Finance, Information Technology and Management.²²

More cost studies are planned for the third year of the IDRC West Africa Study on AEPs by Associates for Change, Dalan and CSAE. These studies will compare the three models of AEPs cross the countries---girls' models---complementary basic education and speed school models.

Section 6: Conclusions: Scaling up AEPs and addressing the Education Crisis in West Africa

Within the countries of focus in West Africa, Accelerated Education Programmes (AEP) are providing contextually relevant educational solutions to children and youth who remain out of school and or drop out. The innovations are particularly relevant to children 'left behind', and for areas of fragility, extreme poverty and locations where teachers are unwilling to serve. They have shown positive results in relation to learning outcomes, learning efficiency for the poor, school readiness and gender equity.

Governments have a responsibility to provide alternative pathways to primary education within contexts where poorly resourced schools remain unable to provide basic learning, literacy and numeracy gains. Evidence from the IDRC West Africa Study on AEPs demonstrates that accelerated systems of education which have been working for the last two decades should be move to full scale and mainstreamed within the government budget systems; AEPs in Africa need to be provided with consistent resourcing and budgeting to attain scale in order to achieve the needed impact and reduce the OOSC phenomena.

The evidence is also demonstrating that learning outcomes for the vast majority of AEP learners result in high transition rates (over 80%) into the formal system; having skipped 3-4 years of formal schooling yet having equivalent levels of competency in literacy and numeracy. This can mean cost savings to government and the families who are supporting these children in often poverty zones and rural deprived areas where schools are not fully functioning.

Yet Government systems need to be ready to accept and accommodate AEP learners who transition into the mainstream. This will likely mean innovative approaches to teacher deployment

²² No study has yet compared the per child cost of AEPs to the formal system of schooling in Nigeria but the IDRC study will do this the 3rd year.

and using locally based community teachers to ensure that schools can receive and ensure quality for the growing numbers of children.

Section 7: Key recommendations to Governments and Policy makers in West Africa

The position paper makes the following recommendations to help scale up AEP and girls' focused programming with emphasis on deepening, sustaining and scaling up the gains achieved through these programmes.

The evidence reveals a need for a partnership between government and non-state actors at the forefront of implementing AEPs particularly in zones of exclusion and areas of deprivation where systems are not fully able to reach.

Government/Policy level actions

▪ Need to have a targeted approach to addressing the OOSC phenomenon

The evidence on OOSC across the countries of focus (Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone) show that the out of school phenomenon is predominant among children aged 6-11 years (primary level). The implication of this finding is that fewer children are completing primary schooling – which is the very basic level of education and this is more predominant in rural and extremely deprived areas.

More targeted investment is called for in accelerated education programmes and approaches which target the high number of OOSC particularly in extreme poverty zones drawing on mapping studies and evidence of where programming has worked in the last decade. Low-cost mapping exercises will be needed in these regions and deprived districts where district/local government and non-governmental actors conduct in collaboration these mapping exercises.

▪ Need to sustain the gains achieved on AEPs and Girls Focused Programmes through sustained funding:

The evidence synthesized in this position paper points to significant results achieved in relation to learning outcomes, completion and transition levels on all the AEPs and girls' focused innovations across West Africa. These models have proven to be very effective in addressing the out of school issues, especially for girls.

Governments across the Sub-region should scale up these Accelerated Education programmes as key models in expanding access to education, assure basic foundational learning outcomes and equity for the poor especially in deprived rural remote and conflict-prone areas.

Ensure that AEP learners and Girls remain and complete basic education pathways

The Ministries of Education across Africa should work at achieving higher levels of funding for AEPs and allocate at least 5% percentage of the basic education budget across the respective countries to fund accelerated education. Collaboration with like-minded agencies including UNICEF and UNESCO will be pivotal in ensuring that international standards are met and that partnerships with local actors can be achieved.

- Initiate partnerships between Accelerated Education Innovators and the universities and teacher-training institutions that share AEP curriculum, methods, and social interventions. Also, encourage such partnerships to implement and collaborate on research, implementation strategies and teacher-trainee practicums, etc.

- Develop integrated social protection and child protection strategies in relation to AEPs in order that child beneficiaries are able to stay and complete primary and Junior high school.
- Provide alternative pathways to apprenticeship, vocational and technical training for AEP graduates who are not able or interested in continuing in formal schooling.
- Continue to work on issues regarding child rights and reproductive health rights with girls, boys and their families to prevent education drop out and teenage pregnancy.

Improving Education Systems readiness for transition and entry of AEP learners

- Support Volunteer Teacher support schemes which assist AEP facilitators also serve in their communities; design and implement schemes which can transition these community-based volunteer teachers into the community schools/ education system as early grade teachers; by supporting their enrolment on distance teacher training programmes once they commit to staying in their communities and running AEP and Formal education programming.
- Ensure trained teaching quotas for rural schools are attained in order to improve quality primary schooling in areas where schools are receiving children from AEPs and girls model programming.
- Consider adopting a new model of community-based volunteer teachers in areas where trained teachers continue to resist postings and deployment due to harsh conditions and the lack of incentives.
- Orient head teachers on “inclusion policies” which enable girls and boys to re-enter school at upper primary and beyond once they have dropped out or to encourage those who have never been to school to enrol.
- Continue training teachers on inclusive, gender and child friendly teaching methods in order to retain AEP learners along with others; particular attention should be paid to using inclusive teaching methods which support differentiated learner needs.
- Promote phonic based approaches at lower primary and where possible use local-language speaking teachers to teach initial reading and numeracy skills to students; collaborate with EIs to build on their existing local language curriculum and materials.

IDRC Research Documents – Year 1 and 2 Outputs

Ghana

Cost-Effective Options for Enhancing Transition and Progression of Hard-to-Reach Populations in Basic School in Ghana: Complementary Basic Education (CBE) Model and Formal Education System. (Policy Brief 1, 2021)

Link:<http://www.associatesforchange.org/new-reports-2022/Cost%20Efficiency%20Policy%20Brief%20by%20AfC.Ghana.pdf>

Best Practices in Primary Education for Improving Retention, Reducing Drop Out and Enhancing Learning Outcomes in Extreme poverty and Rural Areas of Ghana. (Policy Brief 2, 2021)

Link:http://www.associatesforchange.org/new-reports-2022/Best%20Practices%20in%20Primary%20Education_%20Policy%20Brief.pdf

Patterns of School Enrolment and Retention Before and After the Free Quality School Education Policy in Sierra Leone. (Policy Brief 3, 2021)

Link:http://www.associatesforchange.org/new-reports-2022/Patterns%20of%20Enrolment%20and%20Retention_Sierra%20Leone.pdf

Comprehensive Analysis of OOSCY in Ghana (Working Paper 2, 2021)

Link:<http://www.associatesforchange.org/new-reports-2022/Comprehensive%20Analysis%20for%20Ghana.pdf>

Out of School Mapping Study across Ghana's Northern and Upper East Regions (Working Paper 3, 2022)

Out of School Mapping Policy Brief 4, 2022: implications for policy and programme in Ghana.

Sierra Leone

Multi -Dimensional Implications of Out of School Girls in Sierra Leone (Policy Brief 1 SL, 2021)

Link:<http://www.associatesforchange.org/new-reports-2022/MultiDimensional%20Implication%20of%20OOSG%20in%20Sierra%20Leone.pdf>

Patterns of enrolment and retention: before and after the Free Quality School Education Policy in Sierra Leone (Policy Brief 2 SL, 2021) (available on the AFC web site)

Comprehensive Analysis for Sierra Leone

Link:<http://www.associatesforchange.org/new-reports-2022/Comprehensive%20Analysis%20Report%20for%20Sierra%20Leone.pdf>

Out of School Child and Youth Mapping Study for Sierra Leone (2022), Dalan Consultants

Policy Brief 3: Evidence from the Out of School Mapping Exercise for Sierra Leone (2022)

Policy Brief 4: Evidence on the Effectiveness of Accelerated Education programmes and empowerment and livelihoods for Adolescent Girls in Sierra Leone (upcoming 2022) Dalam Consultants

Nigeria

The Economic and Social Costs Of Out Of School Children in Nigeria (Policy Brief 1 Nigeria, 2021)

Link:<http://www.associatesforchange.org/new-reports-2022/Economic%20Costs%20of%20OOSC%20by%20Nigeria.pdf>

Comprehensive Analysis of OOSCY in Nigeria

Link:<http://www.associatesforchange.org/new-reports-2022/Comprehensive%20Analysis%20for%20Nigeria.pdf>

Out of School Mapping Study for Northeast Nigeria (2022): full report. CSEA Nigeria

Policy Brief 2: Understanding the Profile of OOSC youth in Nigeria--Evidence from the OOSC Mapping Study for North East Nigeria, CSEA Nigeria

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4. University of Development Studies

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Annex 1: Enrolment and transition performance across three of Ghana's AEP providers

Performance of AfriKids CBE programme

Education Innovator	CBE Cycle	Enrolment				Total	Transition				Percentage Transitioned	
		Boys	%	Girls	%		Boys	%	Girls	%	Total	%
AfriKids	1	822	58%	594	42%	1416	552	51	539	49	1091	77
	2	1083	46%	1293	54%	2376	994	45	1208	55	2202	93
	3	2739	49%	2876	51%	5615	2699	49	2819	51	5518	98
	4	2273	46%	2627	54%	4900	2234	46	2587	54	4821	98
	5	965	41%	1385	59%	2350	945	41	1352	59	2297	98
Grand Total		7,882	47%	8,775	53%	16,657	7,424	47	8,505	53	15,929	96

Source: Afrikids Annual Report, 2020.

▪ **Performance of AfriKids CBE programme**

The analysis in the Table below shows about 16,657 children were enrolled in the Afrikids programme during Cycles 1–5 (see annex 1, Table 1). Males (58%) outnumbered females (42%) in cycle 1, but the female population rose in subsequent cycles. In cycle 5, the gender difference became more noticeable, with females becoming the majority (59%) due to increasing efforts to become more gender sensitive. Again, the statistics indicate that not all children enrolled were able to transition but the vast majority transitioned to upper primary levels after the nine-month programme. Around 96% of students were able to enter the formal school system, the greatest rate among the three innovators.

Performance of GILLBT CBE programme

Education Innovator	CBE Cycle	Enrolment				Total	Transition				Percentage Transitioned	
		Boys	%	Girls	%		Boys	%	Girls	%	Total	%
GILLBT	1	745	45	920	55	1665	616	43	804	57	1420	85
	2	3200	49	3366	51	6566	2907	49	3018	51	5925	90
	3	2000	50	2008	50	4008	1750	50	1722	50	3472	87
	4	530	52	487	48	1017	460	50	459	50	919	90
	5	366	50	361	50	727	366	50	361	50	727	100
Grand Total		6,841	49	7,142	51	13,983	6,099	49	6,364	51	12,463	89

Source: GILLBT Data, 2021

▪ **Performance of GILLBT CBE programme**

Analysis of the GILLBT-managed CBE programme shows a higher proportion of females across all the cycles except for cycle 4 where there were more males (52%) compared to females (48%) (see annex 1, Table 2). Conversely, there was an equal representation of boys and girls in cycles 3 and 5. In comparison to transition data, the majority of cycles had an equal number of children transitioning from CBE to formal education. The results showed that approximately 50% of boys and girls transitioned throughout cycles 3,4 and 5. At the end of cycle 5, there is a total of 100% transition. Cycle 1 had the smallest proportion of transitioned pupils (85%).

Performance School for Life CBE programme

Education Innovator	CBE Cycle	Enrolment				Total	Transition				Percentage Transitioned	
		Boys	%	Girls	%		Boys	%	Girls	%	Total	%
SfL	2010	5207	52	4793	48	10000	4160	51	3978	49	8138	81
	1	5201	52	4799	48	10000	5201	55	4202	45	9403	94
	2	6552	53	5738	47	12290	5128	53	4636	47	9764	79
	3	6422	51	6282	49	12704	5772	51	5448	49	11220	88
	4	5518	49	5832	51	11350	4601	49	4812	51	9413	83
	5	1874	47	2126	53	4000	1820	47	2061	53	3881	97
Grand Total		30,774	51	29,570	49	60,344	26,682	51	25,137	49	51,819	86

Source: School for Life Data, 2021.

▪ **Performance School for Life CBE programme**

The SfL programme enrolled a total of 60,344 children comprising a slightly higher number of boys (30,774) than girls (29,570). Except for cycles 4 and 5, female enrolment was generally low across the other cycles. On the other hand, the transition rate was modest (86%) in comparison to Afrikids (96%). Girls' transition rates were also low over the first three cycles of the CBE programme mainly due to socio economic factors including preference for boys educational investment due to early marriage and inheritance. Cycle 2 had a low transition rate in comparison to other cycles. Many transitions occurred during cycle 5 (see annex 1, Table 3).

Annex 2; Nigeria's local providers of Accelerated Education programming

The AEP interventions that have been implemented in Nigeria by local providers in the North East include: Horn of Hope Vision for Peace and Community Development of Nigeria (HOHVIPAD) and Kanem Borno Human Development Association (KABHUDA).

▪ **Horn of Hope Vision for Peace and Community Development of Nigeria (HOHVIPAD)**

HOHVIPAD is a faith-based non-governmental organization founded in 2005. It aims to provide humanitarian and community development support to deprived communities in Nigeria. Over the last 15 years, the organisation implemented 4 cycles of AEP programmes – with each cycle lasting for 9 months. The results of the intervention showed that the Education Crisis Response (ECR) project was able to exceed the number of children targeted for the intervention – reaching 1,645 children instead of the projected number of 1,400 children.

During the period of 2015 - 2020, girls focused programmes were also implemented in a few local government areas in Adamawa state. Some of the implemented girls' focused models include: AEP interventions, girls' skill acquisition centres and girls' learning centres.

▪ **Kanem Borno Human Development Association (KABHUDA)**

KABHUDA is a non-governmental organization that was established in 2007 – basically providing food, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), and Education for vulnerable people of all ages and genders in the North-eastern region of Nigeria both during and after emergencies. The organisation also provides non-food items to vulnerable people in IDP camps, host communities and returnees in North-eastern Nigeria. The project focused on achieving the following:

- Create social stability and awareness on reproductive issues, HIV / AIDS, and other related adolescence issues;
- Creating avenues for advocacy for human rights, peaceful resolution of conflicts and sustain socio-economic development among the marginalized communities;
- Advocate for a society whereby children and youth with disabilities have equal rights and opportunities for growth and development;
- Improve access to education and psycho-social well-being of marginalized children and youth;
- Increase household income through self-help projects, hence, eradicating household poverty among the victims of armed conflict and marginalized communities;
- Improve Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) practices in communities, especially in emergency situations.

KABHUDA has over the period implemented 7 cycles of AEP interventions over the last 15 years with each cycle lasting for a period of 9 to 12 months.

In terms of gender focused programmes, KABHUDA has been conducting the GirlsforGirls (G4G) initiative for the past 8 months and is still ongoing. The initiative seeks to provide opportunities for girls to promote enrolment and access to education for those who have dropped out, to enable retention and continuity with the necessary life skills. Also, G4G focuses on girls between the age of 10-16 years.

Overall, the programme targeted 2,200 and 1100 boys and girls respectively. However, the programme achieved more than the projected numbers – reaching 3,300 boys and 2,200 girls.