

ACCELERATE ED+ POLICY BRIEF:

Advancing Education Solutions: Research for Scaling up Education Innovations in Emergency and Fragilities and FCV Affected Areas of Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Nigeria

Effectiveness of Accelerated Education Programs and Girls-Focused Education Innovations in Burkina Faso

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Summary of key points:

This policy brief focuses on innovations in Accelerated Education and Girls-Focused Education implemented in Burkina Faso. It is intended for governments, NGOs, and United Nations agencies working in Burkina Faso. It highlights education's main challenges in areas affected by fragility, conflict, and violence (FCV) in Burkina Faso. This document calls on decision-makers to increase funding and put in place appropriate policies and strategies to strengthen and expand the Accelerated Schooling/Speed schools (SSA/P) and Girls Education initiatives to improve access to quality education in FCV-affected areas.

Background

West Africa faces serious education challenges due to violence, displacement, and systemic fragility in the region. Indeed, more than 19.7 million children are out of the education system in Nigeria, more than one million in Ghana, and 2.95 million in Burkina Faso, including 1.46 million girls (RGPH Report 2019). These indicators show the urgent need to use accelerated education programs through effective interventions and policies to ensure access to learning for vulnerable children.

In Burkina Faso, the number of out-of-school children (OOSC) has increased since the advent of the terrorist attacks. According to the monthly data report from the Secrétariat technique de l'Éducation en Situation d'Urgence (ST-ESU)¹, as of December 31, 2022, 6,253 schools were closed. These closures represented around 23.88% of educational structures in Burkina Faso affecting 1,076,155 school children (of which 523,194 are girls) and 31,594 teachers (of which 10,130 are women).

As a result, the government and its partners have facilitated the development and implementation of initiatives to find appropriate responses and ensure continuity of education. Innovations tested include i) the Strategy for Accelerated Schooling (SSA/P), known as Speed Schools, initiated by the Stromme Foundation; ii) the Radio Education Program (REP) by UNICEF; iii) Girls-Focused and inclusive education programs implemented by the SWEDD project; and iv) teacher training in Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL) and retention approaches.

¹ Technical Secretariat for Education in Emergencies (ST-ESU)

Accelerated Education Programs and innovations in Girls-focused Education in Burkina Faso

1) “Speed Schools” Strategy for Accelerated Schooling (SSA/P)

This strategy has been tested and implemented in Burkina Faso through an agreement signed in 2006 between the Ministry of Education, the Stromme Foundation, and local NGOs. Since then, the SSA/P has produced significant results, allowing its expansion beyond the initial areas. As early as 2011, the relevance of the SSAP led the Burkinabe government to finance the opening of SSA/P centers and to integrate this strategy into the National Strategy for Education in Emergencies (EiE).

Implementation of the SSA/P

In 2019, the government created a Permanent Secretariat for the Accelerated Schooling Strategy (SP-SSA/P) to anchor the initiative institutionally. This demonstrated Burkina Faso's commitment to supporting its implementation.

In 2024, the SP-SSA/P became an integrated directorate of the General Directorate of Non-Formal Education (DGENF). A Steering Committee, chaired by the Minister of Basic Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages (MEBAPLN) has been set up to strategically guide the SSA/P, validate decisions and approve annual implementation reports. Thus, through strategic standards, the implementation of SSA/P respects the principle of subsidiarity based on a distribution of roles between four partners: i) the State, ii) Technical/Financial Partners (PTF), iii) NGOs/local associations, and iv) communities. The government Ministry (MEBAPLN) coordinates interventions, develops educational benchmarks, collects data, and facilitates resource mobilization. Technical and Financial Partners mobilize external resources, while NGOs and local associations ensure social mobilization, recruit and train facilitators, and equip the centers. Communities identify implementation sites and monitor parent engagement.

Regarding educational standards, teaching in SSA/P centers lasts 9 months but 7 months in an emergency context. The teaching combines local languages and French. Each center welcomes 25 to 30 children, with equal numbers of girls and boys. The program condenses the first three years of formal primary school (CP1, CP2, CE1) with a teaching schedule of 34 hours/week. Facilitators receive initial training, annual refresher courses, and quarterly professional development days. The children benefit from a school canteen and educational manuals, just as in traditional schools.

Assessment and transfer of learners

Learning is assessed continuously, with three main assessments, including the national language phase at the end of November, the mid-term at the end of March, and the final at the 3rd week of June. Learners are transferred to local primary schools, depending on their results. Those with a score of at least 4.5 out of 10 are transferred to CE2 (grade 4), while those with a score of 3 to 4.5 are transferred to CE1 (grade 3), and those with lower scores may transfer to lower grades.

SSA/P Performance and Efficiency in Burkina Faso

Existing data indicate that between 2006 and 2020, 83,599 out-of-school children (including 40,848 girls) were enrolled in SSA/P centers. 69,802 learners (34,206 girls and 35,596 boys) have been transferred to primary school. Since Burkina Faso adopted the SSA/P, some of these students have reached university or entered various professional fields.

From 2021 to 2023, 34,009 learners (89.5% of those enrolled) were transferred to formal schools, including 78.3% in CE2 (grade 4), 12.3% in CE1 (grade 3) and 9.4% in CP2 (grade 2). For 2023-2024, 13,730 learners (48% of whom were girls) were welcomed in 475 centers in 22 provinces, funded by nine partners, including the Strømme Foundation and the government.

As part of the 2019-2023 strategic plan, the Strømme Foundation and other partners (EU, UNICEF) have funded the opening of 3,582 centers in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, hosting 96,908 children, 48% of whom are girls.

Cost-effectiveness of Speed Schools

According to the cost tables drawn up by the SP-SSA/P, the average estimated costs are calculated based on 30 learners per centre. Thus, for traditional SSA/P centers, the cost of a center is 4,613,621 FCFA, **with a projected average cost of 153,787 FCFA per learner.** For the SSA/P State resilience centers (emergency situation), the cost of a center is 2,892,584 FCFA, **with a projected average cost of 96,419 FCFA per learner.**

Potential for scaling SSA/P in Burkina Faso

For Burkina Faso, the value, relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency (in terms of cost per learner in an emergency context) of SSA/P, as well as the option of scaling it up are based on the following elements:

- the existence of an increasingly growing target (out-of-school children);
- the existence of clear operational and pedagogical standards;
- the results of sub-regional evaluations and impact studies that confirm the relevance and effectiveness (retention rate of about 95%);
- the existence of an effective program and educational tools adapted to the context of Burkina Faso;
- the existence of national expertise (team of experienced trainers and NGOs/National Associations) for implementation;
- the decade-long history of satisfactory annual results, which confirm the recruitment and reintegration into the primary school of a large number of out-of-school children;
- the adaptability of the program to contexts of crisis, insecurity, violence, and fragility;
- the existence of a 2022-2026 expansion plan.

2) Girls-Focused inclusive education programs

The Sub-Saharan Africa Women's Empowerment and Demographic Dividend (SWEDD) project is a regional initiative funded by the World Bank. It covers 12 countries in West and Central Africa. Its main partners are the West African Health Organization (WAHO), a technical health agency of ECOWAS, and the African Union. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) supports governments in its implementation by coordinating technical assistance with partners such as the Population Council, Equipundo, the Human Center for Pharmacy Professions (CHMP), Plan International-WACA, the GREG Consortium and Johns Hopkins University. The project's overall objective is to accelerate the demographic transition, boost the demographic dividend, and reduce gender inequalities in the participating countries.

Main interventions

SWEDD intervenes through the creation of Safe Spaces (SS), through which training and support are provided to adolescent girls and young women in terms of daily life skills. Initiatives such as *Future Husbands' Clubs (CdFM)* and *Husbands' Clubs (CdM)* encourage positive masculinity and challenge harmful gender norms. Efforts also focus on improving access to reproductive health and family planning services, women's economic

empowerment, and preventing gender-based violence through community engagement and targeted interventions.

Performance and efficiency

Substantial progress has been made in Social and Behavior Change Communication (SBCC) since 2017 through media campaigns, engagement with key influencers, and community outreach efforts. In total, in Burkina Faso, 193 safe spaces have been set up to strengthen the life skills of adolescent girls and young women, reaching 6,807 beneficiaries. At the same time, 120 husbands' clubs were established, benefiting 1,857 young men, while 30 husbands' clubs welcomed 361 adult participants.

In the project's intervention areas, the school retention rate among adolescent girls enrolled in secondary schools who received support reached 97%. In addition, 98% of girls and young women participating in Safe Spaces interventions demonstrated a good understanding of the harmful effects of child marriage and early pregnancy. In particular, they identified the benefits of birth spacing. Overall, 68,714 girls enrolled in school received support through at least one school-related intervention, including transportation, shelter, food, school supplies, and tutoring.

Potential for Scaling

There is an opportunity to create more safe spaces in rural and urban areas, which could attract even more girls to education. Strong partnerships exist between SWEDD, MEBA-PLN, NGOs, civil society, and community-based organizations. SWEDD's good practices and results are integrated into national education policies. However, it should be noted that Burkina Faso just signed the agreement for SWEDD+ in 2024.

3) UNICEF Radio Education Programme

In response to the education crisis, UNICEF has established the Radio Education Program (PER) to ensure access to education for children fleeing conflict. The program consists of disseminating courses for children aged 10 to 17 in French and in local languages (Tamachek, Sonrai, Fulfulde, Koronfe, Moore, Gourumachema, and Dioula) to teach them the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Implementation

The children are welcomed in listening clubs of 40 members led by trained animators or supported at home by the family and 1,000 community relays. They attend radio sessions on life skills, protection, hygiene and sanitation. Out-of-school children aged 10 to 17 also have access to Temporary Learning Spaces (ETAs) set up for these clubs. Radios and USB sticks are provided to ensure access to educational content. Facilitators receive training on the Safe School approach and child protection to create safe and supportive learning environments.

Effectiveness and Impact

In 2024, UNICEF implemented the *Radio Distance Learning Programme* (PEDIR), which enabled 635,000 children, particularly in areas with high-security challenges, to maintain their access to education. Key actions include the creation of Temporary Learning Spaces (ETAs), enabling 14,460 children, 52% of whom are girls, to access school. With this program, 1,439 teachers and facilitators, including 450 women, have been trained in emergency education methods, including alternative emergency classes (ACU) and the Safe School approach.

Potential for Scaling

The strong partnership between UNICEF and MEBAPLN provides a solid basis for expanding this program. In addition, MEBAPLN, through the Directorate of Information and Communication Technologies for Education (DTICE), has begun digitizing the SSA/P national curriculum for broadcast throughout the country. This will enable a broader extension of PEDIR.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This policy brief highlights three innovations that are significantly improving access to education in fragile and conflict-affected regions of Burkina Faso: Speed Schools (SSA/P), girls-focused education programs (SWEDD), and the Radio Education Program (REP). These initiatives show strong potential for broader implementation due to several key factors. First, they benefit from solid institutional support, with active involvement from government structures. Second, they are cost-effective, particularly in emergency contexts where resources are limited. Third, their operational and pedagogical models are clearly defined, allowing for consistent implementation and scalability. Fourth, these programs are built on strong collaboration among various actors, including government institutions, NGOs, community organizations, and international partners. Lastly, there is clear and measurable evidence of their success, notably in the form of high reintegration and retention rates among learners, as well as improved empowerment outcomes for girls.

Despite these strengths, challenges such as limited resources, insecurity, and weak coordination threaten their long-term sustainability and scalability. To address these barriers and successfully scale up these innovations in Burkina Faso, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Strengthen local capacity by empowering decentralized education offices to lead implementation and monitoring;
- Ensure sustainable funding through increased national budget support for SSA/P and Safe Spaces, reducing reliance on external donors;
- Enhance community involvement by expanding awareness campaigns and involving parents and community leaders in school management and girl-friendly programs;
- Train local facilitators and community relays, ensuring a good gender balance to build trust and ensure long-term sustainability;
- Boost digital learning by accelerating the digitization of SSA/P curriculum and using accessible technologies like radio, USB drives, and mobile phones;
- Improve accountability and adaptability through regular impact evaluations and feedback from communities to adapt programs to local needs and realities;
- Expand Safe Spaces, especially in provinces where girls are most at risk of dropping out of school;
- Support learners with essential services, including transportation, school meals, shelters, supplies, and tutoring to remove key barriers to education.

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