ماعت للسلام والتنمية وحقوق الإنسان
Maat For Peace, Development, and Human Rights

Education for human rights
"Expected entitlements and fragile realities in Africa"

MAY 2024

Contents

Introduction

African continent, both countries and regions, has devoted keen attention and strenuous efforts to developing and improving education, culminating in the adoption of 2024 as the "Year of African Education." During this year, Africa aims to intensify its efforts to fulfill education entitlements in accordance with its development goals and aspirations and to invest its returns at all political, security, economic, and legal levels. Although the continent has reached the middle of 2024, it faces many challenges in realizing its education-related ambitions and aspirations, and the fragility of education has resulted in direct and indirect human rights impacts. In this context, and in line with 79th session of African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights presents its study entitled **"Education for Human Rights: Expected Entitlements & Fragile Realities in Africa."** The study evaluates the theme of the African Union 2024, monitors accelerators of fragility of African education, analyzes human rights impacts resulting from fragility of education, and concludes with a set of recommendations.
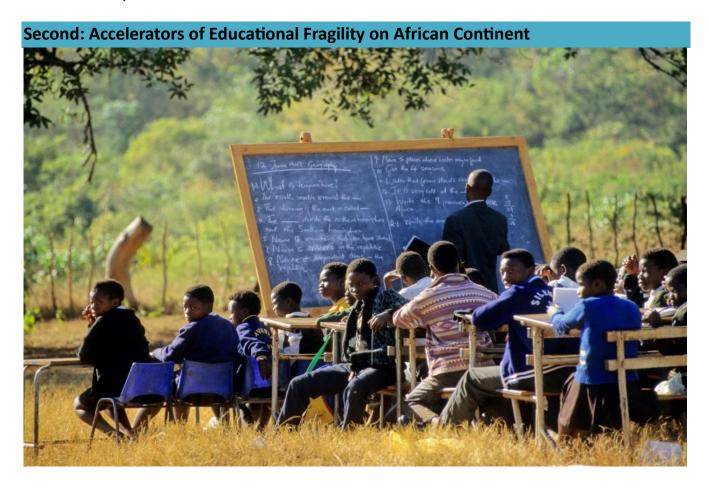
On the African continent, the launch of educational policies, visions, and strategies is well-known. The prominent initiatives include Continental Strategy for Africa, the Continental Strategy for Technical and Vocational Education and Training, and African Union Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation.[1] This commitment culminated in the declaration of 2024 as "Year of African Education," under the theme **"African Education Fit for 21st Century: Building Resilient Education Systems to Increase Access to Inclusive, Lifelong, Quality and Relevant Learning in Africa."** This can be considered a serious continental attempt to implement Agenda 2063, especially the 6th aspiration that requires "**Prosperous Africa Based on Inclusive Growth and Sustainable Development**" and supports educational investments to build human and social capital.[2] It is also an entry point aligns with sixth item of Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan of Agenda 2063, which recognizes education as one of the tools for empowering society

---

[1] Au, Education, Science & Technology. https://au.int/en/education-science-technology
[2] AU, Gender Equality & Development, Access date March 29, 2024, https://au.int/en/gender-equality-development

3

and its members: young men, girls, and children, and supporting them with education and innovation.[3]

Despite these efforts, the results remain largely theoretical, with limited practical impact. The facts and evaluation indicators of African education show that while the continent has increased enrollment rates at the primary, middle, and secondary levels from 52%, 35%, and 23% to 69%, 50%, and 33% respectively during 2000-2022, it still faces significant challenges in activating its 2024 education entitlements. It is reported that 90% of sub-Saharan children at the age of ten are unable to read simple text with understanding, and 80% are unable to learn in their mother tongues spoken at home.[4] The continent also confirms a decline in basic reading and writing skills among children and youth in 4 out of every 10 African countries over the past three decades, and a shortage of teachers and classrooms estimated at 9.5 million teachers and 9 million classrooms by 2050.[5]

Second: Accelerators of Educational Fragility on African Continent

---

[3] AU, Agenda 2063: Launch of 2nd Decade of Acceleration, February 2024, https://shorter.me/J4D9e
[4] UNESCO, Q&A: How are African countries improving the quality of their education?, 20 April 2023, https://shorter.me/nVrA0
[5] MATSH, Youth Employment Statistics in Africa in 2023, 5 October 2023, https://shorter.me/XGRAp

Africa's educational contexts and its attempts to implement and activate its 2024 theme on education, in a way that supports its desired development goals - particularly its Agenda 2063, reveal numerous challenges and difficulties that hinder the implementation of its efforts to develop education. Rather, these challenges accelerate the consequences of educational fragility and its pace. Perhaps the most prominent of these accelerators and dynamics are:

➢ **Poor Financing:**

The fragility of African education appears to stem primarily from weak funding and financial capacities. The African continent has a limited financing and investment infrastructure, and it alone requires more than 90% of global external funding needs by 2030, in addition to its need for an additional $4 billion to finance education according to Agenda 2063.

➢ **Poor Education Infrastructure:**

The African educational infrastructure remains inadequate and fails to meet the requirements of the basic educational process. Less than 50% of schools in sub-Saharan Africa have access to drinking water, electricity, computers, and the internet. Africa also needs about 17 million teachers to achieve universal primary and secondary education by 2030.

➢ **High Dropout Rates:**

The African Security, Climate and Conflict Chronicles capture the approximately 98 million out-of-school children across sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in areas affected by armed conflict, forced displacement, climate change, and other long-term crises.[6] The combined effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, conflict, and climate change have led to at least 13 million children being out of school in Ethiopia, and an estimated 3.5 million additional children (primary and secondary) are at risk of dropping out.[7]

➢ **High Expenses:**

The deteriorating realities of Africa and the high rates of poverty and inflation reveal that Africans suffer from high school expenses and fees, to the extent that about 54% of adults

---

[6] RW, Education Cannot Wait Interviews Professor Mohammed Belhocine, Commissioner for Education, Science, Technology and Innovation within the African Union, March 2024, https://shorter.me/rAOA6

[7] Miss Africa, Miss Africa Project THE EDUCATION OF THE AFRICAN CHILD, https://www.missafrica.tv/project-african-child-education/

in sub-Saharan Africa are affected. Furthermore, 29% of adults in sub-Saharan Africa indicate that school fees are a source of concern, as the cost of sending a child to school in Uganda ranges from US$168 for government schools to US$420-680 for private schools.

➤ Conflict & Disputes:

The observer of the African continent is aware that the conflict environment and the violent clashes and fighting that fill it are one of the main causes of weak education on the African continent. In 2023, the statistics of violent incidents that affect education are 20% higher than their incidents in 2022, especially in Nigeria and Sudan. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, about 50% of out-of-school children live in conflict-affected areas.[8]

➤ Expansion of Terrorism:

The decline in the educational environment on the African continent and the failure of those governments to fully implement continental strategies concerned with education cannot be considered apart from the catastrophic repercussions of terrorism on education, especially in West Africa. A clear example appears in the practices of the terrorist group Boko Haram and the violence and kidnapping it carries out towards girls. According to statistics in July 2022, 11,100 schools were closed due to violence resulting from terrorism and conflicts or threats directed against teachers and students in the Central Sahel region.[9]

➤ Climate Changes:

Climate change has severe repercussions and threatens catastrophic human rights violations, particularly for children on the move. Climate change is responsible for an estimated 40 million children dropping out of school annually.[10] The impacts of climate change are evident across the African continent, primarily threatening over 500 million children under 18 in 35 sub-Saharan African countries, especially in East and Southern Africa. In the Horn of Africa region alone, 2.7 million children are out of school due to drought, with an additional 4 million at risk of dropping out.[11]

---

[8] Education in Africa: Violent attacks against schools rose 20% in 2023, https://shorter.me/saKQ9
[9] Middle East, How does "terrorism" destroy education in Africa? November 7, 2022, https://shorter.me/ovuKa
[10] World Health organization, Climate Change, 17 November 2022, https://bit.ly/2UhIPyO
[11] DW, UN: Drought threatens millions of African kids, 23 August 2022, https://p.dw.com/p/4FvNm

➢ **Gender Inequality:**

Africa has yet to eliminate the gender gap in education. There are 9 million African girls aged 6-11 who have never attended school, compared to 6 million boys.[12] High school dropout rates are also disproportionately higher for girls. In total, the continent has 64 million children out of school at the primary level, 34 million of whom are girls.[13]

➢ **Migration**:

Migration, both regular and irregular, on the African continent has significant repercussions for education. One in four African immigrants is a migrant child who has left the education system, not to mention the challenges faced by mobile and forcibly displaced children.[14]

---

[12] WEF, Education: Girls are catching up with boys in sub-Saharan Africa, July 2022, https://shorter.me/3UAWa
[13] World Bank, The high price of education in Sub-Saharan Africa, 13 March 2023, https://shorter.me/VmETH
[14] RW, Migrant Children in Africa: A Major Challenge for Education Systems, https://shorter.me/nXlMO

Education is not just a basic human right, but an essential starting point that is interconnected with other social, economic, cultural, political, and civil rights. Quality education can lift people out of poverty, reduce inequality, promote sustainable development, foster inclusion, prevent conflicts, encourage dialogue, and provide psychological and social support and protection from violence.[15] Conversely, lack of quality education can destabilize the foundation of human rights and impede their full, rapid and reasonable realization. In this context, several effects and repercussions resulting from or related to fragility of education can be pointed out as follows:

➢ **Undermining Right to Development:**

Education is a key gateway to realizing the right to development and a decent standard of living. Globally, 171 million people could escape extreme poverty if children acquired basic reading skills, and reducing poverty by more than half if all adults completed secondary education.[16] In Africa, fragility of education is a catalyst and accelerator of

---

[15] OHCHR, Human rights education invests in peace and progress, 15 December 2023, https://shorter.me/VNfWh

[16] Micro financing, Education in Africa: Extreme Poverty and the Education Crisis, 4 August 2023, https://shorter.me/H2Yod

poverty, with the continent being home to over 60% of the world's extremely poor - a figure expected to reach 90% by 2030.[17]

➢ Undermining Right to Peace and Security:

Fragility of education deprives the African continent of the benefits of quality education in supporting and consolidating peace, promoting dialogue, and fostering economic development and social equality. Reports suggest that the fragility of education has played a role in igniting conflicts, particularly in West Africa, the Sahel region, East Africa, and Central Africa.[18]

➢ Undermining Right to Political Participation:

Fragility of education in Africa has limited the political participation of African youth. Estimates indicate there are around 72 million African youth who are not in education, employment, or training, distancing them from prospects of civic engagement.[19]

➢ Undermining Right to Work:

Poor education outcomes in Africa have hindered the ability of Africans to fully enjoy their right to work. Weak human capital development and lack of relevant skills have limited economic opportunities. While an estimated 230 million jobs in Africa will require digital skills by 2030, 3 out of 4 young Africans lack the necessary technological competencies to participate in the continent's digital economies[20] - a severe consequence of fragile education. This has contributed to high youth unemployment, with statistics from August 2023 showing 13 million young Africans jobless.[21]

➢ Spread of Child Labor:

Fragility of education indirectly contributes to the rise in child labor prevalence. Poverty stemming from poor educational outcomes drives Africans, especially children, to seek employment to meet basic needs, making them vulnerable to exploitative child labor practices and violations across all levels. This casts a negative shadow on the rights of 72 million African children, 59 million of whom are engaged in hazardous work.[22]

[17] World Bank: Extreme poverty rates are highest in Africa, https://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/3115719.aspx
[18] RW, Education: A path to a peaceful future, January 2024, https://shorter.me/dO5Xf
[19] UN, Young People's Potential, the Key to Africa's Sustainable Development, access date May 17, 2024, https://shorter.me/a29f2
[20] Euro News, How Can African Youth Contribute to Global Growth?, August 22, 2023, https://shorter.me/i2-C7
[21] ILOSTAT, One of the cornerstones of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Access date May 17, 2024, https://shorter.me/72JZ4
[22] RW, Ending child labor through education, 24 Jan 2024, https://shorter.me/O9sjf

Spread of Child Marriage:

Fragility of education in Africa is closely linked to the prevalence of harmful cultural practices, such as child marriage. The continent has become a hotbed for many violations that are inconsistent with human rights and sustainable development entitlements and is home to approximately 130 million women and girls who were married before the age of 18. Child marriage often deprives girls of educational opportunities.[23]

Spread of Harmful Cultural Practices:

Fragility of education in Africa has contributed to the persistence and spread of practices that violate human rights, particularly women's rights. The education system has failed to adequately prevent the widespread practice of female genital mutilation (FGM), with statistics from March 2024 indicating that 144 million African women and girls have undergone FGM, with Somalia having the highest prevalence at 99% among females aged 15-49.[24]

Recommendations to Improve State of Education in Africa

Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights, in its study, has sought to analyze the gap between the aspirations and the fragile realities of education in Africa, and to identify the key drivers of educational fragility and their human rights implications. In line with African Union focus on developing the state of education on the continent this year, Maat offers the following recommendations to all stakeholders concerned with education in Africa, including African Union, African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, African governments, and civil society organizations:

- Maat calls on African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights to provide technical assistance to African governments to address the legal and legislative gaps between international/regional education obligations and the national frameworks of African countries. This should involve reformulating, revising, and amending continental or national education plans and visions to improve quality.
- Maat recommends that African Commission technically support African governments in closing the gender gap in education. This should involve awareness campaigns to tackle negative societal attitudes, highlighting the value of girls'

---

[23] GPE, Child marriage and the education crisis in Africa: Where do we go from here?, Jan 2020, https://shorter.me/uWeRY
[24] OHCHR, The world is failing 130 million girls denied education: UN experts, 23 January 2023, https://shorter.me/2EFFg

education, and ensuring schools are safe and accessible for all, free from gender-based violence and exploitation.

➢ Maat urges development partners and donors, through African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, to increase investments in education projects and plans across Africa, with a focus on fragile countries such as Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia, and South Sudan.

➢ Maat recommends that the African Union and its relevant bodies launch initiatives to swap foreign debts for education funding, allowing African countries to redirect resources towards improving their education systems.

➢ Maat calls on the African Union to accelerate the establishment and operationalization of the African Fund for Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation to mobilize domestic financing for the sector.

➢ Maat recommends that African governments, particularly in East and West Africa, reconsider their educational infrastructure and work to rehabilitate and develop it by creating a healthy educational environment provided with all social and economic services, such as water, sanitation, medicines, and safety tools, build hurricane-resistant schools, and develop early warning systems to protect schools from future disasters, including fragile and rural areas.

➢ Maat urges African governments to expand partnerships with developmental and relevant parties to localize technological and digital capabilities and communications systems within African continent, enhance access to them, establish electronic platforms for training and education via phones and communication devices, and create platforms for research, development and exchange of knowledge regarding digital education solutions.

➢ Maat calls on African governments to increase investments in curriculum modernization, alignment with market needs and sustainable development and 2063 Agenda, ensuring equitable access, especially for marginalized groups and deprived areas, and increasing the ratio of teachers to students

➢ Maat recommends that African governments accelerate early intervention measures to prevent girls from dropping out of school and protect the right of pregnant girls to continue their education, as well as promote female literacy among older girls and mothers.