

Continental vs Global Education Benchmarks: Bridging CESA 16-25 and SDG4

This research brief is part of the series compiled by the GCE Secretariat to disseminate and present findings and summarized information from the published report entitled, *“In Search for A Place in Implementing the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA)”*. The research was commissioned by GCE to understand how the African Union (AU) and its Regional Economic Communities (RECs) engage with the theme of education, and to identify what spaces and opportunities exist for civil society education groups in Africa to interact with those bodies in the service of more equitable and democratic public education systems on the continent. This brief specifically covers the important convergences that have taken place in the past few years between CESA and SDG4, culminated through the publication of the first Continental Report which uses benchmarks and indicators agreed between the AU and UNESCO to monitor progress in the implementation of both agendas in the different African countries.

CESA Monitoring Indicators

The African Union (AU) launched its Continental Education Strategy (CESA) in 2016, as the education component of the Africa We Want vision. The development of CESA indicators followed two years after the launch of the CESA strategy resulting to the publication of [CESA Indicators Manual](#) to empower education managers both inside and outside of African Ministries responsible for Education to perform their jobs more effectively. The selection of indicators for inclusion under the CESA 16-25 Monitoring and Evaluation Framework has been done with participation of Member States officials, representatives from Regional Economic Communities, key agencies working in education in Africa including ADEA, UNESCO and special interest groups, under the auspices of the CESA Education Planning Advisory group”. It described the CESA indicators as the “harmonized framework,” against which countries can report their progress in implementing CESA, and stressed that CESA’s twelve strategic objectives constitute a domestication of the global SDG4 agenda while articulating additional African priorities, which respond to the continent’s long-term development needs. The indicators were selected based on how well they reflect the goals of the CESA Strategic Objectives and the targets of Sustainable Development Goal Four [SDG4], as well as their feasibility for collection.

Key Findings

1. Despite CESA being the education component of the Africa We Want vision that was approved by all African countries with clear goals (and indicators, as we will see below), the translation of CESA into the national context has not taken place, at least not in any visible ways.
2. Although CESA developed its own indicators as early as 2018, there has never been any systematic reporting on the implementation of the CESA goals by African countries.
3. While education stakeholders hold strong appreciation of CESA’s value as the articulation of the African vision for education, there’s a general view that this recognition does not extend to monitoring progress in CESA implementation at the country level.
4. African governments monitor their own progress in implementing the global SDG4 goals through the voluntary national reports (VNRs), but do not do the same with CESA goals.
5. Civil society groups follow their governments’ reporting on SDG4 and issue shadow reports but do not extend that to monitoring how their countries are performing in the implementation of CESA goals.
6. While the CESA framework is more ambitious than the SDG 4 equivalent, overall, there is correspondence between the two frameworks’ objectives, if not in the full details, then in the general formulation of the objectives / goals.

CESA Strategic Objectives and Indicators



SO 1: Revitalize the teaching profession to ensure quality and relevance at all levels of education.

- 1.1 Percentage of Teachers Qualified to Teach According to National Standards.
- 1.2 Percentage of teachers qualified in Science or Technology or Engineering or Mathematics by Sex.
- 1.3 Existence of operational teacher development policy. 1.4 Percentage of Teachers who have undergone In-Service Training.



SO 4: Ensure acquisition of requisite knowledge and skills as well as improved completion rates at all levels and groups through harmonization processes across all levels for national and regional integration.

- 4.1 Gross intake ratio for final year of primary, lower secondary and upper secondary.
- 4.2 Existence of a National Qualifications Framework.
- 4.3 Membership in the Network of African Learning Assessments.
- 4.4 Percentage Distribution of Tertiary Graduates by field of study.
- 4.5 Proportion of children and young people (a) in grade 3; (b) at the end of primary education; and (c) at the end of lower secondary education achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading (ii) mathematics and (iii) science, by sex.
- 4.6 Proportion of population in a given age group achieving at least a fixed level of proficiency in functional (a) literacy and (b) numeracy skills, by sex.
- 4.7 Percentage of girls who complete secondary education



SO 7: Strengthen the science and math curricula in youth training and disseminate scientific.

- 7.1 Percentage of teachers qualified to teach in Science or Mathematics according to national standards.



SO 10: Promote peace education and conflict prevention and resolution at all levels of education and for all age groups.

- 10.1 Your government has developed and adopted strategies to ensure the continuation of education during armed conflict and support the re-establishment of educational facilities.
- 10.2 National education policies exist to address psychosocial support, disaster risk reduction and other systems/mechanisms to protect education from attacks and support for rehabilitation of school infrastructure.
- 10.3 Your Government has a policy or strategies to ensure the continuation of quality education during humanitarian situations.
- 10.4 Extent to which (i) global citizenship education and (ii) education for sustainable development, including gender equality and human rights, (iii) Peace, Life Skills, Media and Information Literacy education, are mainstreamed in: (a) national education policies, (b) curricula, (c) teacher education and (d) student assessment.



SO 2: Build, rehabilitate, preserve education infrastructure and develop policies that ensure a permanent, healthy and conducive learning environment in all sub-sectors and for all, so as to expand access to quality education.

- 2.1 Proportion of schools with access to (i) basic drinking water; (ii) single sex basic sanitation facilities; and (iii) basic hand-washing facilities.
- 2.2 Proportion of schools with adapted infrastructure and materials for students with disabilities.



SO 5: Accelerate processes leading to gender parity and equity.

- 5.1 Gender Parity Index for Gross Enrolment Ratio.
- 5.2 Percentage of Female Teachers.
- 5.3 Percentage of Female Head Teachers.
- 5.4 Girls' dropout rate per reason of drop out.
- 5.5 Percentage of girls enrolled to STEM.



SO 8: Expand TVET opportunities at both secondary and tertiary levels and strengthen linkages between the world of work and education and training systems.

- 8.1 Percentage of Total Enrolment in Technical and Vocational Education and Training.
- 8.2 Percentage of TVET Graduates.
- 8.3 Rate of Graduate Entry into the Labour Market.
- 8.4 Percentage of Students who Meet National Requirements for Academic programs in secondary or University but enrol for TVET.
- 8.5 Number of MoUs signed between TVET Institutions and Private companies.
- 8.6 Percentage of TVET Graduates who have participated in Apprenticeships



SO 11: Improve management of education system as well build and enhance capacity for data collection, management, analysis, communication, and use.

- 11.1 Funds allocated to EMIS (a) are used specifically for EMIS activities and (b) absorption capacity is optimal.
- 11.2 Your Government produces an Annual School Census Report: Last year available.
- 11.3 School Census Return Rate.
- 11.4 Your Government Conducts EMIS Assessments: Last year conducted.
- 11.5 Education Sector Plan includes a chapter on EMIS.
- 11.6 EMIS country performance level.



SO 12: Set up a coalition of stakeholders to facilitate and support activities resulting from the implementation of CESA 16-25.

- 12.1 Existence of School Management Committee Policy.
- 12.2 Existence of National Education Cluster.
- 12.3 Does your Government provide financial or political support to the CESA Implementation cluster on Education Planning?
- 12.4 Evidence of communications and advocacy for CESA objectives at country level.



SO 3: Harness the capacity of ICT to improve access, quality and management of education and training systems.

- 3.1 Proportion of schools with access to (i) electricity (ii) the Internet for pedagogical purposes and (iii) computers for pedagogical purposes.



SO 6: Launch comprehensive and effective literacy programmes across the continent to eradicate the scourge of illiteracy

- 6.1 Youth literacy rate.
- 6.2 Adult Literacy Rate.
- 6.3 Participants in literacy programmes as a percentage of illiterate population.



SO 9: Revitalize and expand tertiary education, research and innovation to address continental challenges and promote global competitiveness.

- 9.1 Number of earned doctoral degrees by field.
- 9.2 Expenditure on Research and Development as a Percentage of GDP.
- 9.3 Enrolment of Students in Higher and Tertiary Education per 100,000 Inhabitants.
- 9.3 Enrolment of Students in Higher and Tertiary Education per 100,000 Inhabitants.
- 9.4 Inbound Mobility Ratio.
- 9.5 Outbound Mobility Ratio.
- 9.6 The quality of graduates and their employability in the world economy.
- 9.7 Conducive environment for research and innovation through the provision of adequate infrastructure and resources
- 9.8 Proportion of Learners enrolled in: a. Distance Education, b. Open learning, c. ELearning Programmes.



Additional Indicators - Agenda 2063 Aspiration 7: Africa with a strong cultural identity, common.

heritage, values and ethics.

- A.1 Existence of African Language Policy.
- A.2 Percentage of pupils being taught using an African language as a medium of instruction.
- A.3 Percentage of Learners learning an African language as a subject.
- A.4 National cultural festivals in Learning Institutions.
- F.1 Public Expenditure on Education as a Percentage of Total Government Expenditure.
- F.2 Public Current Expenditure on Education as a Percentage of Total Education Expenditure by level.
- F.3 Public Expenditure on Education as a Percentage of GDP.

Convergence of CESA and SDG4 Targets

The efforts of the AU and UNESCO's Institute of Statistics (UIS) to bridge CESA and SDG4 have gone through different stages, starting with a general mapping that determined the correspondence between CESA's strategic objectives and the SDG4 goals, culminating in the publication of three important reports:

1. [Continental Overview: Bridging CESA and SDG4](#) (January 2021),
2. [Education Baseline in Africa: Expanding the Coverage of CESA Indicators](#) (November 2021),
3. [Placing Equity at the Heart of Policy](#) (February 2023)

It is important to highlight that while the CESA framework is more ambitious than the SDG 4 equivalent, overall, there is correspondence between the two frameworks' objectives, if not in the full details, then in the general formulation of the objectives / goals.

As can be seen from image 1, the correspondence between a CESA SO is seen to be fully or partially corresponding to SDGs even outside of the education sustainable development goal. SO8 on TVET is considered to correspond to Sustainable Development Goal 8 (decent work and economic growth), as well as SDG4 targets 4.3 and 4.6¹. The CESA SO12, setting up a coalition of education stakeholders, corresponds to SDG17, which is about partnerships to achieve the sustainable development goal

¹ SDG target 4.3 is: "by 2030 ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university", while 4.6 is: "by 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy".

CESA Strategic Objective		SDG Target
SO1	Revitalize the teaching profession to ensure quality and relevance at all levels of education.	By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least-developed countries and small island developing States. 4C
SO2	Build, rehabilitate, preserve education infrastructure and develop policies that ensure a permanent, healthy and conducive learning environment in all sub-sectors and for all, so as to expand access to quality education.	Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all. 4A
SO3	Harness the capacity of ICT to improve access, quality and management of education and training systems.	
SO4	Ensure acquisition of requisite knowledge and skills as well as improved completion rates at all 4.3 levels and groups through harmonization processes across all levels for national and regional integration.	By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes. 4.1 By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university. 4.3 By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy. 4.6
SO5	Accelerate processes leading to gender parity and equity.	By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations. 4.5
SO6	Launch comprehensive and effective literacy programmes across the continent to eradicate the 4.6 scourge of illiteracy.	By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy. 4.6
SO7	Strengthen the science and math curricula in youth training and disseminate scientific knowledge and culture in society.	No specific target for science and math. Refer to UNESCO STEM/SAGA project
SO8	Expand TVET opportunities at both secondary and tertiary levels and strengthen linkages between the world of work and education and training systems.	By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university. 4.3 By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship. 4.4 Target 8.6: By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training. 8.6
SO9	Revitalize and expand tertiary education, research and innovation to address continental challenges and promote global competitiveness.	By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university. 4.3
SO10	Promote peace education and conflict prevention and resolution at all levels of education and for all age groups.	By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development. 4.7
SO11	Improve management of education system as well build and enhance capacity for data collection, management, analysis, communication, and use.	Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development. 17
SO11	Set up a coalition of stakeholders to facilitate and support activities resulting from the implementation of CESA 16-25.	Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development. 17

Other Convergences

- The Agenda 2063 Aspiration 7, which is included in the CESA indicators and is concerned with a strong African cultural identity, is clearly an Africa-specific objective.
- The Financing Commitments that are included in the CESA Indicators are seen to correspond to the Education 2030 Framework for Action (FFA) and to SDG1 on eradicating poverty, the indicators for which include the “proportion of total government spending on essential services (education, health and social protection)”.
- Although Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in the CESA framework is identified as a major challenge for Africa, it is not one of CESA’s 12 Strategic Objectives. The establishment of a special CESA cluster focused on Early Childhood is an indication of the subsequent prioritization of the theme¹, but not being a CESA SO meant that the area of early childhood has no CESA indicators. Consequently, SDG Target 4.2, which focuses on access and quality at the level of early childhood education, finds no direct correspondence in the CESA. This is a case where developing a joint framework allows CESA to benefit from the SDG4 targets and indicators it lacks to monitor progress in early childhood education in Africa.
- When it comes to the CESA and SDG4 indicators, both frameworks have a number of common indicators. According to UIS, in 2021, there were about 47% of CESA indicators being produced by the UIS as part of data it collects for the global monitoring of the SDG4. The conclusion, therefore, was that there is a need for UIS and the AU to jointly increase the coverage of CESA-specific indicators for a joint CESA and SDG4 indicator and monitoring framework in Africa.
- The one CESA SO which does not have any corresponding SDG target(s) is the STEM objective in CESA.

Benchmarking Process and Key Actors

- The process of bridging CESA and SDG4 involved the AU and UNESCO convening consultations and expert meetings to agree possible alignments between the indicators of the two frameworks and expanding the coverage of CESA-specific indicators. The recommendations of the Experts’ Meeting, which took place on 25 February 2021, stated that the experts “reviewed the indicators against the selected SDG4 indicators to ascertain alignment, identified the strategy and methodology for setting minimums, in collaboration with the Regional Economic Communities, and assessed readiness and capacity of Member States to provide the needed data for the selected indicators”.
- The recommendations also called on African member states to support the benchmarking process; adopt the agreed indicators for the regional benchmarking of SDG4 and CESA; and to adopt an interim level for each of those CESA and SDG4 indicators.
- The list of participants¹ included in the *Regional Benchmarks* report does not include any civil society representatives. The meetings and consultations that took place to produce the benchmarks are branded as highly technical, with predominant participation of experts from AU bodies and UN agencies, in addition to representatives of national governments (Ministries of Education) and RECs¹.
- The political process of regional benchmarking should have engaged and involved education stakeholders other than the official continental and sub-regional actors, such as civil society. This happened in some regions, but not in Africa¹, which once again deprived the benchmarking of the inputs and political support of civil society, of significance for deepening national ownership of the benchmarking exercise’s outcomes, especially as, for the first time, benchmarking covered both CESA and SDG4.

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