



All children in Senegal are born to learn



Universal basic education completion and foundational learning are two stepping stones for more advanced skills that support economic and social development and lead to more equitable and inclusive societies.

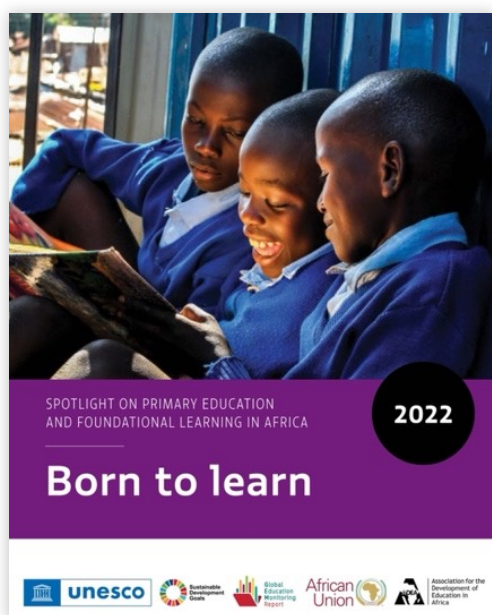
However, today, one in five children of primary school age in Africa remain out of school, one in three children do not complete primary school on time and one in four never complete it. Only around one in two children in rural areas and one in three among the poorest complete primary school.

Data on learning are patchy. The best estimate is that, at most, about one in five primary school-age children achieve minimum proficiency in reading and mathematics and that progress over time is half as fast as in the rest of the world. Children in Africa are five times less likely to learn the basics than in the rest of the world.

Born to Learn

Born to Learn is the first continental report of the three-part Spotlight series on universal basic education completion and foundational learning in Africa, a collaboration between the *Global Education Monitoring Report*, the Association for the Development of Education in Africa and the African Union.

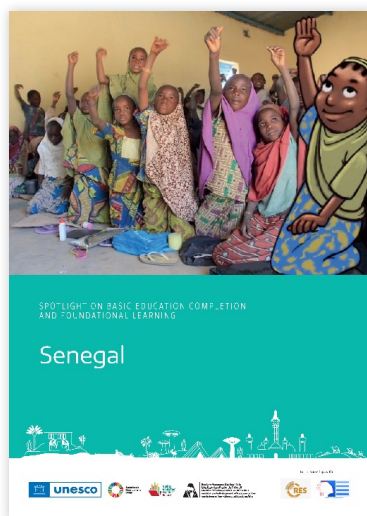
Launched in October 2022, it draws on five country reports: Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Mozambique, Rwanda and Senegal.



Key finding

Completion rates stagnated in recent years and learning outcomes, while better than in peer countries, remain low.

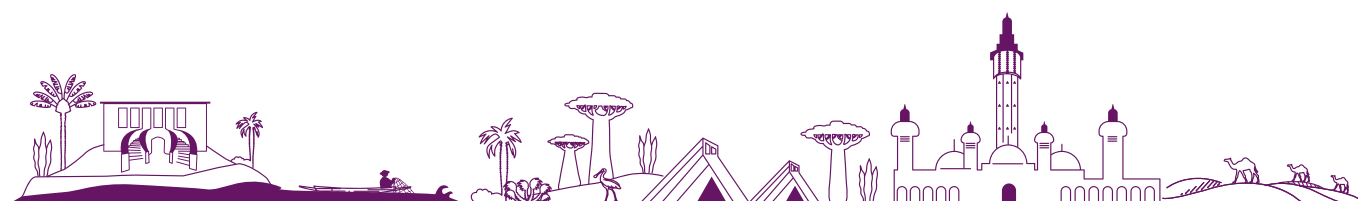
Key evidence from Senegal



The country report was based on a review of the literature, analysis of data on attendance, completion and learning, and fieldwork which provided valuable insights. The country report was developed by Consortium pour la Recherche Economique et Sociale (CRES) and produced in partnership with the Ministry of National Education (MEN).

Drawing on input from stakeholders at subnational (four Inspections de l'éducation et de la formation; IEF, Education and Training Inspectorates) and national levels, the report's relevance was ensured through stakeholder consultations. At the subnational level, a qualitative survey was conducted with 315 basic education stakeholders, which gathered perspectives from teachers, head teachers, community representatives, IEF staff, academy inspectors, directors of Centres régionaux de formation des personnels de l'éducation (CRFPE, Regional Education Staff Training Centres) and mayors. At the national level, views were gathered from key education stakeholders at a national workshop.

Analytical findings and recommendations from the Spotlight report are summarized to inform actions by civil society organizations as they advocate with policymakers to prioritize foundational learning.



Learn

Marking the launch of the first Spotlight continental report, the Leveraging Education Analysis for Results Network (LEARN) was launched by the African Union in October 2022 to encourage African countries to share positive practices on foundational learning.

LEARN will work with three clusters of the Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016-25 – curriculum, teacher development and planning – to catalyse cross-cluster collaboration to focus on foundational learning and basic education completion.

Spotlight recommendations for Senegal

Five tangible actions to improve learning outcomes in Senegal are drawn from the analysis.

All children in Senegal are #borntolearn but they need good teachers to do so.

Recommendation 1:

The Senegal Spotlight Report calls for the government to increase the skills of teachers, as their poor mastery of the basic education curriculum has a negative impact on students' learning outcomes. This will require a focus on training and the provision of teacher guides.

The introduction of the basic education curriculum disrupted habits and required a remodelling of teaching. Interviewees stated there was insufficient time devoted to teaching of reading and mathematics given the complexity of the

skills-based approach, which remains a major innovation for many teachers. According to stakeholders interviewed, the programme is rightly focused on learning reading and mathematics, especially in the first years of primary school. The research found that teaching guides are available but in digital versions. One IEF official confirmed that 'a good portion of the teachers have not adopted the teaching guide'. The use of guides is mentioned as a source of difficulty, and some believe the guides must be adapted to local contexts.

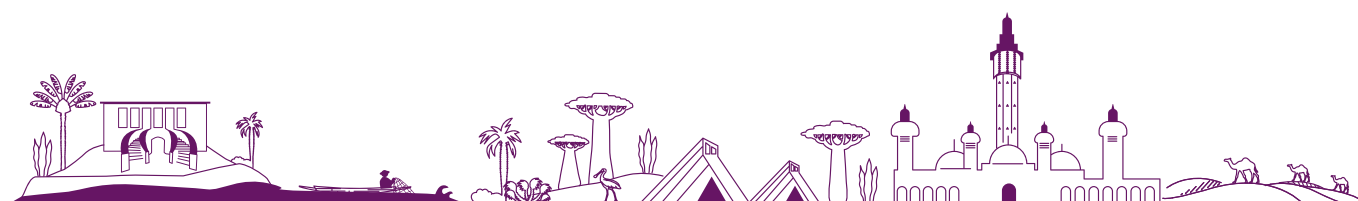
“ [A] child who does not yet know how to read and calculate needs more help at home because the learning time in class is insufficient.
Teacher ”

All children in Senegal are #borntolearn but no child can do so without the necessary resources.

Recommendation 2:

The Senegal Spotlight Report calls for the Ministry of National Education to allocate more of its funding for basic education. In the short term, the option available to the government is to significantly modify public spending in favour of basic education through allocation from other levels of education.

There is a substantial gap between the cost of a 10-year school system and the availability of public resources. Increased stability in the availability of budgets for bodies including IEFs and Inspection d'académie (IAs, Academy Inspectorates) is a necessary condition for proper application of the policies defined in the performance plan. Delays in funding hamper implementation of institutional action plans and school inspections.



All children in Senegal are #borntolearn but they need school buildings of good quality in which to do so.

Recommendation 3:

The Senegal Spotlight Report calls on the government to build more schools and to eliminate temporary structures, which are a source of demotivation for pupils, parents and teachers. Local authorities can play a key role in improving learning through construction of classrooms and enclosure walls, development of more washbasins and toilets, and provision of office furniture, tables and benches. They can also provide incentives to retain teachers in difficult rural or peri-urban areas.

The research found that the most successful schools have significantly smaller class sizes, are better equipped with teaching materials, do not run double-shift classes or hold classes in temporary shelters, and have teachers who demonstrate stronger teaching skills in class.

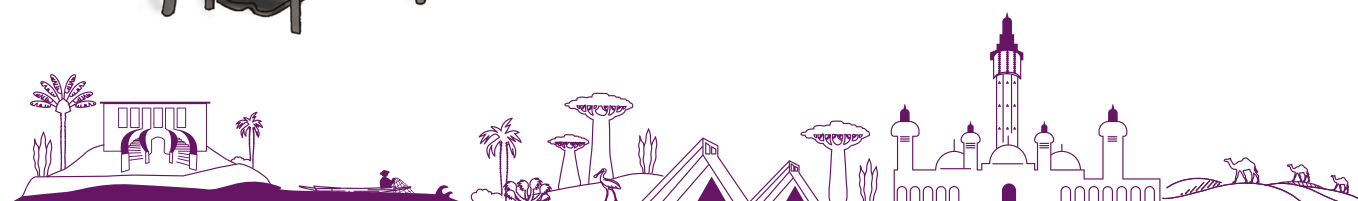
All children in Senegal are #borntolearn but assessment data needs to be collected and available to support their learning.

Recommendation 4:

The Senegal Spotlight Report calls for the government to establish a national policy and system for classroom-based and national assessments: a national standardized assessment should be carried out regularly, for example, every three years.

The CRFPE directors believed assessments must, in the long term, influence education policy implementation. They noted that this included the entire assessment process, including test administration and production of remedial tools. They argued that during inspections, evaluations make it possible to take decisions that can lead to change and that it was therefore essential to initiate teachers to the assessment culture. They also believed stakeholders should be trained on criterion-referenced assessment and new examination formats.

“The lack of means is a reality and yet the [Regional education staff training centres] are of critical importance for the training of teachers of lower grades.
Workshop participant”



All children in Senegal are #borntolearn but millions do not because they are taught in a language they do not understand.

Recommendation 5:

The Senegal Spotlight Report calls for the government to take all necessary actions to allow widespread use of national languages in the early years of primary education.

The government seeks to introduce national languages into basic education by 2026 recognizing that one of the reasons for low levels of learning is the mismatch between the home language of children the language of instruction used in school. The research found that recommended teaching and learning materials are not always available. Those found in classrooms are adapted to learners' age and needs but are not always in their languages.

[A]ll the stakeholders are there: the parents of the pupils, the representatives of the workers' unions, the CODEC (Collective of School Head Teachers). We share the results and point out the shortcomings. On arrival, we detail remedial strategies to be implemented.

Interviewee

Spotlight recommendations for Africa

Recommendation 1: Give all children a textbook.

Ensure that all children have teaching materials that are research-based and locally developed.

One of the most under appreciated challenges children face in Africa – and a strong sign that public policy has not accorded foundational learning sufficient priority – is the low availability of textbooks. No child can learn to read and do basic mathematics without a textbook, especially when most homes own few books. A panel of international experts recently classified textbooks as a 'bad buy', an 'additional input' that will not be effective alone if other issues are not addressed. But this misguided conclusion may hint at the inability of external assistance to help countries develop sustainable national textbook production and distribution policies. The fact is that bringing textbooks and supplementary reading materials into the hands of every child for free is the best buy education systems can make and must be done as a matter of urgency.

It is true that early grade textbooks in circulation in Africa are often not fit for the purpose of helping children acquire foundational learning skills. Burdened with unnecessary information, insufficiently researched and poorly illustrated, current textbooks tend to be poorly linked with pedagogical approaches associated with improved literacy and numeracy. They are not based on evidence. Given how little students are learning in most African countries, it is essential for early grade textbooks to be reviewed and revised so as to align with efforts to improve, simplify and refocus the curriculum and teacher training. They need not only to be based on cognitive science, but also to be developed locally, with substantive teacher participation.



Their use should be evaluated regularly to enable continuing improvement. Although textbook development is strictly a national prerogative, there are potential benefits from closer collaboration among countries in early grade textbook research and development, especially in terms of pooling resources and expertise.

Recommendation 2: Teach all children in their home language.

Give all children the opportunity to first learn to read in a language they understand.

Language issues are complex in every country, as they are intertwined with equity, inclusion, confidence, dignity and identity. In Africa, history has left an indelible mark on education development, as the vast majority of children are taught in a language they do not speak at home, which slows early acquisition of reading and writing proficiency or can even prevent it outright. The use of a child's first or home language for up to six or eight years, alongside the introduction of a second one initially as a subject and later as a parallel medium of instruction, is widely considered the most effective policy, improving outcomes not only in the home language but also in the second language and other subjects.

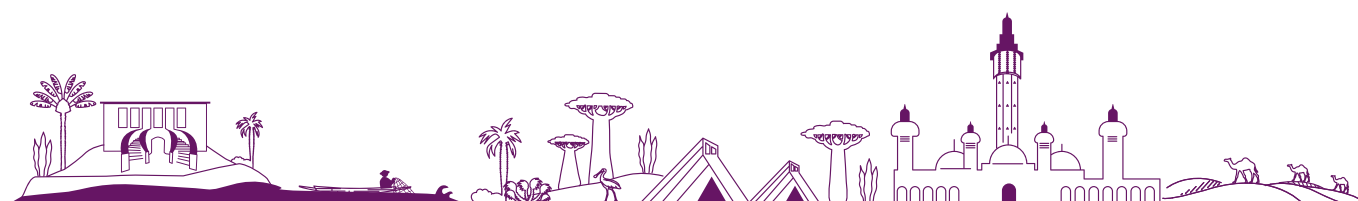
In practice, there are considerable challenges in implementing such policies. Internal migration means urban populations are increasingly mixed, with linguistically homogeneous populations more likely to be limited to rural areas. Rural populations are often suspicious of home language policies, concerned that they deliberately try to exclude their group from economic opportunities, even if the policies are intended to strengthen children's inclusion and sense of belonging. When home language policies are pursued, often uptake is limited, or schools partially or imperfectly implement them. Teachers may not be from the local community and thus not speak the local language. Even those who do may not have been trained appropriately, lack access to teaching and

learning materials in the language or be sceptical about the value of the approach. Problems in implementation also make policymakers lose confidence and mistakenly blame the policy for a lack of results. None of these obstacles should dampen governments' resolve to apply bilingual instruction for as long as possible. The policies need to be deployed flexibly and respond to context. Governments need to strongly support and actively communicate bilingual education policies to demonstrate their commitment to this foundation of education quality and equity.

Recommendation 3: Provide all children with a school meal.

Give all children the minimum conditions to learn at school.

Minimum conditions that help children focus and make the most of their time in school are yet to be reached in many African countries. From derelict, hot and overcrowded classrooms to lack of safety, water and sanitation, the list of obstacles to learning across the continent is endless. But above all, children cannot learn if they are hungry. One in three children in Africa are too short for their age, a sign of malnutrition, disease and inadequate stimulation at home. Although the early years are crucial, the potential of school feeding to make up for some early disadvantage is considerable. Yet only one in three primary school students in Africa receive a school meal. Governments have relied extensively on external assistance for meal programmes over the years, with only a few turning them into nationally funded and owned programmes. Both governments and their development partners must continue to expand and institutionalize school canteens, preferably emphasizing homegrown and locally purchased meals, which are sustainable, nutritious and engage communities. As climate change is likely to increasingly affect agriculture, governments need to design their school meal programmes to be ready to help regions vulnerable to natural disasters.



Recommendation 4: Make a clear plan to improve learning.

Define learning standards, set targets and monitor outcomes to inform the national vision.

Curriculum expectations of early grade reading are not well defined in many African education systems. Standards need to be developed for the skills children should master by each grade, and these standards should be the basis for teacher preparation, teaching practices and textbook design. Standards should be monitored through an integrated national assessment programme, from the classroom to the national level. The system needs to inform communities, teachers, and local and central administrators whether standards are met and, if not, what areas require attention. Monitoring of standards must enable progress to be measured over time.

The resulting data should be used to set national policy targets for the percentage of students who are to achieve proficiency levels, and to understand the characteristics of those who do not achieve them. Defining ambitious but realistic targets and communicating them at all levels, including to teachers and parents, is a crucial part of mobilizing actors to improve learning outcomes. Countries which have succeeded in improving learning outcomes have done so through strong political leadership guided by evidence-based targets. The national SDG 4 benchmarks are the starting point; many countries will need to revisit them as better information is collected. In that respect, national assessment systems, which are fragile in countries with low capacity, could benefit from participating in one of the two regional assessment programmes, PASEC and SACMEQ. Given the challenges both programmes have faced, the possibility of closer collaboration and pooling of resources between the two needs to be explored.

Recommendation 5: Develop teacher capacity.

Ensure all teachers use classroom time effectively through training and teacher guides.

The heart of the challenge of improving learning outcomes in Africa is teacher capacity to impart foundational skills, now too often inadequate. Such capacity is often underestimated: Teaching at lower grades is as complex as teaching at higher grades, if not more so. Yet preparation to teach in early grades is largely absent from initial teacher education programmes. Unsuitable pedagogical methodologies include excessive reliance on repetition and information recall. Inefficient use of classroom time compounds the perennial problem of limited contact hours, which the pandemic exacerbated.

Governments embarking on policies that improve curricula and textbooks need to invest heavily in teacher guides to make up for the fact that even the best initial teacher education reforms will take a long time to reach students. Teacher guides in most countries provide an inadequate basis of support for teachers whose initial training has been weak and who have limited professional development opportunities. The guides need to be upgraded to be aligned with new textbooks, provide a solid basis for lesson planning, steer teachers to assess learning in classrooms, encourage them to develop their own teaching and learning materials and help them not just follow instructions mechanically but adapt flexibly to diverse classroom circumstances.



Recommendation 6: Prepare instructional leaders.

Restructure support mechanisms offered to teachers and schools.

Arguably the most neglected education policy area is the selection and development of education leaders at the school and district levels. Governments that develop a vision focused on improving foundational learning need to communicate it to middle managers in the education system so that they become the instructional leaders who will implement the necessary pedagogical reforms. School leaders need to be selected on the basis of merit, associated with commitment to develop all children's potential and ability to inspire others to do so. They need to be able to coach struggling teachers, create an atmosphere in which teachers can learn from each other, be efficient at managing resource constraints and effectively communicate with the community. They also need to understand changes in curricula, textbooks and assessment methods.

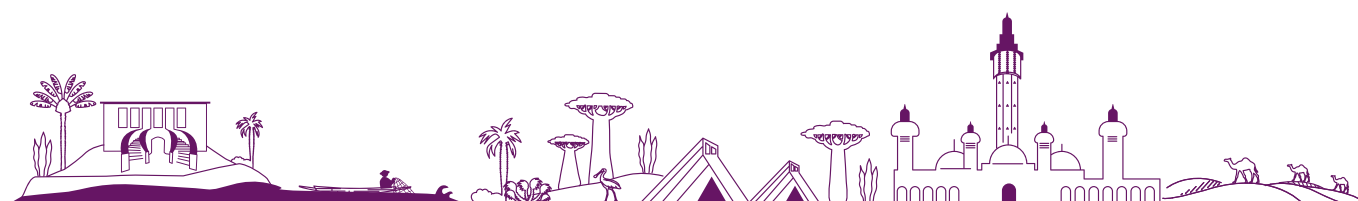
The same expectations should hold for district education officers. This is often a bigger challenge, as they are more distant from the teaching and learning realities of schools. Yet they need to fulfil the sensitive role of being schools' channel of information on new developments. District education officers need to be assigned clear responsibilities, including a focus on learning outcomes. While some daring governance reforms are under way in Africa to increase district education officers' accountability for delivering better results, the policies needed most are those that would instil in these professionals a sense of purpose linked to the national vision.

Recommendation 7: Learn from peers.

Reinvigorate mechanisms allowing countries to share experiences on foundational literacy and numeracy.

Progress towards improved learning outcomes for young children in Africa requires continued civil society pressure to place the issue at the top of the political agenda. Until recently, governments have been reluctant to make this challenge a political priority. Data on learning tend to merely present a bleak picture without showing what governments can do and how fast their actions can lead to improved learning. Ultimately, there is a need for a positive narrative on what countries have done to prepare children for the future, which can create an incentive for governments to learn from each other's experiences.

A peer learning mechanism using a cluster-based approach has been developed in recent years to promote achievement of the African Union's Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016–25. However, this mechanism has been under-resourced. Few clusters focus on primary education and, in the absence of monitoring, no agenda items related to foundational learning have been brought to the attention of African heads of state. By contrast, other policy areas, such as health and gender equality, have featured regularly on summit programmes. It is necessary to seize the opportunity to orient the education peer learning mechanism to foundational learning. Underpinned by evidence and supported by a dashboard of policies applied throughout the continent, this mechanism would strengthen countries' resolve for change.



Recommendation 8: Focus aid on institution building.

Shift from projects to provision of public goods that support foundational learning.

While development assistance is declining as a source of financing for African countries in quantitative terms, it still exerts considerable influence as a source of ideas that can trigger change in education. However, this potential is often squandered. Increasing emphasis on short-term results and ill-conceived notions of value for money has moved funding towards discrete earmarked projects, resulting in increased setup costs and reduced coherence. This report has referred to examples of good practice in donor-supported reform programmes that are wide-ranging in scope, embedded in national policy and based on extensive consultation. At the same time, it has pointed out proponents of foundational learning who work outside government systems, reducing the scope for national solutions and undermining sustainability. Few donors have evaluated the overall success of their operations, rather than individual projects' impact, in relation to improving learning outcomes.

A review of donor-funded support to learning assessments shows continuing malaise in delivering results. Information on what assessments have been supported is lacking. Coordination of planning support to assessments has likewise been absent: Resources have not been directed to develop national institutions, encourage the use of results in policy or enable countries to report internationally comparable statistics. Instead, there has been a focus on short-term collection of data which often are not even shared with governments and the international community but remain with service providers. The precarious funding situation of the two major regional cross-national assessment programmes is a major cause for concern. Donors should review their programming, improve coherence and dedicate more of their efforts to institution building to deliver key building blocks

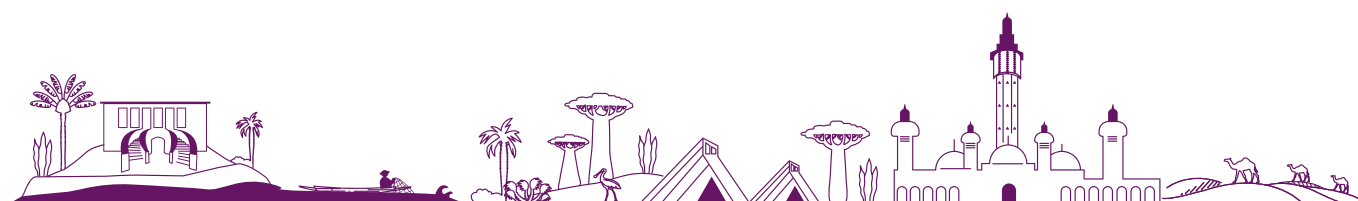
for improved foundational learning outcomes: textbooks, teacher guides, teacher and education leader capacity development, and assessment – all geared towards pedagogical reform.

Links to resources

Spotlight national report on Senegal
Senegal social media resources
Spotlight 2022 continental report
Born to Learn and video
Additional related global GEM Report content on learning

Join the #BornToLearn campaign.

Join our campaign by preparing a photo of yourself signing up for learning by spelling out the letter 'L' with your thumb and forefinger. If you want to put it into a campaign template, use this link, uploading your photo on the left hand menu and pulling it into the card. Or you can post your photo as it is.

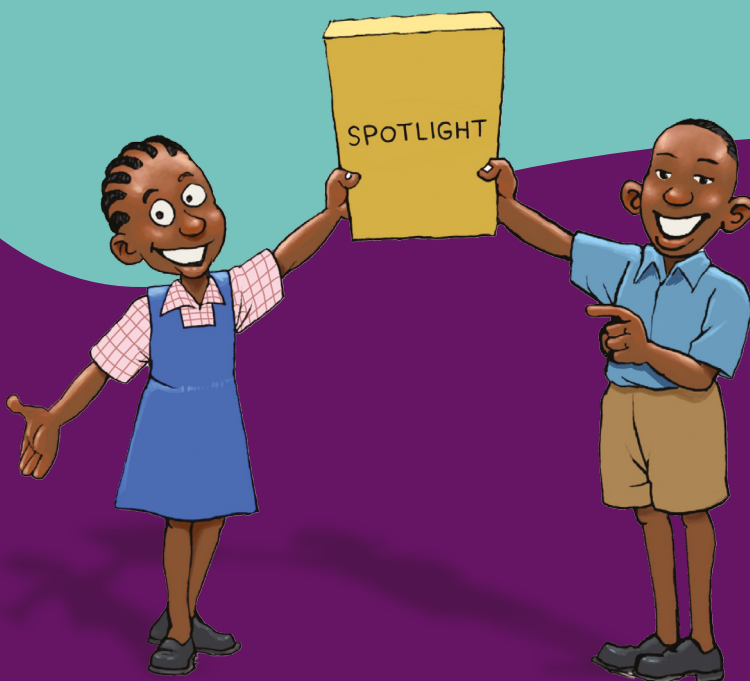


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Analysing the factors that determine the quality of learning could lead to a significant improvement in academic performance. Recognizing this potential, I fully supported the drafting of the Spotlight Report on Basic Education in Senegal. To this end, the Ministry of National Education set up a participatory process of individual and group meetings to identify the current challenges of primary education in Senegal, reach a consensus on priority issues, and agree on possible solutions and areas of intervention. We commend this inclusive approach to drafting the report.

Mamadou Talla, Minister of Education Senegal

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#BorntoLearn



Ushirika wa Maendeleo ya Elimu Barani Afrika
 الرابطة لأجل تطوير التربية في إفريقيا
 Association for the Development of Education in Africa
 Association pour le développement de l'éducation en Afrique
 Associação para o Desenvolvimento da Educação em África

