

Cameroon: Governance in the Education Sector

A qualitative study carried out in the Far North, Littoral and North West regions of Cameroon shed light on the governance challenges in primary and secondary education. It showed that the significant differences in education outcomes among regions and the overall poor performances of the education systems can be partly linked to two main concerns: the inefficient management of the education system and the lack of accountability regarding the allocation of government resources.

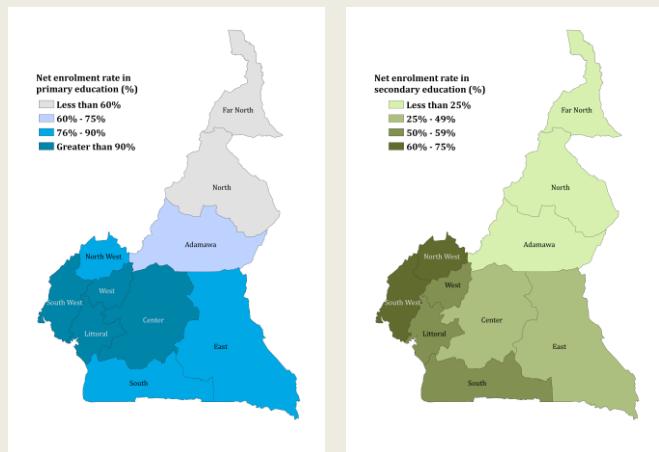
Despite recent progress, significant challenges remain to achieve equitable access and quality in educational achievements

Over the past two decades, Cameroon's primary and secondary education systems provided significant improvements in educational opportunities for children and youth. Nearly 3.4 million children enrolled in primary education in 2009, up from just under 2 million in 1991. More than 90% of school-age children enrolled in primary school in 2009, compared to only 69% in 1991. The abolition of school fees in primary education in 2000 spurred some of this increase in total enrolment. Total secondary enrolment more than doubled in the past two decades, reaching nearly 1.3 million total students in 2009. Overall, children spend 2.5 more years in school than two decades ago, totaling an average 10 years of education, well into secondary school.

However, the Cameroonian education system still faces many challenges in providing a quality education to all children. Compared to some countries in sub-Saharan Africa which made great strides in expanding educational opportunities, such as Burundi and the United Republic of Tanzania, Cameroon is lagging behind in some respects.

- Regional, wealth and gender disparities take a toll on children and put vulnerable groups at risk for not attending school and being further disadvantaged in life opportunities. Nearly 250,000 children of primary school age are out of school, either because they dropped out, never enrolled or are expected to enroll late. Living in a rural area doubles the risk of not attending school and poor children are five times more likely to be out of school than children from rich households.¹

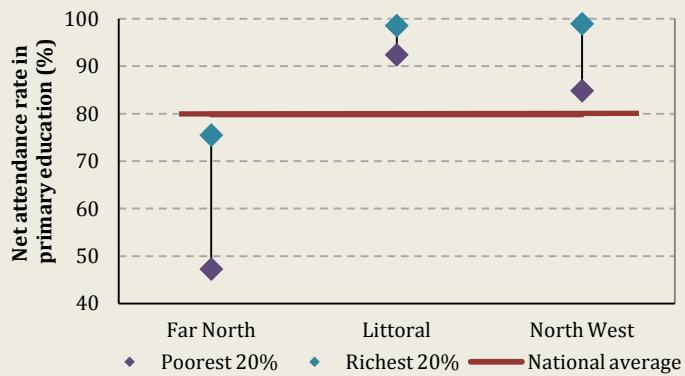
Enrolments in primary and secondary education are higher in the North West and Littoral regions than in the Far North



- Household surveys also highlight significant disparities in education opportunities within and among regions. Primary school attendance in 2004 was below the national average for all children from the Far North, but children from poor households fared worse than those from the richest households. Wealth differences were much less pronounced in the Littoral and North West regions, where all net enrolment ratios were higher than the national average.
- Unequal learning outcomes also reflect the inequitable quality of learning environments in Cameroonian schools. Depending on where children live, their household wealth or gender, some youth faced lower likelihoods of completing basic education. Primary completion rates for girls were about 36% in the Far North region, compared to 88% in the Littoral region. Some children remain therefore ill-equipped to make the transition to secondary school, let alone to enter the labor market.

¹ UNESCO (2010) *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010*. UNESCO-UIS (2005) *Children Out of School: Measuring Exclusion from Primary Education*.

Wealth inequalities in primary school attendance are starker in the Far North region



These education challenges pose a threat to the economic future and viability of Cameroon and deprive children of their right to a quality education. Yet, they are not only the result of lack of funding, but mostly stem from inefficiencies and weaknesses in the governance and management of education.

Budget planning and execution

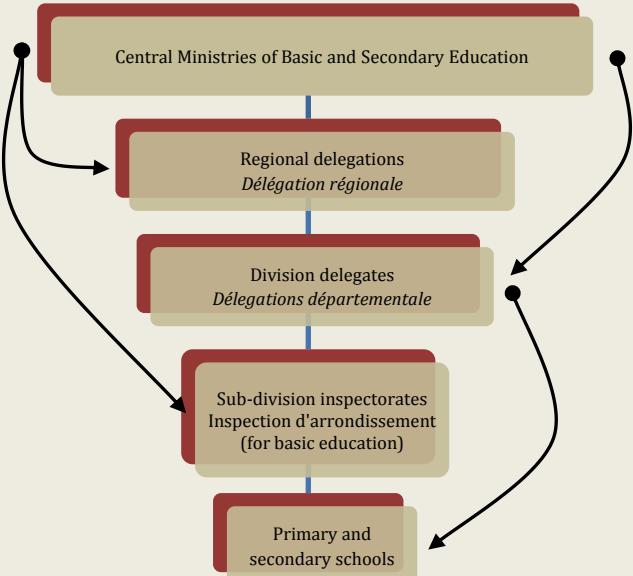
Centralization of budget allocations and financial transfers

The processes behind the central government's budget allocations and financial transfers to schools have led to a complex and poorly governed system. The figure below summarizes resource flows by level of administration. The central government transfers most education funds directly to sub-regional levels (i.e., divisions and inspectorates), bypassing regional authorities. Resources received by regional delegations are mainly for their administrative needs. Sub-regional authorities are accountable to the central government, thereby promoting a lack of leadership at the regional level and poor understanding of their mandate regarding the governance of school budgets and expenditures. Financial management and accounting is very weak across the divisions and control missions from the central government are too infrequent to adequately monitor budget and expenditure accounts.

The manner in which the central government determines regional allocations does not reflect actual needs at the regional or school levels. It systematically underfunds all regions by the same percentage, regardless of regional budget proposals. Financial transfers do not always consider number of classrooms and teachers in each region or adapt quickly enough to enrolment surges, as observed in the Far North. Although schools in richer areas can top up

government funds with parental fees and community contributions to overcome a chronically underfunded education budget, resource-poor schools remain disadvantaged. Even though the Far North is an education priority zone, the central government has not sufficiently increased budget allocations, but focused instead on infrastructure development.

Resources flow from the central government to primary and secondary schools by-passing the regions



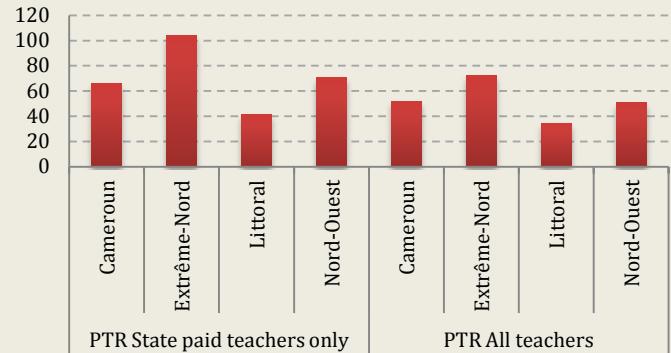
Source: World Bank, 2011

Inefficiency of operations at the regional level

Several weak points in the system facilitate the potential misuse of funds across Cameroon and promote inequality among regions. To limit cash transfers, public procurement at the regional or school level is based on a voucher system with fixed prices determined at the national level. Costs can be highly inflated, however, and do not account for regional price variations, thereby making procurement an expensive and wasteful system. Larger contracts (usually for infrastructure) require bid proposals, whereby contractors are limited to national price lists. In this scenario, however, highly rural areas such as the Far North are more susceptible to poor quality construction, due to the higher-than-average construction costs in remote areas. Collusion between contractors and government officials are known to be frequent, as particularly observed in the Far North also observed in this region.

The dire situation caused by the insufficient level of resources is exacerbated by political interference and poor planning capacity. Site selection for school construction remained a politically-charged agenda in most regions and a significant number of new schools were reported to have been built in response to political interventions. The weak use of recent demographic data can also lead to poor construction site decisions. Between 2006/2007 and 2007/2008, among the 85 new schools opened in the Far North, a significant part were built in unsafe areas or areas with little need.

Pupil/teacher ratios are high in the Far North and the North West regions



Source: MINEDUB and MINESEC Statistical Yearbook

System management and operations

Recruitment and distribution of teachers

Government distribution of civil servants and contract teachers does not benefit schools with the greatest needs. Despite recent government policies aimed to improve teacher employment conditions and motivation —as well as reduce favoritism and nepotism— central decisions on how to allocate teachers across regions remains partly arbitrary and mired in political intervention. Nearly one-third (35%) of primary school teacher appointments are unrelated to total enrolment. Regions with the greatest needs are not those desired by teachers, who frequently request (and are often granted transfers).

Severe teacher shortages still exist across the country, despite government efforts to hire contract teachers in lieu of civil servants to match the enrolment expansion in primary and secondary education of the past two decades. In response, local ad hoc mechanisms have developed and, in particular, parent-teacher associations (PTAs) have hired locally based on finances collected from parents. Yet, PTA teacher recruitment has been insufficient to fill the workforce shortage and Pupil Teacher Ratios (PTRs) remain high even in regions where the share of PTA teachers relative to government teachers is highest. In secondary education, the situation is bleak in the Far North, where more PTA teachers are hired than government teachers.

Overall, the distribution of qualified teachers, across Cameroon is not based on actual need, as reflected by high regional pupil/teacher ratios (PTRs). Although the national PTR in primary education was 52:1 in 2010, it reached 72:1 in the Far North. When considering only teachers paid by the State (ie excluding teachers paid by parents), the PTR reached 104:1 in the Far North, as compared with 41:1 in the Littoral region. Such imbalance in the distribution of teachers negatively affects learning outcomes in deprived areas.

Assessment and teacher motivation

Assessing the quality of the service delivered at schools remains problematic, especially in regions dependent on locally-recruited teachers. Monitoring of teacher attendance and performance is indeed generally inadequate and varies according to teachers' type of contract, creating disparities in teaching quality across schools. Locally recruited teachers are rarely evaluated. Civil servant teachers are assessed using a confidential report common to all civil servants, but which have little relation to classroom performance. They do not promote specific teaching objectives or incentivize teachers through recommendations for promotions and transfers (or demotion and sanctions). Neither teachers nor their immediate supervisors have a chance to review their assessment and learn from them. Contract teachers have different forms, but their assessments also provide limited feedback on quality of instruction. Other forms of assessments – such as pedagogical inspections – remain unlinked to motivating factors. Performance bonuses and sanctions often are ineffective or non-existent.

Accountability in schools

School accountability in primary education is particularly fractured and weak, partly due to poor collection of data at the school level (including on teacher presence) and a dysfunctional inspection system. Inspectors are expected to visit schools several times per year, but travel constraints and understaffed inspectorates make this unlikely, especially in remote, rural divisions. The most influential monitoring mechanism for schools is at the local level by School Councils and PTAs. These groups contribute significant resources (e.g., for school construction, teacher salaries, furniture, books, computers) and oversee financial decision-making related to those funds. Monitoring information on school performance and student learning, however, is not on their agenda and collusion between PTA, school staff and head teachers were reported in some instances.

Improving education equity and outcomes: a governance agenda

The current challenge faced by Cameroon rests at the core of its education system structure. Significant governance and accountability issues mostly related to public expenditure and system functioning require reforms to improve the current education opportunities and increase equity across the country. The four strategies outlined below point to some specific measures to ultimately improve education outcomes of all Cameroonian children.

Establishing and implementing benchmarks and standards for performance at the school and regional levels of government.

- Implementing these standards will involve defining responsibilities, providing the relevant tools and templates, improving skill in documentation and analysis, and developing strategies for communication and feedback.
- Expanding the role of the PTAs, by orienting them to the importance of teaching and learning, would further enhance the implementation of standards and improvements in the quality of education.
- Upgrading the capacity of the inspectorates/inspection d'arrondissements (part of the regional delegation) to monitor the implementation of standards at the school level must be a part of this reform.

Improving teacher management and addressing governance issues.

- Improving transparency in teacher recruitment, and protecting teacher deployment from political interference are major challenges.
- A common, agreed-upon, and easily understandable performance monitoring instrument introduced for all teachers in basic education is critical to improving teacher management. Adequate documentation and reporting of teacher performance on a regular basis will enable the system to track instructional quality.
- Implementing an effective system of incentives and sanctions that addresses shortcomings and violations of standards at the school level will be crucial to improving teacher management.

Ensuring an equitable distribution of resources and the effective monitoring of budgets and expenditure.

- Improving the budget planning process by better matching resources and needs
- Ensure greater accountability for expenditures and financial accounting, it will be helpful to augment Center-fielded control missions with regional involvement in monitoring.
- Blacklisting problem contractors with publicly documented sub-standard construction of schools will demonstrate commitment to improving governance.

Establishing a system of public transparency to promote good governance.

- Granting a more structured role to local leaders and expanding the involvement of the media to help monitor the school system would be helpful.
- Accountability and good governance can also be facilitated through regular assessments and independent surveys, complemented by opportunities for citizens to evaluate and share their perceptions regarding the quality of service delivery.

This Policy Note was prepared by.....