I. Regional Trends and Thematic Analysis

The WCA region is hard hit by poverty, political insatiability and unrest through crisis, wars and emergencies certainly affecting the social sector investments, the education sector in particular. However, over the last years, countries of the West and Central Africa Region (WCA) have made important achievements in education attainment. Governments have placed education high up on the agenda and they have made serious commitments towards the equality goals in education. With regards to girls’ education there has been an effort to work out national policies and strategies that specifically target vulnerable children excluded from a basic education; girls in the first place and children from rural poor families. In terms of reaching the EFA goals and the MDG 2 and 3, a 2006 UNICEF report estimates that among the 24 countries only 5 (Gambia, Ghana, Sao Tome et Principe, Sierra Leone, Togo) are on track for universal education for all MDG2 and only 12 (Cap Verde, Congo, Cote d’Ivoire, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Mauritania, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo) for gender equality in education MDG3 (see Annex 1).

Despite an increase in average Net attendance rate for the region from 59 to 63 percent for boys and from 51 to 56 for girls the above table indicates a slow-down in girls’ acceleration in access between 2005 and 20071, the curve was steeper toward the year 2005 (see table below). Countries having made the strongest improvements are Burkina Faso, Benin, CAR, DRC, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Sierra Leone and Togo. They all increased their girls’ NE/AR by 14 percent or more (see table below).

The table below indicates the “Gross Enrollment Rate for girls and Gender Parity Index level in 2006”, from a recent study jointly carried out by UNESCO, UNICEF and WFP based on UNESCO UIS data show the different countries’ GER for girls and the gender parity index. The graph shows that there is a higher tendency for low enrollment countries to have a lower GPI, in this case below 0.80.

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1 UNICEF SOWC 2008 and 2009
Data on quality indicators from the region is weak, but indicating high repetition and drop out rates for both girls and boys. In Chad only one in ten children reaches the 5th Grade without repeating. In as many as six countries, less than 35 percent of young female aged 15 – 24 years can read and write.

II. Updates on the Regional Partnership

Regional Network Activities

Regional UNGEI Network meeting, November 2008

The Network was established in April 2006 as a regional body to advance girls’ education issues and gender equality and equity in education and to address all factors that exclude West and Central African children from a quality basic education. The partnership has assembled more than 30 regional partners and it functions through an established office consisting of a President; currently the ECOWAS, two Co Chairs; currently UNESCO BREDA and FAWE, and a Secretariat; currently UNICEF.

UNGEI partners met for a two day meeting on November 26 and 27 to discuss work plan achievement and further planning for the year 2009. A review exercise was carried out on the state of the implementation of the work plan:

- Through the ECOWAS gender focal points, joint support missions and technical support to countries, 18 countries now confirm that there is an official national partnership around the issue of girls’ education. These have a specific work plan targeting girls’ education activities;
- The review concluded that the network need to accelerate the regional advocacy activities;
- The following issues should be the central focus areas for the future work plans:
  - Strengthen support to country teams through joint missions and technical support;
  - Carry out advocacy at through regional events;
  - Capacity building on gender in education;
  - Knowledge management through joint research and documentation exercises.
- The partners voted to keep the current office for another period of one year;
- It was decided that the web should be established and function as a tool for daily communication between network members at the regional and national levels.

Development of a tool kit for the use of teachers to eliminate gender stereotypes in the classroom education

As a UNESCO BREDA initiative together with regional and national partners a first draft of the tool kit for the elimination of gender stereotypes in textbooks and in the classroom teaching has been finalized. The tool address textbook printers, teacher training colleges and teachers and provide guidelines on how to provide a more gender equal image through more appropriate use of photographic images, text development, and communication and language use in the classroom.

Participants included: Action Aid, African Islamic Institute, AUF, Aide et Action, ANCEFA, CRS, CIEFFA, CODESRIA, CONFEJES, CONFEMEN, ECOWAS Gender Development Center, ENDA TM, FAWE, Save the Children, UMEOA, UNESCO BREDA, and WFP.
Violence in Schools Project
As a follow up from the Global Report on Violence against Children, a multi partner project has been initiated on the issue of Abolition of all forms of Violence against Children in the School Environment. Key regional partners are Action Aid, Plan International, Save the Children, UNESCO BREDA, and UNICEF. A draft desk review on violence within the educational setting in West and Central Africa has been developed that will serve as a basis for the (1) production of a reader and user friendly report on the material collected, (2) the establishment of a regional advocacy strategy, and (3) production of a technical tool intending to further guide and strengthen national ongoing efforts on the issue.

Data study
A joint study on the situation and trends in education in West and Central Africa has been launched and will cover data for the period 2000 – 2006. It takes into account the most recent data available and analyses inter- and sub-regional differences. The final study has a chapter on gender and girls’ education and compares girls’ education acceleration countries with the others.

ECOWAS Education Ministers Meeting, March 17-20
UNICEF and the AU International Centre for Girls’ and Women Education in Africa (CIEFFA) have made a call and proposed strategies and approaches for an effective gender programming at national levels through effective and visible partnerships at the national and regional levels through the ECOWAS Ministers of Education meeting in March. Discussions highlighted the need to document good practices to foster scaling up of quality models at national levels. Capacity building and the adhesion to UNGEI have been proposed as ways forward.

Perspectives for 2009/2010
- Organize a regional UNGEI event parallel to the African Conference on Gender and Science and Technology Education, Mali July 12-13;
- Organize a regional UNGEI event parallel to the ADEA Conference on contractual teachers;
- Finalize the definition of a consolidated capacity enhancing strategy for gender equality and equity;
- Organize regional follow up actions in relation to the violence in school study;
- Develop a study on key countries’ achievements in girls’ education for the identification of stronger strategies towards 2015.

III. Short Case Study Benin: Girls’ Education Acceleration Strategy
According to UNESCO UIS data, Benin has seen an important improvement in girls’ access to education since the year 2000. The girls GER increased from 83 percent in 2000 to 108 percent in 2006 and the GER gender parity increased from 0.78 0.89 during the same period (Fig. A).

Net Enrolment and Attendance Rate data from UNICEF SOWC show equally that the country has gone through steady progress towards access and gender equality in Primary Education. During the 2001 – 2007 period girls NE/AR data increased 47 – 62 percent, an increase of 15 points while the boys increase was 13 points during the same period. The GPI increased from 0.77 to 0.9.
Despite these trends pointing in the right direction, they are not sufficient for the MDG 2015 deadline. The Average Annual Rate of Increase (AARI) for the girls NE/AR has been 2.4 points and in order to reach the 2015 target of education for all the AARI for girls will have to equal 4.75.

**Response to Accelerate Girls’ Education in Benin**

As a follow up of the Burkina Faso 2003 conference on Girls’ Education Acceleration, the country has made important engagements towards the achievement in UPE and GE in particular. The issue of education and gender equality and equity has been mainstreamed through the various agendas of the PRSP, the CCA/UNDAF, and the SWAp and a gender- and girls’ education focal point has been appointed in the MOE;

**Policy Development**: Based on pilot experiences on girls’ education, partners started working towards acceleration by developing national tools and policies that would ensure to engage stakeholders through better harmonization and coordination of interventions. In this regards a national policy for girls’ education was developed and approved in 2006;

**Coordination**: A national girls’ education acceleration strategy was also developed and implemented through the sector plan in targeted zones as the Essential Learning Package for accelerated girls’ education. In this regards a Steering Committee for the ELP was established in 2004;

**Important partners are**: Ministry of Education, AFD, DANIDA, Germany, Netherlands, UNICEF, UNESCO, USAID, WFP, UNFPA, FTI, Aide et Action, BorneFonden, CFS, Plan Benin, and local NGOs.

**Recent and ongoing activities:**

- The “Quality Basic Education” norms (Normes de l’Ecole de Qualite Fondamentale) were developed by the Government in 1995 and updated in 2003. Last year they were reviewed taking into consideration the national policies on girls’ education and the Child Friendly School model;
- A throughout review and evaluation process of the girls’ education acceleration strategy is ongoing whereby the results will feed into the development of a 5 year national work plan that has a national target;
- Policy established to recruit and/or train 30% female teachers by providing specific incentives for encouragement.
- Introduction of school performance form. The strategy opens up for a communication between teachers and parents (also parents who are illiterate) on their child’s education;
- Empowering women through participation in the management of the school, build capacities in income generating activities to establish Mother’s groups that make a stronger pressure on the education system and on girls’ participation, access and achievement. DANIDA, USAID and UNICEF are together working on the implementation of these models with the decentralized government and NGOs.

Impressive achievements have been made in targeted zones and communities with regards to the accelerated girls’ education strategy. The new phase of the joint initiatives with its reviewed strategies and work plans that are being finalized are approaching the challenges of working at scale. The approach being taken is to provide through a national programme and target; a generic package for all children with a more complete package in zones where the indicators and social specificities require a special attention – aiming to reach the 2015 targets in education.