

Education for All within Emerging Context: Ivorian Experience, Issues and Perspectives

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Corresponding Author

Rassidy Oyeniran¹
Bekoe A. Mcjerry²

¹Department of Education, Institut Pédagogique National de l'Enseignement Technique et Professionnel (IPNETP), [National Pedagogical Institute of Technical and Professional Education], Côte d'Ivoire

¹Email: rassidy2006@yahoo.fr Tel: 00225 71072678

²Faculty of Education, Beijing Normal University International and Comparative Education Research Institution, 19 Xin Jie Kou Wai Street, Beijing 100875, PR China.

²Email: mcjerrybekoe@yahoo.co.uk

ABSTRACT

It is the sole aim of every country to ensure that Education for All (EFA) becomes a reality. The presence of educational challenges that pose a threat to the attainment of EFA are worrisome. The obstacles to educational development in a changing environment such as Cote d'Ivoire are being eradicated gradually by sound measures. However, there exist some challenges that call for immediate policy reassessment and re-evaluation as well as prompt actions on the part of the government and key stakeholders. These seeming challenges called for this study. This paper sought to unveil some of the challenges and as well propose workable recommendation. The study employed a qualitative approach to analyze its outcomes by conducting document analysis. The results showed that despite sustained efforts since 2012, there are some traits of failures in the system. These include low enrolment at the secondary level, discrimination against the girl-child, variance in the school curriculum and the demands on the job market, to mention but a few. This paper recommended among other things to policymakers and stakeholders in the education sector of Cote d'Ivoire the need to further establish and develop an inclusive approach to compulsory schooling for children from 6 to 16 years. It is suggested that reforms should be carefully enacted, and additional resources are to be planned through the National Development Plan.

Keywords: Côte d'Ivoire, Education system, Emerging school, Issue, Challenge, Schooling, Dependency, Policy.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

The educational system of Côte d'Ivoire borrowed the French model inherited since the colonial epoch. Ivorian educational system is hierarchically structured imbuing with the French system briefly as described in the following lines. Pre-school education; primary education; general secondary education, the first cycle of which, together with primary education, constitutes basic education; technical education and vocational training; Higher Education; and literacy and adult education. Pre-school education is mainly concentrated in urban areas and expanding rapidly. The private sector receives more than 50 percent of the children enrolled at this level, but with relatively high tuition fees. Pre-school education is 3 years (small, medium and large section). Primary education, lasting 6 years, theoretically concerns children aged 6 to 11 years. It leads to the certificate of elementary primary education (CEPE), while access to the first cycle of secondary education, for a period of 4 years, is subject to passing the entrance examination in grade 6. The first cycle of secondary school is provided in high schools and sanctioned by the Junior Secondary School Certificate Examinations, *BEPC*. The second cycle lasting three years takes place in high schools and is sanctioned by the Baccalaureate, which allows access to higher education (Universities/Higher professional schools). The private sector accounts for about 35% of general secondary education. Vocational training and technical education are mainly at the secondary level, and different branches of higher education are professional or lead to *Brevet de Technicien Supérieur (BTS)*¹, especially in the private sector. In March 1993, in collaboration with the Ministry of National Education, the African Development Bank set up a project called "ADB Education Project IV" to improve the quality of education, increase the school enrolment rate in general and that of girls in particular.

1.2. A Brief Overview of Ivorian Education System

According to the Office of Strategies, Planning and Statistics the number of pupils in primary schools (public, private and community) is around 3176874 of which 2696450 in the public (46.1%), 425,772 in the private sector (48.0%) and 254,652 in community schools (43.0) (MENETP, 2014). In 2005, Côte d'Ivoire had 6,519 primary schools of which 86.8% were public, with 38,116 teachers and 1,661,901 students (Ekanza, 2011). In Côte d'Ivoire, 55% of the population aged 6 to 17, and 61% of girls in this age group were out of school (Government of Côte d'Ivoire, 2016). The low enrolment rate of girls led the state to introduce, in the 1990s, a specific policy that encourages and for girls' schooling. The primary gross enrolment ratio (GER) has continued to grow, reaching 94.7% in 2013-2014. However, since then there is still a lot to do in increasing the low number of girls in schools.

Although high, this rate hides regional disparities and gaps that exist between the North and the South. Moreover, it is not enough to achieve universal enrolment. To achieve this goal, early and late schooling should be resorbed and the net rate should reach 100%. The main financial and technical support are the General Financing Budget of the State of Côte d'Ivoire, UNESCO, UNICEF, the African Development Bank, the UNDP, and the Regional Partner Organizations such as CONFENMEN (Conference of Ministers of Education of Francophone African countries), and PASEC (The Programme for the Analysis of Education System).

This structuring of the education system has been accompanied by multiple political reforms translated by definitions and implementations of national plans and strategies aimed at meeting an ever-increasing educational demand.

¹This certificate is earned two years after the Baccalaureate from Higher vocational School, which is very popular since a decade in Côte d'Ivoire.

After taking office in 2011, the current President Alassane OUATTARA delivered a memorial speech presenting his vision for Côte d'Ivoire. He particularly emphasized the high time for the country to become an emergent country by 2020 with an emerging economy to guarantee social, political and economic sustainable prosperity. However, since then the reality is not reflecting the earlier ambition even if much has been done economically, other sectors especially education has not yet received adequate improvement while we are approaching 2020. The following picture [Figure 1](#) is the map of Côte d'Ivoire.



Figure-1. Map of Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast).

Source: World Bank (2016).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Education and the Dream for Development

As mentioned earlier, in recent years, Côte d'Ivoire has experienced a socio-political crisis that has significantly disrupted the functioning of the country and unbalanced the foundations of the main sectors of society. In the context of a sustainable return to normality, the Government has initiated strategic reflections in several sectors, including education and training with a view to building a credible sectoral development program.

The fourth edition of the World Bank Report ([World Bank, 2016](#)) on the economic situation of Côte d'Ivoire revealed to the Ivorian authorities with an adequate diagnosis. According to Pierre Laporte, Director of Operations of the World Bank in Côte d'Ivoire, the country continues to distinguish itself by its good economic performance, the growth rate to reach 7.9% in 2016, the second largest countries of sub-Saharan Africa. It also notes "the short

and medium-term outlook remains favourable despite external risks, such as the recent fall in the price of cocoa, and internally the social movements observed in the country at the beginning of the year.

The report notes, however, that Côte d'Ivoire needs to strengthen its human capital by improving its education system, including increasing the quality of public spending in this strategic sector. At least to fulfill the standards of emerging countries, like India, Thailand or China. "Though the report recognizes that in 2016, the Ivorian education sector received nearly 5% of GDP in budgetary resources from the State, which placed the country among the first on the African continent, it points to the poor performance of Ivorian students compared to the African average, all the more so in comparison with emerging countries," said Pierre Laporte (World Bank, 2016)

About the question of how Côte d'Ivoire can prolong this strong growth while allowing a greater sharing of its outcomes, by examining the challenges posed by the education sector, the report argues for an acceleration of reforms. On the first hand, when looking closely at the interpretations of the report, it seems the State needs to consider adopting the current education system to the economic trend. On the other hand, there is a need for aligning education with the economic emergency, which has not been really gained a focus and close attention since the beginning of 2000 due to the instability of the country. Actually, the State is seeking a good economic position, forgetting that education should be the most important thing that goes along with the economic growth for the sake of the citizens. In other words, based on the report, if the country desires to make up the performance and enter the emerging countries, efforts should be made, and the efficiency of the expenditure will have to be improved with a sense of urgency as well. This will require rethinking the human resources policy towards teachers, changing the system of subsidies to private schools, and reducing administrative expenses as these three components account for more than 90 percent of public expenditure, as reported the Director of Operations of the World Bank Laporte. Besides, Laporte elaborated, "The ultimate goal is to maximize the impact associated with each franc invest into the education system so that the majority of young Ivorians can learn and thus acquire the skills they will need to perform well in the job market thereby hoping for a better future. That is why he hailed the Ivorian Government in their efforts to further improving the country's economic situation.

With regard to the country's education system, it appears that there is still a lot to be done to reach an optimal level of performance and to meet the emergency by 2020 including the achievement of educational goals worthy of an emerging country. The World Bank, therefore, invites Côte d'Ivoire to accelerate reforms, despite its good economic performance.

2.2. The Call for Educational Reform

Kandia Camara, Minister of Education recently was inviting the social partners and the international institutions to assist the state in the reforms undertaken for the sake of Ivorian educational system. However, it is necessary to say that everything is not to initiate reforms, it is necessary to take measures adapted to the Ivorian context and to accompany them with the means to apply them. Admittedly, there is urgency with regard to education in Côte d'Ivoire. As [Morisset and Ndem \(2017\)](#) reveal, at the end of primary school, young Ivorians read and calculate less well than young Burundians, Burkinabe and Senegalese. The authors also note that in the long term, the quality of the workforce does not match the expectations of the labour market and Côte d'Ivoire ranks only 172 out of 188 countries in the UN development rankings of human capital. However, as mentioned above, the question of performance is also related to investment and use available resources. It is better to spend because it is almost a quarter of the state budget that is devoted to education. The World Bank also emphasizes the need to spend in this manna better to make it more efficient; this implies building schools, promoting education in the

provinces and finally restoring the balance of enrolments that are too important in the primary compared to the secondary.

Several reforms initiated either by the government or suggested by international donors have undertaken a few years ago. At the center of these reforms is the need to promote the efficiency of public spending, which remains relatively lower than the average in Africa, by improving the performance of the teaching profession, by revisiting the private school subsidy mechanisms and by increasing the spending on equipment while reducing administrative costs (Morisset and Ndem, 2017). Though several avenues for reform are suggested or inspired by international experiences, an indispensable step is to set up a new social contract where all the stakeholders will work for the educational success of all the children of Côte d'Ivoire.

After five years of strong economic expansion, Côte d'Ivoire must sustain its growth. The diversification of the economy becomes the new Government building site as explained in its National Development Plan for the years 2016-2020. This gives confidence to the Ivorian authorities to believe in the emergence of the country. However, Côte d'Ivoire major challenge is to promote new skills, which necessarily requires the establishment of an efficient education and learning system. Even if skill acquisition is the result of multiple economic and socio-political factors, it is generally admitted that the performance of the education and learning system is a determining factor. It must, therefore, not only provide opportunities for the maximum number of children and young people to go to school but also acquire the knowledge they need during their adult lives, especially in the labour market (Glewwe and Kremer, 2006). Despite some progress, Côte d'Ivoire economic performance in 2015 remains below that achieved by most African countries, including the sub-region. If the country wants to achieve its ambitions and join the group of emerging countries, an acceleration of reforms within the education system will be necessary for the coming years. These reforms will have to cover several levels, depending on the multidimensional nature of the education system, which must not only provide students with skills that match the needs of the labour market, but also train them in the vagaries of life.

2.3. Schooling Instability and Projections: Malfunction Effects of the Educational System

After more than ten years of multifaceted crisis, many people spoke of a sacrificed generation. Indeed, the Ivorian education system did not operate at full capacity between the end of the 1990s and 2011. In several regions, insecurity simply prevented children from attending school. Political and social demands, especially in basic education, were almost unsatisfactory or even trampling on the needs and rights of an ordinary citizen, which had led to several years without schooling. In short, while Côte d'Ivoire had long been considered one of West Africa's flagship educational institutions, the situation had changed in the late 2000s. In the 1950s, Côte d'Ivoire was part of what was then called "high-participation colonies" in terms of schooling, with an enrolment rate of 26% against 8% in Sudan and 3.4% in Niger (World Bank, 2016). In 1958, the country had a classical high school, a normal school, four modern colleges of which one was reserved for girls, 17 normal and complementary courses, a technical college and four learning centers.

After a decade of crisis (2000-2010), the Ivorian education system is on the rise, but its performance still remains below that reported in many African countries. In addition, this performance is far from that of emerging countries, as Côte d'Ivoire is about 25 years behind Thailand (Morisset and Ndem, 2017).

Another very important element of the diagnosis is the imbalance that exists in the education system between its lower part and its upper part. The cumulative effect of the quantitative and qualitative failures of primary school in the past is that today about 5.3 million people between the ages of 15 and 45 are illiterate (World Bank, 2016).

This situation is obviously harmful because the country does not benefit from the proven positive effects of complete primary schooling on poverty reduction, labour productivity and changes in individual health.

In the lower part of the system, evidently, the current situation presents only 46% of the age group who completes the primary cycle; about 1.2 million young people of primary school age are out of school (World Bank, 2016). Moreover, the level of learning of those who complete primary schooling is slightly lower than the regional average, but which is especially such that about one-third of those who finish primary school are illiterate in adulthood (Ministry of National Education, 2009).

In the upper part of the system (higher education, technical education and vocational training), a very significant proportion of individuals trained at these levels are permanently exposed to unemployment or forced to accept under-qualified jobs, thus creating frustrations and disappointed expectations at the individual level and waste of talent and resources collectively. To respond to the social demand for education, the National Development Plan of the Ministry of Education has tried to initiate strategies and plans that were expected to have long-term impact.

For primary school, it was predictable that 90% of children would have access to school in 2015, and 90% of them would complete the cycle in 2020. This objective would lead to the number of young people attending school in this age group from 1.9 million in 2007 to 3.7 million in 2020 (MNE, 2009). With an average class size of 40 students, this would mean that the number of teachers in the public would increase from around 50,000 in 2007 to 94,000 by 2020. Another purpose was to guarantee minimum funding for other levels of education, which are central in the overall sectoral strategy (primary, but also higher level).

For the first general secondary cycle, the situation has not been easy because one of the goals was to enable the largest number of those who complete primary education (which is rising sharply because of the measures taken in primary education) to pursue studies.

For the second general secondary cycle, and in the application of the strategic options defined above, the program first anticipates that enrolment will increase, albeit more modestly, to take into account the prospects for leaving this level of education, and the desire to contain access to the higher level. The program expects an increase from 208,000 in 2007 to 284,000 in 2020, allowing a 12 to 16 percent increase regarding the rate of access to upper secondary general education over the period. The average size of the education divisions would be increased from 47 to 45 in 2020, but the level of operating expenditure at the school level would be greatly increased (from 3% to 14% of total current expenditure for the cycle) (MNE, 2009). All these descriptions inevitably cause challenges to Ivorian education system while moving in on economic emergence.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study sought to analyze Ivorian Experience in Educational System within its emerging Economic Context. The qualitative approach was used to critically uncover the actual situation of the education system. In this light document analysis was utilized. Bowen (2009) suggested that document analysis, in the qualitative study, is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents both printed and electronic sources. Therefore, document analysis helped to review the contents of documents (Mucchielli, 1991; Bardin, 2003). The data collected are essentially based on secondary sources. The accounts of documents were gradually extracted from materials such as manuals, academic articles, newspapers articles, monographs, books, and government websites, organizational/international agencies' reports, survey data and policy documents. The researchers explored and exposed the challenges, the difficulties and the perspectives that Ivorian education system experiences which would be relevant for a better understanding of the issue understudy drawing ways for dealing with current challenges.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. Education Sector Invasion versus Educational Policies

Looking at the education sphere today, it is obviously invaded by private holders who control the national economy and lands. Multinational and big companies sell ideologies through their networks (Ball, 2012). Generally, the purpose of their invasion is to fulfill the mercantile interests hidden under a neoliberal policy that favours their actions/interventions. The case of Bolhoré, a rich businessman, who invested in transportation in Université Félix Houphouët-Boigny in Côte d'Ivoire, is evidence of developing and maintaining his prosperous profits in the country. Bolhoré group is one of the powerful rich men, from France since the beginning of the 1980s in West Africa, particularly in French-speaking countries including Côte d'Ivoire. He has the monopoly of Abidjan Port importing and exporting goods with the support from every government for years. He is also involved in many other sectors, including education.

As emphasized by Klees (2008) neoliberal economic policies call for a series of interrelated reforms: macroeconomic stability; cutting back government budgets; privatisation of government operations; ending of tariffs and other forms of protection; facilitating movement of foreign capital; emphasising exports; charging user fees for many public services; and lowering worker protections through flexible labour markets. Klees (2008) further reported that "Neoliberals are well-intentioned, believing that the policies they recommend will make the world a better place, not just for the wealthy people. However, based on past experiences, the reality is that these policies help the rich, not the poor. We live in a world structured by capitalism, patriarchy, and racism, where the dominant ideology leads to policies that help the advantaged accumulate over more advantages and help maintain poverty, inequality, and marginalisation. Privatization and other management measures and education funding can be ineffective if we do not address real human needs, social and physical education. Therefore, the question is how best the educative policies as well budget can be properly used for education in order to achieve the planned/expected goals.

As can be seen above, there is a need to critically look at how the governments of developing countries like Côte d'Ivoire could prevent the invasion of education by businessmen/ private sector in this era of globalization. The autonomy of Ivorian educational systems may be gained by a radical change for the sake of its communities, especially for the generations of children. In particular, the challenge is how can policymakers withstand international aid and avoid dependency.

4.2. Dependency within the Globalized World

Since 1980s, most of the African countries including Côte d'Ivoire are still under the influence of foreign powers (Toh, 2008). There are several thoughts that come to mind when looking at the general situation of education, the first being how globalization has affected the education sector.

Just like in Latin American countries serious governance problems under the influence of multinational companies and the US because they depend economically and socially (Arnove *et al.*, 2007). This situation continues today. The consequences of this dependence are inter alia inequality and inequity in education. Schooling and literacy remain the major challenges in the countries of the Latin American region. This situation is similar to Africa, especially to Côte d'Ivoire. Côte d'Ivoire experiences external domination and has difficulty in meeting the social and economic needs of its people/populations. The capitalist social formations in Africa and Latin American share a number of similar characteristics, including the illiteracy of the peasantry. As stated by Torres (2009) in "Globalization and Education", while most of the African countries have already confused about rural educational development, in Latin American, by contrast, due to the process of accelerated urbanization, growing internal

migrations, and agribusiness penetration-in short, the combined effects of uneven capitalist development a progressive imbalance exists between the rural and the urban areas. The illiterates are concentrated, in equal measure, within the rural areas and within the periphery of metropolitan or major cities. Education is used by multinationals and foreign powers to accentuate their domination on the potential of the countries they control.

The effects of globalization on education have been related to the move to have a more uniform sort of education for all universities through collaborations and most importantly through *marketizing* education (Torres, 2009). This has led to the phenomenon of treating education as no longer a social service but as a commodity for sale. Globalization of higher education in developing countries has faced a lot of challenges. Côte d'Ivoire for its part has seen many protests coming from the underprivileged who feel that the government's reduction in subsidizing the user fees for students is cutting off their chances at attaining a better social standing. Morrow (2006) points to how the redefinition of relationships between state, global economics and education has resulted in the reduction of institutional autonomy leaning more towards treating knowledge as a commodity as a result of pressure linked to economic globalization thereby increasing the hegemonic influences that domestic and international political and economic trends have over higher education policies. These hegemonic influences have led to the mushrooming of private Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) whose growth has been attributed to privatization in the bid to promote competitiveness for the individuals and also from a global perspective; as result, these influences have brought about dependency. Côte d'Ivoire for its educational budget depends mostly on donor funding. However, foreign borrowing has been a two-edged sword as the loans obtained from donors and other creditors need to be repaid at some point. The result of this has been that spending on education has been heavily dependent on how much aid can be obtained to sponsor the education sector. For example, the amount of Official Donor Aid (ODA) for education that Côte d'Ivoire solicited from ODA accounted for approximately 50% of their public education resources in 2008 (UNESCO, 2011). Another illustration is the Debt Reduction and Development Contract called *C2D*, which is a new mechanism for financing Côte d'Ivoire development. This borrowed mechanism consists of converting the debt repaid into a grant for development projects in Côte d'Ivoire. These projects are selected by mutual agreement between Côte d'Ivoire and France. All these funds are part of the general framework of the *National Development Plan* (PND). Six sectors benefit from C2D funding, including education, training and employment. Two C2Ds are currently running, education and health for the 2012-2015 and 2014-2020 periods, for a total amount of CFAF 1,151 billion (EUR 1.755 billion) (Fraternité Matin, 2017).

This sort of dependency is the one that (Arnové, 1980) wrote about when he referred to how donor agencies influence research in, especially developing countries. Donations are made towards research projects that are aimed at getting information that is beneficial to the donor agencies thus not focusing on promoting social justice. The information collected is thus tailored not for local use but mostly for the donating agency.

Sometimes aid is given in the form of long term debts keeping the state in economic dependency while officials return to take up positions of influence in institutions and implement that policies which actually set room for private investors. Generally, this forms aid leads to control over knowledge, and alter the entire idea/goals of education being a public good because the decisions are no longer only affected by the national authorities but the donors as well. Therefore, there is the matter of repaying the debts.

Yet, what comes into question is that Ivorian academicians could play a significant role as researchers because what is relevant and can contribute towards individual growth as well as to societal development should be more emphasised as opposed to leaning towards an idea that seems to promote what funders to the sector dictate for the good of their own agenda.

Torres (2002) pointed to how globalization confines state and national sovereignty thereby affecting education. This, he argued, can be seen in the conflicts that exist between global and local dynamics in all policy spheres. Torres (2002) pointed to the double-edged nature of globalization where some countries as a result of this phenomenon have benefited to the detriment of others. The global north seems to ride on a successful wave while most of the global southern countries are slowly drowning in debt. While Stromquist (2002) argued that globalization has assumed the feature of migration towards the North in search of better economic opportunities for individuals. From my perspective, it arguably how the conflicting relationship between education and investors roles and interests can be seen in the Ivorian situation related to demonstrations that have ripped through public educational institutions not only universities as students demonstrate over the reduction of bursaries places by the government. This builds an image of how social classes are maintained and probably when Apple (2004) spoke of the need to understand the relationship among curriculum, culture and economic reproduction, he was stressing the hegemony that schools create by allowing certain social classes to remain in control. How bursaries are awarded and on what grounds they are awarded all relate to a hegemonic control that goes beyond the mere selection process.

In this case, favouritism and discrimination in allocating grants deprive students who are productive from being admitted into the public educational institutions meaning that even though the person awarded has the financial backing of the family that could pay their way through university. Productivity is affected as the workforce produced is not as refined as would be expected but rather compromised. That is why in dealing with hidden curriculum, Apple (2004) talked of how certain ideologies and values seem to be promoted more than others are where certain meanings and practices are chosen for emphasis while some are excluded, deleted, diluted or reinterpreted.

4.3. Issues of Schooling and Obstacles

It is a general knowledge and a common reality that at almost all levels of our education and learning systems, students are not effectively learning because of the presence of socioeconomic and political conditions impacting negatively the system.

As stated in the introduction section of this paper, the government is doing its best in addressing the needs of the educational sector in the countries but like many African countries, there is the need and urgency for the government to address basic and major challenges that have engulfed the education sector so as to ensure that Education for All is not just a rhetoric. The continuing public discussion as well as a progressive discourse to improve the education system has not seen any major eradication of the existing challenges. One can easily make the claim and argue that better education presently seems rare in Africa if you are poor in general and Cote d'Ivoire in particular. The situation in Cote d'Ivoire has left the poor to be marginalized with the government public schools which are confronted with enormous obstacles.

Inequality and inequity in the education sector of Cote d'Ivoire have become so common as a result of the sharp disparity in terms of infrastructural development between public schools in the rural and that of the urban public schools. Schools are organized under trees and dilapidated structures in most part of Cote d'Ivoire, especially in the Northern Côte d'Ivoire. Gender disparity among other things is also considered as some of the obstacles in the development of education in Cote d'Ivoire. From a gender point of view, serious gender gaps are particularly obvious in basic education, where girls start out at a disadvantage and see this drawback is accentuated at higher levels of education. As result, few girls/women are trained for skilled jobs at the higher end of the labour market,

and dramatic inequalities in basic literacy at the lower end of the income scale are noticeable (Croke and Smith, 2013).

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Côte d'Ivoire has made improving the performance of its education system one of the priorities of its development strategy. The economic growth paid and is still playing a significant role. However, there are still challenges to deal with. Despite sustained efforts since 2012, the system still has failures. The number of students entering secondary education remains low, discrimination against girls remains persistent, classrooms are not always well equipped, teachers are sometimes poorly trained, and the school curriculum is not adapted to the needs of the labour market. Although this indicator remains imperfect, Ivorian students stay on average less time in school than in many other African countries, especially compared to emerging countries. While the Government has already pledged to increase budgetary resources to the education sector, these efforts need to be followed by reforms aimed at increasing the efficiency of spending, which remains low in the state today. This would avoid total dependency on foreign aids. In addition to these initiatives, the state is suggested to further establish and develop an inclusive approach to compulsory schooling for children from 6 to 16 years. It's suggested that reforms should be carefully enacted, and additional resources are to be planned through the National Development Plan in the coming years, which means the Government must speed up measures/policies so that the country achieves the educational goals to foster the emergency.

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