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No. 14, 2009

Lloyd, Cynthia B. and Paul C. Hewett. "Educational inequalities in the midst of persistent poverty: Diversity across Africa in educational outcomes," *Poverty, Gender, and Youth Working Paper* no. 14. New York: Population Council. ([PDF](#))

ABSTRACT

This paper explores inequalities in education across sub-Saharan Africa. Although we mainly focus on primary school completion rates, attention is also given to literacy as a more proximate indicator of human capital acquisition. Using data from the Demographic and Health Surveys and UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys, we explore cross-country variations in primary school completion rates, gender and wealth gaps in education, and literacy rates in relation to one another and in relation to cross-country variations in national income per capita. While these data paint a picture of overall educational progress, particularly for girls, this general picture is juxtaposed against an extremely diverse landscape across Africa with respect to primary school completion rates and retained literacy. Although cross-country variation in primary school completion rates can be partially explained by variation in national per capita income, the same cannot be said for literacy rates. Even the poorest countries have significant variation in achieved literacy, suggesting that learning can occur even in resource-poor environments. At the same time, our findings are sobering: In many countries, international educational goals are unlikely to be reached by 2015, and poor learning outcomes are frequently widespread.



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