Changes in Girls’ Educational Opportunities in Former Afrique Occidentale Française (AOF) States Since Independence (1960)

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Table of Contents

I. Introduction

II. Part 1: Overview of French Colonial Education in AOF
   a. Role of Mission Schools in limiting in Education
   b. Koranic Schools
   c. Privileging of Boys in Colonial System
   d. Legacy of Direct Rule

III. Part 2: Becoming Independent
   a. La Communauté Française
   b. Immediate Changes to Education (1960-1969)
   c. Marxism in AOF

   a. Periods of Military Rule

V. Part 4: Role of Traditional Society
   a. Early Marriage
   b. Adolescent Pregnancy
   c. Public vs. Private Sphere
   d. Labor/Unpaid Care Work
   e. Religion
   f. Mobility
   g. Menstruation

VI. Part 5: Changes Since 2000
   a. Impactful Government Initiatives
   b. Continued Lack of Resources
   c. Work of International Organizations
   d. Plaguing Instability
   e. COVID-19

VII. Conclusion and Prospects for the Future
List of Tables and Figures

Figure 1.1 – Average Years of Schooling of African Countries (2017)
Figure 1.2- Map of AOF 1920
Figure 1.3 – Map of Present-Day West Africa
Figure 3.1 – Primary GER by Gender 1971
Table 3.1 – Key Changes Period I
Table 4.1 – Periods of Military Rule
Figure 4.2 – Primary GER by Gender 1999
Table 4.1 – Key Changed Period II
Figure 5.1 – Expected Years of Schooling 2016
Figure 5.2 – Child Marriage Rates
Table 5.1 – Adolescent Fertility Rate 2017
Table 5.2 – GER by Gender at the Primary and Secondary Levels 2004 & 2014
Table 6.1- Years of Compulsory Schooling by Country
Figure 6.1 – GPI at Primary Level 1999 and 2016
Figure 6.2 – GPI at Secondary Level 1999 and 2016
Table 6.2 – Key Changes Period III
Figure 6.3 – Out of School Rate at Primary level 2019
Table 6.3 – Out of School Rate at Lower and Upper Secondary 2019
Table 6.4 – Education Expenditures by Country (2000-2018)
Table 6.5 – Pupil to Teacher Ratio and Percent of Female Teachers
Table 6.6 – Expenditure on School Materials and Share of GDP
I. Introduction

Education is vital not only to the personal development of individuals but also to the overall economic development of countries as well. It socializes children, builds tolerance, creates innovation, and acts as the foundation of socioeconomic development of a country (Ozturk 2001). The importance of education cannot be underestimated; an educated population is necessary for sustained economic growth and development. An uneducated population is “unable to defend its social, economic and political rights, promote a healthy environment and ensure eradication of epidemics and diseases,” and understand why it is necessary to adopt family planning techniques (Quist 1994). Uneducated children become uneducated adults thus creating a shortage of skilled laborers and human capital. Early education is an integral step to developing a politically aware, socially responsible, and employable adult population; a lack of education or an inadequate education system can act as a major barrier to development.

Unfortunately, despite its significance, education is not available and/or accessible to all groups throughout the world at the same rate. African countries south of the Sahara experience some of the lowest education rates in the world; figure 1.1 depicts the average years of formal schooling by country and shows that West Africa experiences some of the lowest expected years of schooling and the highest out-school rates on the continent (Kielland et al. 2017). From 1999 to 2008, the percentage of primary school-aged children out of school remained stagnant at 54% (Wolf et al. 2016). The statistics are even worse when looking specifically at girls’ education. While great progress has been made to close the education gap between boys and girls in many parts of the world, the gap remains large in Africa south of the Sahara. Of the 19 countries with fewer than 90 girls for every 100 boys enrolled in primary education, 13 are in sub-Saharan Africa (“No Country” 2021). According to the 2013 United Nations Millennium Development Goal factsheet, gender is one of the key factors that keep children out of school. Recent instability and violence in the region have not helped promote
education. Save the Children’s 2021 Global Childhood Report ranked four of the former French West African colonies among the top 10 countries where childhood is most threatened: Guinea, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger are all in the bottom 10.

Figure 1.1 Average Years of Schooling of African Countries (2017)

In this thesis, I focus on the territories formerly held by France in West Africa known collectively as Afrique Occidentale Française (AOF). Today the region is made up of Benin (previously Dahomey), Burkina Faso (previously Upper Volta) Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea (previously French Guinea), Mali (previously French Sudan), Mauritania, Niger, and Senegal. A map of the AOF territory under French rule is depicted in Figure 1.2 and a current map of the region is shown in Figure 1.3. French colonization left AOF countries at a huge education disadvantage; by the time AOF colonies gained their independence, Côte d’Ivoire, Senegal, Mauritania, and Mali all had illiteracy rates in the 90

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1 In the report, threats to childhood consist of death, chronic malnutrition, being out of school, performing adult work, marriage, and motherhood (“Global Childhood Report 2021).

2 Mali and Guinea assumed their contemporary state names upon receiving independence from France. Benin changed its name from Dahomey in 1975 and Burkina Faso officially changed its name from Upper Volta in 1984. From here on out, these countries will be referred to by their present-day names.
percentile which was not uncommon for African countries emerging from colonization (Quist 1994; Bola 1990). In addition to the generally restricted nature of French colonial education in the AOF, there was also a systemic privileging of boys over girls (Parpart 1986). As will be discussed, this tradition remained the norm in West Africa even after the departure of the French. In the case of former AOF countries, the discrepancy in educational attainment between boys and girls can partly explain the slow progress made towards education development since independence in 1960.

In this paper, I first provide background on French colonial education, the impact of mission and Koranic schools, and the continued and systematic privileging of boys under the colonial system to contextualize the education systems inherited from the French by the West African states. Figure 1.1 suggests that colonial legacy matters when considering later education outcomes as the two countries with the highest average years of schooling in West Africa are former British colonies while the countries with the lowest number of years are both former French colonies. I then begin to analyze the changes that occurred to education in the eight former AOF states looking specifically at three separate time periods: immediate changes following decolonization (1960-1969), post-independence (1970-1999), and changes after 2000. The major reforms of each of these periods and their effects on girls’ access to education are considered for each country. I separate the first decade of independence from the rest of the changes in the 20th century because in many ways the first decade of independence represented hope and change for many of the countries. The first independent leaders of AOF took different approaches to educational reform and they are important to analyze as separate from later educational reforms because of how new the countries were. The second period is marked by attempts at nation building and various stints of military rule in many of the countries. Access to education for girls began to increase in the second period due to the Education For All Conference, held in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, marking a major moment in education development. The final period can be separated from its predecessors because of the amount of international attention and support given
to gender issues in education; this change was influenced by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the World Education Forum.

This paper also examines the societal constraints girls face when trying to access education to account for continued education disparities in the region. Even when federal policy supports girls’ education, there are other barriers girls face when entering the school system. There are institutional and capacity limits that can negatively impact a state’s ability to provide education caused by insufficient funding and poor management. Poverty is another major barrier to girls’ access to education as attending school often requires some type of monetary contribution from families (Spence 2006). Girls in these countries also face restrictive gender norms and roles that can limit their access to education or how long they remain in school. These barriers can help explain why certain gender disparities continue to persist despite federal education policy reforms. Overall, this paper seeks to offer an analysis of how girls’ access to education has changed in former AOF countries since gaining independence by examining policy changes, analyzing data, and considering barriers at both the contextual and individual levels. To my knowledge, no such piece of literature exists in the scholarship of West African Education.

Figure 1.2 – AOF 1920

Figure 1.3 Present Day West Africa

II. Part 1: Overview of French Colonial Education
To analyze how girl’s educational opportunities changed after independence in AOF countries, it is imperative to first examine the education system that West African countries inherited from the French. In the beginning of French colonial rule, missions took primary responsibility for education and the running of schools. As France began to seek more direct influence over the native societies in the region, the colonial administration instituted a new public education system designed to consolidate French influence and increase the productivity and profitability of the colonies (Chafer 2018). In AOF, France created a centralized federalist administration under a system of direct rule that differed from the indirect approach of the British who relied on governing “through native rulers” (Whittlesey 1937). Although for different reasons, both mission schools and colonial schools privileged educating boys over girls. Central to colonial education policy was France’s so-called *mission civilisatrice* that sought to cultivate loyalty to the French among the local population and allowed for limited levels of education to create a sufficient, obedient native working population (Gravelle 2014). Before discussing decolonization, it is important to understand the legacy left behind by the French and the history of gender gaps in education.

a. Role of Mission Schools in limiting in Education

The beginning of colonial education in AOF colonies was marked by religion and gender expectations. Prior to the formal organization of the AOF, France largely left education in its African territories up to the clergy and the mission schools with little oversight (Gardinier 1980). There were only a handful of mission schools scattered throughout the territory meaning European-style education following a state-sanctioned curriculum was almost nonexistent in the beginning (Gravelle 2014). Mission schools were supported by the colonial administration at first because they were believed to play a substantial role in converting the natives to Christianity and in “promulgating

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3 *Mission civilisatrice* translates to civilizing mission; the same rational was used by many European colonial powers to justify colonization; they believed the people living in areas they conquered were savage and needed saving by Europeans.
European secular norms” (Barthel 1985). In the beginning, France had so little desire to be involved in the educating of native children that they even allowed English mission schools within their territory; it was not until the 1880s that France demanded mission school teach only in French (Gardinier 1980). This initial lack of interest in educating natives from the French government stemmed from a lack of necessity and a general disregard for native population; the public education system of AOF was not created until the creation of the federation caused an increased need for skilled labor (Chafer 2001). During this time, the few boys and girls who were in these schools were educated separately and were taught different curriculums.

The mission schools largely favored the education of boys over that of girls because it was the boys who would become instrumental to the economic force of the colonies and serve as priests to continue the conversion of natives. In the beginning, girls were denied access to education almost completely. When girls were finally given access, their education was largely limited to subjects that prepared them for domestic roles and how to be a good housewife (Njoh and Akiwumi 2012). As more colonial administrators and their families began moving to the region, some girls were taught skills to allow them to provide services for the French. For example, starting in 1852, native girls were taught skills that would allow them to provide services for the white settlers such as sewing. The policy of segregating education content by gender was not limited to mission schools in AOF. British missionary schools in the British West African colonies also restricted the education of girls to domestic skills such as sewing to form subordinate Christian women (Leach 2008).

While the education of girls was largely left to missionaries during this period, the colonial administration took steps to provide education for some boys. In the case of Senegal, the *Ecole des Fils de Chefs* was founded by the governor of Senegal, Louis Faidherbe, in 1853. The school was meant to extend French influence and Governor Faidherbe thought a secular school was more likely to attract

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4 School for the Sons of Chiefs
Muslims than a Christian school; while it did somewhat achieve its goal, the school also resulted in the educating and training of a male native administrative elite (Chafer 2004). The role of missionary schools in AOF became highly restricted and regulated by the French government in the beginning of the 20th century as France sought to develop a tight grip on education in the colonies. The role of missionary schools became more and more limited as state-run schools became more prevalent. After the permanent establishment of the AOF federation in 1904, the French colonial government moved to take over control of the education of natives. The colonial administration’s change in attitude was precipitated by an increase in the exploitation of the colonies’ natural resources. As colonial operations expanded, there was also a rise in the need for natives to help fulfill the colonial administration’s ambitions (Kamara 2005). The first World War also affected France’s colonial policy in West Africa because prior to August 1914, the French government had not given serious thought to the potential contribution of African territories in “either men or raw materials, to a war in Europe” (Andrew and Kanya-Forstner 1978). After suffering great losses in the war, France looked to its colonies to provide soldiers and workers to fill the labor shortage; hundreds of thousands of natives from France’s African colonies were conscripted including a large percentage from AOF (Andrew and Kanya-Forstner 1978). Following the war, investment in AOF increased as the French recognized its importance and value. French desire for more control over the colonies and education was apparent in a 1922 colonial decree that required that the establishment of new schools in AOF colonies receive approval from the government, use exclusively French as the language of instruction, employ government-certified teachers, and teach the government curriculum (White 1996). While mission schools were the only option for many children during the early colonial period, they became less prevalent as the French colonial administration sought to consolidate its control in the expanding AOF territory in the beginning of the twentieth century (Gravelle 2014). Their role in education in the early colonial period was important but mission schools served a very limited percentage of the population in the territories.
b. Koranic Schools

Christianity was not the sole religion competing for educational influence in the AOF during the colonial period. Islam’s origins in West Africa can be traced back to the eighth century and spread through trade and commerce with North Africa (Hill 2009). Its spread was propagated by the empires of the precolonial period, including those of Mali and Songhay. By the time France began its colonizing mission, Islam was firmly rooted among native groups throughout what would become AOF territory as were Koranic schools. The influence of Islam on the native populations, especially in education, served as a motivating influence for the implementation of French-run schools within the colonies.

Koranic schools existed in West Africa long before the Europeans arrived and continued to exist after their departure. The term madrasa encompasses Islamic educational institutions at every level and can be used interchangeably. These schools existed as separate entities from both the French colonial schools and mission schools and did not follow a French curriculum. Koranic schools were numerous in the AOF especially in Mali and Guinea. These schools differ greatly from the metropolitan-modeled schools the French later imposed because Koranic schools were generally “community-based” with no formal administration to oversee them (Boyle 2018). As their name suggests, these schools also included a heavy focus on the text of the Koran and students were required to learn Koranic texts by rote. For the most part, the French perceived Islam as a threat to their influence in all the colonies except for Senegal where the religion was suitably managed in the French interest and marabouts played important roles in the administration of the territory (Oloruntimewin 1974). To try to quell the spread of Islam and its influence, the colonial administration allocated money for the creation of new French schools to compete against the Koranic ones. The effort by the French was mostly in vain and Islamic influence did not falter but continued to grow. Instead of building support for the French among the

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5 Madrasa is the Arabic word for school and has also been transliterated madrasah, medresa, madrassa, madraza, and medresse.
Muslim community, the French initiated a competition directly with popular Islamic leaders (Byrant 2020). The French resorted to another plan to try to exert their own influence over Koranic schools. The colonial administrators opened their own French-managed madrasas in parts of the AOF territory including Senegal, Mali, and Mauritania; the schools were not as successful as the French hoped, but they did allow for the training of translators for the French colonial administration although these opportunities were limited to male natives (Anderson 2016). Islam’s presence in the region proved too strong to be usurped or controlled by the French.

It is also important to note the influence of Islamic religious leaders, marabouts, in AOF and the role they played during the colonial period. The French recognized that the marabouts could significantly impact the rest of the Muslim population. Once it became evident that the French could not compete with Islam, the colonial government realized that having the support of marabouts could benefit the French. For this reason, during both World Wars, the French “collected written declarations of loyalty” from the most prominent marabouts in AOF to try to ensure the loyalty of the Muslim population and prevent an internal threat (Seesemann and Soares 2009). The outbreak of WWI also coincided with a wave of severe French distrust of Islam leading to the surveillance of all major marabouts (Zambakari 2021). Their power as religious and community leaders was strong enough to change French policy. The resistance of Marabouts to French cultural and social dominance played a part in influencing the colonial administration’s decision to shift from a policy of assimilation to one of association (Zambakari 2021).6

During the colonial period, Koranic schools did little to promote girls’ education. Girls were much less likely to have access to Koranic schools than boys as girls were expected to learn how to

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6 The policy of assimilation was marked by a focus on forming French citizens out of native Africans through deliberate indoctrination using language, culture, and education. The policy of association, that followed assimilation, was centered around working with African institutions and trying to shape them in ways that benefited the French rather than crushing them by force (Zambakari 2021).
perform domestic tasks from their mothers. As for boys who did attend Koranic schools, the teaching mostly consisted of memorizing and reading the Koran, and the class was typically taught by a religious leader (Boyle 2018). In terms of educational development, the Koranic schools of this period were not focused on offering a wholistic educational experience. The presence of Islam did increase educational opportunities in AOF through the education of their own students and by causing the creation of new French schools, but these opportunities continued to be largely limited to boys. Girl’s education continued to remain largely unavailable.

c. Privileging of Boys and Elitism

With the turn of the century, colonial education shifted from being led by missionaries to being organized by the colonial administration. During the 1902-1904 formal organization of the AOF, the administration assumed control of all schools in Senegal, Mali, Guinea, Côte d’Ivoire, and Benin; not long after the schools in Mauritania, Niger, and Burkina Faso were also under French direction. Mission schools were still permitted in small numbers if they used French as the language of instruction and promoted sentiments of loyalty to France (White 1996). Education became one of France’s crucial instruments in asserting political and social control of the colonized. However, native children were not educated to become critical thinkers and leaders; French colonial education was meant to prevent a “feared revolutionary situation” caused by the “unrestricted influx of metropolitan ideas” (Oloruntimihin 1974). Few children received adequate education during this period, but access was more available to boys than girls due to the continued privileging of boys.

The French colonial administration in AOF largely privileged the education of boys to achieve their goal of domination over the indigenous people. It was cheaper and more efficient to train natives to serve as intermediaries between the colonial government and the masses rather than convince French citizens to move to the colonies; unlike Algeria, AOF colonies were not meant to be settler colonies. To achieve this structure, the French depended on the traditional male rulers in the territories
as well as the creation of new elites to serve in the roles. The reasoning for this patriarchal system of rule was a mixture of the French’s preconceived notions of men as leaders and varying levels of existing patrilineal cultures throughout the territories. This societal power translated into boys receiving educational opportunities while many girls did not. Receiving a French education was made a precondition to serve in the elite intermediary roles in the early twentieth century which influenced privileged natives in society to send their male children to French schools (Oloruntimehin 1974). This contributed to not only the gender gap in education but a gendered division of labor that privileged boys. To cultivate this new class of French African elites, the colonial administration created urban schools that were “almost entirely European” and that followed the French education structure and curriculum (White 1996). The expectation during the colonial period was clear; if the natives wanted to have any power, they needed to be educated in the French colonial school system. The focus on creating a new native elite unsurprisingly had adverse effects on the colonial education system. Because the French sought to employ natives as professional administrators and intermediaries, there was less investment in universal primary education (Frankema 2012).

It is important to note that women were not treated equally in pre-colonial West African societies as well. Some women in pre-colonial Africa did have economic and/or political influence but it was largely granted with the permission of men. Also, indigenous religions, prevalent in pre-colonial Africa, did allow for women to exercise more freedom within their communities than was permitted during French colonial rule (Njoh and Akiwumi 2012). Some women also held the position of queen mother. While it is debated by scholars whether the title came with any real power, most women in pre-colonial West Africa were living under patriarchal societies with limited opportunities (Saidi 2020). Gender inequality was not a new phenomenon brought in by the Europeans; French colonization did however result in gender inequality becoming institutionalized in all facets of society. “Patriarchal alliances” negotiated between colonial administrators and traditional African leaders resulted in the
“systematization and codification of patriarchy” (Akyeampong and Fofack 2012). In many ways, European colonialism in Africa redefined women’s gender roles which inherently affected whether girls could access education, the quality of education, and duration of education available to girls. As the colonial system transformed the labor markets of AOF territories, men were taught to grow new cash crops, work in mines, or employed in town while women were much more likely to be confined to rural areas taking care of subsistence agricultural and domestic duties (Anunobi 2002). The French imposed their own prejudices and preexisting ideas about gender onto the local cultures they conquered; this was apparent in the way men gained political advantages while traditional sources of female political and economic power were largely ignored and undermined. Colonial rule also resulted in the exclusion of women in access to important resources such as education, skill training, and money, and land (Anunobi 2002). These expectation of women’s roles in the colonial system, enhanced by the patriarchal policies and structure of the colonial administration, further limited access to education for girls. Because girls were expected to work mainly in subsistence agriculture and childcare as adults, the French colonial administration did not view their education, beyond basic general education if that, necessary. There were girls who were able to pursue an education past primary school and even attend technical universities to learn skills, but unfortunately under French colonial rule, these girls were the exception rather than the standard. Another reason for the lack of investment in education in AOF was because the colonial administrators themselves did not educate their children in the colonial territories; as discussed later in this paper, the pattern of elites sending their children to the best schools abroad continued after decolonization (Oluwadamilol 2016).

While boys had greater access to learning compared to girls during the colonial period, many boys still received very limited education or none. Only an “elite” few were deemed worthy of receiving additional training to meet the personnel needs of European firms and the colonial administration by serving as clerks, primary school teachers, and medical assistants (Chafer 2018). The French viewed
educating the natives as not only a security risk but also unnecessary. They perceived the high fertility rates in AOF as a potential threat to French dominance. A major goal of the limited general colonial education was to prevent the creation of high numbers of déracinés within the colonies.⁷ Déracinés referred to the Africans that had no real place in either traditional or colonial society; the natives who were educated enough to be discontent in the colonial system but not educated enough to be part of the French African elite. It was feared that déracinés would cause trouble for the colonial administrators (Sabatier 1978). It was also feared that too much exposure to French education and politics could lead to revolutionary thought and cause trouble in the colonies; they feared an educated and politically conscious native population. The election of Blaise Diagne, a native of Senegal, as deputy to the French National Assembly in 1914 displeased the colonial administration; Lieutenant Governor Raphaël Antonetti feared Diagne’s election would have consequences for French influence and control in Senegal (Duke Bryant 2015 138). To prevent losing control, colonial education efforts focused mainly on primary education to promote literacy, elementary arithmetic, and limited geography and history. French colonial education also tried to create loyalty to France among the natives by promoting French cultural ideals while trivializing the indigenous cultures within AOF; the last thing the French wanted was to create a native political consciousness that would challenge French rule (Gravelle 2014). The type of education being taught to the non-elite natives - who were able to access it - was “at best a diluted and truncated form of the French original” (Gravelle 2014). Looking at the number of schools in AOF reveals just how exclusive and limited education was; in 1920, the entire AOF territory had only four hundred primary schools (Oloruntimehin 1974). By the 1930s only 40,000 pupils were in French schools and 6,000 in missionary schools in the entire AOF territory; this accounted for less than 5% of the school-age population (Chafer 2018). While it is difficult to find

⁷ Les déracinés translates to the uprooted in English; the term is representative of their in-between position in colonial and traditional society.
specific education data separated by gender for the French colonial period in AOF, it is highly probable that boys were enrolled at much higher rates than girls.

Secondary education was even more limited in AOF and mainly confined to Saint Louis and Dakar in Senegal, considered France’s most important African territory due to its designation as capital of AOF (Bawa 2013). Even the elites deemed worthy of post-primary instruction received an education mainly geared towards performing “low-level colonial positions” and did not receive the equivalent of a French diploma (Gravelle 2014). The highly selective nature of French colonial education can be attributed to French policy that only offered further education to individuals to fill “estimates of projected manpower needs (White 1996). Beyond basic education, Albert Charton, who served as the inspector general of education from 1930 to 1936, declared the goal of any further education to be to “turn out useful men and women who will form the backbone of the new native civilization” (White 1996). This rhetoric was common among French colonial administrators who sought to fulfil the mission to make the colonies as profitable as possible by increasing productivity, also known as mise en valeur (Gravelle 2014). Education opportunities began to expand during the colonial period when it became economically necessary. Sub-professional and professional schools began opening to produce agricultural assistants, telegraphists, and doctors especially after the first World War. For example, the École William Ponty in Dakar, considered the most elite school in AOF, mostly trained teachers and the École Pinet-Laprade trained technicians. Once again, these opportunities were mainly limited to men while women were expected to take on roles considered better suited for their gender.

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8 Ecole William Ponty still exists in Kolda, Senegal; it is now known as Ecole de Formation d’Instituteurs William Ponty and is associated with the French University IUFM at Livry-Gargan in mainland France. Also, significant to note is that the school remains named after Amédée William Merlaud-Ponty who served as the Governor General of AOF from 1908-1915.
Despite the colonial administrators’ best efforts, a political consciousness grew in AOF. Africans, both male and female, within the colonies were not content with their second-class treatment and the sub-par educational system. Resistance grew throughout AOF as many natives began to view the French colonial education system as a “symbol of political and cultural domination;” the education gap between the rural schools and the elite French schools in urban areas also caused a lot of dissatisfaction (White 1996). In Senegal, a group of lower-level colonial employees formed a political group known as the “Young Senegalese” in the early 20th century to combat their second-class status in society; having been educated in French colonial schools, members of these groups contested the “overbearing authority of the colonial state and of their own elders” (Duke Bryant 2015 139). The period post-World War II marked a major shift in French colonial education that did, to some degree, benefit girls’ access. As nationalist movements emerged in AOF colonies, they began demanding better quality education and increased access including secondary and higher education. These resistance efforts culminated in the 1944 Brazzaville Conference in which better and more accessible education for AOF colonies was discussed. With the victory of the Allied forces on the horizon, Charles de Gaulle hoped the conference would reassure the French metropole that he did not intend to allow the British to encroach on French territories; after heavily relying on Britain throughout WWII, some feared de Gaulle planned to cede some colonial territory (Freeman and Munro 2020 82). In his plan for the future of the colonial empire, de Gaulle emphasized the need to raise the standard of living and improve education and health systems for the native populations. In reaction to de Gaulle’s plan, Governor General of the AOF at the time, Pierre Charles Cournarie, pledged to “move toward mass education” in the territories with a new plan “to establish in AOF a system of primary schools analogous to that of the metropole” (Gamble 2017 192). The Brazzaville Conference also concluded that education should be expanded to reach more people, classes should be taught in French, and that more African teachers should be recruited (White 1996). Although no Africans were
invited to the Brazzaville Conference, it did prompt an expansion in colonial education and discussions among French administrators on how to “represent the colonies within a new French constitution (Freeman and Munro 2020 84). Activists from throughout AOF also met in Bamako, Mali in 1946 for a political rally that resulted in the creation of the Rassemblement Democratique Africain (RDA), the first inter-territorial African political party (Skurnik 1967). Natives within AOF were actively trying to better their communities and criticized the French for their oppressive and unequal policies.

d. Legacy of Direct Rule

As mentioned above, the French used direct rule in AOF territory in contrast to the indirect rule employed by the British in Africa. While the French did rely on pre-colonial power structures within AOF to achieve their goals, they placed traditional leaders in “an entirely subordinate role” and viewed them as agents of “the central colonial government” (Crowder 1964). The British generally relied on traditional leaders to manage the native population in their interest and only interfered in “extreme circumstances” (Crowder 1964). These contrasting approaches to rule led to different educational outcomes as well. To briefly compare French colonial education with British colonial education in Africa, there are some major differences. In general, the British system allowed education providers a “high degree of autonomy” and promoted “intense competition” among them while the French system was “highly centralized” and controlled by the French government (Feldman 2016). This led to the schools in British colonies employing many local teachers and thus becoming better adapted to local conditions in contrast with the French who prioritized elitism over the expansion of education. The language of instruction and the content taught were also significantly different among colonial powers. Schools in British colonies taught using local languages in the beginning grades allowing children to enter school with less of a barrier than in French schools where French was the sole language of instruction (Feldman 2016). In terms of content taught, schools placed more emphasis on
mastering reading while French schools offered a very basic level of education. As to how these different approaches affected girls specifically, it generally accepted that the French colonial education system disadvantaged girls more than British education because the British did not prioritize elitism and instead allowed for the expansion of education services (Feldman 2016).

The differences in British and French colonial education policy can also help account for the long-term educational differences seen not only in West Africa, that experienced both French and British colonial rules, but on the continent of Africa as a whole. Several studies have compared education outcomes in former French and British colonies. One econometric study found that the percentage of population attending school at the time of independence in Africa was significantly higher in former British colonies (Grier 1999). Inheriting a more developed education system put former British colonies at an advantage over former French colonies that inherited an education system with severely limited capacities and a legacy of entrenched elitism. Other papers on the effects after independence have concluded that British colonies experienced higher enrollment rates in both primary and secondary education in the decades following decolonization (Feldman 2016; Garnier and Schafer 2006; Cogneau 2003; Brown 2000). As the changes made after independence are discussed, it is important to remember the legacy of colonial education and its effects on educational progress in former AOF countries.

III. Part 2: Becoming Independent

Unlike some other French colonies, the decolonization process in the Afrique Occidentale Française was largely peaceful. All colonies except Guinea chose to remain closely tied with France as part of La Communauté Française. Continuing the relationship with their former colonial power, the newly independent countries did not experience many major changes to the structure of the education systems directly following independence. With hindsight, the decolonization process can be analyzed and critiqued it for its maintenance of the status quo.
a. La Communauté Française

World War II marked a major turning point for France’s colonial empire. By 1945, the war had severely drained France of much of its military, financial, and political authority meaning the state needed to reevaluate its colonies (Cooper 2018). Also following WWII, during which African men fought alongside their colonizers, independence movements calling for self-determination throughout the AOF were on the rise. Most African leaders began engaging with the colonial state through formally organized political parties and trade unions; between 1950 and 1960, many of these parties led the transition to independence and became the first ruling parties of newly independent African states (Talton 2011). This pressure from the colonies coupled with France’s weakened power led to the renaming of the French Empire to the French Union and the granting of certain civil rights to the colonized. Limited citizenships rights were given to natives and local elections were held for General Councils, although the elected bodies had little influence over the colonial administration. These changes proved too little too late and *La Communauté Française* replaced the French Union in 1958 as part of the constitution of the Fifth French Republic.

As part of the creation of *La Communauté Française*, all French territories were given the option by vote to join the new community or to sever ties with France and become fully independent immediately (Gertis 2019). Choosing to remain tied with France, meant AOF territories would become protectorates with a French head of state and an African head of government; this gave Africans the semblance of sovereignty without jeopardizing French influence in the region. Of all the territories, only the people of Guinea voted to sever ties with France and paid a heavy price their refusal. Ahmed Sekou Touré, Guinea’s first president, famously said “we prefer poverty in liberty than riches in slavery” and the French made sure that Guinea did face poverty for its non-compliance (Talton 2011).
Guinea became independent in 1958 while the rest of the AOF countries gained their formal independence in 1960. The process of the referendum resulted in a non-violent decolonization. However, it was not smooth; the transition process to independence was extremely difficult and complex. While the AOF was spared a violent war for freedom, they were largely only free in name as French colonial legacy continued to pervade the political, social, economic, and educational institutions in the newly independent countries. Few changes occurred in the education sector promoting a continued elitism; emblematic of the elitist French colonial structure of education, many of the first post-colonial leaders received an education from the top French schools including Felix Houphouet-Boigny, Leopold Sedar Senghor, and Ahmed Sekou Touré (Gardinier 1980). As the only country to vote no, Guinea attempted to remove French influence and included local languages into the education system marking a major shift from colonial education.

b. Immediate Changes to Education

The newly independent countries were left with large numbers of uneducated and illiterate adults and children due to the lack of educational investment during the colonial period; of the illiterate population, women and girls constituted a greater proportion (Quist 1994). Despite this tragic phenomenon, education was not at the forefront of most of the new West African governments’ priorities often due to more pressing issues and/or a lack of feasibility. As mentioned above, all states but Guinea voted to remain close with France meaning that directly after decolonization, there were not many drastic policies implemented to contain or combat French influence in any institutions.

9 Originally “Nous préférons la pauvreté dans la liberté à la richesse dans l'esclavage” from his August 25th, 1958 speech in the presence of French President of Charles de Gaulle.
10 France reacted very badly to Guinea’s no-vote and withdrew completely from the country which effectively halted their development; this was not Sekou Toure’s intention and caused the West African nation to turn to the Soviet Union for aid (Schmidt and Mann 2008). During France’s withdrawal, they took everything they could with them including light bulbs, plans for sewage pipelines in Conakry and even burned medicines rather than leave them (Gwaambuka 2019). France’s message was clear: any colony that refused to obey would face the consequences like Guinea.
including education. Directly following independence, all former AOF countries faced extremely low levels of education; for example, only 10% of Mali’s population was literate. The different approaches taken to address education discrepancies varied by the political alignment of the new native governments in power. Because AOF countries became independent during the Cold War, the competition between communism and capitalism heavily influenced how countries handled education policy. French influence, especially in education, also continued to dominate in newly independent states. As part of the cooperation agreements of decolonization, France supplied some teachers, administrators, and technicians to the former colonies, and it soon became clear that their main purpose was to spread and protect “French culture and economic, political, and strategic interests” in the former colonies (Oloruntimehin 1974).

Senegal’s first president, Léopold Sédar Senghor, benefited greatly from his own education and sought to boost his country’s education system. Senghor was one of the few natives to attend the lycée de Dakar, one of two secondary schools in Senegal offering the French metropolitan curriculum. His attendance was noteworthy because spots in the school were typically reserved for children of French settlers or elites (Gardinier 1980). In many ways Senghor embraced French culture and tried to find ways to add in aspects of traditional African cultures without alienating the French. Senghor maintained a close and positive relationship with the former colonial power and as a result did not seek any radical internal or external policies (Bolibaugh 1972). Immediately following Senegal’s independence, education remained largely “limited to and set up for the children of the Senegalese elite” (Ndiaye 2012). While Senghor initially considered the proliferation of education to be one of his priorities, many of his policies fell short of increasing accessibility. One of Senghor’s first goals was to

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11 After years of economic and political pressure, Guinea eventually gave in and reestablished ties with their former colonial master. In many ways, Guinea served as a warning to other former French colonies of what happened to former colonies that dared to stand up to France.
establish French as an official language; his pro-French position was often criticized by the opposition (Ndiye 2012).

Despite facing criticisms, Senghor sought to reform the colonial education system through policies of *l’enracinement* and *l’ouverture*, *enracinement* dealt with engaging with values and traditional social frameworks from a pan-African perspective while *ouverture* welcomed the inclusion of non-African traditions and systems (Nzewi 2016). Together, they were meant to create an awareness of African traditions and cultures while also incorporating universal values. As part of this reform, Senghor sought to decentralize the school system, enact a curriculum relevant to lived experiences, and provide all citizens, including girls, access to a free education (Ndiaye 2012). These ambitious reforms did not materialize in the manner Senghor planned and ultimately a lack of financial resources and shifting policy priorities resulted in no dramatic increases in education access for girls. Enrollment did increase from 106,900 in 1960 to 248,749 in 1968 for primary school and from 8,663 in 1960 to 47,400 in 1968 for secondary school but these increases were limited largely to boys (Bolibaugh 1972). The increases in enrollment were also accompanied by higher dropout rates as children often did not progress past primary school. Although the intentions of Senghor’s education reforms were progressive, the ultimate execution lacked any substantial changes to differentiate the new Senegalese system from the French colonial education system. A common theme while conducting this research is a lack of gender specific data available on education for the period directly following independence (1960s). This data gap makes it more difficult to analyze how certain policies affected girls’ access to education specifically. Using what is known about general male privileging in the colonial system and in society, it is possible to make an inference that none of these policy changes affected girls at the same rate they affected boys, but the data is not available to make concrete accurate conclusions.

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12 These ideas were present in all of Leopold Senghor’s policies, not only education, as he sought to champion culture while pursuing social development, economic prosperity, and national planning (Nzewi 2016).
Directly following independence, Niger’s first president, Hamani Diori, consolidated power under his political party, Parti Progressiste Nigérien (PPN), and traditional societal structures. Policy making in the first few years of Niger’s independence was concentrated on improving and strengthening the existing leadership of Diori and other elites and maintaining the relationship with France (Higgot 1980). The new Nigerien government did recognize that education was essential for the development of not only the citizens but the country as well. The first major education reform following independence occurred in 1966 and sought to increase the number of schools in Niger to expand access by bringing education closer to children (Hamidou et al. 2005). The state faced many obstacles as it tried to expand the number of schools and raise literacy rates. One barrier was a heritage of centralism and hierarchy within Niger’s education system that was difficult to overcome (Hadari 2005). The attempted reforms could not bridge the gap between the different sects of society and struggles with the elites. The country’s heavily traditional society also did little to help girls’ access to education due to cultural norms privileging boys over girls. Niger’s education system by the end of the decade was marked by its “rigidity and formalism” and was facing a crisis; the population was rapidly increasing as educational capacity remained stagnant (Hadari 2005). In terms of education development and growth, the first decade of independence was not successful for Niger.

Côte d’Ivoire’s first president, Félix Houphouet-Boigny, sought to invest in education to increase its accessibility. Houphouet-Boigny himself had greatly benefited from French colonial education; as the son of a powerful Baoulé tribal chief, he was educated in the best schools including Ecole William Ponty and Ecole de Medecine et de Pharmacie de Dakar (FHB Foundation for Peace).¹³ He was involved in politics long before Côte d’Ivoire gained its independence and was even elected as a representative to the French National Assembly; he also was appointed to a cabinet minister post in

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¹³ Ecole de Medecine et de Pharmacie de Dakar was the first medical school established by the French in AOF.
Paris. When Houphouet-Boigny became Côte d'Ivoire's first president in 1960, he sought to expand the education system in a way that would democratize education.

Côte d'Ivoire emerged from the colonial period with huge economic potential due to its exporting of coffee and cocoa. At the time of independence, however, the West African nation was severely lacking educated and trained human capital, like the rest of the former colonies. In 1960, over 80 percent of Côte d'Ivoire’s population was illiterate and there were not nearly enough schools to accommodate the population (Brayton 1979). Due to Côte d'Ivoire's relative economic power and the support of France, the government was able to prioritize education and train both men and women. President Houphouet-Boigny’s decision to remain closely allied to France also helped Côte d'Ivoire's development prospects as France provided over 80% of total external aid to education development in 1964 (Bolibaugh 1972). Côte d'Ivoire did not seek any radical departure from the French colonial system and continued to teach children in French. This intense investment in education immediately following independence by President Houphouet-Boigny’s government put the country at an advantage compared to other former AOF countries and resulted in both girls and boys gaining marginally better access to education. By 1965, 44% of elementary age children were in school with about 32% of those children being girls (Bolibaugh 1972). While this enrollment both overall and specifically for girls appears quite low, it an impressive outlier for the region. Looking at Table 3.1, Côte d'Ivoire’s continued investment in education improved enrollment rates even more. This positive outcome in education reform so soon following decolonization was unfortunately rather rare among former AOF states. While the overall curriculum and system continued to remain closely aligned with the French, more boys and girls were gaining access to schooling. The system was by no means perfect; like other former AOF countries, it continued to be plagued by a shortage of trained teachers, high dropout rates, and insufficient schooling resources and materials. Despite these pitfalls,
Côte d'Ivoire emerged from the first decade of independence with the highest primary school enrollment for both boys and girls.

Independence in **Mauritania** presented a different set of challenges that ultimately left girls with extremely limited access to education. Not only did Mauritania become the world’s first Islamic republic, but the country had to grapple with a heavily traditional society dominated by hierarchy and a predominantly nomadic population that was not conducive to the creation of central administrative agencies. Creating a strong centralized government was key to preventing ethnic tensions from turning into conflicts. Moktar Ould Daddah, the first president of Mauritania, knew that to foster national unity among Mauritania’s different ethnic groups the government needed to represent Mauritania’s regional and ethnic diversity (“Mauritania in Perspective” 2012). Daddah tried to appeal to the diverse population by including several black Mauritanians in his cabinet; he also recognized secular education as a key method to promote national unity.

Rather than promote national unity, Daddah’s education policy led to criticism and demonstrations from dissatisfied Mauritanians. By making Hassaniyya Arabic, the dialect spoken by Mauritania’s Moors, a compulsory language in school and one of the country’s national languages, Daddah’s government angered many of Mauritania’s predominantly black non-Moor population who spoke their own languages (“Mauritania in Perspective” 2012). This attempted Arabification of the non-black African children is comparable to how France tried to impose its own culture and influence on its colonized people through the forced instruction of French. Public education in Mauritania was also at a disadvantage following decolonization because many parents preferred to offer their children traditional religious education rather than send their children to state run schools. The preference for

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14 At time of independence roughly 70% of Mauritania’s population were Moors. While almost all Moors speak Hassaniyya Arabic, the group can be broken down to beydanes (“white moors”) with Arab-Berber lineage and haratines (“black Moors”) with Sudanic African lineage. The other major group in Mauritania is often referred to as “black Africans” that consists of five primary ethnic groups: Toucouleur, Fulbe, Soninké, Wolof, and Bambara. Both the Moors and black African ethnic groups have traditional caste systems. (“Mauritania in Perspective” 2012)
traditional religious education was so strong in Mauritania that in the mid 1960s, only 14% of all school-aged children had enrolled in public schools (“Mauritania” 2021). The religious education was largely provided by Islamic schools; within these schools, boys typically received seven years of education while girls received much shorter periods of instruction if any at all (“Mauritania” 2021). The continued preference for traditional schools in the period following decolonization led to many girls being excluded from formal school. Even though Daddah’s government tried to popularize the state-run schools that girls in theory would be able to attend, the preferences of parents for traditional religious education and dissatisfaction with the perceived Arabification of public education kept many children, both female and male, out of state-run schools.

Maurice Yaméogo became Burkina Faso’s first president upon the country gaining independence in 1960. Following his rise to power, Yaméogo quickly consolidated his authority as dictator of the newly independent country. Yaméogo, being in a position of such power, did not shy away from excessive spending. While his country and its people remained poor, Yaméogo and his elites gained riches. His irresponsible use of state funds ended up having detrimental effects on Burkina Faso’s education system that was already severely lacking funding. In 1965, Yaméogo’s desire to construct a luxurious party palace resulted in inadequate funding for the education sector. As a result, there were not enough classrooms and teachers to accommodate the number of students leading to students being refused education (Muase 1989). This shortfall of Yaméogo’s administration is even more incredulous when considering that school enrollment that same year was only 11% (Sheram 1988). Only 11% of school-aged children were in school and the system could not even accommodate that many.

In the same year of the education crisis, a decree was signed emphasizing the country’s goals of achieving universal schooling by 1980 and organizing the country’s primary education (King 2000). There were also calls for a reform of the country’s education curriculum to better represent the
geographical, historical, and cultural reality of Burkina Faso but the reform was never implemented because it was viewed as too superficial (de Lange 2007). Following Yameogo’s fall from power in 1966, the country took a new approach to education with a focus on the rural areas that made up most of the country. In 1967, the government opened *Les Centres d'Éducation Rurales* (CERs) that offered three-year programs in agricultural education. The CERs were meant to provide children in rural areas with the functional skills they needed to succeed along with some basic education components. The CERs were abandoned in 1970 when the state found that they only reached 20% of the children they were targeting (de Lange 2007). Burkina Faso ended its first decade of independence with an education system that largely resembled the French colonial model. Although some reforms were attempted, state mismanagement of funds and lack of capacity severely limited progress. Education enrollment did slightly increase during the period, but education continued to be highly elitist and inaccessible, especially for girls.

e. Changes in Marxist Countries

The countries discussed above were considered aligned with the West or nonaligned in the Cold War following decolonization. Mali, Guinea, and Benin all experienced left-leaning governments following independence which generally resulted in closer ties with the USSR, reforms to combat French influence, and the prioritization of education, although not all investments proved successful.

The first president of *Mali*, Modibo Keita, used his socialist ideology to develop a new education system in Mali in 1962 focused on increasing literacy and ensuring that Malians learned skills that would allow them to contribute to the economy (Obichere 1976). The main objectives of the 1962 educational reform were to “offer mass and quality education to the needs and realities of Mali” and to provide an education that “decolonizes the minds and rehabilitates Africa and its own values” (Bolibaugh 1972). The mission and the timing of the policy was truly revolutionary. For such an

15 Rural Education Centers
ambitious framework to be announced only two years after independence was shocking. Mali was trying to reverse the psychological effects of colonialism and restructure the education system left behind by the French to better suit Malians. Keita and his administration sought to make education a right rather than a privilege enjoyed only by the elite (Bolibaugh 1972).

The progressive 1962 policy brought with it some major structural changes. Of note, it created a nine-year sequence of education labeled as fundamental education and made it compulsory (Bolibaugh 1972). There was also significant investment into the infrastructure of the education system; the number of classrooms in Mali increased from 1,920 in 1962 to 5,040 by 1969 (Bolibaugh 1972). Unsurprisingly, the increase in enrolled students was not accompanied by an increase in education quality as the state could not keep up with the demand for trained teachers and school materials. Despite the limitations, the progressive investment and expansion of education taken by Mali following independence makes the state stand out among other former AOF countries. In terms of expanding education for girls, there is a paucity of scholarship concerning the 1962 reforms effect on girls’ access to education nor is there much data available. It is known that women had a hand in crafting the education reform because the National Women’s Union served on the Committee that helped draft the law (Bolibaugh 1972). There is also data from 1966-1967 that shows that 103,065 boys were enrolled in school compared to only 56,506 girls showing that the gender gap was quite large (“Annuaire Statistique” 1967). With limited data, it is difficult to draw conclusions on how girl’s access to education changed in the period directly following independence. While the overall increases in education accessibility were bound to have positively impacted girls as well as boys, knowing the privileged position boys hold in society, it is reasonable to conclude girls were not affected to the same extent boys were. The investment and progress made directly after decolonization were eventually

16 The policy noted that total enrollment of school age children would not be possible for at least several years and instead mandated that mandatory attendance be linked to the number of open spots (Bolibaugh 1972).
stunted in the following dictatorships, but the strides made in education in Mali following decolonization were impressive.

Like Mali, **Guinea**’s education policy following independence was centered around renewing African cultural values, enforcing education as a right for every citizen, and providing citizens with an education that would help move the country towards development (Bolibaugh 1972). As discussed above, Guinea emerged from colonization with Ahmed Sekou Touré as president. Touré attended a Koranic school before graduating from a French technical school. During the colonial period, he made a name for himself as a pro-African activist and was elected Guinea’s deputy to the French National Assembly, a member of the Guinea Legislative assembly, and the mayor of Conakry. After successfully campaigning his compatriots to vote no in the 1958 referendum, Touré led Guinea into independence. He wasted no time in making changes to education; he issued the Presidential Order of August 5, 1959 that made education compulsory for children aged 7 to 15, required schooling to be provided at no cost, and set guidelines for administration, personnel, and diplomas (Bolibaugh 1972). A significant change to education policy was the language of instruction; under Sékou Touré’s reforms, the first four years of primary school were to be taught in local languages followed by French in later years (Bolibaugh 1972). This marks an additional change from the French education system that prioritized instruction in French above all other local languages.

Touré’s policies were ultimately successful at increasing overall enrollment in education but once again the exact effects for girls are unclear. The total number of students enrolled in primary education increased from 46,616 in 1958, the first year of independence, to 111,937 in 1962 (Bolibaugh 1972). While this increased enrollment was still nowhere close to the total number of school age children, the progress made in such little time is significant and noteworthy. Due to data gaps, it is unclear to what extent girls were positively affected by the education reforms following independence.
Nevertheless, the investment in and expansion of education laid a strong foundation for the newly independent Republic of Guinea.

**Benin** does not quite fit into this category because it was not officially declared a Marxist state until 1974 by military dictator Lieutenant Colonel Mathieu Kérékou. I nonetheless include it in this category because the major changes to education happened under Marxist rule. The period directly following independence in Benin was not conducive to education reform. The country faced violence and a series of coups and regime changes in the decade following decolonization. Between 1960 and 1972, there were twelve attempted coups d’état of which five were successful (Engel et. al 2011). The constant changes from civilian to military rule during the first twelve years of independence made it incredibly difficult for any significant reforms to be successful; policies that were enacted were often reversed or not implemented when the next leader came to power. Specifically in terms of education, it simply was not a high political priority for politicians in the country and thus the system remained highly elitist and closely aligned with the inherited colonial system (Engel et. al 2011). State run schools were minimal and education remained highly inaccessible throughout Benin.

Kérékou rose to power through a military coup in 1972 and later declared Marxism-Leninism as the official national ideology of Benin in 1974 (Dossou-Yovo 1999). Kérékou enacted significant changes to Benin and its overall structure including changing the country’s name from Dahomey to Benin. Kérékou’s left leaning government and the nationalization of industries took a toll on French-Benin bilateral relations and reduced overall French influence in the country (Dossou-Yovo 1999). Still in the context of the Cold War, Benin was behaving more like a Soviet bloc country than a western capitalist. In terms of education, Kérékou’s first major education reform was to nationalize schools to confront the inequalities apparent in the education system. As a result of this newfound investment in education, both the number of schools in the country and enrollment increased substantially (Engel et. al 2011). The other major educational reform enacted by Kérékou involved completely reinventing
the curriculum being taught in schools. The new curriculum, named *Ecole Nouvelle*, contained a large amount of ideological content and was meant to distance Benin from French colonial legacy and liberate the people from “foreign domination and all cultural alienation” (Ordinance No. 75-30)\(^\text{17}\) The new curriculum was supposed to bridge the gap between what was being taught in the classroom and what Beninese citizens needed to go about everyday life and be productive (Imorou 2014). Kérékou did not trust the existing teachers in Benin to implement *l’Ecole Nouvelle*; he viewed teachers and other educated elites as “enemies of the people, agents of servility, and handmaidens of imperialism” (Imorou 2010).

While Kérékou attempted to revitalize education programs that had suffered due to years of violence and instability, his reforms were limited by financial constraints as his regime faced economic issues. Ultimately by 1980 the quality of education in Benin for girls and boys had”’ gravely weakened” and by 1989 education in Benin was in crisis (USAID 2005).

Overall, the period immediately following decolonization brought varying degrees of educational reform with ultimately all eight countries falling short of their goals. While different approaches were taken, insufficient resources, lack of leadership, and the continuation of societal norms all limited the effectiveness of education policies. The policy changes that had positive effects for education access were largely limited to boys as an accompanying shift in gendered expectations did not occur. Girls remained significantly disadvantaged in educational opportunities in all eight former AOF countries as the education of girls continued to be ignored. Potential for analyzing these post-independence policies is seriously limited by the lack of sufficient data separated by gender. Education data in general is already limited for this time period and when looking specifically at girls, data is even more difficult to find. The gap is representative of priorities within the countries and throughout the international community. Newly independent West African states lacked the capacity and/or the desire to measure data pertaining to girls’ education and the goal of educating girls that is

\(^{17}\) Originally: “toute domination étrangère et de toute aliénation culturelle”
shared by many international organizations today was not as high of a priority during the 1960s. As girls’ education became more and more of a focus, data became more and more accessible. The earliest data available for all eight former AOF countries is from 1971 and can be seen in Figure 3.1. Côte d’Ivoire with its heavy investment in education in the 1960s leads former AOF countries in primary school enrollment while Niger and Burkina Faso are the countries with the two lowest primary gross enrollment rates in 1971.18 Guinea and Senegal’s above average GERs can be explained in part due to Senegal’s continued support from France and Guinea’s prioritization of education under Touré. Benin stands out as a bit of an outlier because despite being faced with several conflicts during this period, the country had the second highest male GER as seen in 1971. I expect this discrepancy between Benin and some of the other former AOF countries to be more indicative of how weak the inherited education systems were in Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and Niger rather than representative of the strength of Benin’s system. All three countries faced different kinds of challenges to increasing education enrollment during this period such as nomadic populations and preference for traditional schooling among families. This data shows the effects of policies pursued during the first years after independence and just how limited access to education continued to be. Despite the hope for change decolonization represented, girls continued to remain largely disadvantaged in the post-colonial education system as they had during the colonial system.

**Figure 3.1 – Primary School GER by Gender 1971**

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18 The gross enrollment rate (GER) is the total enrollment in a specific level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the population in the official age group corresponding to this level of education. GER can exceed 100% due to the inclusion of over-aged and under-aged students because of early or late entrants, and grade repetition.
By the end of the first period, the Marxist leaning countries despite their deviation from the status quo, did not have seriously different education outcomes than those that remained closely aligned to France. In figure 3.1, wide gender gaps exist in each country’s primary GER. Despite deviating from the French colonial education system left behind, Mali and Guinea did not consider gender equality in their reforms. Their reforms were also limited by financial means as trying to remove French influence often caused a decrease in foreign assistance from France. As mentioned, after Guinea voted no, France totally cut ties with its former colony. France removed almost everything from Guinea including administrators and teachers, lights bulbs, and important documents; France also discontinued its “financial assistance, trade support, the pensions of Guinean war veterans,” and blocked Guinea’s account in the French treasury (Hayter 1965). Mali also experienced tensions with France but for different reasons. In the beginning of his rule, President Keita of Mali removed all foreign banks from Bamako except for one French bank and cut ties with the French franc, a move that had serious negative effects for the Malian economy and eventually forced Mali to rejoin the
The lack of gendered focus of the reforms of Marxist leaning countries during this period and limited support from France and other external actors can account for the lack of drastic differences observed in education outcomes in the decade after independence.

**Table 3.1 – Key Changes Period I**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benin</td>
<td>Benin experienced a series of regimes changes and instability directly after independence that were not conducive to education reform. After Kérékou seized power, he increased investment in education and created a new curriculum, <em>Ecole Nouvelle</em>, meant to separate Benin from its colonial past. Economic issues severely limited the success of these reforms, and they ultimately led the country into an education crisis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>The first president consolidated his own power and spent state funds frivolously leading to major cuts in education funding. The government did set education goals and invest in community education centers in the second half of this period, but they made no significant progress. The reforms of this period also lacked a gendered focus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Côte d’Ivoire</td>
<td>Côte d’Ivoire emerged from colonization with an advantage due to its economic power which allowed the government to invest in education for both boys and girls. Due to its continued close ties with France, the government did not seek to radically change the existing education system. Côte d’Ivoire ended this period with the highest primary GER for both boys and girls.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>After voting no to joining <em>la Communauté Française</em>, Guinea included local languages in schools marking a breakaway from the prioritization of French. Education was also made compulsory and free for all Guineans in theory although the country lacked the capacity to achieve this reform. While girls were technically included in the reforms, they lacked a gendered focus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>Adopting a socialist leaning government, the first president of Mali introduced ambitious education reforms soon after decolonization that sought to reverse the effects of colonial education. This resulted in a break from the French colonial education structure and increased investment in the education sector. No specific action was taken to target girls’ education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mauritania</td>
<td>Ethnic differences made education reforms difficult during this period; the government was accused of trying to impose Arab culture on the other ethnic groups through education. A preference for traditional religious education also hindered progress in public education and increases in girls’ access. Mauritania ended this period with the lowest primary GER for girls.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niger</td>
<td>Niger’s first president focused on consolidating his own power and maintaining traditional society. Attempted reforms did not result in any significant positive changes for girls. Niger ended this period with the lower primary GER for boys and the second lowest for girls.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td>Senegal maintained a very close relationship with France after independence; education remained largely elitist despite Senghor’s reforms to decentralize the school system, create new curriculums, and provide all citizens with free education. Compared to other countries, Senegal’s primary GER was one of the higher ones.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

19 The Franc Zone refers to countries that have currencies linked to the French franc at a fixed rate of exchange and are freely convertible into that franc. The CFA franc introduced in 1945 is an example of this type of currency and is still used in 14 African countries. As of 1999, the currencies of the Franc Zone became linked to the euro as France phased out the French franc ("History of the CFA franc" 2022).

The period after independence was marked by many different economic and social challenges that made it difficult to expand education and continued to leave girls disadvantaged. Some former AOF countries faced frequent changes in government making it difficult to invest in and build upon existing programs while others were ruled by a single leader for decades which contributed to corruption and misuse of public funds. Politics directly influences education; policies affect education programs and education expenditures are reliant on who is in charge (Oluwadamilola 2016). Advancements in education are also not easy to achieve; they require resources and above all else time. Changes to the educational structure rarely result in immediate results and require adequate time to produce positive changes. It is necessary to keep these limitations in mind when examining the evolution of education systems in former AOF countries post-independence.

Before looking specifically at reforms and their impacts within former AOF countries, it is worth discussing the World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) that took place in Jomtien, Thailand in March 1990 because it marked a major turning point in education reforms for AOF countries. WCEFA was attended by delegations from all eight former AOF countries and the influence of the conference can be seen in varying degrees in their subsequent reforms. The conference was organized in response to worries over the “deterioration of education systems during the 1980s” and the millions of illiterate children and adults around the world (“Education for All” 1993). It was attended by representatives from 155 governments, 33 intergovernmental bodies, and 125 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and ultimately resulted in the adoption of two documents: the World Declaration on Education for All and the Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs. WCEFA is significant not only for its mobilization of so many countries and organizations but also for its highlighting of the global gender gap in education and the privileged access boys received in education systems. It marked the first-time girls’ limited access to education was being discussed in
such depth and with an international audience. There was a special emphasis on the disadvantages women and girls faced in education compared to men and boys especially in sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab states, and South Asia where two out of three women were illiterate (“Education for All” 1993). Article three of the World Declaration on Education for All notes: “The most urgent priority is to ensure access to, and improve the quality of, education for girls and women, and to remove every obstacle that hampers their active participation. All gender stereotyping in education should be eliminated (1990).” As a result, over 100 governments formulated plans of actions that included strategies to address gender inequities in education (Swainson et al. 1998). This conference and its culminating documents, while not specifically focused on education in Africa, had implications on how the governments in former AOF countries addressed education disparities within their own countries. The WCEFA led to more focus being put on girls’ education especially within Africa. As a result, in 1993, the Pan-African Conference For the Education of Girls was held in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso; the conference sought to plan ways to improve achievement of girls, increase access to education, and make girls the center of decision-making (“Pan-African Conference” 1993). Six years after the WCEFA, a Mid-Decade Meeting of the International Consultative Forum on Education for All was held in 1996 to follow up on the impacts of EFA throughout the world. Other than increasing support for EFA and demonstrating the commitment of the international community for the initiative, the mid-decade meeting did not spark as much change as the WCEFA.

Another important shift that occurred during this period and that impacted education programs in former AOF countries was the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) during the 1980s. SAPs consist of loans provided by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) with the goals of adjusting a country’s economic structure to generate long-term benefits (“Adjustment From Within” 2001). SAPs promulgated across low- and middle-income countries during the debt crises of the 1980s. A decline in raw materials and international economic activity left
many countries, including those in West Africa, in a negative economic situation (Mohs 1988). The loans offered through SAPs by the IMF and World Bank were conditional; the introduction of SAPs required governments to make neo-liberal changes to their economies including reducing public expenditures and increasing private sector participation (Pamba 2012). The decrease of public services often has negative effects on the poorest and most marginalized groups within society who rely on state programs (Mohs 1988).

In general, SAPs had mixed effects on the education systems in former French West African countries. Countries that followed SAPs reduced public expenditure on education more than those that did not; this decrease, along with the economic recession and rising school population, led to lower per pupil expenditure and less expansion of public education (Bonal 2002). One of the policies linked to SAPs was the policy of cost-sharing; to reduce education expenditures, the World Bank and the IMF wanted states to split the cost of education with families rather than relying on public expenditure alone. Cost-sharing, when a significant proportion of the population is living in poverty, is not a viable option and can be linked to higher rates of out of school children (Pamba 2012). Due to a focus on rates of return on education investment, SAPs did help prioritize the expansion of basic education because the World Bank found investments in primary education led to the largest returns (Bonal 2002). The effects on SAPs on education in each country is discussed further in this section.

Due to limited progress in the first decade of independence, education remained out of reach for many in former AOF states, especially women. In 1975, 96.7% of women in Burkina Faso and 94.3% of women in Mali were illiterate; Benin, Côte d’Ivoire and Niger had high rates of illiteracy in 1980 as well with 83.2%, 76%, and 94.2% of their female population illiterate respectively (Quist 1994). While five out of the eight former AOF countries spent most of this period under military rule, Senegal, Côte d’Ivoire, and Guinea were governed by civilian rule for the majority of this period. Côte d’Ivoire
and Guinea both experienced short periods of military rule near the end of the 20th century but they did not last long.

**Senegal**, that had largely failed to make education more inclusive during the first decade of independence, continued to try to expand access throughout this period. Senghor’s ambitious education policies were unfortunately never realized during his time as president. The second president of Senegal elected in 1981, Abdou Diouf, was determined to provide a “countrywide democratic schooling for the people” and finally remove the elitism in education that had carried on after independence from the French colonial system (Ndiaye 2012). Diouf had progressive ideas for education reform and sought to vastly increase the education capacity of Senegal to accommodate more students. As was common for many developing countries, the reforms were limited by the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) by the Bretton Woods institutions. In Senegal, these programs led to the “forced liberalization of the markets” and decreased social programs, including education, resulting in higher illiteracy rates (Ndiaye 2012). They proved to be economically detrimental to the country and negatively affected the bulk of the civilian population that relied on social programs for everyday services. For education, SAPs resulted in “widespread deterioration of educational standards” and increased dropout rates that disproportionately affected girls (Salmon-Marchat and Dramani 2016).

1990 marked a turning point in Senegal’s education reforms. The WCEFA brought attention to the importance of making basic education accessible to every citizen in the country. While access to education in urban areas had increased in Senegal, low enrollment remained a barrier to educating children in rural areas (Ndiaye 2012). To try to meet the goals set in the World Declaration on Education for all, Senegal sought to invest in both primary and secondary education (Acedo 2002). President Diouf made changes to his education policy in the years following WCEFA. He prioritized literacy and even created a Ministry of Adult Education and Literacy teaching in 1992. He also took
steps to further remove the Senegalese education system from lasting French influence; Diouf wanted the majority of the education personnel in the country to be Senegalese nationals rather than expatriates. He also promoted the teaching of other national languages besides French for literacy purposes. There were overall increases in education enrollment during this period in Senegal, but the reforms lacked a gendered focus. As a result, girls remained disadvantaged.

As discussed in the prior section, Côte d’Ivoire emerged from the 1960s with a stronger education system than most former AOF countries due to the country’s heavy investment in education. Between 1960 and 1980, Côte d’Ivoire’s education budget constituted of more than 45% of the national budget (Oyeniran 2017). Unfortunately, the progress in education did not continue throughout the rest of the 20th century. Economic stagnation in the 1980s caused by “deteriorating terms of trade and fierce competition between economies” took a toll on Côte d’Ivoire’s economy and prospects for development (Oyeniran 2017). Côte d’Ivoire was forced to put in place SAPs by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). These programs had negative overall effects on education including its quality; the budget that once allocated 45% for education was decreased (Oyeniran 2017). Côte d’Ivoire’s education system suffered under SAPs and education growth stagnated.

After attending the WCEFA, Côte d’Ivoire adopted a National Education plan for All in 1992 to try to meet the goals of the conference. Key in the new national strategy was achieving a gross enrollment rate of 90% by 2000. Under Minister of Education Pierre Kipre, Côte d’Ivoire sought to reform the education system by decentralizing the organization of exams and standardizing the quality of education (Oyeniran 2017). They culminated into the Law of September 17th, 1995 that reaffirmed the right to education and equal treatment of all citizens, including in public education. While the goal of 90% GER was not met by 2000, the increased investment in education during the 1990s allowed French (was and continues to be) the official language of Senegal but is only spoken by a small percentage of the population. Six other languages are considered national languages in Senegal and are spoken by 86% of the citizens (Hyter).
Côte d’Ivoire to enter the 21st century with positive momentum. The growth at the end of the period applied to girls as well; as seen in Figure 4.2, Côte d’Ivoire had the second highest female GER in 1999.

**Guinea** remained under Sekou Touré’s leadership until his death in 1984. The progress from the first decade of independence suffered in the 1970s and 1980s as Guinea faced economic hardship. After 26 years in power, Touré’s death also proved to be destabilizing and resulted in a subsequent military coup in 1984 by Lansana Conté. Military rule lasted until 1990 as Conté led Guinea’s transition back into civilian multiparty rule with the adoption of a new Constitution and multi-party elections in 1993. A combination of these political and economic factors resulted in Guinea’s education indicators decreasing (Midling et al. 2006). By 1985, primary gross enrollment rates for girls were “among the lowest in the world” with less than 25% of school age girls attending school (Midling et al. 2006). The hope for Guinea’s education development from the 1960’s did not last into this period. With the help of outside partners, Guinea tried to reverse these trends by enacting several different reforms.

In 1984, after Conté rose to power through a coup, education became a top priority of his government. Though General Conté had risen to power through illegitimate means, he delegated decision making on education to qualified professionals. Two national education conferences were held in Conakry in 1984 to assess the state of education in the country followed by two major reforms. The first major reform, *Le Plan d’Action Intermediaire*, notably reintroduced French as the language of instruction from the start of primary school; this marked a substantial departure from Touré’s education policy that allowed for instruction in national languages (Diallo 2019). The next major education reform was when Guinea adopted a new education policy statement in 1989 that identified goals for the country until the year 2000. Some of these goals included increasing budgetary allocations for education to at least 20% of the national budget, decentralizing the planning and management of education, and increasing enrollment in primary school to at least 50% of the eligible population.
The National Education Policy of 1989 was adapted and incorporated into a new policy, *Programme d’Ajustement Sectoriel de l’Education* (PASE), that served as Guinea’s education policy document until the turn of the century. PASE I and its successor PASE II included the reforms of the National Education Policy of 1989 and added an emphasis on improving the quality of education and the decentralization of education management (Diallo 2019). Despite attending the WCEFA in 1990, Guinea’s Education for All reform was not established until 2002. While girls were included beneficiaries in the reforms introduced during this period, Guinea lacked a policy or reform focused specifically on increasing girls’ education access compared to boys. Because of the gender education gap that exists throughout former AOF countries, it is not enough to just increase education overall. Achieving gender parity in education requires programs and policies directed at getting girls specifically into school and making sure they stay in school. For Guinea, this gendered approach to education policy did not occur at the national level until the 21st century.

a. Periods of Military Rule

It is important to discuss how military rule impacted education gender disparities because these periods often led to instability, misuse of public funds, and increased violence. Education in a state is dependent on the person and institutions in power. Even if a country is economically wealthy, without the willingness to invest in education, positive changes are unlikely to occur. Periods of military rule are also important to analyze in the case of former AOF countries because all of them, except Senegal, underwent a period or multiple periods of military rule following independence. The duration of military regimes and the times at which they occurred following independence vary and can be observed in Figure 4.1.

Periods of military rule are typically characterized by human rights abuses, oppression, and absolute control by the ruling military official(s). Because of these characteristics, military regimes are

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21 In English: National Education Program Adjustment
generally not conducive to education development or the promotion of gender equality. Very little, if any progress is made in education meaning that gender gaps are often supported and maintained during periods of military rule. Generally, military regimes “systematically reduce health and education expenditures” when in power while civilian governments are more likely to invest in those areas (Looney 1990). Military dictators in West Africa tended to reinforce traditional life as well, meaning women were often further oppressed during these periods and less likely to attend school. Benin, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Mali, and Niger all spent much of this period (1970-2000) under military rule. To understand the changes to education for girls during this period requires a closer look at the regimes.

**Figure 4.1** Periods of Military Regimes in former AOF

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22 Vertical bars on the graph marks when one period of military rule was interrupted by another coup d’éetat and the installation of a new regime.

23 While working on this project, Burkina Faso underwent a military coup d’éetat on January 24, 2022. The coup was led by Lieutenant-Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba who has since been named as transitional leader. Although the military junta has promised a transition back to democracy, no timeline has been given. Guinea also experienced a military coup d’état while I was working on this project on September 6, 2021. Colonel Mamady Doumbouya led the coup against former President Alpha Conde who had been in power for 11 years. Since the coup, Col. Doumbouya has become the interim president of Guinea.

In 2020, Colonel Assimi Goita led a coup against President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita. After transitional civilian leaders were put in place, Col. Goita led another coup against the civilian leaders and had them arrested in May 2021. Col. Goita claims elections scheduled for February 2022 will still take place.
After experiencing four military regimes, including the 18-year rule of Mathieu Kérékou, Benin ended the 20th century by investing in education and trying to reform its system. Following the education crisis during the late 1980s, the sovereign people of Benin came together for *La Conference Nationale de 1990* and wrote a new National Constitution that prioritized democratic ideals and switched the economy to capitalism. The new constitution was followed by elections making Benin the first African country to successfully transition from authoritarianism to democratic rule (Biao 2021). A new president was elected, Nicephore Soglo, and he attempted to revitalize the country’s education system throughout his time in office (1991-1996). Soglo implemented a new policy that sought to increase the enrollment of underprivileged groups specifically girls. In 1992, the country introduced affirmative action programs that exempted girls in rural areas from paying school fees; the government also created a section within the Ministry of Education dedicated specifically to girls’ education planning. The 1992 reform also established a girls’ schooling network composed of community authorities, NGOs, parents, teachers, and students active in promoting girls’ education (“Country Context Report” 2004). These changes occurred following the WCEFA and marked a shift.
towards a gendered approach to education in Benin. The establishment of the girls’ schooling network also set this reform apart from prior reforms in the country because it got people on the ground involved; the network involved mobilizing people within communities to advocate for girls’ education. Rather than just changing national policy, it provided a plan of action. This new policy revitalized Benin’s education system and was made possible by the reestablishment of democracy with the election of Soglo, changes from IMF and World Bank SAPs, and help from outside organizations (Midling et. Al 2005). With this new plan, the government made education free, guaranteed equal opportunity for all, and committed to fight against high dropout rates in schools especially for girls (Greeley 2017). The initiative proved to be successful and within three years, Benin reached levels of enrollment comparable to those prior to the collapse of the educational system (Midling et. Al 2005).

The government of Benin also introduced a United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) backed Population Policy during this period meant to slow population growth and allow the government to catch up with the demands of a large and predominantly youthful population (Arowolo 2010). The education crisis in the 1980s was caused in part by the rapidly growing Beninese population and the slow economic growth of Benin. The government could not keep up with the demand for education due to insufficient funds, teacher shortages, and lack of infrastructure to accommodate teaching so many children (Amoussou-Yeye 1996). The state of education in Benin got so bad that it had one of the lowest enrollment rates and highest illiteracy rates in all of Africa during the 1980s. The education crises also exacerbated gender disparities in enrollment as the enrollment rate for boys was 68% and 34% for girls in 1983 (Amoussou-Yeye 1996). While the policies of the 1990s by no means solved all the issues in the country’s education system, it did signify steps being taken in the right direction. Specifically, girls in Benin did greatly benefit from the education reforms. The new approach proved to have a positive impact on Beninese girls’ access to education. Looking at enrollment rates, GER for girls increased from 42.7% in 1992 to 84.3% in 2004 (Midling et. Al 2005). From a complete
collapse of the education system to successful and impactful reforms, Benin finished the 20th century with considerable progress made not only in its overall education system but also in girls’ access to education.

As seen in Figure 4.1, Burkina Faso was ruled by the same military dictator, Sangoulé Lamizana, for 15 years before experiencing multiple regime changes throughout the 1980s. When considering data from this time period (1970-1999), the time under military rule did not have many outwardly negative impacts on the education system. Enrollment numbers in Burkina Faso increased throughout the 1970s while the country was still under Lamizana’s rule. Despite the country facing four regime changes during the 1980s, investment in education still occurred.24 Between 1983 and 1987, 22,379 new classrooms were built, an “obligatory national service” was established that required teachers to work in rural areas, and many new teachers were recruited (de Lange 2007). This investment increased enrollment numbers in Burkina Faso but also likely resulted in a decline in the quality of teaching as the newly recruited teachers lacked some necessary qualifications and extensive training. Burkina Faso was also subjected to SAPs by the World Bank and the IMF that changed some aspects of the education system.25 One change made during this time was the introduction of double-flow classes (DFCs) in urban areas and multi-grade classes (MGCs) in rural areas (“Study on the Effects” 2011).26 This change allowed for the schooling of more students in urban areas because it contained demographic pressure within cities and for more students in the rural areas where population density was much lower. While SAPs had negative impacts on education in some other former AOF countries,

24 Saye Zerbo followed Lamizana in 1980. Zerbo was then ousted by Jean-Baptiste Ouédraogo who was only in power for 268 days before being replaced by Thomas Sankara in 1983. Finally, after Sankara was assassinated in 1987, Blaise Compaoré took control and remained in office until 2014.
25 Although SAPs are traditionally introduced during periods of severe economic turmoil, Burkina Faso’s economic situation was not dramatic. This meant that Burkina Faso’s SAPs were more focused on growth-promoting measures rather than stabilization measures (Bourdet and Persson 2001).
26 DFCs and MGCs are types of classes that combine children from different age brackets and are taught by one teacher, in one class at the same time. These types of classes allow for more children to be enrolled in school although it is often associated with lower educational quality in LMICs (Kivunja and Sims 2015)
Burkina Faso did not experience this phenomenon to the same extent. Because the economic situation in Burkina Faso was not as dire as in some other countries, the negative impacts of SAPs were not as strong either (Bourdet and Persson 2001). Education under SAPs had mixed results for girls. The urban gender gap in education decreased by 2.5% from 1994-1998 but increased in the rural context during the same years (Bourdet and Persson 2001). Access to education during the 1990s increased for both boys and girls but throughout the country the gender gap remained present.

Burkina Faso stands out from some of the other former AOF countries during this period because the country introduced policy focused specifically on education for girls at the national level. The country created a special action plan in 1996 to address the gender disparity in education. As part of the plan, the government created a special board for girls’ education, Direction de la Promotion des Filles (DPEF) to oversee the goals of the plan: increase girls’ enrollment, keep them in school, and let them succeed (de Lange 2007). Despite this gendered focus, education in Burkina Faso in the 1990s remained out of reach for many children due to fees. A Burkinabe law in 1996 made education compulsory for children aged 6 to 16 and while the government provided the infrastructure, equipment, and teachers, education was still costly. Parent teacher association fees and costs for school materials can quickly add up especially for the most impoverished students and their families. Aside from the fees, the enforcement of this policy was hardly uniform throughout the country; even in areas with schools, the law was not or only weakly enforced at times (de Lange 2007). Despite major gains in girls’ education in Burkina Faso during this period, the progress was limited by financial barriers and sporadic enforcement of the compulsory education policy.

Mauritania, that emerged from the 1960s with the lowest GER for girls as seen in Figure 3.1, began to try to increase the quality of its education system in the next few decades and did so with unparalleled success. Although the country was under military rule from 1978, after President Daddah was deposed in a coup, until 1992, Mauritania still managed to make progress in education. The most
ambitious reforms however were not introduced until the government transitioned back to civilian rule in the 1990s. The first major reform of this period was put in place in 1979; this reform introduced the teaching of local languages in schools and divided the overall education system into two sections: the Arab section and the bilingual section (Arabic and French) (Vall 2005). This reform was meant to make education more applicable to what life would be like after school. Like all former AOF countries, Mauritania’s ability to invest in education was severely limited by its economic prospects. The implementation of SAPs during the 1980s helped liberalize the Mauritania’s economy and increase economic growth (Vall 2005). This allowed the government to refocus its efforts on handling social issues like education.

Mauritania largest changes to education in this period occurred in the 1990s; following the World Declaration for Education for All, the government of Mauritania implemented an education policy focused on achieving universal enrolment by the year 2000 (Mahfoud 2003). The country returned to civilian rule under Maaouya Ould Sid’Ahmed Taya who had already been in power for 13 years as a military dictator. It became clear early in the decade that Mauritania was going to try to follow through with its education goals, specifically the goal of gender parity. In 1992, the government created the State Secretariat for Women with the objective of promoting education for girls and women (Vall 2005). In 1999, the government of Mauritania implemented a progressive reform of its education system that focused specifically on increasing the quality of education, retention of students, and prioritized strengthening girls’ education (Vall 2005). The 1999 reform also consolidated the education system into one track ensuring all students received bilingual education, added a year of secondary school, and strengthened foreign language instruction (“Saber Country Report” 2016). While the country ultimately missed meeting their ambitious goal, the changes made during the 1990s substantially increased enrollment rates for both boys and girls. From 1991 to 1999 the gross enrollment rate for boys rose from 53.4% to 86.2% and from 47.2% to 83.5% for girls making
Mauritania, the former AOF country with the highest female primary GER at the end of the century (Mahfoud 2003). The progress made during this decade while impressive, is limited due to Mauritania’s low retention rates in school; while the number of children enrolling in school has increased, so has the number of children dropping out. Nonetheless, Mauritania made significant strides towards eliminating the gender disparity in its education system during this period and entered the 21st century with positive momentum.

Mali emerged from the first decade of independence in a state of political and economic turmoil, conditions not associated with education development. After coming to power via a coup in 1968, General Moussa Traoré attempted to liberalize the country’s economy but did not achieve any dramatic positive results. The 1970s were characterized by “poor management of national resources,” long periods of drought, drop in export earnings, and an increase in fuel prices that created a serious economic and humanitarian crisis for the country (Bender et al. 2007). These conditions left Mali unable to pay its foreign debt and led to the introduction of SAPs in the country that resulted in a decrease in recurrent expenditures in the education sector in Mali from 1982-1991 (Bender et al. 2007). Reforms under Traoré’s regime were limited in their success. Education reforms that stressed the expansion of access and the improvement of education quality were implemented in 1978 (la Consultation Nationale) and 1989 (les États Généraux) but the fiscal and political constraints limited the government of Mali to create and implement positive reforms (Bender et al. 2007). The 1989 reform introduced instruction in maternal languages and was supposed to offer more options in school programs but disagreement over budgeting severely limited the enforcement of the reform (Charlick et al. 1998). Schools in many parts of the country remained unsatisfactory and as a result, wealthier families opted their children in private schools, including religious-based school; this pattern continued to promote elitism within education as children from wealthy families received a much
higher quality of education in private schools than children attending often over-crowded, under-funded public schools (Charlick et al. 1998)

The 1990s brought political and social change in Mali. After 23 years in power, General Moussa Traoré was forced out of power by civil unrest. General Amani Toumani Touré then seized power through a coup but supervised elections leading to Mali’s first democratically elected president, a former teacher named Alpha Oumar Konaré. Following the fall of Moussa Traoré, the country sought to revamp its education system and held several meetings and forums soon after the EFAWC. Issues of financing continued to plague Mali’s education sector and by 1992 the government had revised education policy to allow non-state actors to open schools because the state could no longer keep up with demand. In 1995, the Malian government instituted another education reform known as la Nouvelle École Fondamentale (NEF). The idea behind NEF was to link education to the community by using maternal languages (accompanied by French) and to the development to the country. Also, NEF was meant to standardize basic education and in time would merge formal and non-formal school to NEF schools (Charlick et al. 1998). NEF lasted only four years due to its inability to create positive results for pupils, poor planning, and lack of human and material resources (Loua 2017). NEF was replaced by Le Programme Décennal de Développement de l’Education (PRODEC) in 1998 and remained Mali’s national education policy until 2008. PRODEC contained reforms for all levels of education and listed its overarching objectives to be to train patriotic citizens, build democratic society, and promote development (Loua 2017). Despite the financial constraints and political changes during this period, the implemented reforms did result in overall increases in girls’ access to education. The GER for girls in Mali increased from 20% in 1990 to 40% in 1997 and girls throughout the country

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27 In English: New Primary School
28 Formal schools consist of public and primary schools. Informal schools refer to Centres d’Éducation pour le Développement (CED) and ECOMs.
experienced increased access, not just girls in urban areas (Bender et al. 2007). The improvement in educational access continued to be accompanied by large gender disparities and low retention rates.

**Niger** failed to make the same amount of progress in education as some other former AOF countries directly following decolonization. Looking at figure 3.1, in 1971 Niger had the lowest GER for boys and the second lowest GER for girls meaning the education system was only actually educating a small percentage of children. Under Hamani Diori’s male-dominated conservative regime, women faced many barriers to education. After the 1972 strikes against French President Pompidou’s visit led by students, including many prominent female students, education became even more difficult to attain for girls. Women who participated were expelled from school, public opinion turned against women’s education, and parents became more reluctant to educate their daughters (Zeinabou 2005). It became clear following the protests that public opinion was turned against women’s empowerment in any form. Laws were passed to try to keep women in traditional domestic roles including a law forcing any pregnant female students to be expelled from school and charged with a misdemeanor, effectively ostracizing them from society (Zeinabou 2005).

While women continued to face social and legal barriers to school, a newfound approach to education in Niger was introduced after Diori’s regime was overthrown by Seyni Kountché in 1974. By 1975, the government of Niger under the new leadership implemented an education reform that restructured the system. Under the new system, national languages would be the language of instruction for the first four years of education with French being introduced as a foreign language in the second year before eventually becoming the main language of instruction in the fifth year. The main goals of this education strategy were to form responsible citizens who could contribute to the state and promote economic, social, and cultural development (Hamidou et al. 2005). In 1998, Niger instituted the *Loi d’Orientation du Système Éducatif Nigérien* (LOSEN) that declared education a national priority and that it was the state’s responsibility to provide education for children aged 4 to 18.
also guaranteed the right to education no matter a citizen’s age, sex, race, ethnicity, religion, or socio-economic background and put special emphasis on eradicating the obstacles preventing girls from receiving education (“Rapport d’Analyse” 2012). LOSEN also officially established bilingual education as a formal option for students in Niger (Hamidou et al. 2005). While LOSEN was a predominantly progressive reform, it reversed old policy that required the state to cover all financial costs of education and instead stipulated that the costs would henceforth be shared by the state and families (Zainabou 2005). Despite ending the 20th century by making progress in education, the instability throughout the period led to Niger having the lowest GERs compared to the others in the region in 1999 as seen in Figure 4.2.

The period following independence brought some varying degrees of positive change for girls’ access to education in former AOF countries. As seen in Figure 4.2, by the end of the 20th century, Mauritania made considerable progress for both boys and girls during this period despite prolonged periods of military rule while Niger continued to remain significantly behind the other former AOF countries in both girls’ and boys’ primary GER. While some countries chose to invest in education with marginal success, many others chose to focus on other priorities. Some countries struggled with political stability and/or economic stagnation. Despite the differences experienced by former AOF countries during this period, all eight countries introduced SAPs and signed the World Declaration on Education For All near the end of the 20th century. Throughout the 1980s, public expenditure on formal education in West Africa declined due to a shift in budget allocation to the purchasing of military hardware and economic recession (Quist 1994). In addition to military spending, the education budget must compete with other social programs and health services. For government policies to create positive change they must consider the role of parents in sending children to school. Families facing unemployment, poverty, or living in rural areas might be less likely to allow children to go to school; any policy addressing education gaps must also address the contributing individual and
contextual factors (Quist 1994). Economic and social context can help explain why education policies implemented from 1970-1999 did not achieve their intended goals. The next section discusses how social norms and tradition can act as barriers to girls’ education even when laws and policies are in support of promoting gender parity in education.

**Figure 4.2 –** Primary GER by Gender 1999

![Gross Enrollment Rates Primary School (GER) 1999](chart.png)

**Table 4.1- Key Changes Period II**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benin</td>
<td>After an education crisis in the late 1980s, Benin returned to both civilian rule and a free market economy in 1990 prompting increased investment in education. The country introduced reforms with a gendered focus specifically targeting the girls least likely to attend school. SAPs had a relatively positive effect on Benin’s education reforms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>Despite facing many regimes changes during this period, investment in the education system continued. The government built new classrooms, recruited teachers, and introduced federal policy specifically focused on girls’ education. Financial barriers kept these reforms from achieving their full potential.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Côte d’Ivoire</td>
<td>The country had to put in place SAPs due to economic hardship in the 1980s causing less investment in education. In 1992, the government adopted the National Education Plan for All in reaction to WCEFA. In the 1995, the government also reaffirmed the equal treatment of all citizens, including girls, in education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>Due to economic hardship, Guinea had one of the lowest enrollment rates for the girls in the world by 1985. To counteract this decrease, the government enacted a series of reforms that reintroduced French as the language of instruction, increased budget</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
allocations for education, decentralizing education, and increasing enrollment rates. These reforms, while ambitious, lacked a gendered focus.

Mali

Economic turmoil and a coup d’état left Mali unable to pay its debt and led to SAPs in the country. Reforms under Traoré’s regime were limited by the economic constraints and lack of political will. After Traoré’s rule, the country sought to revamp its education system; policies were implemented to expand access to education and promote development, but they lacked a gendered focus.

Mauritania

While military rule did not stop education reform in Mauritania, the most ambitious reforms in this period were happened under civilian rule. Following WCEFA, the government focused its efforts on achieving universal enrollment. The country also concentrated its reforms on trying to get girls in school. Low retention rates and capacity limits restricted the effectiveness of these reforms, but the progress made in this period is significant.

Niger

Under Diori’s regime, women faced extremely limited access to education. After Diori was overthrown, the new leadership restructured education and introduced national languages into schools. The government ended this period by introducing LOSEN that guaranteed the right to education for all Nigeriens. Niger continued to lag behind the other countries significantly in primary GER for both boys and girls.

Senegal

The introduction of SAPs limited the success of education reforms in this period. After WCEFA, President Diouf took measures to increase investment in primary and secondary education, remove the education system from French influence, and increase literacy. Gendered education reforms were not implemented.

V. Part 4: Role of Traditional Society and Cultural Norms

Traditional society and norms within former AOF countries have largely affected and continue to affect girls’ ability to access education. Gender norms and limiting expectations for women exist in every social and cultural context but continue to be pervasive in former AOF countries; the impact of these norms is especially apparent when looking at differences in educational attainment of boys and girls in these countries. Despite being independent, the sexism and systemic undervaluing of women standardized during the colonial period continues to be an issue; the effects of the French colonial administration’s “affirmation of the biological inferiority of women” and “destruction of social relations,” which contributed to the subordination of women, continue to be felt throughout all former AOF countries to varying degrees (Bertolt 2018). The predominant cultural norms in many former AOF countries require that girls are prepared for life in the home where they are expected to be “good wives and mothers” (Oluwadamilola 2016). This expectation, although not as pervasive as it once was, restricts women’s social mobility and limits most of their activity to the private sphere.
Women are not expected to need to operate outside of the home, so in the traditional view, they do not require education like boys who will be working in the public sphere. Although some countries have achieved gender parity or close to it in primary GER, there continue to be significant gaps in secondary school GER in most former AOF countries (Kieland et al. 2017). Gendered expectations for women can help explain why gaps in secondary school enrollment and educational progress continue to persist despite decades of freedom from French colonial rule and its oppressive education system. They can also help explain why certain policies implemented by West African governments have had somewhat limited positive change on girls’ education.

**Figure 5.1**

- Expected Years of Schooling by Gender 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Male 2016</th>
<th>Female 2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Niger</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cote d’Ivoire</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benin</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mauritania</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>8.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: World Bank Gender Statistics Databank

**a) Early Marriage**

29 There were data gaps for Senegal and Guinea so their data in the graph came from the same source but the year of 2018.

30 Expected years of schooling is the number of years a child of school entrance age is expected to spend at school, or university, including years spent on repetition. It indicates the average number of years of schooling that the education system can offer. A high value indicates a probability for children to spend more years in education. Note that the expected number of years does not necessarily coincide with the expected number of grades of education completed, because of repetition. (World Bank)
One major issue that continues to negatively impact gender disparities in education is child marriage also referred to as early marriage. This category covers girls who are married before the age of eighteen. While the practice is not as common as it once was in West Africa, especially among middle and upper-class families, it continues to have enormous adverse effects on girls’ educational opportunities especially in lower income families; child marriage is also more than twice as common in rural areas than urban areas (Phillipose et al. 2018). Since 1990, child marriage has been on a slow but steady decline in West Africa although several former AOF countries continue to experience concerningly high rates of child marriage as seen in Figure 5.2.

There are several driving factors of child marriage including but not limited to a shortage of schools, poor quality of education, pressure to find a suitable husband, and parental fear of sexual activity outside of marriage (Wodon et al. 2017). Although norms are slowly changing, in some instances marriage and eventual childbearing are seen as the major responsibilities of females. Educating daughters can be seen as an unnecessary financial burden for families; even when education is provided by the state free of cost, there are usually fees for materials and others in the family must take over chores usually performed by the daughters. Some parents might decide the opportunity cost of sending their daughter to school is too high and keep them at home to help with work. Bride price or dowry can have varying effects on child marriage and education. In some instances, the tradition of bride price contributes to the cycle of early marriage because it essentially renders girl-children as potential sources of income for families (Oluwadamilola 2016). Bride price is the money, property, and other valuable items given to the bride’s family by the groom’s family. For families struggling with poverty, early marriage not only reduces the number of children at home to feed by removing one of the female children but also offers compensation to the family. This means some girls are taken out of school early to be married off for the benefit of the rest of the family. In contrast, some studies have found that the practice of bride price can result in increased investment in girls’ education when
families receive larger dowries for better educated daughters making girls’ education a smart investment for the whole family (Ashraf et al. 2016). Other studies suggest that rather than child marriage being a cause of low educational attainment, the poor quality of education offered in some regions makes families believe that child marriage is a better option for girls (Kieland et al. 2017). While child marriage has decreased in West Africa, it is still an important cultural factor to analyze when looking girls’ access to education in the post-colonial years. Early marriage can help account for some of the gaps seen in Figure 5.1 and why girls’ enrollment is lower in some regions. While it is not a cure all, ending child marriage would improve girls’ educational attainment; conversely, keeping girls in school happens to be one of the best ways to end child marriage (Wodon et al. 2017).

The prevalence of early marriage varies by country with some experiencing some of the highest child marriage rates in the world. Although there are large data gaps in child marriage rates throughout the world, looking at past data for former AOF countries provides a situational awareness of the prevalence of the issue in the region. For example, Niger has the highest child marriage rate in not only West Africa but the world with a prevalence rate of 76% (Phillipose et al. 2018). Figure 5.2 depicts the most recent data available on child marriage rates in former AOF countries. It shows the percentage of women aged 20-24 who were married before age 15 and before age 18. For each country, the percentage married by age 18 is significantly higher than the percentage married by age 15. This means most girls being pulled out of school for marriage are between the ages of 15 and 18; however, this does not mean that girls younger than 15 are not still pulled out of school to begin preparations to become a wife. Overall, high rates of child marriage are linked to lower levels of girls’ education and Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Guinea stand out as the former AOF countries with the highest child marriage rates. Comparing this data to the data in Figure 5.1, the same four countries also have among the lowest expected years of schooling for girls. Early marriage is just one contributing piece
to low educational attainment of girls but should be recognized a significant barrier to girls’ access to education.

**Figure 5.2** - Child Marriage Rates by Country

Due to data gaps in child marriage rates, the data depicted in Figure 4.2 is not all from the same year. The most recent data available was used for each country. The data from Senegal is from 2019 while the data for Benin, Guinea, and Mali is from 2018. The most recent data for Côte d’Ivoire, Mauritania, Niger and Burkina Faso is from 2016, 2015, 2012, and 2010 respectively.

b) Adolescent Pregnancy

Another barrier to girls’ education, that is somewhat linked to early marriage, is adolescent pregnancy. According to the UN, the continent of Africa has the highest adolescent pregnancy rates in the world (Martinez and Odhiambo 2018). When schoolgirls become pregnant, they often face high levels of discrimination from their communities, and it is not uncommon for them to be denied education as a result or drop out due to social or financial pressures. Adolescent pregnancy is one of the main contributing causes to girls stopping their education and can partly account for the high gender disparity in enrollment in secondary schools throughout former AOF countries (Chigona and Chetty 2008). Although the African Union and its member states have pledged to protect pregnant girls and adolescent mothers’ right to education, the promises of protection are not always followed.
by action (Martinez and Odhiambo 2018). School girls who carry their pregnancy to term are often ostracized in their schools and are discouraged from continuing their education or forced to drop out (“Country Context Report” 2004). While some countries offer re-entry programs for young mothers, there is insufficient awareness about the programs and they often fail to account for the other barriers young mothers face including financial constraints, lack of support, and high stigma within schools and the larger community.

Rates of adolescent pregnancy vary throughout former AOF countries as do the educational reforms enacted to combat the negative effects it has on girls’ continued education. Table 5.1 shows just how big of a problem adolescent pregnancy is for some countries. Adolescent pregnancy is much more common in Niger, which leads the world in adolescent fertility rate, than it is in Mauritania. Early childbearing poses a significant challenge to several former AOF countries; Niger, Mali, Guinea, and Côte d’Ivoire are among the top 15 countries in the world with the highest adolescent fertility rates (UNDP). Countries have made efforts to keep girls in school during pregnancy and to get them to come back after giving birth. For example, Senegal provides special accommodations for young mothers at school such as setting aside time for breast feeding or doctor visits while Côte d’Ivoire offers comprehensive sexuality education at schools to try to prevent adolescent pregnancy (Martinez and Odhiambo 2018). Both Benin and Mauritania have national laws that protect pregnant girls’ and mothers’ right to education; Côte d’Ivoire’s policy allows for the continuation of girls’ education during and after pregnancy without a mandatory pause. Mali and Senegal have conditional return to education policies for pregnant girls and young mothers. Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Niger all lack an official policy for pregnancy during education which leads to “irregular enforcement” and the educational fate of pregnant girls left at the discretion of school officials (Martinez and Odhiambo 2018). It is not surprising that the countries with the highest child marriage rates also have high rates of adolescent pregnancy because the two events often support each other. Whether a girl is married
and then has a child or gets pregnant first and is then encouraged to marry, both events negatively impact a girl’s likelihood of staying in school or returning to her studies. Having a baby affects a girl socially and financially; without a strong support system and ample financial resources it is unlikely that teen moms can afford to return to school.

**Table 5.1** – Adolescent Fertility Rate 2017 (births per 1,000 women aged 15-19)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benin</td>
<td>86.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>104.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cote d’Ivoire</td>
<td>117.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>135.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>169.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mauritania</td>
<td>71.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niger</td>
<td>186.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td>72.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UNDP World Population Prospects

c) Public vs. Private Sphere

Sociologists, anthropologists, political theorists, gender scholars and others have done extensive research on the differences between the public and private spheres and what impacts these differences have. The spheres have “gender-specific connotations” with the public sphere being coded as male and the private sphere coded as female and often referred to as the “woman’s realm” (Wischermann and Mueller 2004). In most cultures, the way boys and girls are perceived in the public sphere differs. Girls/women are expected to exist primarily in the private sphere while boys/men are given implicit, sometimes explicit, permission to dominate the public sphere. Generally, this phenomenon applies to former AOF countries although to different extents. The expectation that women are meant to remain in the home stems from a mixture of colonial, religious and traditional influences. Due to these expectations, many West African women are deprived of their capacity to exist in the public sphere and are thus often limited to taking care of fields, preparing food, fetching water, and taking care of children especially in rural areas (Bertolt 2018). This division of the world into public and private can greatly impact a girl’s ability to attend school or pursue employment outside of the home. This
phenomenon can help explain why girls are not in school at the same rates as boys and why those in school may not remain in school for the same duration as their male counterparts. Generally, dropout rates are higher for girls than for boys in former AOF countries due to “traditional ideas regarding girls’ education” and/or a lack of resources for a family to continue sending their daughter to school (Quist 1994). For example, within these traditional ideals, a family that started off by sending both their son and daughter to school, is more likely to privilege their son’s education over their daughter’s if they can no longer afford to send both children to school. Boys are expected to one day seek employment outside the home and provide for their families meaning they need an education more than girls who will likely be married at a young age and spend most of her time on domestic and care work. This hypothetical situation can help account for why primary school enrollment has increased significantly for girls over the years, but secondary school enrollment has not increased at the same level. The changes in GER from 2004 to 2014 are represented in Table 5.2.

Education is also a public activity meaning that as girls get older, it might become less acceptable for them to leave their home and community for education. There are also concerns about safely getting to and from school. These concerns can ultimately culminate in barriers to education for girls. Lack of mobility caused by the public/private sphere divide is discussed later in this section.

**Table 5.2 – GER by Gender for Primary and Secondary School**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benin</td>
<td>89.9</td>
<td>117.2</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>39.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>60.3</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Côte d'Ivoire</td>
<td>63.5</td>
<td>80.2</td>
<td>nd</td>
<td>nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>66.4</td>
<td>85.6</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>34.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>61.7</td>
<td>79.6</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mauritania</td>
<td>94.2</td>
<td>93.3</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niger</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>54.7</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

32 There is no accessible data for Secondary school GERs in Côte d'Ivoire prior to 2014.
d) Labor/Care Work

School requires significant time commitment and, in some contexts, traditional norms about how much children should be contributing to their households can pose a barrier to girls attending school and whether they are able to further their education. The type of work performed by young girls can generally be placed in two different categories: labor and care work. Labor in this case refers to any work done to help the family earn money whether it be helping on the family farm or selling goods at a market. Care work refers to domestic work that is disproportionately performed by girls to care for the household; it can include activities such as fetching water, cleaning, cooking, taking care of animals, and shopping for goods.

Throughout former AOF countries, people living in rural areas tend to be more dependent on agriculture. In Mali, this constitutes 70-80% of the population (Bender et al. 2007). In communities highly reliant on agriculture, children can be valuable workers. This means that allowing children time off to attend school comes with opportunity costs; every hour they are away at school could be an hour they are tending to a field or helping harvest. These opportunity costs tend to be higher for girls, due to preexisting beliefs they should not attend school, resulting in wider gender disparities in enrollment (Bender et al. 2007). This type of labor also may hinder educational attainment because children may miss periods of school for work during important seasons. Some children also might work outside the home in which case their likelihood of staying in school decreases (Canagarajah 2001).

Care work is typically performed by women without any compensation and is often done on top of other responsibilities. For girls in school, care work can lead to poor educational attainment and higher dropout rates. Having domestic responsibilities that are often prioritized over education, results in increased number of students needing to repeat class or dropout; care work is one of the leading causes of girls leaving school early (Abou 2016). This work is seen as the women’s domain.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Senegal</th>
<th>76.1</th>
<th>80.1</th>
<th>17.0</th>
<th>23.6</th>
<th>90.5</th>
<th>80.8</th>
<th>50.1</th>
<th>50.4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Source: World Bank DataBank Gender Statistics
and girls are given responsibility for household tasks early on because it is seen as part of their training. When girls marry, they are expected to know how to take care of the domestic duties. The distribution of unpaid care work privileges men globally but the gender gap is particularly large in sub-Saharan Africa where women spend 3.4 more time on unpaid work than men (“ILO Calls for Urgent” 2018). Both child labor and unpaid care work negatively impact a girl’s ability to attend school and her chances of succeeding.

e) Religion

When considering gender roles, we cannot ignore the role of religion. Religion plays an instrumental role in defining the “position of women vis-à-vis men in a hierarchical structure” around the world (Njoh and Akiwumi 2012). While most religions entail gender roles and expectations that disadvantage women, when looking at former AOF countries, it is necessary to examine three categories of religion: indigenous African beliefs, Christianity, and most importantly Islam. Islam has a strong presence in every former AOF country which has societal implications for educating girls; of the eight former AOF countries, Benin and Côte d’Ivoire are the only states where Islam is not the majority religion. While there is no formal prohibition to educating girls in the Quran, in some Islamic communities, gender expectations tied to religion do limit the opportunities and social mobility of girls and women. Religion can also influence what is deemed appropriate content for girls to learn while boys tend to face fewer religious restrictions in education. If we look at Mali which is 90% Muslim, it is legal for girls to marry at the age of 6 and many do marry young without receiving formal education (Oluwadamilol 2016). Mali is not the only country where Islam plays a role in limiting girls’ access to education; across West Africa, the Muslim girl-child is more likely to not be in school than girls of other religions, especially in poorer families (Oluwadamilol 2016). Islamic extremism in the central Sahel has also been contributing to the oppression of girls in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger although the actions of extremists do not represent Islam as a religion.
Traditional African religions make up a minority of practiced religions within former AOF countries. They have largely been abandoned in favor of Islam or Christianity despite the practices predating the spread of both religions in West Africa. These indigenous African religions essentially have “no restrictions on the role of women” and allow for women to be active in both the public and private spheres (Njoh and Akiwumi 2012). There were still norms for what was acceptable for women, but they were much more lenient than today’s norms. Within these religions, men and women are viewed as complimentary rather than hierarchical. Prior to the arrival of Islam and Christianity, under indigenous religions, women held positions of political and economic power (Ngoh and Akiwumi 2012). While women were not considered equal to men, they experienced more freedom. Christianity, introduced into West Africa via European colonialism, continues to be practiced by significant percentages of the population in Côte d’Ivoire and Benin and to a lesser extent in the other former AOF countries. Christianity tends to be linked to higher levels of educational attainment in Africa over Islam (McClendon et al. 2018). The historical presence of Christianity in Côte d’Ivoire and Benin may contribute to the two country’s higher levels of education enrollment and attainment, but it does not fully explain the situation. Both indigenous African religions and Christianity have limited roles in most former AOF countries and thus their influence on actual education policy and on societal norms is usually not as strong as Islam’s. They are still important to consider however because they can influence individual families’ choices on whether to educate their daughters and for how long.

Islam, as the predominant religion in the region, can have strong effects on how girls’ education is perceived and norms surrounding girls. In general, countries where Muslims make up a larger share of the population have lower female educational attainment and wider gender gaps (McClendon et al. 2018). These countries are more likely to have “patriarchal institutional arrangements that promote greater gender inequality” (Norton and Tomal 2009). In more conservative areas, typically rural, interpretations of the Quran tend to favor the more traditional, domestic role of women which does
not lend itself to the promotion of girls’ education. Beliefs that it is the man’s role to work outside the home have led to some families withholding female children from school (Norton and Tomal 2009). Girls can also internalize these gender norms and perform poorly in school or drop out early as a result; girls who remain in school and perform well might also face discrimination in the classroom due to their gender (McClendon et al. 2018). These gendered expectations influenced by Islam can lead to lower levels of female education attainment and contribute to more significant gender gaps. Early in the 21st century, USAID found that within the minority Muslim population of Benin, most girls were not encouraged to pursue formal education beyond learning the Quran (“Country Context Report” 2004).

I want to reiterate that Islam and other religious beliefs are not inherently tied to repressing girls’ education nor is it the only factor contributing to educational discrepancies among boys and girls in former AOF countries. There are many interpretations of Islam that are compatible with gender equality and women’s rights (McClendon et al. 2018). Religion can have positive effects on increasing girls’ education through various ways. Some religious figures have used their influence to promote girls’ education; in Mauritania, Imam Abdallahi Sar encourages his community to educate girls in his mosque and emphasizes the importance of including girls for the future of the country (Bissoonauth 2019). There has also been substantial debate concerning the position of women within Islam and norms in West Africa seem to be slowly changing.

It is also important to note that many Islamic education institutions continue to operate today in former AOF countries, but their purpose and accessibility has expanded since the colonial period. They no longer focus only on the memorization and teaching of the Quran and instead offer lessons on more conventional subjects such as math and science in addition to religious lessons; they serve as an alternative to state-run public schools and usually offer instruction in Arabic (Boyle 2019). Unlike during the colonial period, Koranic schools have been educating more and more girls in the past few
decades. For example, in Mali in 2008, no *madrasa* sampled in a study had a female enrollment less than 35% (Boyle 2014). In areas where trust in the government and its institutions are low, *madrasas* may be the only option for children to receive a basic education. While Islamic schools represent another opportunity for girls to enter schooling, the financial costs are high because they do not receive state funding in most countries.

f) Mobility

Mobility, or rather lack thereof, is another serious constraint negatively impacting girls’ access to education in some parts of former AOF countries. Mobility refers to the “extent to which people are able to move around inside and outside of their communities to access various resources and services” (Lodin et al. 2019). Generally, women and girls in West Africa experience lower mobility than boys and men; in some contexts, girls are not allowed to travel distances away from the home without a chaperone. Low mobility can negatively impact a girls’ access to education because the average home to school distance (HTSD) in certain areas can be high. When girls must travel further to attend school, their families are less likely to send them over fears for their safety; not only is violence a concern but depending on weather conditions dirt roads can become unsafe (Porter 2007). Studies have found HTSD and enrollment are directly correlated; when HTSD decreases, enrollment is higher and remains higher (Schaidle 2016). A 2012 World Bank study that included data from Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, and Mauritania found that when the nearest school is more than 5 kilometers away only 41% of children are enrolled but when the nearest school is 2 or less kilometers away 66% of children are enrolled (Majgaard and Mingat 2012). In rural areas, HTSD is often higher than in urban areas; rural areas also tend to have poorer roads that can further inhibit girls’ mobility (Porter 2007). While HTSD can affect both boys and girls, girls are more likely to be restricted from attending schools further away from home than boys are (Bender et al. 2007).
Not only does safety while traveling play a role in limiting girls’ access to education but also the extra time it takes to get to and from school. Because girls disproportionately perform more household work than boys, further distances to school result in less time for girls to finish their domestic work. This extra work coupled with long distances to school can contribute to girls being pulled out of school or attending infrequently as household duties are sometimes prioritized over school (Porter 2007). Some countries have taken measures to try to counteract the negative effects limited mobility can have on girls’ access to education. Benin constructed several secondary school boarding houses in rural areas to reduce the increased danger of sexual violence girls experience from walking long distances to school (Engel et al. 2011). In general, girls in urban areas have greater chances of not having their education access restricted by mobility than rural girls because HTSD tends to be higher in rural areas and so does the amount of time spent on care work.

**g) Menstruation**

Menstruation, although often overlooked as a cause of school absenteeism, can result in girls missing school and disruptions in education. Although menstruation is a natural body function, girls in many parts of the world, including West Africa, face barriers to attending school while menstruating. These barriers include inadequate clean and reliable menstrual products, stigma surrounding menstruation, insufficient water and sanitation infrastructure, and a lack of disposal facilities (Hennegan et al. 2021). Globally, the effect of menstrual hygiene management on education has been under-researched, but existing findings show a correlation between menstruation and girls’ participation and performance at schools in areas with improper sanitation and higher stigma surrounding menstruation (Keihas 2013). There are both infrastructure and societal challenges to attending school while menstruating. Many of the schools in former AOF countries lack adequate water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities; very few have a private place for girls to change and dispose sanitary products (Keihas 2013). Within society in former AOF countries, menstruation
remains a taboo topic. A study on Niger and Burkina Faso found that some women only talk about menstruation with other women while others do not talk about it at all (Keihas 2013). The stigma has led to misinformation about menstruation and the social exclusion of menstruating girls in some communities. Due to beliefs that women are “dirty” and “impure” during menstruation in some communities, there are certain activities girls are not allowed to perform while menstruating. These activities can include praying/attending religious services, preparing or serving food, and even attending school (Keihas 2013). While missing a few days of school during menstruation may not seem to be a cause for concern, the typical menstrual cycle occurs every month. Students who do miss school for menstruation whether due to insufficient infrastructure, societal barriers, or a mixture of both, might be missing a few days of instruction every month. Those absences can increase quickly and result in poor school performance and perhaps even school dropouts in severe instances. Also, the amount of the female student population that reports missing school due for menstrual reasons is not minute. A 2021 study found that 15% of girls in Niger and 15% of girls in Burkina Faso reported missing school in the past year due to menstruation (Hennegan et al. 2021). When analyzing current trends in education disparity between boys and girls, menstruation is important to consider especially at the secondary school level and above.

VI. Part 5: Changes Since 2000

In recognizing that positive changes to education have occurred in former AOF countries since decolonization, the region continues to fall short of education standards set by the international community especially for girls. This is not to undervalue or invalidate the success achieved since decolonization for girls in former AOF countries; instead, the purpose to is to demonstrate that girls continue to face disadvantages in education access compared to boys. Since the beginning of the 21st century, governments of former AOF countries have become more and more aware of the presence of the societal barriers, discussed above in Part 4, in their countries. As a result, many of the reforms
and education plans enacted since 2000 take into account both the institutional and societal barriers girls face in education. As will be discussed in this section, changing the norms that disadvantage girls and women requires groundwork at the community level and the countries that have achieved the most success in boosting girls’ education access have included grassroots action plans within their policy reforms.

Table 6.1 - Years of Compulsory Schooling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Total Years of Compulsory Schooling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benin</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Côte d’Ivoire</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mauritania</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niger</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. **Impactful Government Initiatives**

The 21st century is by far the period with the most widespread support for girls’ education since former AOF countries gained independence. Analyzing policies of this period and their effects is also much easier due to there being much more available data and resources. There are still some data gaps but compared to the previous periods, the information available since 2000 is unparalleled. All former AOF countries with the support of the international community have been making great progress in their education systems and in closing the gender gap. All eight countries being examined in this paper have implemented legislation requiring mandatory schooling— the number of required years depends on the country with the most being 11 and the least being 6 (Table 6.1). All the countries have also introduced laws guaranteeing that education is provided free of cost. While these policies are ambitious, they are unfortunately not often realized. As will be discussed in the section in greater detail, former AOF countries lack the resources to enforce compulsory schooling for all students and
attending school usually leads to extra costs that some families cannot afford. The extra costs can include uniforms, boarding fees, learning materials, school feeding programs, and transportation (Kerr 2020). The policies in this period have largely been focused on overcoming the barriers faced by students to move closer to universal enrollment and close the gender gaps in education.

Before discussing specific policies implemented during this period, the 2000 World Education Forum held in Dakar, Senegal must be discussed. In April during the first year of the new century more than 1,100 participants from 164 countries gathered to analyze the progress made since the WCEFA. The Forum culminated in the adoption of the Dakar Framework for Action (DFA) which reaffirmed the goals of Education For All that began with the WCEFA and set a goal of achieving quality basic education by 2015. The goals laid out in article 7 of the DFA put emphasis on girls’ education as a priority:

ii) “ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children who are in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities have access to free and compulsory primary education of good quality the end;”

v) “eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 and by 2015 to achieve gender equality in education, a focus on ensuring girls’ full and equal access to quality basic education with the same opportunities to get good results” (2000).

The DFA also recognized the unlikelihood of developing countries achieving these goals themselves and included a pledge from donor countries and organizations that “no country seriously committed to basic education will be thwarted in the achievement of this goal by lack of resources” (2000). Representatives from all eight former AOF countries attended the conference in Dakar and became signatories to the DFA. The influence of the framework is evident in the national development plans and educational reforms enacted by the countries during this period.

Aside from DFA, another commonality among former AOF countries during this period is the introduction of development plans, usually covering ten years at a time. Countries often drafted
education development specific plans as well. The plans in this period have largely been influenced by the DFA, continued focus on EFA, the Millennium Development Goals, after 2015, the Sustainable Development goals (Chimhowu et al. 2019). As will be discussed, not all plans have achieved the same levels of success; lack of financial resources, unplanned issues, and entrenched societal beliefs can severely hinder a development plans’ effectiveness.

**Benin**’s political leaders have greatly prioritized girls’ education throughout this period. Under Mathieu Kérékou’ leadership, the country enacted a public campaign in 2005 entitled *Toutes les Filles a l’Ecole.*\(^{33,34}\) The campaign, led by the government and 22 development partners, targeted its efforts in communities where primary GER for girls was under 60% (Engel et al. 2011). This program was put in place in recognition of the regional gender disparities in enrollment. While prior government programs had found some success in increasing girls’ enrollment in urban areas, rural areas tended to have less girls enrolled and larger gender gaps in comparison. The government of Benin built upon the public campaign by introducing the country’s first major educational reform of the 21st century: a new 10-year education development plan entitled *le Plan Décennal de Développement du Secteur de l’Éducation* (PDDSE). The three major components of the plan were free pre-primary and primary education, the exemption of school fees for girls for the first three years of secondary education, and free university registration for students (“KOF Education System” 2017). This plan aimed at getting more girls in secondary school because as seen in Table 5.2, Benin was close to achieving 90% gross enrollment in primary schools for girls by 2004 but had lower than a 20% GER for girls at the secondary level. By removing some of the costs of secondary school, the Beninese government sought to alleviate the financial barriers families faced and influence parents to further their daughters’ educations. Because girls already had to overcome the traditional norms discussed in Part 4, making the beginning of

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33 In English: (Enroll) All Girls in School
34 Kérékou returned to power in 1996 via democratic elections and served two terms as president of Benin. His second term ended in 2006
secondary education free alleviated one hurdle girls faced. By making primary education free, Benin also hoped to close the remaining gender gap at that level. Prior to the adoption of PDDSE in 2006, all public schools charged tuition fees ranging from “1,000 XOF (about $2) to 10,000 XOF (about $20);” the fees were also usually accompanied by other out of pocket costs for parents (Somasse 2014). The removal of these fees proved to be successful at getting more girls enrolled in primary school; by 2014, female primary enrollment was almost on par with male enrollment (“KOF Education System” 2017).

Central to the PDDSE, is a continued focus on community outreach and engagement. Like the 1992 education reforms, the PDDSE continues to emphasize the importance of outreach and informational campaigns to address and overcome socio-cultural constraints to girls’ enrollment in schools. The government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have partnered to provide “widespread outreach and information campaigns” to address views about education held by parents, community elders, religious leaders, and out-of-school children (Engel et al. 2011). The success achieved in Benin during the 2000s shows that it is possible to achieve substantial improvements in access and equity in low-and-middle income countries (LMICs) with limited institutional capacity if there is sufficient political support, internal and external financial support, and perhaps most importantly engagement at the local level. The ground-level approach to girls’ education recognized that only so much can be achieved from top-down federal policies; many of the persisting barriers to girls’ education in Benin needed to be handled at the grassroots level. To build on the success of PDDSE and to try to fill the remaining gaps, the government of Benin implemented a follow up plan to cover the period of 2018 to 2030 entitled le Plan Sectoriel de l’Éducation (PSE). PSE’s main vision is to create an education system that “ensures that all learners without distinction, have access to the skills, entrepreneurial spirit and innovation that will make them fulfilled, competent, and competitive
citizens able to ensure economic growth, sustainable development, and national cohesion” (2018). The sub-goals of the PSE remains closely aligned with the goals of its predecessor including promoting equitable access to education, improving teaching practices, and increasing girls’ access to schooling (“Implementation Completion” 2019). Ultimately, only time will tell if the new policy is successful in achieving its goals. Despite the ample progress made by Benin during this period, there continues to be challenges and barriers to girls’ education. Poverty, lingering patriarchal norms, and high secondary school dropout rates are among some of these challenges (Engel et al. 2011). Like other former AOF countries, Benin also is faced with teacher shortages and limited financial resources to support its education system.

Burkina Faso implemented its own 10-year education development plan in 2001 entitled le Plan Décennal de Développement de l’Éducation de Base (PDDEB). The PDDEB aimed to solve problems of access, quality, and management of the educational system in order to reach the Millennium Development Goals and the DFA (Kouraogo 2010). One of the major goals outlined in PDDEB was to “raise the school enrollment rate to 70% by 2009, with a particular effort for girls and children in the most disadvantaged rural areas.” Burkina Faso also became one of the countries of the Education for All Fast Tract Initiative (FIT) that began in 2002; FIT was a partnership between global donors and low income countries to help meet the goals of EFA (Bermingham 2007). In 2007, the government passed the 2007 Education Orientation Law that defined primary school (6 years) and lower secondary school (3 years) as basic education and thus compulsory; this culminated in there being 9 total years of mandatory schooling as seen in Table 6.1. The PDDEB and support of FTI

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35 Originally: « En 2030, le système éducatif du Bénin assure à tous les apprenants, sans distinction aucune, l’accès aux compétences, à l’esprit d’entrepreneuriat et d’innovation qui en font des citoyens épanouis, compétents et compétitifs, capables d’assurer la croissance économique, le développement durable et la cohésion nationale »

36 Originally: “porter le taux de scolarisation à 70 % en l’an 2009, avec un effort particulier pour les filles et les enfants des zones rurales les plus défavorisées”

37 FTI was only eligible to countries with poverty reduction strategies and education sector plans which included a focus on gender parity and primary education. Four former AOF countries were part of the initial FTI group (Bermingham 2007).
resulted in increases in not only primary but secondary GER as well for both boys and girls. As seen in Table 5.2, primary GER nearly doubled and secondary GER rose by 18% for girls from 2004 to 2014. These increases are substantial and indicate that the gendered focus of PDDEB had positive effects on girls’ access to education. As seen in figures 6.1 and 6.2, Burkina Faso had achieved gender parity in both primary and secondary education by 2016. While the country has not achieved universal enrollment, the progress made in gender parity is impressive, nonetheless.

The current plan for education, the *Programme Sectoriel de l’Éducation et de la Formation* (PSEF), was introduced in 2017. The PSEF will last until 2030 and is meant to reform all levels of the education system in line with the needs of the economy; the plan recognizes the insufficient number of teachers and resources within schools, gender inequalities, and weak management ("Burkina Faso Higher Education” 2018). The plan hopes to bring the country closer to achieving a democratic and inclusive education system that meets the needs of socioeconomic development in Burkina Faso. PSEF hopes to increase the country’s educational capacity to move the country closer to universal enrollment while maintaining the levels of gender parity previously achieved. The main strategies of the plan are to 1) increase access to education by investing in infrastructure and hiring and training teachers; 2) improve the quality of learning by enhancing teaching and learning at school; 3) promote better management of the education sector (2017).

**Côte d’Ivoire**

The beginning of this period was marked by instability in Côte d’Ivoire. The country entered the 21st century under military rule and experienced a civil war soon after that lasted from 2002 to 2007. During the war, the country was split between a rebel-held north and government held-south. The conflict reignited in 2010 after President Laurent Gbagbo refused to concede defeat in elections
but ended within a year with Gbagbo’s arrest ("Summative Evaluation" 2018). Despite the conflicts, the government of Côte d’Ivoire implemented several ambitious education initiatives early on in this period. The first education sector plan lasted from 1998-2010 and was referred to as le Plan National du Secteur Éducation Formation (PNSEF). PNSEF was set to be followed by Plans d’Actions à Moyen Terme (PAMT) in 2010 but the election crisis delayed its implementation until 2012 ("Summative Evaluation" 2018). Both plans shared the objectives of universal enrollment, increasing teacher recruitment, decreasing the number of repeat students, and putting special focus on education for vulnerable populations. PAMT included specific actions to be taken to try to increase girls’ enrollment such as giving dry rations to schoolgirls in areas where girls’ enrollment was the lowest (2010). In 2015, the government introduced several new reforms to support the goals and initiatives of PAMT. One of these new reforms included the adoption of nine years of compulsory education which included primary and lower secondary school, as seen in Table 6.1. Also in 2015, the government made a significant increase to their education spending; the new law allows for 18.7% of total government expenditure to be focused on education. The reforms of 2015 gave the education system a new direction and set a goal of universal enrolment by 2025 (Oyeniran 2017). As seen in Figure 6.1 and 6.2, PNSEF and PAMT resulted in increases of gender parity at both the primary and secondary level, but gaps remain.

Côte d’Ivoire’s most recent education policies are le Plan Sectoriel de Éducation et Formation (PSEF) that covers 2016-2025 and the Gender in Education Policy and Action Plan (GEPAP). The main mission of PSEF is to ensure the Ivorian education system provides a quality, equitable, and

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38 Laurent Gbagbo was detained by forces loyal to the country’s newly elected president, Alassane Ouattara, after refusing to accept that he had lost the election for four months. His refusal to step down led to deaths of over 3,000 people and the displacement of at least half a million more. Gbagbo’s arrest was widely supported among the international community; prior to his arrest, the United Nations, the U.S., and the European Union all demanded Gbagbo’s resignation and imposed severe economic sanctions. French troops and United Nations peacekeepers even went so far as to coordinate airstrikes on Gbagbo’s personal residence where he was hiding. The day of the arrest forces loyal to Ouattara were supported by French special forces. Gbagbo was tried by the ICC from 2016 to 2018 but was acquitted of all charges and released in 2019.
inclusive education that considers the needs of socioeconomic development and promotes social cohesion (2016). To try to close persisting gaps in Côte d’Ivoire’s education system, PSEF prioritizes removing barriers to girls’ access to education and increasing institutional capacity to promote universal enrollment (2017). The government has taken steps to further address the persisting gender disparities in education; policy makers in Côte d’Ivoire have developed the Gender in Education Policy and Action Plan. The development of GEPAP began in December of 2020 and while the plan is completely developed, it has not yet been fully implemented within the country. The plan hopes to address many of the barriers girls’ face by identifying some possible solutions: life skills for personal growth and empowerment, second chance school for dropouts, vocational training to build workforce skills, special provisions for girls in science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics, and mentoring by the private and public sector (Kifanda 2021). Once this plan is fully implemented, it will hopefully lead to increased gender parity in education. The suggested actions seem to be similar to the other successful plans implemented in former AOF countries but only time will tell if these result in progress within the Ivorian context. As of now, Côte d’Ivoire’s education system is still marred by gender gaps at every level of education as a result of a combination of traditional societal norms and a lack of teachers and schools.

Guinea adopted its EFA framework in 2002 after being greatly influenced by the DFA and so that the country could qualify to be one of the initial members of FTI. The initial program covered a period of 12 years and listed its main objective as achieving universal primary education and equitable development of the entire education system (Diallo 2019). FTI proved successful for Guinea and resulted in increases in overall enrollment as well as girl’s primary completion rate (Bermingham 2007). Guinea’s second major education sector reform covered the period of 2008 to 2015 and was referred to as Programme Sectoriel de l’Education (PSE). PSE was heavily influenced by EFA, DFA, and the MDGs; it envisioned creating an education system that promotes economic and social development by
increasing access, improving quality, and strengthening management (2007). PSE also lists improving girls’ access specifically to education as a goal. Between 2010 and 2017, school and classroom construction increased by 81% which greatly contributed to overall increases in enrollment as well (“Project Information Document” 2019). To supplement the PSE, Guinea introduced the FIERE program (*Programme Filles Éduquées Réussissent*) that specifically focused on improving girl’s enrollment, retention, and success in education. As part of German development agency (GIZ) funded the program, school supplies were distributed to girls, stipends were awarded, and an awareness campaign was launched. The program was found to be successful at not only increasing girls’ enrollment but also how long girls remained in schools (“Poverty Reduction Strategy” 2015). Over twelve years, the FIERE program reached over 15,000 girls (“Promotion of Basic Education” 2018). Together these reforms resulted in increases in girls’ access to education. As seen in Table 5.2, GER for girls increased substantially at both the primary and secondary level between 2004 and 2014.

Since PSE, Guinea has implemented two new education sector plans. The first also entitled *Programme Sectoriel de l’Éducation* covered the period of 2015 to 2018. PSE II functioned as a transitional educational plan and addressed low access, poor quality of education, and poor management. The plan did result in some positive changes including increased classroom construction, moderately better teacher training, and marginally better management but did address inclusive education or gender equity (“Summative GPE Country” 2020). The newest and current education plan is the *Programme Décennal de l’Éducation en Guinée* (ProDEG) was implemented in 2020 and will cover the education sector until 2029. ProDEG lists six priority areas: equitable access to basic education, quality and pertinence of education, literacy of adults, reform of the technical and vocational sector, higher education reform, and management of the education sector (2019). While the effects of ProDEG are not yet apparent, there have been significant quantitative gains made in Guinea since the beginning of the 21st century. Like the other former AOF countries, Guinea continues to face education challenges
including lower levels of enrollment in rural areas where access to education often faces greater barriers. Teacher shortages and insufficient teacher training both contribute to a lower quality of education; gender gaps are also still persistent despite the progress made and as many as 30% of school age children remain out of school (Diallo 2017). Overall, the education sector continues to be characterized by “inadequate financial resources, highly centralized ministerial bodies, and poor institutional capacity” (“Project Information Document” 2019).

Mali’s prospects for development were seemingly optimistic as the country entered the 21st century. After returning to civilian rule in 1992, the country elected a member of the opposition to the office of president in 2002, marking a seemingly important shift towards democracy. Education was a priority for the government at the beginning of this period. The ten-year education plan implemented in 2001 was finalized during the 1990s with the help of the World Bank. The education plan, officially titled *Programme Décennal de Développement de l’Éducation* (PRODEC), was unlike any prior reforms in Mali because it covered all levels of education (Bender at al. 2017). The major goals outlined in PRODEC were basic education for all, use of national languages in public schools along with French, sustainable financial policies, operational textbook and learning material policy, and consistent teacher education policy (2000). PRODEC incorporated some earlier reforms from the past while trying to meet the goals of EFA. Even after the implementation of PRODEC, girls’ enrollment rates continued to be significantly lower than boys’ in all areas outside of Bamako, the capital area. While Bamako’s primary GER for girls was 128% for girls in 2004, in the region of Kidal, a very rural area, the GER was only 28% (Bender et al. 2007). Despite these vast regional disparities, the program did result in increases in girls’ GER at in both primary and secondary schooling, but the gender gap remained large. The GER increases for girls experienced in Mali from 2004 to 2014 were also not as drastic as the other countries in Table 5.2.
Following the end of PRODEC and a military coup in 2012, a temporary education sector plan was developed and implemented. *Le Plan Intermédiaire du Secteur de l'Éducation* (PIRSEF), was originally supposed to only cover 2015 and 2016 but was extended to 2018 as the development of the next education sector plan took longer than expected. PIRSEF failed to meet the criteria of a credible education plan because it lacked proposed actions to achieve its broader visions ("First Annual Report" 2019) The coup d’état and instability that followed hindered the ability Mali’s government to try to make any large reforms through PIRSEF; rather PIRSEF’s focus was to continue the progress previously made and prevent backsliding. In 2019, the country introduced PRODEC II, a follow up to the initial ten-year plan. Initially, PRODEC II was meant to be introduced following PRODEC I, but violence in the north region of the country and subsequent coup d’état by General Amadou Haya Sanogo caused an eight-year delay. PRODEC II has five major components: improving the internal and external efficiency of the educational system, improving teacher training and management, promoting equitable and inclusive access to quality basic education for all – especially for girls, strengthening the governance of the sector, and strengthening the resilience and capacity of the sector ("First Annual Report" 2019). While PRODEC II’s long awaited introduction brought with it newfound hope for Mali’s education system and girls’ access, the latest political instability in Mali caused by subsequent coups in 2020 and 2021 threaten to hinder PRODEC II from being successfully implemented. Without political support and stable conditions, girls in Mali will continue to face disadvantages in education; in fact, they may even worsen.

**Mauritania**, seemingly against the odds, has found great success in girls’ education during this period. The country has a strong Islamic presence, a heavily patriarchal traditional society, and large rural population. As discussed throughout this paper, those factors are commonly associated with lower levels of education and larger gender disparities. Considering the data for Mauritania in Table 5.2 and other indicators, it seems the opposite of what is expected has happened; the education system
in Mauritania is becoming more and more equitable and gender parity has been achieved. Looking at Figure 5.1, Mauritania is one of the only former AOF countries where girls’ expected years of schooling is slightly higher than boys, although the total number of years remains low. This progress has largely been the result of sustained political will for the development of the education system and a community-centric approach to the promotion of girls’ education (Vall 2005).

The government of Mauritania demonstrated its commitment to education at the start of this period by passing a law making primary education compulsory. The law also guaranteed that education should be free to guarantee all Mauritanian children receive an education. The Programme National de Developpement du Secteur de l’Education (PNDSE) started in 1999 carried on throughout the 2000s; the national plan put emphasis on education quality, retention rates, and girls’ access (Vall 2005). Mauritania was also one of the initial participants in FTI and received donor support to implement PNDSE (Bermingham 2007). As part of PNDSE, Mauritania took a multi-pronged approach to improve girls’ access to education. Like in Benin, the government of Mauritania got individuals within the community involved in spreading awareness for girls’ right to education through Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) programs. In some of the most conservative sectors of society, religious leaders helped promote girls’ education and inform families of the overall importance of education (Vall 2005). Mauritania also began scholarship programs specifically for girls to incentivize staying in school as well as constructed more schools in rural areas to lower the HTSD. The confluence of these programs has led to girls enjoying greater access to education.

After the conclusion of PNDSE, the government of Mauritania developed PNDSE II to be implemented from 2011 to 2021. PNDSE II built upon many of the same goals of its predecessor but is much more detailed and precise (“Summative Evaluation” 2018). The main strategic objectives increase access to achieve universal basic education, improve the relevance and quality of education, and better management of the sector. PNDSE II has resulted in the country making important
progress in terms of ensuring girls complete different education levels as much as boys and as can be seen in Figure 6.1 and 6.2, Mauritania achieved gender parity at both the primary and secondary level. Despite the progress made in gender equity and primary GER, low secondary enrollment rates and lacking resources continue to hinder the education system. Also, some of Mauritania’s policies have also had adverse effects on education. In 2016, Mauritania’s Ministry of the Interior and Ministry of Education adopted a joint policy prohibiting the enrollment of students in public or private educational institutions unless the registration process was completed correctly (HRW 2018). While this requirement does not seem inherently destructive to education access, when considering the strict requirements for registration it becomes clearer. Mauritania’s biometric civil registration process that began in 2011 requires a range of official paperwork; many citizens, especially poor ones, lack all the proper documentation and the resources to replace them (HRW). In this case a government policy is keeping poor children disproportionately out of school over paperwork.

Following the 1999 democratic elections, Niger entered this period with newfound political stability, but the education system continued to suffer from years of under-investment and poor management. First, the government made basic education a key focus of its 2001 Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. The commitment shown by the government coupled with the poor state of education in the country led to Niger being selected as one of the 18 countries invited by the international community to participate in the Education For All FTI (Buston 2003). In response to the invitation, President Mamadou Tandja’s government introduced a 10-year education plan in 2003 referred to as Programme Décennal Pour le Développement de l’Éducation (PDDE). The main goals outlined within PDDE were the recruitment and training of more teachers, more relevant and higher quality learning, improvements in school infrastructure, increase state contribution to basic education, better management of the education system, and specific targeted interventions to support the education of girls, disabled children, and those living in nomadic areas (2003). PDDE also outlined activities to
support its goals including the construction and renovation of schools, investment in learning materials, and strengthening the organization of the Ministry of Education (Dumitrescu et al. 2011). The EFA FTI and PDDE proved to have positive effects on education in Niger; by 2005, Niger experienced an 84% increase in pupil enrollment, a 16% increase in girl’s enrollment, and a 7% increase in girls’ primary completion rate (Bermingham 2007).

*Le Programme Sectoriel de l’Éducation et de la Formation* (PSEF) became the next education plan for the country; it was implemented in 2014 and will last until 2024. PSEF seeks to address institutional constraints to universal education including the teacher and classroom shortage; the plan sets goals of recruiting 2,400 new teachers each year and thousands of new classrooms (“Evaluation Externe” 2013). PSEF also aims to increase the capacity of secondary education so that as more students enter primary education, they will be able to continue their education without overcrowding. PSEF also prioritizes the education of vulnerable populations including girls, but the government of Niger really showed their commitment to girls’ education in 2017. The government endorsed the “10 Commitments to Girls Education” in 2017; this was followed by Niger’s president, Mahamadou Issoufou, signing a Presidential Decree on the Protection of the Schoolgirl that provided legal framework for the protection of girls’ education (“Niger Annual Report” 2017). This decree raised the age of compulsory schooling to 16 for girls to try to keep them in school longer and reduce child marriage rates (“Sectoral and Thematic Report” 2019). The government of Niger has continued to show its support for girls’ education in this period by validating *la Stratégie National de la Formation et de l’Éducation des Filles* in 2019. This plan considers child marriage, harmful social norms, retention difficulties, and low literacy rates among women. It promises girls, no matter their background or circumstances, access to a quality education, positive learning environment, and support (“Validation de la Strategie” 2019). The effects of this strategy are largely unknown due to how new it is and the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on education. Overall, in this period, Niger has made
progress in improving girls access to education, but much work remains to achieve universal enrollment and close the gender gaps. Particularly girls’ school dropout and failure rates remain high (Yahaya 2014).

**Senegal**, as host of the World Education Forum in 2000, was especially motivated to meet the goals laid out in the DFA. Senegal’s ten-year education plan was implemented under newly elected President Abdoulaye Wade in 2000. The plan referred to as *le Plan Decennal d’Éducation et de Formation* (PDEF), outlined goals for the first decade of the new century including increasing pre-primary enrollment, reducing the number of school drop outs especially among girls, increasing teacher training, and revitalizing basic education curriculum to fit the economic needs of the country (Pellegrini 2000). PDEF proved to be successful at increasing enrollment at the pre-primary, primary, and lower secondary levels. Primary school enrollment increased by 24% from 2005-2011 and doubled for pre-primary and lower secondary (“Summative Evaluation” 2019). To support the plan, the government passed law No. 2004-37 in 2007 making 10 years of fundamental education mandatory in Senegal; the compulsory education cycle consists of one year of pre-primary, primary, and lower secondary school (Republique du Senegal).

Following the end of PDEF in 2010, the government of Senegal implemented a new education sector plan, *Programme d’Amélioration de la Qualité, de l’Équité et de la Transparence* (PAQUET) and a new national framework, *Plan Sénégal Émergent* (PSE) in 2013. These two policies seek to increase equality within schools and create an education system that will help promote Senegal’s furthered development. In terms of gender equality within education, Senegal has “substantially improved” education access for girls but this progress has seemingly come at the expense of boys’ education; little attention has been given to the growing number of underperforming boys in national plans and policies (“Summative Evaluation” 2019). Senegal achieved gender parity for GER at the primary level in 2007 and at the lower secondary level in 2012. This parity has changed to higher levels of girls’
enrollment in primary school than boys as seen in Table 5.2 causing a reverse gender gap that has persisted (DeStefano et al. 2009). This reverse gender gap coupled with the unaddressed underperformance of boys in school can help explain why girls are expected to complete almost one more year of school than boys as seen in Figure 5.1. Despite the country’s efforts, Senegal remains far from achieving its goal of universal basic education and getting out-of-school children in schools. Senegal’s high enrollment rates hide the country’s lower than average completion rate; compared to other African countries, Senegal ranks near the bottom for school completion though the country seems to be making progress (DeStefano et al. 2009).

**Figure 6.1 – GPI Primary 1999 and 2016**

![Gender Parity Index (GPI) Primary 1999 and 2016](image)

Source: World Bank Data Bank Gender Statistics

**Figure 6.2 GPI Secondary – GPI Secondary 1999 and 2016**

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39 Gender Parity Index (GPI) for gross enrollment ration in primary and secondary education in the ratio of girls to boys enrolled at primary and secondary levels of school respectively. A GPI of less than 1 suggests that girls are more disadvantaged that boys in learning opportunities and a GPI great of 1 suggests the opposite. (World Bank)
Table 6.2 - Key Changes Period III

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benin</td>
<td>The government has continued its investment in girls’ education through the establishment of the <em>Toutes les Filles à l’Ecole</em> campaign and other reforms. The government also introduced PDDSE that gives girls free pre-primary and primary education and reduces costs for secondary school. Also central to PDDSE was community outreach that aimed to help change gender norms at the grassroots level. The current education development plan, PSE, is closely aligned with PDDSE. Poverty, limited capacity, and high dropout rates continue to plague the education system, but Benin has achieved great progress in promoting girls’ education.</td>
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<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>The first major reform of this period, PDDEB, sought to raise school enrollment especially for girls. Burkina Faso also became an EFA FTI country and received extra support from the international community. The current education plan, PSEF, seeks to reform all levels of the education system with a continued gendered focus. The country achieved gender parity in both primary and secondary education by 2016 and while universal enrollment has still not been achieved, the progress made in gender parity is significant.</td>
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<td>Côte d’Ivoire</td>
<td>Despite instability in the country, the government implemented PNSEF followed by PAMT that focused on achieving universal enrollment, increasing teacher recruitment, and put special emphasis on education for vulnerable populations including girls. The current education policy, PSEF, prioritizes girls’ education and increasing capacity limits. It is set to be accompanied by GEPAP that will further address barriers to girls’ education. The government has made great progress but gender gaps at every level of education persist.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>Guinea was also classified as an EFA FTI country which allowed Guinea to achieve increases in girl's GER and completion rate. The second major reform of this period, PSE, listed improving girls’ access to education as a goal. The current plan ProDEG hopes to build upon the progress already made and increase capacity of the education system. Guinea has made progress but continues to face inadequate financial resources and persistent gender gaps.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>Mali introduced PRODEC early on in this period that sought to make basic education for all a reality; while PRODEC did have some positive effects on girls’ access to education it failed to address regional disparities in the country. Following a coup in</td>
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2012, PIRSEF was introduced and failed to create any positive changes. PRODEC II, implemented in 2019 refocuses the country's efforts on increasing state capacity and education for all especially girls. Recent instability threatens to undo progress made in Mali.

**Mauritania**
The education plan enacted in 1999, PNDSE, put emphasis on education quality, girls’ access, and community outreach especially in the most conservative areas of the country. The country also benefited from being named an EFA FTI country. PNDSE II was introduced in 2011 and built upon its predecessor and set universal basic education as an objective. As a result of these reforms and continued political support, Mauritania has achieved gender parity in secondary education and a reverse gender gap in primary education. Universal enrollment has still not been achieved.

**Niger**
Niger was also selected as an EFA FTI country and implemented PDDE as a result. PDDE sought to bolster the education system and target interventions at girls and other vulnerable children. PSEF, the current education plan, seeks to address the institutional constraints in the education system and continue targeted interventions for girls. The government has reiterated its support for girls’ education through various decrees and strategies, but the gender gap in education remains.

**Senegal**
As host of the World Education Forum, Senegal was highly motivated to make progress towards universal education. Senegal’s’ first education plan of this period, PDEF, included a gendered approach to education development. The plans that followed, PAQUET and PSE, both seek to create an equitable education system that promotes development. The country achieved gender parity at the primary level by 2007 and at the secondary level in 2012. This progress has led to reverse gender gaps at both the primary and secondary levels which has adverse effects for boys’ education. Senegal still faces high dropout rates and has not achieved universal enrollment.

Overall, the policies pursued by former AOF countries since 2000 have all been steps in the right direction. Each country has adopted its own education development plans and included a gendered approach to education policy. Not every country has enjoyed the same amount of success from their policies, however. The countries that have made significant progress in boosting girls’ access to education and closing the gender gap have adopted bottom-up policies to address the societal norms preventing girls’ schooling in addition to federal policy changes. Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and Senegal have made the most progress in girls’ education and this has been possible through changes at the community level as well as the national level. Benin also implemented bottom-up action plans and while the country has not achieved gender parity, it has made significant increases to its gender parity index at both the primary and secondary levels as seen in Figures 6.1 and 6.2. Countries that have focused only on national policy have not experienced the same level of success. Because the
norms and expectations discussed in Part 4 can be so pervasive, just changing a law is not enough to remove the barriers. Even with the progress made during this period, no former AOF country has achieved universal enrollment at all levels of education meaning that boys and girls continue to miss out on education. As seen in Figure 6.3 and Table 6.3, out-of-school rates continue to vary widely throughout former AOF countries. Benin and Côte d'Ivoire have managed to greatly decrease the amount of primary aged children not in school while Niger and Mali continue to experience large percentages of primary aged children missing out on school. Table 6.3 shows that the number of out of school children is much higher in lower and upper secondary school with most countries experiencing higher rates of girls missing out on school.

The gendered focus of the policies of this period have had positive results; as seen in Figures 6.1 and 6.2, the changes made during this period resulted in increases in the gender parity index for both primary and secondary education. Gender gaps in primary education are much smaller than they used to be with Burkina Faso achieving gender parity and Senegal and Mauritania experiencing a reverse gender gap in primary education. The gender gaps in secondary education, except for in Senegal, Burkina Faso, and Mauritania, continue to persist and are larger than the gaps at the primary level. Because of the reverse gender gaps achieved in Mauritania and Senegal, there are more boys out of school than girls at the primary level; Mauritania even has more boys out of school than girls at the lower and upper secondary levels as well. While Côte d'Ivoire and Benin are close to achieving universal enrollment at the primary level, no country is anywhere close to achieving universal enrollment in lower or upper secondary. The progress made towards gender parity and increasing enrollment during this period is a positive sign but looking at the amount of out of school children shows how much work remains to be done in education. The next section discusses how a lack of resources continues to support the education gender gaps experienced in some former AOF countries and prevents the countries from achieving universal enrollment.
**Figure 6.3** – Out-of-School Rate at Primary Level by Gender (2019)

![Graph showing out-of-school rate by gender and country](image)

**Table 6.3** – Out of School Rate Lower and Upper Secondary (2019)\(^{40}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Out of School Rate (%) Lower Secondary 2019</th>
<th>Out of School Rate (%) Upper Secondary 2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>Girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benin</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>42.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>48.22</td>
<td>43.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Côte d'Ivoire</td>
<td>40.66</td>
<td>48.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>42.80</td>
<td>59.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>49.39</td>
<td>56.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mauritania</td>
<td>30.78</td>
<td>25.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niger</td>
<td>60.97</td>
<td>69.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td>39.28</td>
<td>39.28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UNICEF Data Warehouse

b. **Continued Lack of Resources**

\(^{40}\) No gender specific data is available for out-of-school rates for Senegal for lower or upper secondary school. The number in the table is the average rate of out of school children at each corresponding level.
A monumental barrier to education in former AOF countries is a lack of resources. These barriers impact not only the access of girls and boys but the overall quality of the education system as well. From the discussion of gender expectations earlier, it is also probable that fewer openings in education will result in the privileging of boys for those spots; this means that when education is limited either due to a lack of classrooms, teachers, or funds, girls will suffer the consequences at higher rates than boys. While insufficient resources have impacted education in the region since independence, looking at the continued lack of resources since 2000 provides a partial explanation for why the education of girls in the region continues to trail behind that of boys. This lack of resources is prevalent not only in a country’s education expenditures and infrastructure but supply of trained teachers as well.

Education systems require sustained heavy investment to be able to achieve the necessary quality of education and to educate the quantity of students in a country. Half of the former AOF countries are classified as low-income countries (Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger) while the other half are classified as lower middle income (Senegal, Mauritania, Côte d’Ivoire, and Benin) (World Bank 2020). These classifications, made using gross national income, indicate that former AOF countries have limited economic resources to invest into education. Despite their status, West Africa as a region experienced high positive economic growth prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2019, Benin had the highest growth rate of the group with 6.9% growth while Senegal had the lowest with 4.4% growth (World Bank 2019). This economic growth has not necessarily led to the development of education system in these countries. Taking a closer look at the types of economies these countries have can also help explain why underdevelopment and a lack of resources continue to hinder education. The majority of former AOF countries continue to have mostly traditional economic systems where much of the population engages in subsistence agriculture and bartering is common (World Population Review 2021). Only Benin and Senegal have mixed
economies which combines characteristics of market, command, and traditional economies. Exporting goods, often raw materials, is also important to many of the economies of these countries. The major exports of the region include cocoa, precious metals, minerals, cotton, coffee, and agricultural products; these are all commodities that are heavily reliant on market prices. For example, volatility in the cocoa markets means that farmers in Côte d’Ivoire could be paid up to 21% less for their 2021-22 harvest compared to their 2020-21 harvests (Taylor 2021). Commodity dependence makes states vulnerable to price downturns which can stunt economic development and lead to recessions (Coke-Hamilton 2019).

Financial investment is one of the most important resources necessary to have a successful education system. Without the resources to facilitate the implementation of these programs, including the provision of teacher’s salaries, purchasing of textbooks, and maintenance and/or refurbishment of schools, the education system risks falling apart. As part of the DFA in 2000, West African countries agreed upon setting a regional target of allocating 20% of government resources to education; most countries within the region however have failed to meet this goal (“Analysis of Education Spending” 2021). As seen in Table 6.4, although Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, and Senegal achieved this goal at one point during this period, no country has been able to maintain the level of investment. While dedicating 1/5 of state expenditures to education seems high, the education systems in these countries are not adequately formed yet; they are still works in progress. Heavy investment is needed to hire and train new teachers, build new schools, remodel existing classrooms, purchase learning materials, and provide education services at no cost to students. Without the political will to increase spending on education, girls will continue to have disproportionately less access to education than boys in some countries. The accessibility of education must be increased so that more girls will be able to attend school; a major part of increasing accessibility comes from increasing expenditures. State expenditures on education allow for the training of teachers, the construction of schools, scholarships
for students, and the purchasing of learning materials; the importance of state investment cannot be overstated.

**Table 6.4 – Education Expenditures (as % of total budget) by Country (2000-2018)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benin</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>n.d</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>22.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Côte d’Ivoire</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mauritania</td>
<td>n.d</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niger</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: World Bank Data Bank

One resource that no former AOF country seems to have enough of is trained teachers. As enrollment rates have dramatically increased over the past few decades, so has the demand for teachers. The teacher shortage and low educational attainment are somewhat mutually reinforcing issues. If there are not enough teachers, the number of spots in schools decrease and/or the quality of education decreases due to high teacher to pupil ratios. Without quality education, there becomes a shortage of educated adults to serve as teachers. The cycle of poor education and scarcity of teachers can be broken but it requires a significant investment in the training of new teachers and the education system at large. Teacher shortages in former AOF are also expected to get worse over time if rates of teacher recruitment are not increased. With predominantly youthful populations and an average fertility rate of 5.1 among these 8 countries, the number of school age children in the next decade is going to increase (World Bank 2019). Some countries face higher gaps than others. In Mali, Oxfam estimates that there is a workforce gap of at least 27,000 teachers (2009). Looking to the future, Mali and Niger, will need the highest annual growth in primary teacher numbers in the region with at least

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42 Average fertility rate, total (births per woman) for former AOF countries was calculated using World Bank data from 2019 for each former AOF country and finding the mean fertility rate.
6% or more growth necessary annually to keep up with demand. As for secondary teachers, Niger will need more than 10% annual growth (UNESCO 2021). Another indicator that can be used to measure teacher shortages is pupil-teacher ratios. These ratios can give an idea of how many teachers are employed, how much face-to-face time students are getting with their teachers, and the overall quality of education. As seen in Table 6.5, every country’s pupil to teacher ratio decreased from 2000 to 2016 except for Guinea. This is a positive result and is largely due to the education development plans implemented by the countries during this period. Compared to the rest of the world, the ratios are still high and as demand grows in the future, unless the governments invest more resources in the training of teachers, the ratios are at risk of increasing again.

**Table 6.5 - Pupil-Trained Teacher Ratio and Percent of Female Teachers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Pupil-Teacher Ratio Primary</th>
<th>% of Female Primary Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benin</td>
<td>52.6</td>
<td>41.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>48.9</td>
<td>41.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Côte d'Ivoire</td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>45.6</td>
<td>47.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>65.3</td>
<td>39.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mauritania</td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niger</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>36.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>31.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: World Bank Databank

The teacher shortages experienced by former AOF countries vary in cause. In general, inadequate teacher training institutions, poor teaching conditions, high rates of teacher attrition, and lack of funding are to blame for the lack of teachers (“Closing the Gap” 2021). The teacher shortage results in a lower quality of education due to higher student-teacher ratios. These ratios are often highest at the primary level creating learning gaps early in the learning process that tend to worsen over time (“Analysis of Education Spending” 2021). High levels of teacher absenteeism, usually due

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43 Senegal’s 2016 data for % of Female Primary Teachers is from 2015 due to data gaps.
to illness, among former AOF countries also lead to significant learning losses; this issue is even more aggravated in areas of conflict where teachers must risk their own safety to teach in schools (‘Analysis of Education Spending’ 2021). Within the eight countries studied in this paper, there are low percentages of female teachers compared with the rest of the world. This lack of female teachers has important implications for girls’ enrolment since female teachers can have a positive impact on girls entering and remaining in school (UNESCO 2021). As seen in Table 6.5, while there have been increases in the share of female primary school teachers during this period, most former AOF countries, except for Niger, continue to have low numbers of female teachers.

Aside from teachers, there are also concerns over adequate infrastructure and school materials to satisfy the increasing demand of education. These materials and buildings are incredibly important for the learning process and without them the quality of education can severely suffer. In all former AOF countries, teachers’ salaries make up the majority of education expenditures leaving little room for investment in schooling infrastructure and learning materials; for example, Senegal, Guinea, Côte d’Ivoire, and Mali all spend over 90% of their education expenditures on teacher salaries (‘Analysis of Education Spending’ 2021). Table 6.4 shows the percentage of total primary school state expenditure used for the purchasing of schoolbooks and teaching material. Each country’s expenditures are incredibly low.

### Table 6.6 - Expenditure on School Materials and GDP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Expenditure on School books and teaching material as % of total expenditure in primary public institutions</th>
<th>% of GDP spent on Education (2019)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benin</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Côte d’Ivoire</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mauritania</td>
<td>n.d</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

44 For expenditure on schoolbooks and teaching materials, each country’s most recent available data was used.
Overall, a lack of financial resources continues to hinder the overall development of education systems in former AOF countries. Insufficient funding and mismanagement of resources have contributed to education systems that cannot support the rising demand for schooling. This impacts girls’ prospects for education because due to social norms, girls are more likely to be overlooked for education especially when there are only a limited number of spots. To try to bridge the gaps caused in part by insufficient state funding, international organizations have been active in the region for decades. The next section discusses their work and collaboration with the host governments in more detail.

c. Work of IGOs and NGOs

Education, specifically education for girls, has become an increasing priority for many intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The right to education has long been established with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948 and has been reaffirmed in multiple conventions and treaties since then, including the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) (Right to Education Initiative 2021). As discussed in Part 3, the 1990 World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand also marked an important step in the international community’s acceptance of education as a right; the conference culminated in the World Declaration on Education for All. Girls’ access to education has been prioritized in recent years through Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As part of MDG three, Target 3.A sought to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015 (United Nations). SDG four seeks to
“1. by 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and Goal-4 effective outcomes and 2. by 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and preprimary education so that they are ready for primary education” (UN Women).

SDG Five also supports girls’ education because it deals entirely with empowering women and removing the barriers they face to achieving equality. While conventions and goals are positive and ambitious, many of their requirements have not been met. However, international organizations seek to fill the education gaps that governments cannot cover. In Africa especially, NGOs and IGOs play a significant implementing role in the education sector (Miller-Grandvaux et al. 2002).

Through partnerships with host countries, many different organizations have had success in increasing the number of girls in school and the quality of education they received by influencing policy, training teachers, and supporting education programs. Many of these organizations are well-known like UN-affiliated organizations, the World Bank, or the Red Cross but there are also many smaller less-known organizations working to increase access to education for girls in former AOF countries. Larger organizations like UN organizations tend to focus on other areas of aid as well whereas smaller NGOs are more likely to specialize only one area allowing them to fill gaps (Brophy 2020). In many instances, larger organizations rely on and collaborate with smaller NGOs to help fulfill their objectives. Education has long been a priority for international organizations, but both NGOs and IGOs only began to view education through a gendered lens around the late 1980s after the World Bank sponsored studies that found “significant social and economic benefits from investing in the education of females” (Swainson et al. 1998). This bolstered the number of international organizations that included gendered approaches to education in their programs.

NGOs have been instrumental in the investment in girls’ education in a variety of different methods. While usually much smaller than IGOs like the UN and African Union, NGOs have
participated in the construction of schools, brought education closer to communities, improved textbooks, increased the number of women teachers, supported teacher training programs, offered scholarships specifically for schoolgirls, and sought to influence state education policy (Swainson et al. 1998). They can vary greatly in size from truly international NGOs like Save the Children that works in over 100 countries to much smaller, regional organizations like the Baobab Senegal Education Initiative that is focused specifically on supporting girls and women from rural Senegal in their educational aspirations (Baobab Senegal 2021). No matter the size, NGOs have and continue to perform important work in former AOF countries. In many instances, NGOs are handling on the ground logistics and bringing education to children. They have been instrumental in the building of community schools; these schools are often created in response to government inefficacy in providing certain areas of the country education. NGOs like Save the Children and World Education sponsor these schools, often in rural areas where education access is low, as alternatives to state run education (Miller-Grandvaux et al. 2002). By performing this essential role, NGOs play a vital role in education in former AOF countries. They also focus on capacity building and getting parents involved in their children’s educations. In both Guinea and Mali, World Education has programs aimed at supporting parent’s associations of schools. Another role of NGOs in former AOF countries is the influence of education policy. NGOs often have their own policy agendas they try to get the host countries to implement. In the West African context, these recommended changes often include the promotion of girls’ education as a priority and the training and recruitment of more teachers.

As mentioned, many different IGOs have worked and continue to work on improving girls’ access to education in former AOF countries. While the efforts of these organizations could fill up a book, it is worth discussing some of the most influential organizations and their efforts. Several different UN affiliated agencies work on advancing girls’ education in West Africa. UNICEF does extensive work throughout sub-Saharan Africa on education and the promotion of girls/women. As
one of the co-sponsors of the WCEFA, UNICEF is a major proponent of EFA and has sought to achieve its goals through the improvement of primary school infrastructure, use of non-formal education approaches, and the promotion of girls’ enrollment (Swaison et al. 1998). Earlier this year, a joint initiative of UNAIDS, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF, and UN Women was announced. This new initiative that is set to last until 2025 is entitled Education Plus and is focused on the empowerment of adolescent girls and young women in sub-Saharan Africa; Education Plus puts special emphasis on secondary schooling as enrollment rates have not increased at nearly the same rate as primary school GERs (“Education Plus Initiative” 2021). There is also the United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative (UNGEI) that “champions the rights of girls to a quality education in a safe and gender-sensitive learning environment;” among other benchmarks, the collective advocates for girls’ right to 12 years of quality education (UNGEI 2021).

While some IO initiatives have an international focus, some are much more focused. Plan International, Catholic Relief Services, Tin Tua, and the Forum for African Women Educationalists worked together to implement Burkinabe Response to Improve Girls’ Chances to Succeed (BRIGHT). The BRIGHT program focused on 132 villages in 10 provinces within Burkina Faso where girls’ enrollment was the lowest; BRIGHT was active from 2005 to 2008 and was found to have had a 20% point positive impact on girls’ primary school enrollment and on Math and French test scores (Levy et al. 2009).

Despite the important role of international organizations, they often face challenges when trying to implement their education programs. NGOs have been working within former AOF countries for decades and as a result have had to navigate regimes changes and other political issues. On top of instability, NGOs require the permission of the government to work in a country; this relationship is usually dependent on “politics, economic situation, and historical relationship with the NGO” (Miller-Grandvaux et al. 2002). Generally, because education is beneficial to socio-economic...
development, states are willing to partner with NGOs as long as they are not pushing for radical change or undermining government policy. Another issue encountered by NGOs while working in West Africa is weak governmental institutions and a lack of capacity; in some cases, NGOs are faced with developing capacity and infrastructure to “manage and deliver education programmes” (Brophy 2020).

NGOs have had varying degrees of success in their education programs throughout former AOF countries. Overall, the World Bank has found that international organization investment into primary education has a much higher rate of return than investment in secondary or tertiary education (Brophy 2020). The issue in trying to measure the success of individual organizations or programs is that it is hard to pin down what results are caused by what program. It is apparent that the increases in girls’ education programs provided by both NGOs and IGOs have led to increases in girls’ access to education in the past few decades. It is also apparent that the work of international organizations is going to be necessary in the coming future to continue to support education and girls in former AOF countries as the states lack the resources to provide ample and adequate education independently.

d. Plaguing Instability

Instability and conflict can be major barriers to education and unfortunately, some former AOF countries continue to face both obstacles. When there is fighting and violence happening and it is not safe to attend school, both boys and girls suffer the consequences. Disruptions in education can seriously impact children’s developmental progress. Violence is a significant barrier and can have serious repercussions for a country not only in the moment but later down the line as well. The effects of periods of violence and instability since independence were discussed earlier in this paper, but some parts of the former AOF territory continue to experience instability in the present. The effects of these on-going conflicts are and will no doubt continue to be significant, but the extent of their impact on
education are unknown. As mentioned earlier, Burkina Faso, Guinea and Mali have experienced coups d’état in the past year. The events were perceived as shocking by the outside world due to beliefs that democratic ideals are the new world standard and that unlawful power take-overs of power are a thing of the past.

Political instability is not the only barrier to education in the region. Conflicts and violence in the central Sahel area of West Africa – Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger- have seriously impacted education. Over the past few years, armed attacks in parts of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger have increased, leading to forced displacements and the disruption of millions of children’s education (Dori 2020). Within the three countries, domestic and regional terror groups, some of which are affiliates of the “Islamic State” and Al Qaeda seek to dominate local communities through the trafficking of drugs, cigarettes, humans, weapons and other goods (Fomunyoh 2020). Attacks on schools in Mali doubled between 2017 and 2019 and over 3,300 schools have been closed in Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali affecting more than 650,000 children and more than 16,000 teachers (“Crisis in the Central Sahel” 2020). Whereas schools are supposed to be safe from attacks under the Safe Schools Declaration, in the central Sahel conflict, schools have been directly targeted.45 School closures due to conflict can have catastrophic effects on education; what begins as a short-lived school closure can result in a student never returning to school (“Education Under Threat” 2019). Breaks in education can also result is developmental delays that the school systems are not equipped to deal with; if a child falls behind in school, it is unlikely they will catch back up. Not attending school in this region is especially harmful for girls who are more likely to experience sexual violence, forced marriage, and early pregnancy when not in school (“Central Sahel Crisis” 2021).

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45 The Safe Schools Declaration (SSD) is an inter-governmental political commitment that has been endorsed by 112 states since it was drafted in May 2015. The SSD outlines a set of commitments to strengthen the protection of education -students, teachers, schools – from attack and restrict the use of schools and universities for military purposes.
in the former AOF, the French military has been involved in the Central Sahel throughout the crisis to the dismay of many locals. Operation Barkhane, France’s anti-insurgent operation in the region, has been active since 2014. Due to lack of public support among Sahel countries and an inability to collaborate with national governments in the region, Emmanuel Macron announced that the operation will end by 2022 but that some French forces would continue to remain in the area as part of an international mission (Charlton and Petesch 2021).

There are also concerns over authoritarian shifts among former AOF countries. Since Patrice Talon was democratically elected as President of Benin in 2016, he seems to be consolidating power and undermining democratic institutions. Under Talon, the Beninese National Assembly was not elected but handpicked by him, political opponents have been exiled and jailed, and protestors have been violently repressed (Biao 2021). Also in Côte d’Ivoire, President Alassane Ouattara won reelection for a third term in a controversial election that breached the term-limit provision of the country’s constitution (Gyimah-Boadi 2021). Senegal’s President, Macky Sall, has also faced criticism for changing election and defamation laws to oppress the opposition and the media (Gyimah-Boadi 2021). The coups in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Guinea also mark democratic backsliding. In March 2021, a unit of Niger’s military unsuccessfully attempted a coup just days before the newly elected president was to be inaugurated. These events happening so close together raise concerns over “the return of the gun as a regime-changing tool in West Africa” (Gyimah-Boadi 2021). In Freedom House’s 2021 Freedom of the World Report, four of Africa’s worst performers are former AOF countries - Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Mali. All these recent events are cause for concern because they have potential negative effects for education. Instability, violence, and authoritarianism are not usually conditions conducive to education development. Looking toward the future, the current state of affairs in some former AOF countries are major causes of concern.

e. COVID-19
One of the most pressing issues impacting not only the former AOF countries but the whole world is the COVID-19 pandemic. The effects of the pandemic on education have been severe. The spread of the virus has resulted in prolonged school closures throughout the world. This is not the first time West African countries have been forced to close schools due to the outbreak of an illness. In 2014 and 2015, some countries in West Africa were forced to close schools after an Ebola outbreak. During the epidemic, girls’ chances of returning to school following school closures were incredibly low. The continuity of their learning was threatened by gender-based violence, early pregnancy, forced marriage, and early transitions to work (Kwauk et al. 2021). Researchers fear the effects of school closures due to COVID-19 will be worse because there are higher chances of repeat closures and longer periods of closures due to variants of the virus. Data from Senegal from schools reopening found “surprisingly low” dropout rates and no statistical difference between boys and girls; unfortunately, the rate of grade repetition has nearly doubled from pre-COVID-19 levels (Kwauk et al. 2021). The total impact of COVID-19 on education among the West African states and on girls’ education specifically is largely unknown. The pandemic is still ongoing and African countries have some of the lowest vaccination rates in the world due to insufficient vaccine sharing by the rest of the world. So far, it is apparent that the pandemic has resulted in many children in the region missing out on learning because options or remote learning are “significantly limited” (“The Impact of COVID19” 2020). The pandemic is also exacerbating other issues such as food insecurity and poverty that can cause families to deprivitize their children’s education. COVID-19 marks a new and pressing challenge that can have disastrous effects on the education progress made thus far.

VII. Conclusion and Prospects for the Future

This paper has covered how girls’ access to education has changed since French colonial rule in former Afrique Occidentale Française countries. Notably, the changes from three different periods were analyzed: the period directly following independence (1960-1969), the post-independence period
(1970-1999), and the 21\textsuperscript{st} century (2000-2021). By examining policy changes and analyzing available data, I have concluded that decolonization proved to have no immediate positive effect on girls' access to education. The newly independent countries lacked the institutional capacity to enact meaningful reforms and the gender inequality formalized under French colonial rule largely continued. The progress made in girls’ access to education after independence was slow, sporadic, and insufficient.

The next period brought varying degrees of investment in education. Some countries faced periods of instability and military rule, stunting the progress made in education. Near the end of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, former AOF states and the international community began to recognize the need for gender specific reforms and initiatives to close the gender gap in education. The theme of girls' education carried over into the 21\textsuperscript{st} century as the countries strived towards the MDGs followed by the SDGs. All former AOF countries have introduced education plans with a gendered focus marking a step in the right direction. Despite having the policy to support girls’ access to education, some countries continue to experience low enrollment and large gender gaps. While Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and Senegal have reached gender parity in primary education, Mali, Niger, and Guinea continue to trail behind.

This paper has also examined the societal barriers and norms that disadvantage girls in receiving an education. Specifically, child marriage, early childbearing, child labor/unpaid care work, limited mobility, and menstruation all have negative effects on a girl’s chances of receiving an education. Furthermore, these norms and traditional expectations tend to be more prevalent in rural areas than urban areas. While gains have been made in enrollment and the amount of time girls spend in school, the larger societal barriers and gendered expectations for girls continue to harm their opportunities to pursue a quality education. These societal factors are important to understand because they can provide an explanation for continued delays in the promotion of girls’ education. All former AOF countries have legislation specifically targeted at increasing girls’ access to education and yet some countries continue to see unacceptable gender gaps. Having written support for girls’ education
is not enough to ensure girls have access. Understanding how these norms and traditional beliefs affect women and girls in their daily lives, can help account for the lack of gender parity. These gendered societal expectations can also be used to create more effective and targeted state policy to get more girls in school.

Looking to the future, Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Côte d’Ivoire, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Senegal all must continue to invest in education not only to maintain the progress made thus far but to increase their institutional capacity. As it stands, no country has achieved universal enrollment at any level, and this is partly caused by the lack of capacity to provide schooling to all the students. In terms of girls’ education specifically, more bottom-up, communal level programs and campaigns are needed to help change gender norms and remove barriers facing girls. Countries continuing to face gender gaps should adopt community-based approaches unique to their countries’ needs. Also, by continuing to collaborate with NGOs and other international partners, the countries can gain a better sense of some of the social barriers prohibiting girls from attending schools and work to address them. It is also unlikely these countries can achieve universal enrollment alone so the international community must continue to offer support and assistance.

Education remains an important area of research and countries would benefit from further analysis of their education systems. Data gaps proved to be frequent in every education indicator examined in this paper; expanding education research can help bridge these gaps and allow for more accurate conclusions to be made concerning the effects of specific reforms or programs. Another important area for further research is examining the continued legacy of colonial influence in West Africa. Some studies look at how countries that experienced British rule differ from countries that experienced French rule. Understanding the lasting colonial legacy helps account for some of the education gaps and can help influence what interventions are needed. Looking specifically at gender outcomes in
former French colonies compared to former British colonies would also be an interesting area of
future research.

Education remains one of the best ways to set an individual and a country up for success. Schools
contribute to both personal and social development and allow children to become educated adults
prepared to participate in society. Expanding education can potentially also lead to increasing
other development indicators because an educated population tends to be more engaged politically
and contribute more to the economy. Closing the gender gap in education will also hopefully translate
to smaller gender gaps in the work force, political representation, and other aspects of society.
Educating girls helps alleviate one barrier they face and better prepares them for adult life. For far too
long, women have experienced limitations in their educational development in part due to traditional
gender norms. As Senegalese author Mariama Ba writes in her book *So Long a Letter*, women have the
right to pursue education “to the furthest limits” just as much as men do (1979 61). Continued
investment in education will not only help girls achieve their full potential but benefit the entire region
as well.


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110


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116


