

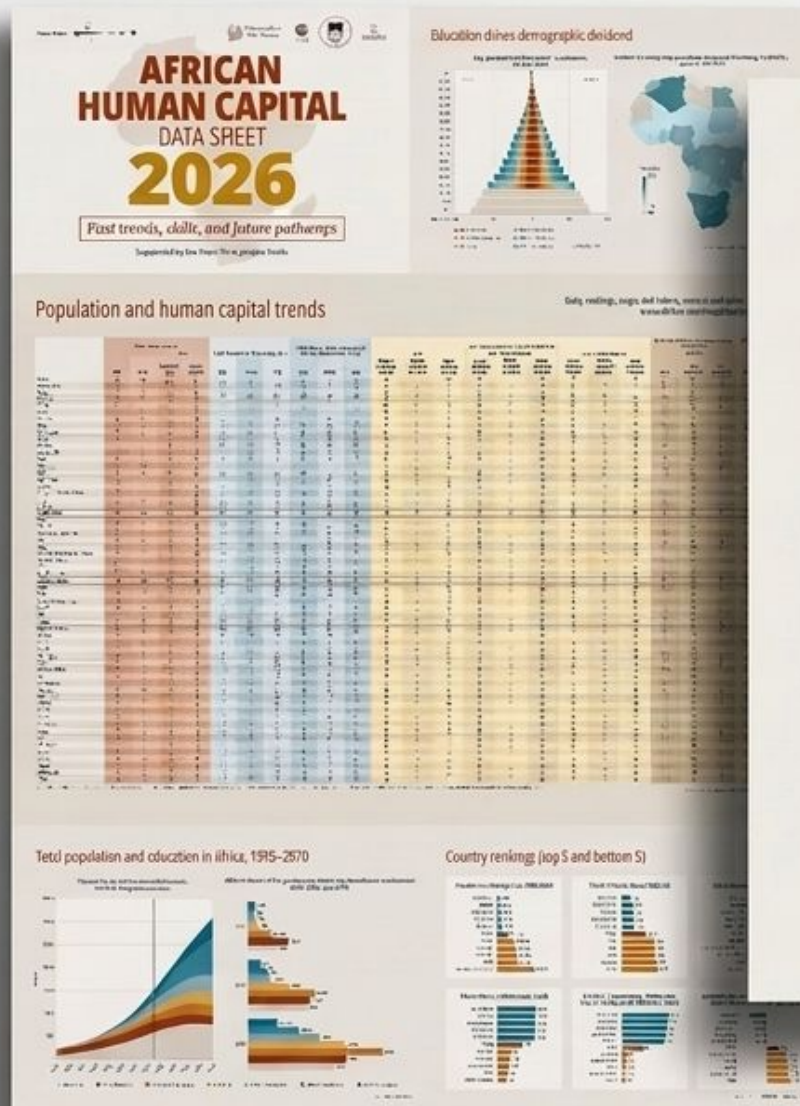
Human Capital for Sustainable Development

A Focus on Africa

Cynthia Fonta
Yidan Prize Conference
29 June 2026, Dakar



Returning to the evidence from the African Human Capital Data Sheet

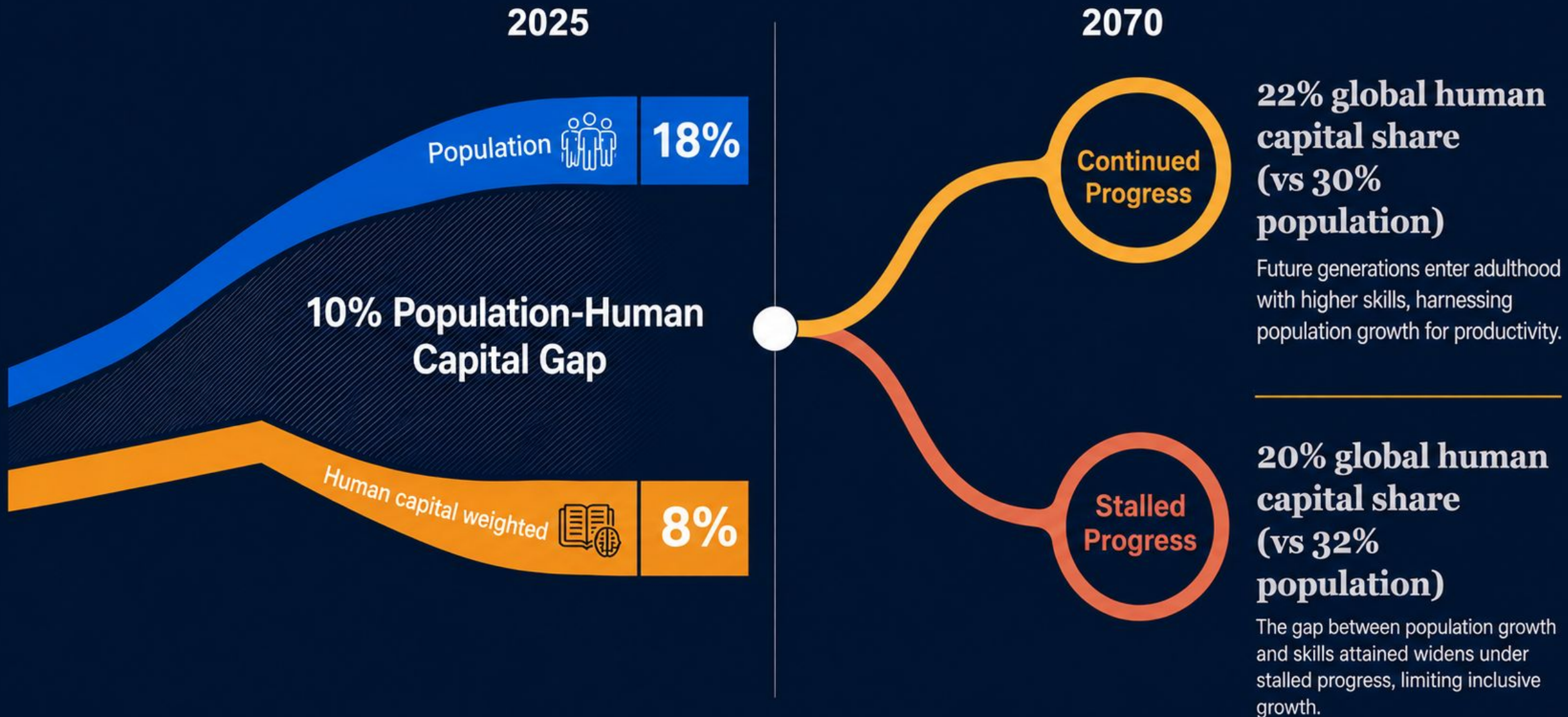


AFRICAN HUMAN CAPITAL DATA SHEET 2026

Past trends, skills, and future pathways

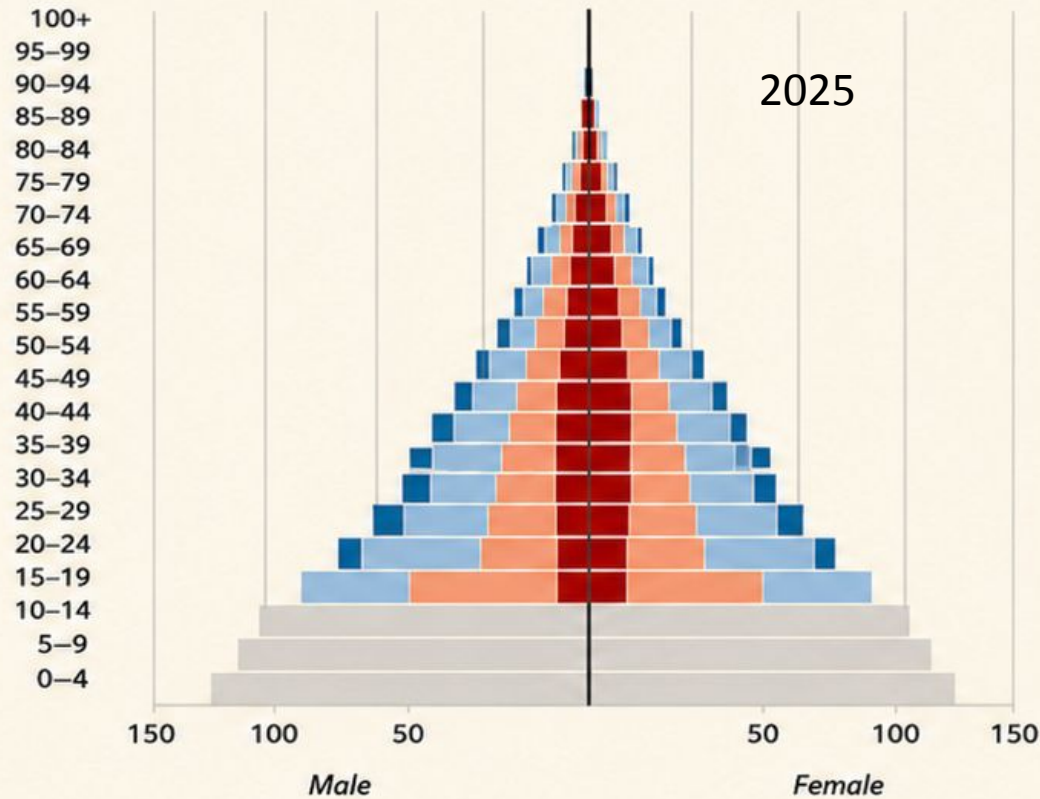
Supported by the Yidan Prize project funds

Africa's global human capital share

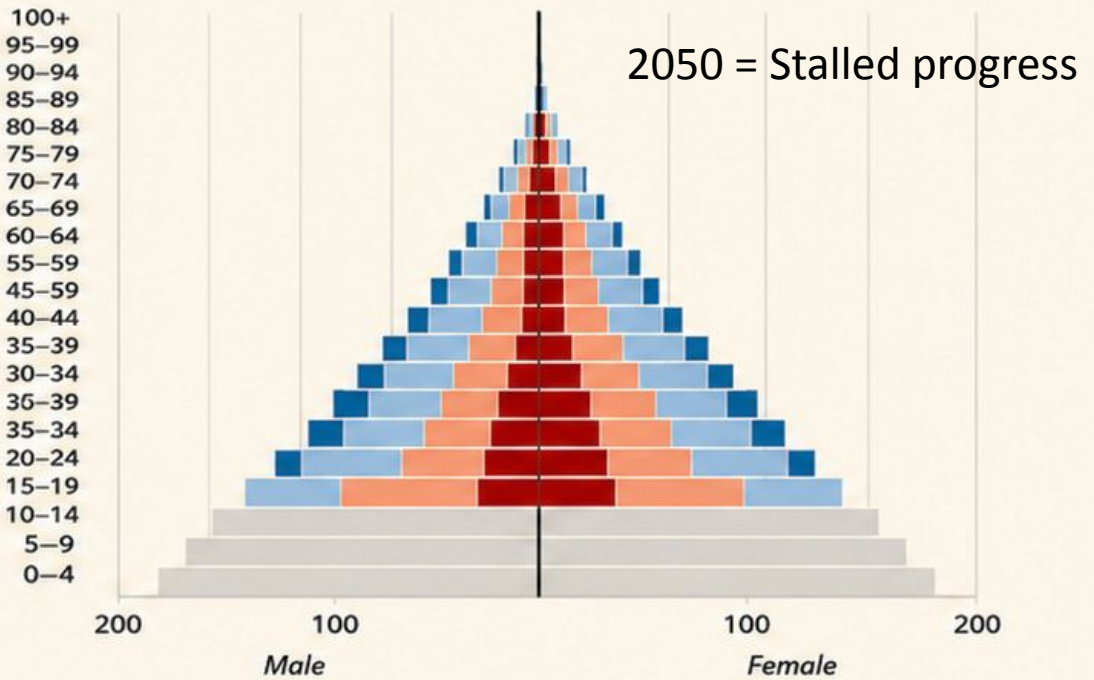
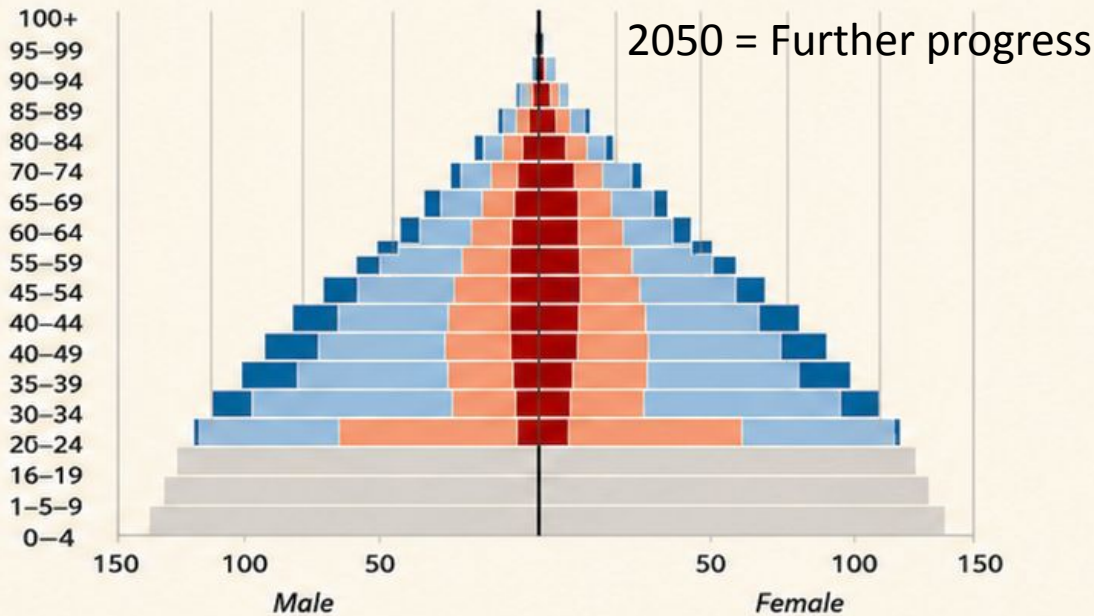


Age Pyramid by Educational Attainment, Africa (2025-2050)

What happens when fertility and mortality decline, and investments in education are sustained?



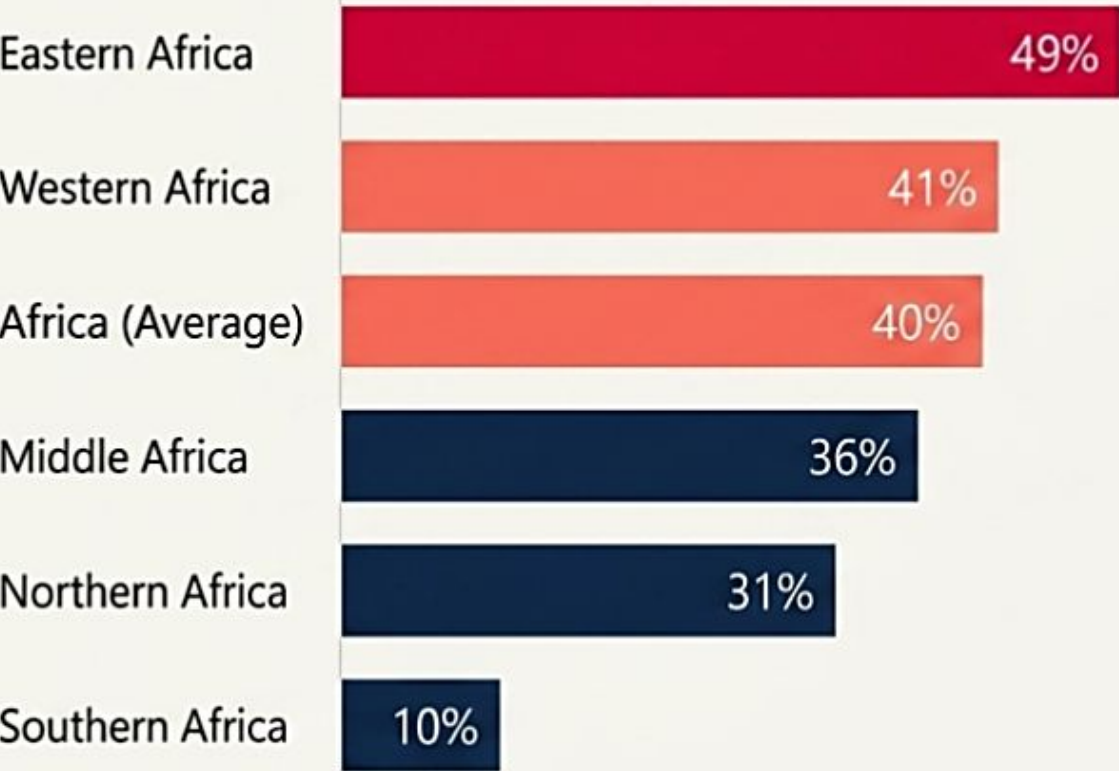
Under 15 No education Primary Secondary Post Secondary



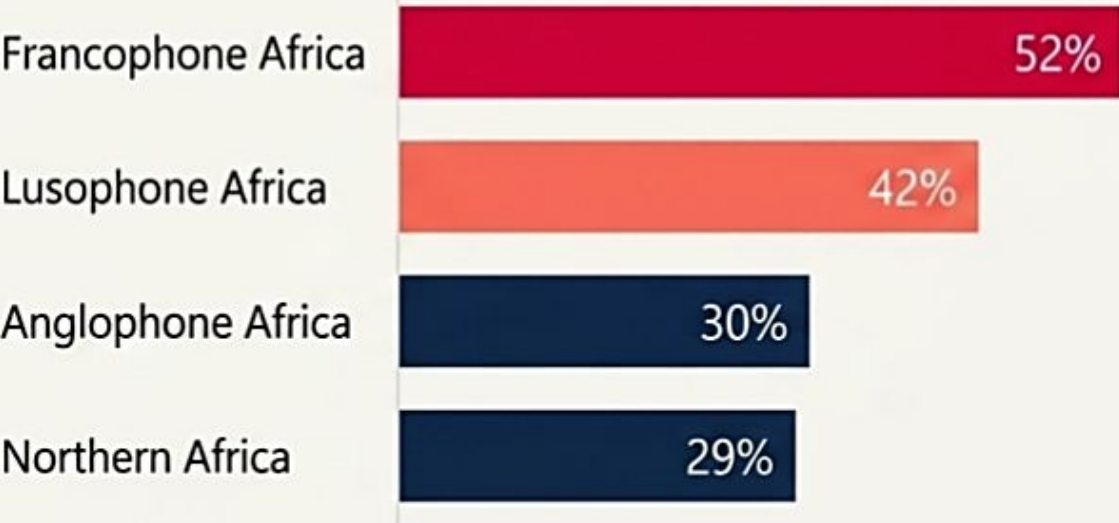
Diagnostic 1: Disparities in Less than Primary Education in Africa (2025)

Nearly half of the population in Eastern and Western Africa, particularly in Francophone Africa, has not completed primary education.

Regional Vulnerability



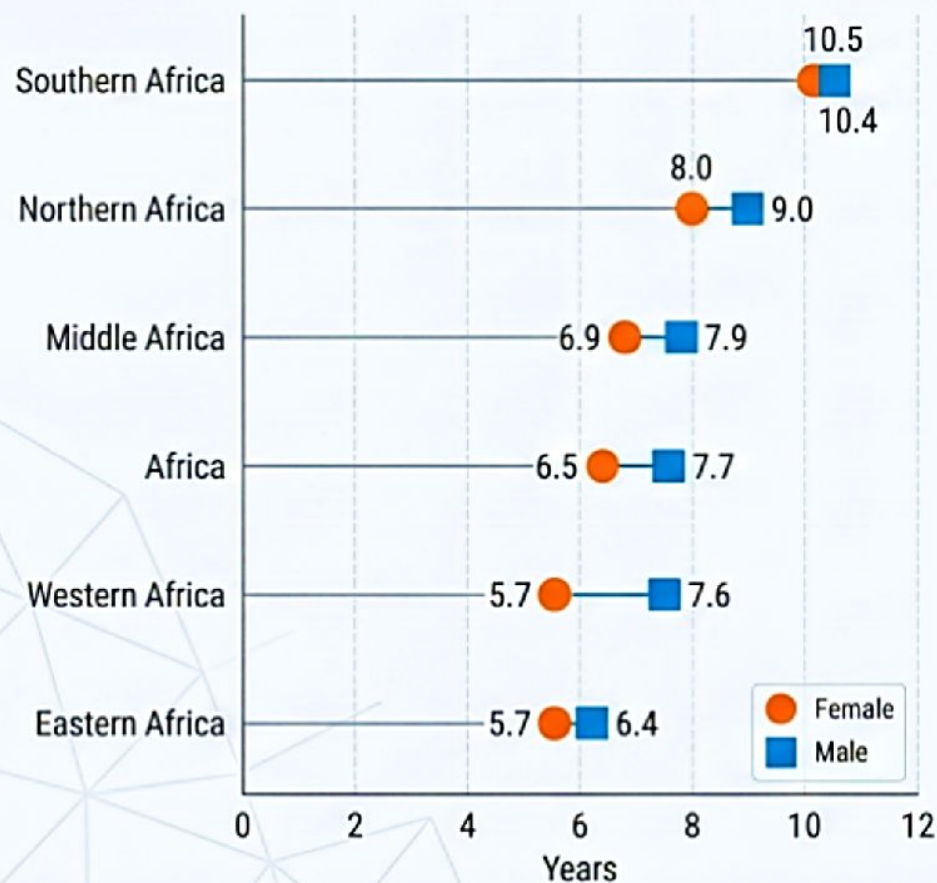
Colonial-Language Group Vulnerability



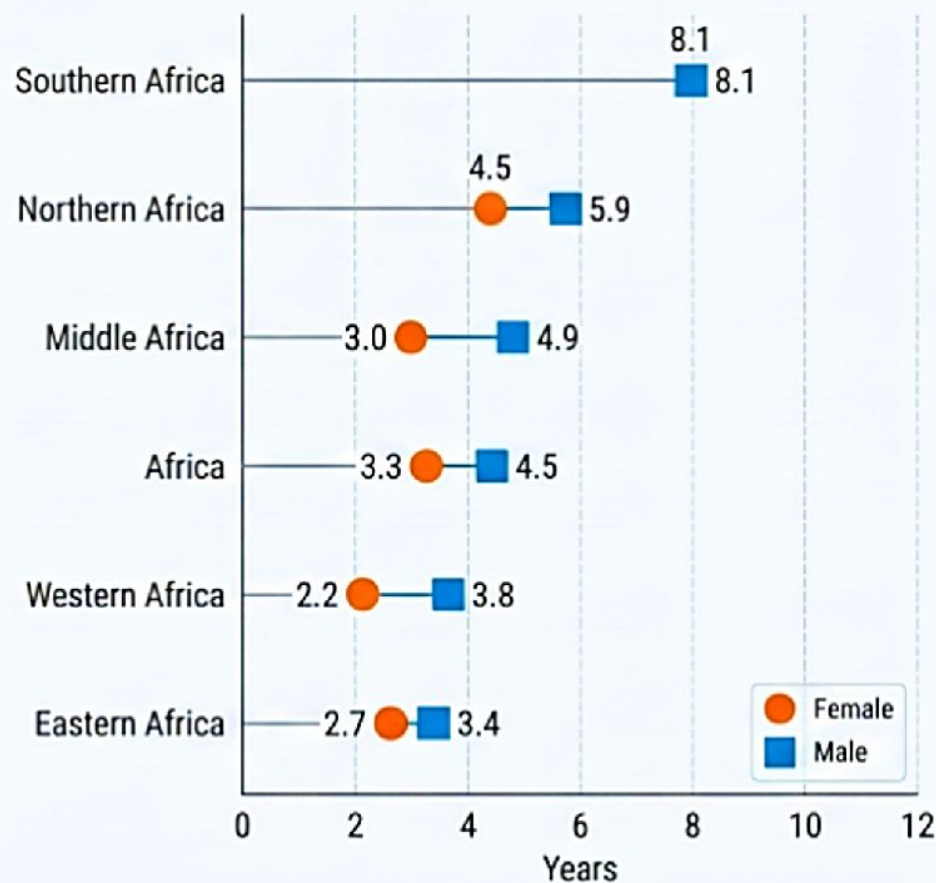
Diagnostic 2: Gender Disparities

Across most regions, females spend 1-2 fewer years in school than males

Mean Years of Schooling (MYS)



Skills in Literacy Adjusted Mean Years of Schooling (SLAMYS)



 **Southern Africa Leads in Both Metrics**

Southern Africa shows the highest attainment and the smallest gender gap in both categories.

The Skills Gap Phenomenon



Across all regions, skills-adjusted years are significantly lower than actual years spent in school.

Gender Disparity in Western Africa



Western Africa exhibits one of the largest gaps between male and female schooling years.

Diagnostic 3: Africa's Learning Deficit

Learning across Africa is on average over 40% lower than years spent in school

FEMALE DATA			Region	MALE DATA			
Female MYS	Female SLAMYS	% Lower (Female)		Male MYS	Male SLAMYS	% Lower (Male)	
10.5	8.1	22.9%	Southern Africa	10.4	8.1	22.1%	✓
9.4	6.4	31.9%	Northern Africa	10.2	6.8	33.3%	
5.8	3.2	44.8%	Middle Africa	7.3	4.0	45.2%	
6.5	3.3	49.2%	Africa (Total)	7.7	4.5	41.6%	
5.7	2.2	61.4%	Western Africa	7.6	3.8	50.0%	
4.8	2.3	52.1%	Eastern Africa	5.6	2.7	51.8%	

Southern Africa Leads in Quality

This region maintains the highest SLAMYS (8.1) and the lowest percentage loss for both genders.

61.4% Learning Gap in Western Africa

Western African females face the largest percentage drop between school attendance and actual learning outcomes.

Africa-wide Quality Deficit

On average, actual learning in Africa is nearly **50% lower** than the years spent in school.



Unlocking Africa's Demographic Dividend

THREE PILLARS OF STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT

PRIORITIZE EDUCATION QUALITY & SKILLS



Actual skills acquisition and education quality are just as vital as classroom access.

ECONOMIC PRODUCTIVITY

TARGET EXTREME LOCAL DISPARITIES



Focus on **Francophone** and **Lusophone** East/West Africa rather than broad regional mandates.

CLOSE THE FEMALE HUMAN CAPITAL GAP



Closing this gap is a non-negotiable prerequisite for future productivity.

THE FOUNDATIONAL REQUIREMENT



Investment is the Catalyst for Growth

Population growth requires sustained, targeted human capital investment to generate a demographic dividend.



Wittgenstein Centre

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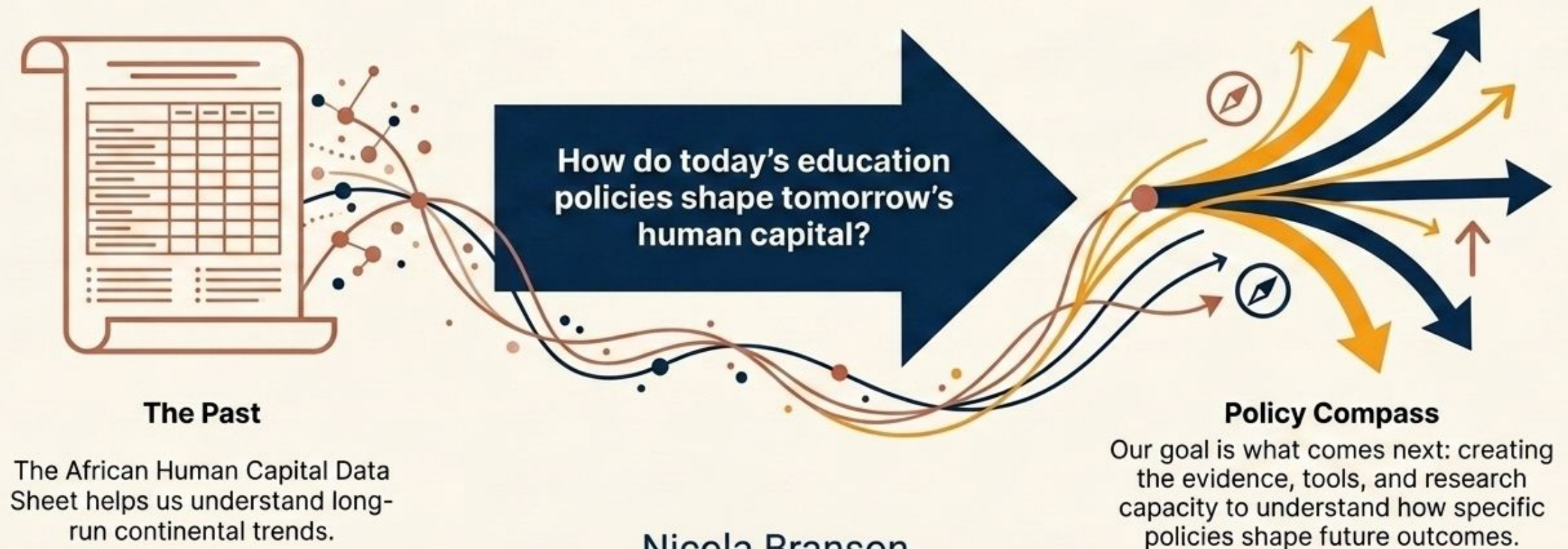


SALDRU

Southern Africa Labour and
Development Research Unit

MERCI

Beyond the Data Sheet: Shaping Tomorrow's Human Capital



Nicola Branson
Yidan Prize Conference, Dakar 29 June, 2026

Building African-Led Human Capital Research

This initiative is driven by researchers working directly within their own countries and contexts.

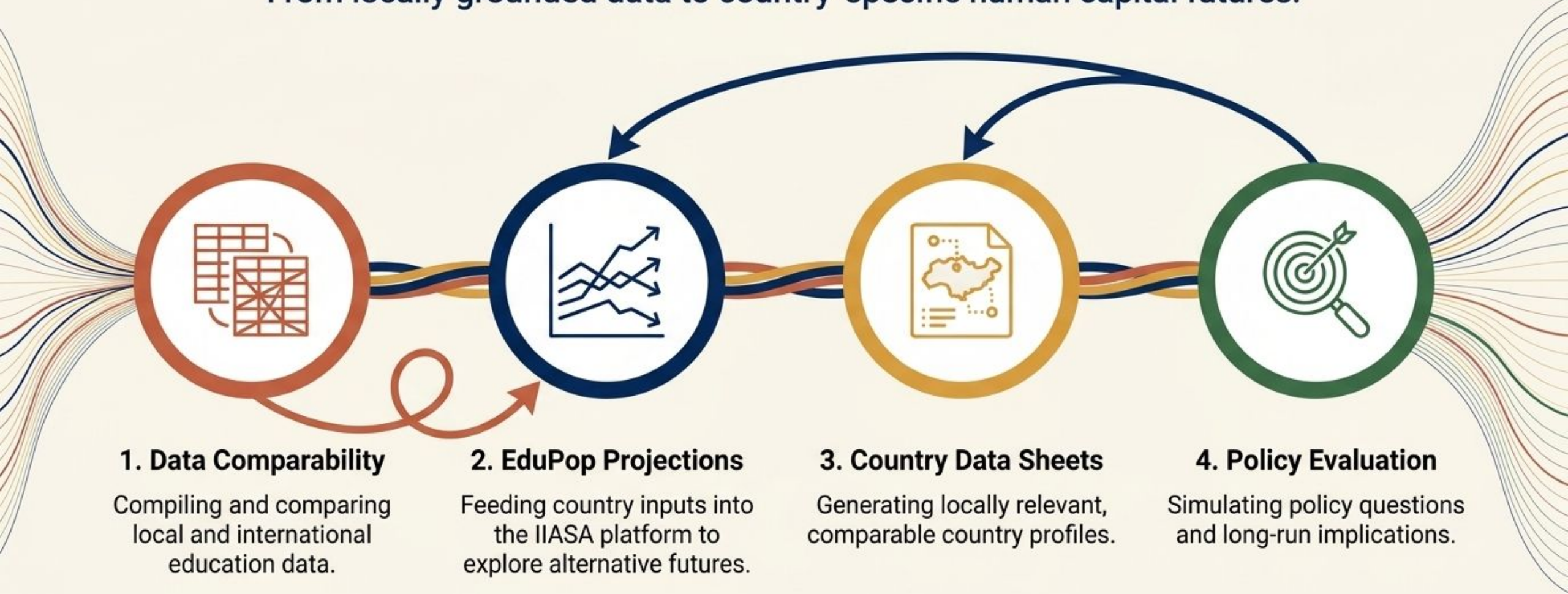
Moving beyond generic continental averages requires evidence that reflects the realities of individual African nations.



Local Knowledge + Local Data + Advanced Modeling = Policy-Relevant Evidence

A Shared Framework Across Countries

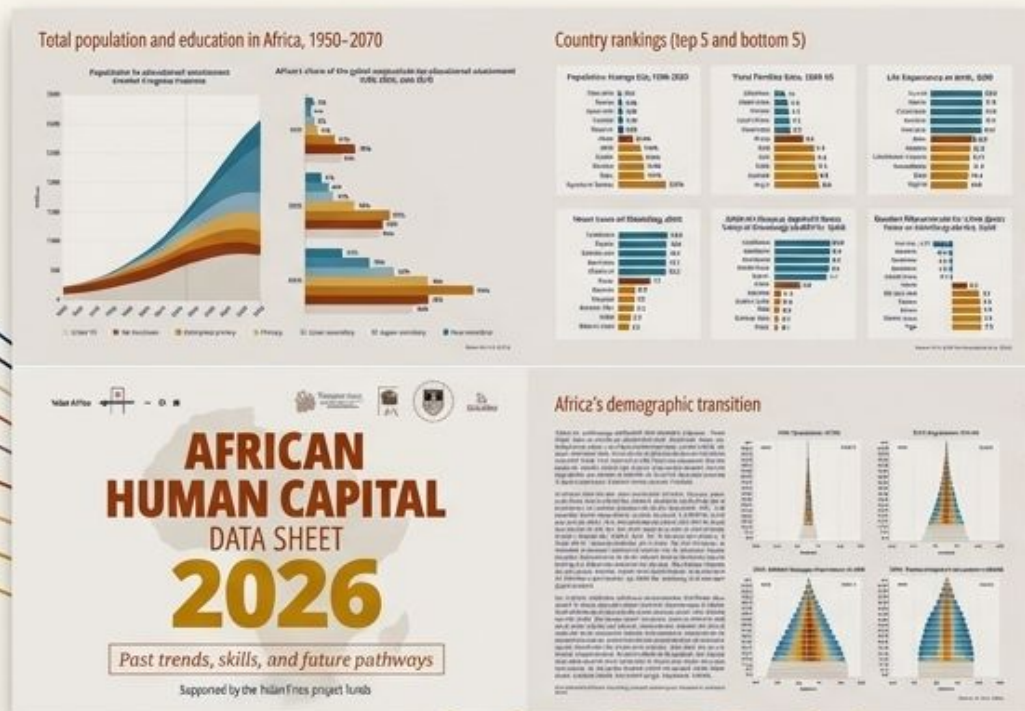
From locally grounded data to country-specific human capital futures.



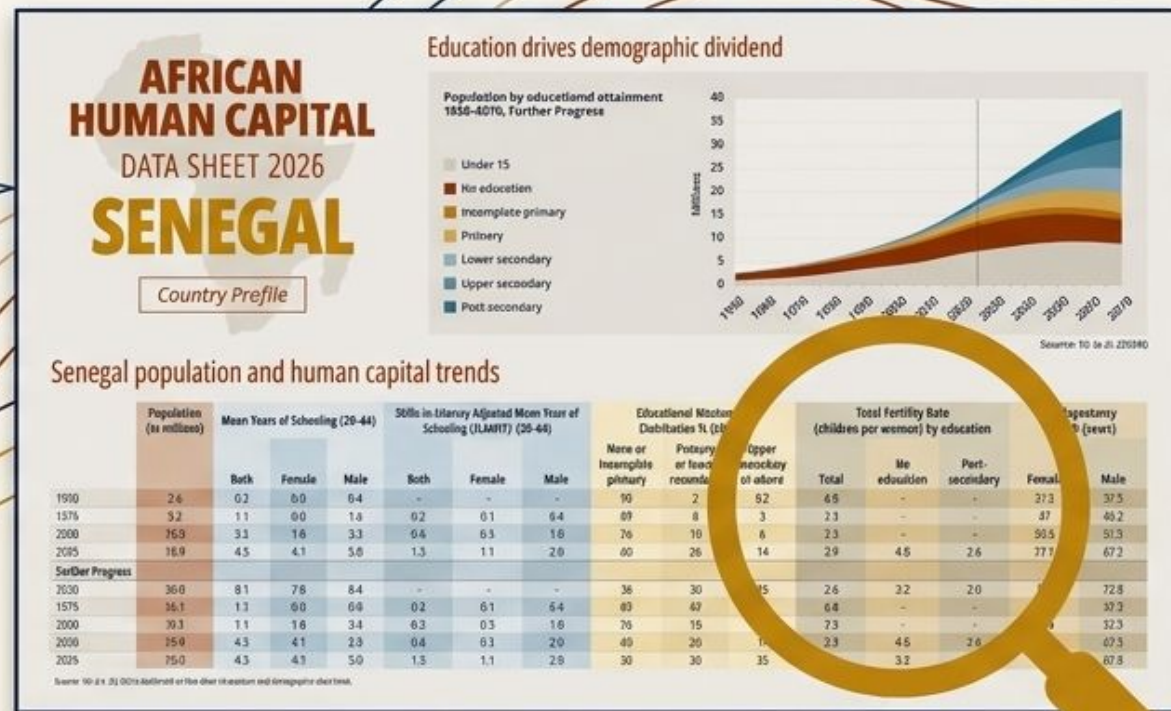
A scalable engine linking data reconciliation, projection tools, country-specific evidence, and policy-relevant research.

Creating Country-Specific Human Capital Data Sheets

Continental Averages

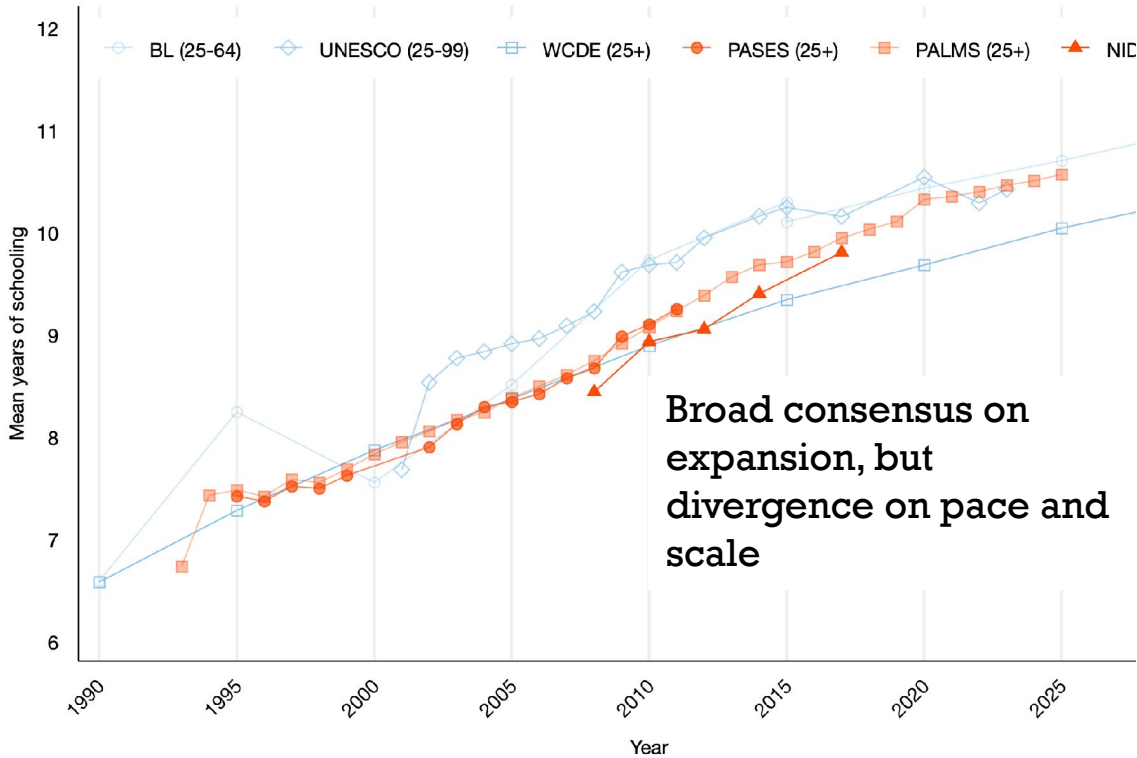


Local Evidence



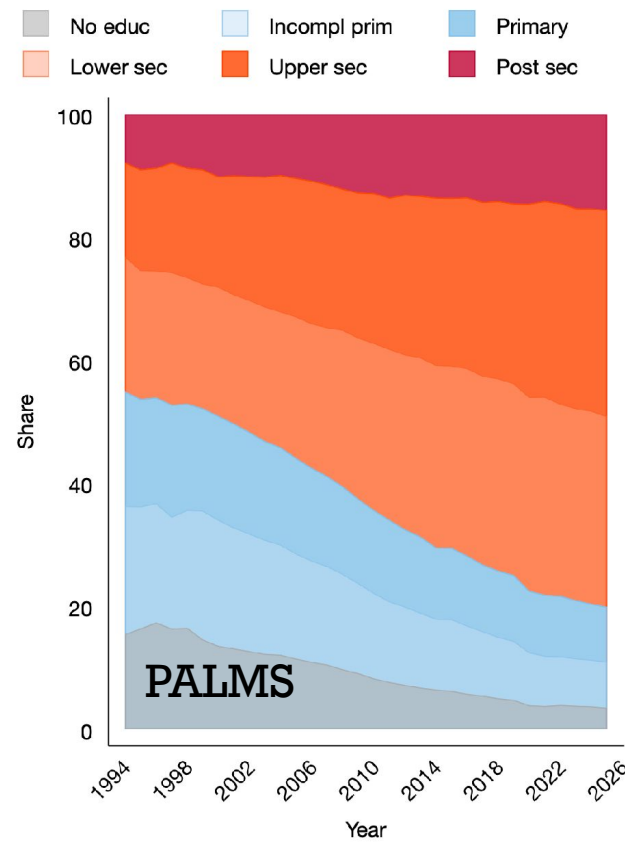
While continental overviews provide vital context, policy is enacted at the **country level**. Incorporating multiple local education data sources allows us to build profiles that draw directly on localized realities while remaining comparable across borders.

Mean years of schools in South Africa over time

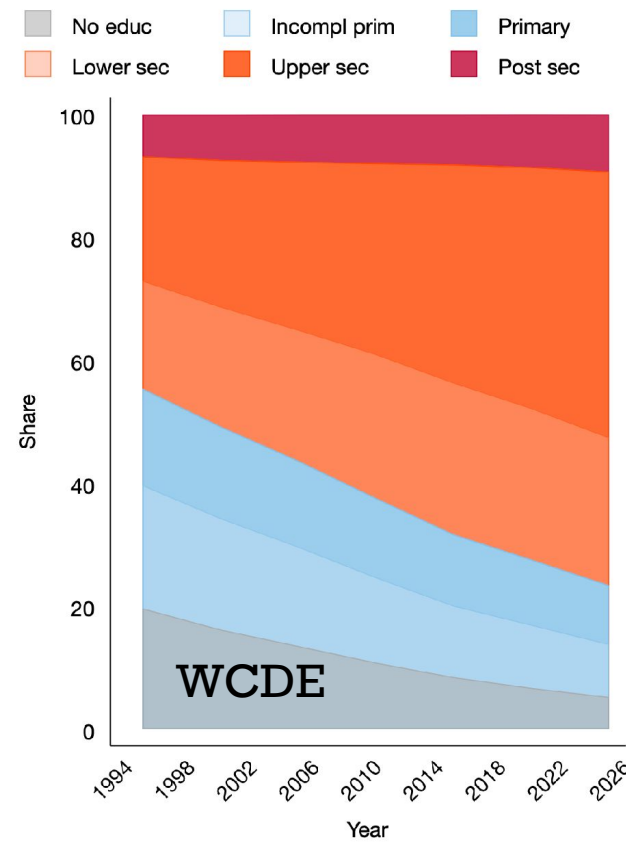


Note: PASES and PALMS are weighted using cross entropy weights. PASES stops in 2011 as the weights do not exist beyond this. This is because the household benchmarks are derived from the census 10% samples and 2011 is the last census with reliable info.

Highest education level attained, PALMS (age 25+)



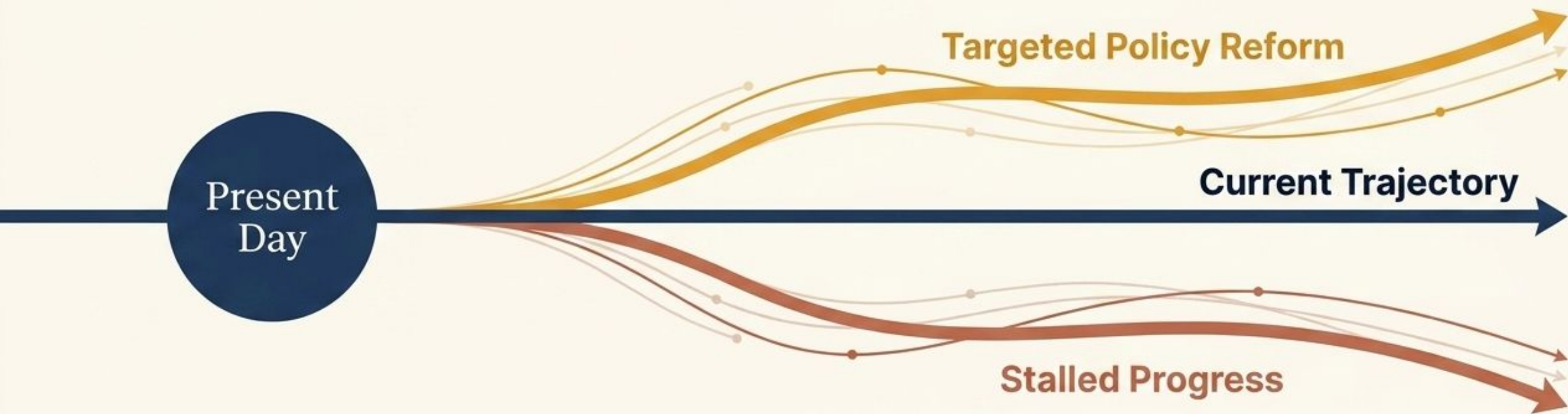
Highest education level attained, WCDE (age 25+)



Reconciling trends in education in South Africa

- Differences arising from varying surveys, reconstruction methods, and modeling adjustments
- Before building projections, we must systematically document and understand these differences rather than accepting any single dataset as definitive.

Using Local Evidence to Explore Future Scenarios

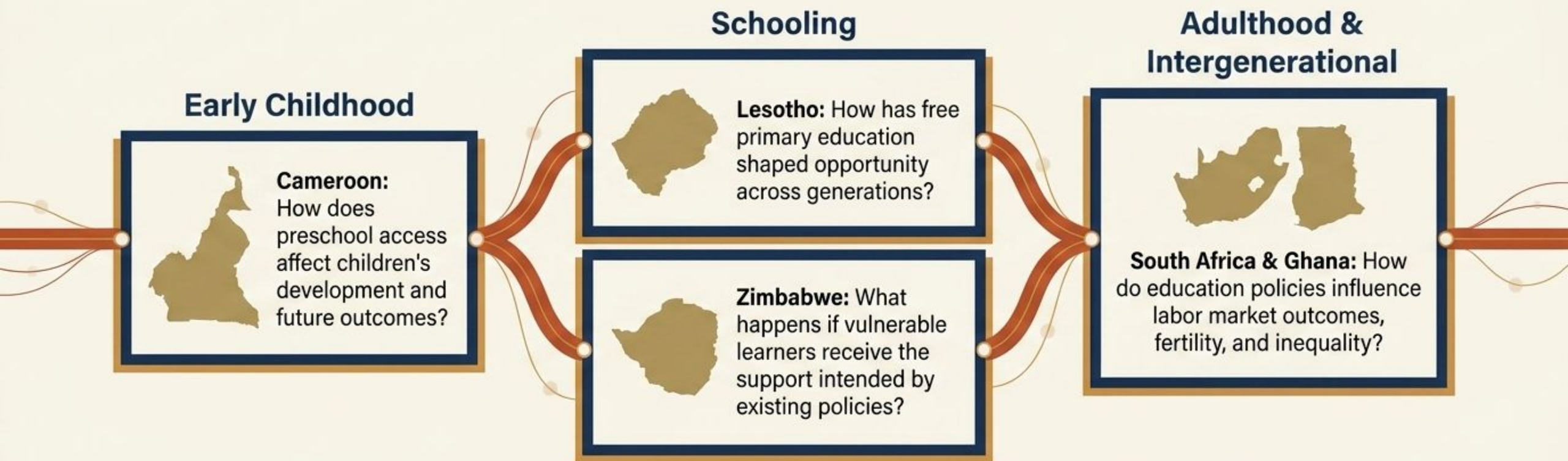


EduPop integrates **locally validated datasets** into a **flexible projection system**.

Rather than producing a **single rigid forecast**, it allows us to **test "what if" scenarios**.

Moving beyond asking what the future looks like, to asking **how specific policy choices shape future outcomes**.

Tracking Human Capital Across the Life Course



Empirical findings from these life stages create a bridge between past achievements and future simulations within EduPop.

Providing the Evidence to Shape Africa's Future

The goal is not only to project Africa's future human capital, but ultimately to help shape it.

Focus on Human Capital

Population growth alone is not enough.

(Human capital matters.)

Long-Term Policy Impact

Education policies shape outcomes for decades.

(Their effects extend across generations.)

Need for Localized Data

African-led research is essential.

(High-quality, localized data systems drive accuracy.)



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**CHALLENGING INEQUALITIES THROUGH POLICY
RELEVANT ACADEMIC RESEARCH.**