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Strengthening System Learning Through Evidence: Inaugural Report of the Regional Community of Practice in the Centre Region

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About the Unlocking Data Initiative

The Unlocking Data Initiative is a community of practice that connects African scholars, NGOs, national statistics offices, and policymakers to improve access to and use of education data. The **Unlocking Data: Scaling Uses and Users of Education Data** project is a collaborative work led by Zizi Afrique Foundation and supported by Education Sub-Saharan Africa, eBase Africa, and the University of Malawi's Centre for Education Research and Training (CERT). The latter project, which is being implemented in Cameroon, Kenya and Malawi, aims to scale up uses and users of data to address the knowledge gap of how to adaptively scale up the effective use of existing education data by policymakers and researchers in Africa.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

CoP Community of Practice

MINEDUB Ministry of Basic Education (Cameroon)

FLN Foundational Literacy and Numeracy

NGO Non-Governmental Organisation

NIS National Institute of Statistics

APEE Association des Parents d'Élèves et Enseignants (Parents and Teachers Association)

SEL Social and Emotional Learning

SIGE Système d'Information de Gestion de l'Éducation (Education Management Information System)

1. Executive Summary

The Government of Cameroon, through MINEDUB, has reaffirmed its commitment to improving foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) outcomes through the routine, credible, and learning-focused use of data and evidence.

The inaugural meeting of the Ministry-led Regional Community of Practice (CoP) on Foundational Learning Data Use in the Centre Region marked a shift from fragmented discussions about data to a structured platform for sustained system learning. The meeting did not aim to collect new data or launch isolated projects. Instead, it served as a deliberate entry point into long-term system strengthening through shared priorities, collective sense-making, and evidence review.

1.1. Key achievements and outputs

- **Operationalisation of a functioning, ministry-led mechanism:** The Regional CoP for the Centre Region was activated as a permanent multi-stakeholder platform to strengthen routine data use for children aged 4-10 years.
- **Learning Agenda produced and validated:** Participants articulated and validated a shared Regional Learning Agenda that articulates the system's priority learning questions across governance, pedagogy, inclusion, parents and communities, financing, decentralisation, resources, and data systems.
- **Evidence Rush completed:** Stakeholders assessed existing evidence against the Learning Agenda using the "traffic light approach", highlighting where it is strong, partial, or weak using the traffic light approach for learning-focused decision-making.
- **Candid examination of incentives and trust:** Participants identified fear of sanctions or audits, competition for funding and projects, selective reporting practices, and weak feedback loops as structural drivers of poor data quality and low data use.
- **Governance arrangements endorsed:** While plenary time did not allow full finalisation, the proposed governance mechanism was shared through the official CoP communication forum, discussed further, and endorsed by members. It establishes MINEDUB as the institutional chair and eBASE Africa as the Technical Secretariat, with task-based working groups aligned to priority learning questions.

1.2. Core breakthrough

The meeting helped reframe data from an instrument of control and compliance toward an instrument for learning and improvement, creating a foundation for trust, collaboration, and sustained coordination in the Centre Region.

2. Introduction and Strategic Context

2.1. Background and institutional rationale

The Government of Cameroon, through the Ministry of Basic Education (MINEDUB), has reaffirmed its commitment to strengthening foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) outcomes through evidence-based decision-making. However, recent analyses, including the national situational analysis ([Pambe et al., 2025](#)) and the evidence gap map ([Pambe et al., 2025](#)), have highlighted persistent systemic challenges in the education data ecosystem. These challenges include fragmented data sources, weak feedback loops between data producers and decision-makers, limited trust in data credibility, and insufficient use of evidence to inform policy, planning, and classroom practice.

Discussions during the meeting further underscored that these challenges are not solely technical. Participants repeatedly pointed to incentive structures, fear of sanctions or audits, competition for funding and projects, and selective reporting practices as key drivers of poor data quality and limited data use.

In response, MINEDUB, in partnership with eBASE Africa under the Unlocking Data Initiative, initiated the establishment of Ministry-led Regional Communities of Practice (CoPs). These CoPs are designed as permanent, multi-stakeholder platforms to strengthen the routine use of data and evidence for improving foundational learning outcomes for children aged 4 -10 years (early grades).

The Yaoundé meeting marked the inaugural operationalisation of the Regional CoP for the Centre Region.

2.2. The challenge

The meeting surfaced a set of reinforcing constraints that limit credible, learning focused evidence use:

- **Fragmentation:** Multiple actors such as ministry departments, councils, NGOs, researchers hold relevant evidence, but it is distributed across institutions with limited synthesis and coordination.
- **Weak decision value of available data:** While many sources exist, much of the information has limited value for learning oriented decisions because it is not sufficiently linked to classroom practice or learning outcomes.
- **Weak evidence for determining learning:** Evidence is weakest for classroom practice, inclusion effectiveness, learner motivation, and parental engagement,

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limiting the ability to identify what works in classrooms and to target improvement efforts effectively.

- **Trust and political economy constraints:** Participants noted that manipulation or selective use of data can be driven by fear of audits, funding-related expectations, or competition for projects.

2.3. Objective

The purpose of the inaugural meeting was not to collect new data or to design isolated projects. In line with the approved Terms of Reference, the meeting sought to:

- Operationalise the Regional CoP as a functioning, ministry-led mechanism
- Activate core CoP functions through practical, structured exercises
- Establish a shared regional Learning Agenda
- Test collaborative approaches to evidence review and prioritisation
- Lay the foundations for sustained coordination, trust, and system learning

In practical terms, the meeting delivered a validated Regional Learning Agenda, completed an Evidence Rush assessment, and advanced a proposed governance mechanism to support follow-up coordination and implementation.

3. Methodology and Participation

3.1. Methodological approach

The workshop facilitation followed a structured three-phase approach, informed by the Unlocking Data Initiative's Guidance Note on Developing Research Agenda ([↑Lawson et al., 2026](#)). This approach was designed to move stakeholders from passive recipients of information to active co-creators of the Regional Learning Agenda.

Phase I: Presenting the Evidence Gap Map (EGM)

The first phase focused on grounding all participants in a shared understanding of the existing evidence landscape before co-creation could begin. Consistent with the Guidance Note ([↑Lawson et al., 2026](#)), this was achieved in three steps. First, facilitators walked participants through the EGM, explaining it as a tool that highlights existing and missing evidence on foundational learning, and orientating participants on how to interpret its structure including the sources of information and the coding framework used. Second, The EGM presentation was made interactive: rather than a one-way presentation, participants were invited to interrogate the map through guided questions such as “Which gap is most critical to you as a researcher, decision maker on FLN practitioner?”

Phase II: The Co-creation Session

The second phase operationalised the “Clinic to Workshop”. Consistent with the Guidance Note’s emphasis on deliberate stakeholder selection and the formation of a thematic groups ([Lawson et al., 2026](#)), the four pre-workshop clinics served as a safe space in which education officials, local governance actors, researchers, and civil society actors could freely surface their priorities and proposed contributions without the inhibiting effect of cross-sector power dynamics. These structure inputs were brought into the plenary as stakeholders briefs. During the main convergence, participants were organised into mixed working groups for diverse contributions. Facilitated activities included coming up with research priorities and the evidence rush exercises were then used to generate structured dialogue on what evidence exists, what is missing, and what action is required for each proposed learning question.

Phase III: Developing research priorities

The third phase translated the outputs of the thematic group work into a formal ranked set of research priorities. Facilitators first reviewed and consolidated all thematic and priority questions generated across the groups, resolving overlapping proposals. Participants then engaged in a ranking exercise to determine which questions were most critical for the 2020-2026 cycle, assessed against criteria including the severity of the evidence gap, the feasibility of research in a conflict affected context, and the potential impact on policy and planning.

3.3. Participants and institutional anchoring

The meeting brought together 26 stakeholders (8 women and 18 men), reflecting the full education data ecosystem. This composition was reported to make participation transparent and to signal attention to inclusion in convening across system actors.

Participants included:

- Regional and divisional officials of MINEDUB
- Representatives of the National Institute of Statistics and related agencies
- Local authorities and councils
- Civil society organisations and NGOs working on foundational learning
- Researchers and academics
- School heads and education practitioners

This diversity was intentional and aligned with the CoP’s Terms of Reference, which emphasise that the use of credible evidence requires interaction among data producers, intermediaries, and decision-makers.

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MINEDUB provided leadership and institutional legitimacy, while eBASE Africa acted as the Technical Secretariat responsible for facilitation, documentation, and technical support.

The participants' list is referenced in the annexe.

4. The Regional Learning Agenda

The first working session focused on articulating what the system needs to learn. When analysed collectively, consolidated and validated in plenary, outputs revealed a coherent demand for learning across stakeholders rather than a fragmented set of concerns.

4.1. What the system needs to learn, key themes

A shift from access to learning quality

Across groups, the dominant focus shifted from access (enrolment, infrastructure, and coverage) toward learning quality and effectiveness. Questions centred on pedagogy, teacher practice, learner engagement, inclusion, and the conditions under which children acquire foundational skills. This emphasis reflected frustration with reforms that improve access, for example, investments focused primarily on infrastructure or learning materials rather than on changes in classroom practice, without demonstrable gains in learning outcomes.

Governance framed as a learning problem

Participants framed governance as a learning problem rather than only an administrative issue. They emphasised how coordination failures, weak accountability, unclear roles and broken feedback mechanisms undermine learning outcomes. They further noted that data is often perceived as an instrument of control rather than a tool for learning, reinforcing defensive reporting behaviours.

Inclusion as an unresolved implementation gap

Inclusion and equity were consistently prioritised, particularly for learners with disabilities, displaced children, and those in peri-urban or otherwise vulnerable settings. Participants questioned how inclusion policies are operationalised and why implementation remains uneven at the school level.

Recognition of non-school determinants of learning

The Learning Agenda also recognised non-school determinants of learning, including parents and communities, learner motivation, and age of school entry.

Taken together, the Learning Agenda suggests that the system is not confused about its challenges, but constrained in its ability to learn from them.

4.2. The Learning Agenda, consolidated priority domains and questions

The following Learning Agenda was consolidated during the meeting and validated in plenary as the analytical reference framework for the CoP. It will be used to structure CoP learning cycles and prioritise evidence synthesis and review against agreed learning questions.

Domain 1: Governance and system coherence

1. How do coordination and accountability arrangements across central, decentralised, and school levels affect foundational learning outcomes?
2. Where do feedback mechanisms between schools, councils, and the Ministry fail to inform corrective action?
3. Is there a case for a dedicated national policy or strategic framework focused specifically on foundational learning, and how might this improve coherence and accountability?

Domain 2: Pedagogy and teacher practice

1. Which classroom practices are most consistently associated with improved foundational literacy and numeracy outcomes?
2. To what extent do current teacher training and supervision approaches influence classroom instruction and learner progress?

Domain 3: Inclusion, equity, and social and emotional learning

1. Which inclusive education approaches are effective for learners with disabilities and other vulnerable groups?
2. Why do inclusive education policies encounter persistent implementation challenges at the school level?
3. How do social and emotional learning competencies influence foundational learning outcomes, and how are these competencies currently supported within classrooms?

Domain 4: Parents, communities, and learner behaviour

1. How does parental and community engagement shape early grade learning outcomes?
2. What role do learner motivation and attitudes toward schooling play in learning trajectories?
3. How does the age of school entry affect foundational learning progression?

Domain 5: Financing, decentralisation, and resources

1. How do education investments translate into learning supportive conditions at the school level?
2. How do financing arrangements between the State and local councils affect the quality and equity of foundational learning provision?
3. What accountability mechanisms exist to ensure that decentralised education spending supports learning outcomes rather than administrative compliance alone

Domain 6: Technology and education data systems

1. How can existing education information systems better support learning focused decision making?
2. Which digital tools are relevant, credible, and appropriate for improving data timeliness, analysis, and feedback at different system levels?

5. The Evidence Rush Findings

5.1. Evidence Rush purpose and approach

The Evidence Rush assessed existing data and evidence against the Regional Learning Agenda to identify what is already known, highlight evidence gaps, avoid duplicative data collection, and inform the prioritisation of future analytical work. The assessment focused on the availability and usefulness of evidence for learning-focused decision-making. In this exercise, “evidence” included administrative data, inspection reports, SIGE outputs, NGO reports, and academic studies, and the assessment was based on rapid stakeholder judgement rather than a formal systematic review.

5.2. Reflections from Working Session 2: What the system actually knows

Data abundance, limited decision value: Participants identified a wide range of existing sources, but judged much of the information to have limited value for learning-focused decisions because it is oriented toward inputs and compliance rather than learning processes and outcomes.

Weak evidence for determining learning: Evidence was weakest for classroom practice, inclusion effectiveness, learner motivation, and parental engagement, limiting the ability to identify what works in classrooms and to target improvement efforts.

Fragmentation as a structural constraint: Evidence relevant to foundational learning is distributed across multiple actors and institutions (e.g., MINEDUB units, local councils, NGOs, and researchers), limiting synthesis and coordinated use.

Trust, incentives, and political economy dynamics: Participants reported that manipulation or selective use of data by schools, non-state actors, and public institutions, driven by fear of audits, funding expectations, or competition for projects. These exchanges reinforced that data quality is embedded in incentive and power structures.

The Evidence Rush applied a traffic-light interpretation of evidence strength:

-  Strong evidence sufficient to inform immediate analysis or decision making.
-  Partial evidence exists but is incomplete, weakly synthesised, or poorly linked to learning outcomes.
-  Weak evidence is largely absent or anecdotal and not sufficient for learning focused decision.

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Table 1 summarises the Evidence Rush results by domain using the traffic-light system.

Table 1. Evidence Rush consolidated overview using the Traffic Light system

Learning domain	Status (traffic light)	Main existing sources	Key observations for learning focused decisions
Governance and coordination	●	Administrative data, inspection reports, SIGE outputs	Evidence describes structures and compliance with a weak linkage to learning outcomes
Pedagogy and classroom practice	●	Inspection records, teacher training data	Limited classroom-level evidence on effective practices
Inclusion and equity	●	NGO reports, policy documents	Scarce evidence on the effectiveness of inclusive approaches
Social and emotional learning (SEL)	●	Isolated project reports	No systematic data or monitoring
Parental engagement	●	APEE records, NGO studies	Evidence is fragmented and anecdotal evidence with limited synthesis
Learner motivation and behaviour	●	Isolated academic studies	Significant evidence gap
Financing and learning impact	●	Budgets, infrastructure data	Limited analysis of value for money or learning returns
Education data systems (SIGE)	●	SIGE yearbooks, administrative statistics	Robust input data, but learning indicators are underutilised, limiting learning focused decision value

Evidence is more available for inputs, structures, and compliance than for learning processes and outcomes. Fragmentation across institutions continues to limit evidence synthesis and the coordinated use of evidence for decision-making. Trust, incentives,

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and governance arrangements shape data quality and reporting behaviour, affecting the credibility and usefulness of evidence.

6. Practical realities shaping evidence credibility and use

While the meeting was not designed as a testimonial session, plenary discussions and group work surfaced practical realities that shape the credibility and use of evidence in the Centre Region. These reflections help explain the Evidence Rush ratings in Table 1. These realities highlight that evidence-use challenges are not only technical; they are also shaped by incentives, trust, and how data is experienced by actors across the system.

Data culture and defensive reporting: Participants noted that data can be perceived as an instrument of control, sanctions, or audits rather than a tool for learning. This perception contributes to selective reporting and defensive behaviours that undermine the credibility of data.

Incentives, funding competition, and selective disclosure: The meeting highlighted how competition for funding and projects can influence what is reported and how it is reported among both state and non-state actors. This dynamic can reinforce selective disclosure practices and constrain shared learning across institutions.

Where evidence is weakest: Across groups, participants consistently identified the weakest evidence areas as classroom practice, inclusion effectiveness, learner motivation, and parental engagement. This evidence gap was treated as a barrier to improving learning quality, limiting the ability to identify what works and to target support at the school and classroom levels.

Feedback loops and the cost of the current data architecture: Participants described weak feedback loops to schools and delays in decision-making as costs associated with the current data architecture. These costs affect the ability of actors at different levels to act on evidence in real time, see recommendations in Section 7.

7. Strategic Outcomes: Governance of the Community of Practice

The meeting was expected to conclude with agreement on governance arrangements. Due to time constraints, the plenary discussion could not be finalised. A proposed mechanism was presented during the meeting and then shared through the official CoP communication forum. Following further exchanges, members endorsed and approved the mechanism.

Agreed governance arrangement

- MINEDUB serves as the institutional chair of the CoP
- eBASE Africa serves as the technical secretariat
- Task-based working groups are aligned with priority learning questions
- A shared communication platform supports coordination and validation of outputs

7.1. Key insights

This subsection captures the main themes raised by participants, using cautious wording where claims reflect perceptions and dynamics rather than independently verified effects.

It also makes explicit where incentives and governance across both state and non-state actors shape reporting behaviours and learning.

1. **Incentives and governance appear to be key constraints:** participants repeatedly frame data quality and data use challenges as shaped by incentive structures, fear of sanctions or audits, competition for funding and projects (among both state and non-state actors), and selective reporting practices, which together can discourage honest reporting and meaningful use.
2. **Positioning of the CoP is long-term rather than event-based:** The inaugural meeting was designed *not* to collect new data or design isolated projects, but to operationalise the CoP, activate its functions, and lay foundations for sustained coordination, trust, and system learning.
3. **Shift in stakeholder demand is toward learning quality:** Across working groups, the dominant “learning demand” focuses on pedagogy, teacher practice, learner engagement, inclusion, and the real conditions under which children acquire foundational skills, reflecting concerns that reforms that improve access or inputs do not necessarily translate into learning gains.
4. **Governance is being reframed as a learning problem:** Participants emphasised how coordination failures, weak accountability, unclear roles, and broken feedback mechanisms can undermine learning outcomes, and how data can be perceived as a tool for control rather than learning, reinforcing defensive reporting behaviours.
5. **Inclusion remains an implementation gap:** Inclusion for learners with disabilities and other vulnerable groups was consistently prioritised, with questions centred on what works, for whom and why implementation remains uneven at the school level
6. **Determinants beyond the school are increasingly being recognised:** The learning agenda incorporates parental and community engagement, learner motivation, attitudes toward schooling, and age of school entry, reflecting a shared view that learning outcomes are shaped beyond the classroom

7. **An abundance of data does not automatically translate into decision value:** Participants identified many data sources but judged much of it insufficiently useful for learning-focused decisions, particularly because it is oriented toward inputs, structures, and compliance rather than learning processes and outcomes.
8. **Evidence is weakest where learning is produced:** The evidence review highlighted weak or absent evidence on classroom practice, the effectiveness of inclusion, learner motivation and behaviour, social and emotional learning (SEL), and parental engagement.
9. **Fragmentation limits synthesis and use:** Evidence related to foundational learning is distributed across multiple actors and institutions, and the lack of coordination and synthesis constrains collective sense-making and practical use.
10. **Political economy dynamics are explicit:** The meeting surfaced candid discussions about how audits, funding expectations, and project competition can shape what is reported and how it is presented, underscoring that data credibility is linked to power and incentives.
11. **Validation occurred asynchronously, signalling that both constraints and commitments:** Governance arrangements were not finalised in plenary due to time constraints, but were shared in the CoP communication forum and later endorsed, suggesting the platform can support follow-through beyond formal sessions.

7.2. Recommendations

Building on the key insights from the inaugural meeting, the following recommendations focus on operationalising the CoP, addressing incentive and trust constraints, improving the decision value of evidence through synthesis, closing priority evidence gaps, and strengthening feedback loops to schools and councils.

7.2.1. Make the CoP operational with clear routines, outputs, and accountability

1. **Adopt a simple annual CoP workplan anchored in the Learning Agenda domains.** Translate the validated Learning Agenda into a calendar of quarterly learning cycles (one to two domains per quarter), with defined outputs such as synthesis briefs, dashboard prototypes, or practice notes.
2. **Formalise task-based working groups with explicit deliverables and timelines:** Use the agreed governance model (MINEDUB Chair, eBASE Africa Secretariat, working groups) to assign each group a domain, a lead, and a minimum set of products per cycle.
3. **Strengthen the CoP communication platform as the default validation channel:** Since governance endorsement occurred through the forum, adopt a

standard protocol for asynchronous review and sign-off of outputs to reduce reliance on plenary time.

7.2.2. Address incentives and trust explicitly, not implicitly

4. **Introduce a “learning safe space” commitment to reduce defensive reporting:** Establish a written norm that CoP evidence review is used for improvement and support, not sanction, to counter fear of audits and the perception of data as control.
5. **Create incentives for truthful reporting and evidence sharing:** Recognise and reward institutions or councils that share high-quality data or complete syntheses (eg, public acknowledgement, priority technical support, or visibility in CoP products) to counter selective disclosure driven by competition.
6. **Map incentive risks that distort reporting and propose mitigations:** Working groups should document where funding expectations, project competition, or audit pressure affects data behaviours, then propose practical safeguards such as data anonymisation, peer verification, or shared interpretation notes.

7.2.3. Improve evidence usefulness by prioritising synthesis before new data collection

7. **Start with evidence synthesis for “partial” domains before commissioning new studies:** The Evidence Rush indicates that multiple domains have partial, fragmented evidence; consolidate and assess what exists first to avoid duplication.
8. **Develop short “decision value” criteria for evidence in the CoP:** adopt a checklist that tests whether evidence links to learning outcomes, supports action at a specific level, and includes workable feedback loops to schools.

7.2.4. Close the evidence gap where learning is produced

9. **Prioritise rapid learning studies on classroom practice and pedagogy.** Where classroom evidence practice is limited, conduct targeted observation or coaching-linked analyses to identify practices associated with improved FLN outcomes.
10. **Build a practical evidence stream on inclusion focused on implementation barriers and what works:** convert inclusion questions into an implementation learning agenda that documents effective approaches for learners with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, and explains why policies stall at the school level.
11. **Launch a focused evidence effort on learner motivation, behaviour, and SEL:** With SEL and learner motivation identified as weak evidence areas, begin with small-scale monitoring frameworks and consolidate existing isolated reports into a usable baseline.

- 12. Strengthen measurement of parental and community engagement using existing records:** Where engagement evidence is fragmented and anecdotal, harmonise how APEE and NGO records are captured and synthesised, and link findings to school-level actions.

7.2.5. Fix feedback loops so evidence reaches the classroom and local decision-makers

- 13. Institutionalise a feedback product for schools and councils after each CoP cycle:** Given weak feedback mechanisms, produce a simple “what we learned and what we will change” note after each quarter, with practical recommendations for schools and councils.
- 14. Link evidence products to specific decision points in planning and supervision:** Align CoP outputs with ministry planning, inspection cycles, teacher supervision routines, and council-level education investments, so evidence is used rather than archived.

8. Conclusion and Next Steps

The inaugural meeting of the Regional CoP on Foundational Learning Data Use in the Centre Region marked a shift from fragmented discussions about data toward a more candid examination of learning quality, governance, incentives, and trust. By articulating a shared Learning Agenda, reviewing available evidence, and acknowledging political economy dynamics, participants laid the groundwork for a more credible, learning-centred use of evidence in the region.

Immediate next steps (anchored in meeting outputs)

1. Use the validated Learning Agenda as the reference framework for CoP analysis and collective learning activities.
2. Prioritise evidence synthesis in domains classified as  and initiate targeted learning activities to address domains classified as .
3. Activate task-based working groups aligned with priority learning questions, and use the shared communication platform to coordinate and validate.

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