UNLOCKING DATA

LEARNING AGENDA

The Bamenda Charter Research Mandate: The Northwest Regional Learning Agenda on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy

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About this document

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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 the use of data and its users to address the knowledge gap on how to adaptively scale up the effective use of existing education data by policymakers and researchers in Africa. To learn more about

us, visit https://unlockingdata.africa/. Our evidence library can be found at https://docs.unlockingdata.africa/lib/

Contents

Figures and tables

Abbreviations and acronyms

CoP	Community of Practice
UCCC/NW	United Councils and Cities of Cameroon (Northwest)
MINEDUB-NW	Ministry of Basic Education (Northwest)
PWDs	Persons with Disabilities
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EMIS(SIGE)	Système d'Information et de Gestion de l'Éducation (Education Management Information System)
NIS	National Institute of Statistics
BUST	Bamenda University of Science and Technology
HTTC	Higher Technical Teacher Training College (inferred from context in related documents)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
KAP	Knowledge, Attitude, and Practice
AWA	Association for the Welfare for the people with Abinism

1. Executive Summary

In the conflict-affected Northwest Region of Cameroon, reliable data is an operational necessity for the education sector. The "Unlocking Data" workshop series established the region's first Community of Practice (CoP) on the use of foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) data and evidence, bridging the critical "trust gap" between government statistics and reality on the ground.

Key Achievements:

- **Diverse and inclusive participation:** The main workshop brought together 37 high-level stakeholders, achieving near-perfect gender parity (with 19 female and 18 male participants). Crucially, the event prioritised inclusion, featuring 3 Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) and 1 representative from the Association for the Welfare of People with Abinism (AWA), ensuring that vulnerable voices were part of the decision-making process.
- **Strategic outcome:** The ratification of "The Bamenda Charter," a binding regional framework that establishes protocols for safe data sharing and mandates an 'offline-first' digital architecture.
- **Main objective achieved**: The successful formulation and adoption of the Regional Learning Agenda, consisting of 8 priority research questions that will guide data collection and synthesis for the next 18 months.

Core breakthrough: The workshop moved stakeholders from suspicion to collaboration. Government officials formally agreed to integrate "shadow indicators" (indicators which CSOs generate but are not usually considered by the government as official data) from Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) such as teacher absenteeism and real-time displacement figures, total studying hours, to fill the blind spots in official statistics caused by the crisis.

2. Background & Strategic Context

Foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN), the ability of a child to read a simple sentence and perform basic arithmetic by the end of primary school is the bedrock of all subsequent learning. When these foundations are weak, the consequences compound across a learner's entire educational trajectory and ultimately, across a country's human capital development. In the Northwest region of Cameroon, this challenge is not merely academic. The region faces a dual crisis in which an ongoing socio-political conflict has severely disrupted schooling, weakened routine data systems, and depended on pre-existing gaps in foundational learning outcomes.

Despite this difficult context, a significant and largely untapped opportunity exists. Across the region, data on foundational learning is being generated every day by school heads completing administrative returns, by CSOs tracking teacher punctuality, by university researchers producing theses, and by local councils filing infrastructure needs assessments. The problem is not a shortage of data. It is the fragmentation, mistrust, and lack of coordination that prevent this information from being synthesised into actionable evidence for decision-makers.

It is in response to this challenge that the Unlocking Data Initiative, led by eBASE Africa, The Regional Delegation of Basic Education, North West (MINEDUB) and the United Councils and Cities of Cameroon - Northwest (UCCC/NW) convened the Northwest Regional Community of Practice (CoP) on Foundational Learning Data. This CoP is designed as a multi-stakeholder platform that brings together government officials, local councils, civil society organisations, researchers, and education practitioners to collaboratively produce, share, and use FLN data to improve learning outcomes.

This Learning Agenda document reports on the outcomes of the inaugural CoP workshop series held in November 2025 in Bamenda. It presents the eight consensus research questions and two alternate questions adopted by the CoP as its mandate for the 2025 - 2026 cycle, the findings of the Evidence Rush exercise that mapped existing data against those questions, and the key insights and recommendations that emerged from the deliberations. Most significantly, it documents the ratification of the Bamenda Charter, a binding regional framework that sets the governance, ethics, and technical protocols for collaborative data use in the Northwest Region. Together, these outputs mark the beginning of a new, evidence-driven chapter in the region's approach to foundational learning.

2.1. The challenge

The Northwest Region faces a dual crisis: a persistent gap in foundational literacy/numeracy (FLN) and an ongoing socio-political conflict which disrupts schooling and weaken routine data systems.

- **The "Trust Gap":** A pre-workshop analysis identified a "wide divide." Government officials questioned the credibility of CSOs data, while CSOs questioned the neutrality of government data, and which most of the time, unavailable.
- **The "Data Silos"**: Critical data exists in university theses, NGO reports, and council filings, but is fragmented and often legally ambiguous.

Together, these constraints limit timely decision-making and weaken accountability for foundational learning outcomes.

2.2. Workshop objectives

This initiative aimed to co-create a Regional Learning Agenda on foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) to guide the regional research and data priorities.

1. **Map the Evidence**: Identify what reliable data exists versus what is missing for research priority.
2. **Build trust**: Create a neutral platform (the CoP) for data verification.
3. **Localise policy**: Interprete and operationalise national statistical laws to the realities of a crisis zone where online reporting is often impossible.

3. Methodology & Participation

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 (20-21 November), 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

Northwest FLN Learning Agenda | Bamenda Charter

impact on policy and planning. Finally, the eight consensus learning questions were formally adopted by the plenary as a Regional Learning Agenda, ratified under the Bamenda Charter.

3.1. Participant profile

The main workshop was meticulously curated to ensure diverse representation across sectors, gender, and inclusion of vulnerable groups:

Table 1. *Profile of participants*

Participant characteristic	Number of participants	Key roles/representation
Total Participants	37	Curated mix of subnational policymakers, data producers, and grassroots implementers.
Gender (Female)	19 (51%)	Gender distribution (as recorded for participants)
Gender (Male)	18 (49%)	Gender distribution (as recorded for participants)
Persons with disabilities (PWDs)	3 (of 37; ~8%)	Representatives who highlighted critical gaps, such as a lack of data on persons living with disabilities.
Marginalised groups	1 (of 37~3%)	Representative from the geographically isolated indigenous communities.

Figure 1. *Group photograph of participants at the CoP workshop on FLN data, Bamenda, Northwest Region, Cameroon, [insert date].*

4. The Regional Learning Agenda

The primary objective of the workshop was to define the region's research priorities collectively. After intense deliberation, the CoP adopted these eight consensus learning questions as the mandate for 2025-2026:

1. How can we strengthen teacher retention, especially in rural areas?
2. How can we motivate data actors to share data in a trustworthy, timely and safe manner?
3. How can we effectively collect and use data on teachers' Knowledge, Attitude, and Practice (KAP)?
4. How can educational institutions adapt to better accommodate learners with disabilities?
5. Why are FLN outcomes declining despite the increasing number of trained teachers?
6. How can we strengthen parental and caregiver involvement in children's learning?
7. Which factors most influence learning outcomes in the Northwest Region?
8. What support do FLN stakeholders need to produce, report, share and use data effectively?

4.1. Other Research Questions Identified

Additional research questions were identified during the workshop discussions, but were not prioritised within the eight consensus learning questions for the 2025–2026 mandate. These include

1. To what extent do existing national education policies on foundational literacy and numeracy address learning outcomes?
2. Which social and emotional support structures are most effective in helping learners build resilience and maintain focus in mathematics?

5. The Evidence Rush Findings

During the "Evidence Rush" session, participants mapped existing data sources against the newly adopted Learning Agenda for each learning question. For the purpose of this exercise, "evidence" included administrative data sources, assessment/exam data, and published or unpublished research and reports. The findings were categorised using a traffic light system:

🟢 **Green:** Sufficient evidence exists (available evidence is adequate to inform decisions now).

🟡 **Yellow:** Some evidence exists but is incomplete, fragmented or requires harmonisation across sources.

🔴 **Red:** No reliable evidence was identified during the session; new data collection and/or primary research is required.

Table 2. *Evidence rush summary*

Number	Research question	Status	Existing evidence sources	Action required
1	Teacher retention (rural).	🟡	MINEDUB Postings, Council Payrolls	Improve data: Harmonise "posted" lists (teachers assigned on paper) with "actual presence" lists (teachers physically present and teaching) to identify gaps.
2	Motivating data sharing.	🔴	No reliable sources were identified during the session.	New evidence: Commission a study on trust and incentives for data sharing among key data actors (e.g., schools, inspectorate, councils, CSOs/NGOs), including incentives such as feedback loops, recognition, resourcing, and protection protocols.
3	Teacher KAP data	🟡	Inspectorate reports; university theses.	Improve data: Standardise KAP assessment tools across the region
4	Disability accommodation	🔴	CSO reports (fragmented).	New evidence: Collect data on disabilities that are often under-identified (e.g., autism and trauma-related needs) to enable targeted support planning and resource allocation.
5	Falling FLN outcomes.	🟢	World Bank, PASEC, and UNESCO reports.	Use now: Synthesise existing reports to guide policy and contextualise implications for conflict-affected settings in the Northwest Region.

Northwest FLN Learning Agenda | Bamenda Charter

6	Parental involvement.	🟡	Parent–Teacher Association minutes; university theses.	Improve data: Digitise PTA records to track trends over time, capturing at minimum meeting date, attendance, agenda items, decisions, and follow-up actions, and agree where records will be stored and accessed (school, council, inspectorate, and/or CoP repository).
7	Factors influencing learning.	🟢	Inspectorate reports; GCE Board results.	Use now: Analyse associations between exam results and school environment data (e.g., teacher attendance, class size, safety, WASH, and displacement-related disruptions), noting that correlation does not necessarily imply causation.
8	Stakeholder support needs.	🔴	No reliable sources were identified during the session.	New evidence: Conduct a needs assessment for data producers and users, producing outputs such as a skills matrix, a prioritised training plan, governance actions, and tool requirements.

6. Voices from the Field: The Reality on the Ground

i.   Governance: "Not Just Benches"

The President of UCCC/NW, Denis Awoh Ndong set the tone for a new era of local data ownership, stating:

"The law on decentralisation transferred new responsibilities... We are no longer merely providers of benches and classrooms; we are now co-managers of the entire learning process in our municipalities."

Implication for the agenda: This statement reinforces councils' role as co-managers of learning, strengthening the case for integrating council-level data and planning processes into the regional FLN evidence system.

ii.   The "Needy School" paradox

A critical finding regarding teacher allocation data emerged during the discussions. A communiqué from the Ministry of Basic Education (MINEDUB) dated October 8, 2024, regarding the recruitment of 3,000 teachers explicitly references "les besoins des écoles nécessiteuses" (the needs of needy schools). According to MINEDUB school is classified as "needy" if it has fewer than three teachers. The government deploys staff to address this issue. However, due to an ageing workforce and high retirement rates, the school often reverts to "needy" status within a year.

- **Data insight**: The region has received 1,300 trained teachers since 2018, yet the effective presence in classrooms remains low due to this "revolving door" of retirement and displacement.

Implication for the agenda: This paradox underscores the need to reconcile deployment records with verified school-level presence and retention tracking so staffing decisions reflect reality, not only administrative postings.

iii.   The "Climbing Trees" reality

The Regional Chief of Statistics at MINEDUB, Mr. Bauket George highlighted during the plenary, the physical danger of data collection. In remote zones like Nkambe and Ako, enumerators often have to "climb trees or hills" just to get a network signal to transmit data. This connectivity challenge renders mandatory online reporting tools (such as SIGE) inaccessible to many remote schools and data collectors.

Northwest FLN Learning Agenda | Bamenda Charter

Implication for the agenda: This supports the rationale for offline-first reporting approaches and alternative submission pathways (e.g., store-and-forward, periodic syncing, or supervised uploads at council/inspectorate hubs) to reduce systematic under-reporting.

iv.   **Understanding the Underreporting of Disability Data**

A Head Teacher provided an illustrative testimony on why disability data is missing:

"Some parents refuse to acknowledge the fact that their children have disabilities... especially children with autism. If we have a class of 38 pupils and two refuse to sit, we cannot stop the class. We are forced to take them out."

Implication for the agenda: This points to stigma and limited classroom support structures as drivers of under-identification, which in turn weakens planning for inclusive education services, teacher training, and appropriate learning support.

7. Key Insights

While the workshop successfully launched the CoP, the deliberations revealed deep-seated structural and capacity deficits that currently hinder the region's data ecosystem for FLN planning and accountability.

1. **Limited data literacy and governance awareness:** A significant finding from the working sessions was a fundamental gap in understanding what constitutes high-quality, decision-ready data among non-specialist stakeholders. Many participants, particularly at the grassroots level, were unfamiliar with standard frameworks for data collection, storage, analysis, and use. There is a tendency to view data merely as a form to complete rather than as a rigorous cycle of evidence generation. Without a shared understanding of data ethics and validation protocols, there is a risk that the stakeholders generate high volumes of low-quality information that cannot be used for policy.

2. **The evidence void for strategic priorities:** The formulation of the **Regional Learning Agenda** exposed a critical vulnerability: for several of the newly adopted research questions, no reliable evidence was identified. Questions regarding the motivation for data sharing, the psychosocial needs of learners in crisis zones, and the specific learning outcomes of children with disabilities were classified as "Red" in the Evidence Rush. This implies that the region is currently making high-stakes decisions with limited baseline evidence on some of its most pressing human capital issues, limiting the ability to measure progress over time.

3. **Systemic data failures:, inaccurate and exclusive):** Stakeholders delivered a frank critique of the current administrative data systems, including SIGE (the EMIS platform). Key challenges identified include:
   - **Outdated & inaccurate data:** By the time data from rural councils is manually aggregated and digitised, it is often obsolete. This reduces its usefulness for decisions in a fast-changing crisis context. **The "Decentralisation" gap:** The EMIS system remains heavily centralised and lacks key data elements needed to address foundational learning challenges in the region (e.g., teacher presence/attendance, disruption- or displacement-related interruptions, and disability disaggregation).
   - **Exclusion of PWDs:** Data on Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) is either missing entirely or lacks granularity (grouping all impairments together), rendering it unusable for planning specialised support.
   - **Administrative bias:** The current system focuses heavily on administrative metrics (inputs such as benches and buildings) rather than learning

outcomes (literacy and numeracy proficiency), thereby masking the true depth of the learning crisis.

These insights provide the rationale for the subsequent recommendations on capacity building, filling priority evidence gaps, and modernising data collection approaches in line with offline-first realities.

8. Recommendations

To address these identified challenges and operationalise the Bamenda Charter, the CoP proposes the following strategic recommendations:

1. **Institutional capacity building: data synthesis & management:** To bridge the literacy gap, the CoP must move beyond simple sensitisation. We recommend the immediate organisation of **technical training workshops** focused on the entire data value chain *(collection, cleaning, storage, analysis, synthesis, and use).* These trainings should target all CoP members (council planning officers; inspectorate; school heads; CSO M&E/data staff; university researchers, MINEDUB officials, head teacher), equipping them with the skills to produce data that meets the rigorous standards required by the National Institute of Statistics (INS).

   Suggested outputs: a shared minimum dataset for FLN (including disability-relevant disaggregation), agreed validation/verification steps, and a simple data-sharing protocol aligned with the Charter.

   Operationalising the research agenda: commissioning research.
   Recognising the "Evidence Void," the CoP cannot wait for national surveys to fill the gaps. We recommend **commissioning PhD and Master's students** from regional universities (UBa, BUST) to carry out primary research on the "Red zone" questions. By providing small research grants or technical support to these students, the CoP can cost-effectively generate the missing evidence on teacher retention and psychosocial support while simultaneously building the region's next generation of researchers.

   Implementation note: Ensure all commissioned studies include ethics and safeguarding procedures, conflict-sensitive data collection plans, and clear agreements on data ownership and sharing consistent with the Bamenda Charter.

   Digital modernisation: pilot mobile-based data collection)To address outdated and inaccurate data, the region must pivot to technology that aligns with its infrastructure reality. We recommend **piloting a mobile-based data collection tool** in selected schools. This pilot will test the feasibility of collecting **real-time, accurate data** that captures learning outcomes and PWD indicators directly from the source. Success in this pilot would provide the proof of concept needed to advocate for a region-wide rollout of offline-first digital tools.

Minimum design requirements: offline data entry with later synchronisation; clear user roles (school, council/inspectorate verification); basic data protection (device security, controlled access); and a minimum FLN dataset that aligns with the learning questions and avoids overburdening schools.

9. Conclusion and Next Steps

The inaugural community of practice workshop in the Northwest region represents a landmark moment in the region's approach to education, planning and data governance. Against the backdrop of the prolonged socio-political conflict that has fractured trust, disrupted schooling, and weakened routine data systems, the workshop achieved what many would only consider unlikely. It brought together 37 diverse stakeholders and moved them from suspicion to collaboration. The key deliverables of the process and clear and concrete. The CoP formally adopted eight consensus learning questions as the Regional Learning Agenda, providing the region with its first collectively owned research mandate. The evidence rush exercise produced an honest, traffic-light assessment of the existing evidence landscape, distinguishing where data is sufficient for immediate action, where it exists but requires harmonisation, and where primary research must be commissioned. Most importantly, the stakeholders ratified the Bamenda Charter, a binding governance framework that establishes protocols for the safe data sharing, mandates off-line first digital architecture appropriate to the region's connectivity realities, and creates the institutional structures through which the CoP will operate.

Beyond the tangible outputs, the deeper achievement of this process was a shift in mindset. As the pre and post workshop survey data demonstrate, participants move from being blocked by fundamental "how to begin" obstacles to engage with practical, institutional, and quality challenges of data use. This represents a maturation, from apprehension to problem solving, which is the essential precondition for a functioning evidence ecosystem. The words of Dr. Alang Ernest Wung, on behalf of the Team Lead from eBASE Africa, capture this transition precisely:

"The region does not suffer from a lack of intelligence, but a lack of coordination. We must measure the system that exists, not the system we wish existed."

This insight anchors the entire agenda. The Northwest Region possesses significant intellectual capital , real-time grassroots data, and institutional structures capable of generating meaningful evidence. What has been missing is a shared framework for coordination, trust, and accountability. The Bamenda Charter and the Regional Learning Agenda provide that framework.

Sustaining this momentum will require confronting the structural constraints that the workshop itself surfaced. The evidence void for several high-priority questions particularly around data sharing incentives, psychosocial support for learners in crisis zones, and disability-disaggregated outcomes means that the region is currently making consequential decisions with limited baseline evidence. The limitations of the EMIS/SIGE platform, including its centralised architecture, its focus on administrative inputs rather

Northwest FLN Learning Agenda | Bamenda Charter

than learning outcomes, and its inaccessibility in remote and conflict-affected areas, will not be resolved by goodwill alone. They require deliberate technical investment, policy advocacy, and sustained institutional commitment.

Furthermore, the inclusion agenda remains fragile. The voices of Persons with Disabilities, displaced learners, and geographically isolated communities were represented in this inaugural workshop, but their systematic integration into the region's data architecture , so that they are counted, and therefore served will require dedicated effort.

Next Steps

The CoP has identified three immediate priorities for the 2025 - 2026 implementation cycle:

First, the capacity-building plan will be launched, tailored to the specific needs of each stakeholder group from council planning officers and school heads to CSO data staff and university researchers, equipping them to produce data that meets the standards required for policy use.

Second, the CoP will commission graduate students from regional universities (UBa, BUST, and HTTC) to conduct primary research on the "Red Zone" questions for which no reliable evidence currently exists. By pairing small research grants with technical support, the CoP will cost-effectively generate missing evidence while building the region's next generation of researchers.

Third, a mobile-based, offline-first data collection pilot will be launched in selected schools, testing the feasibility of capturing real-time, accurate FLN and disability-disaggregated data directly at the source providing the proof of concept needed to advocate for a region-wide rollout.

The Northwest CoP has made a credible start. The foundations have been laid in trust, in governance, and in a shared mandate. The measure of success over the next 18 months will be whether that mandate translates into evidence that reaches decision-makers, informs resource allocation, and ultimately improves the foundational learning outcomes of children in the Northwest Region.

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