

What Does Quality Education Cost?

Lessons from the adaptation of Brazil's CAQi model in 4 African countries



Introduction

Debates about education financing often focus on whether governments meet international benchmarks, such as allocating 4–6% of GDP or 15–20% of national budgets to education. While these benchmarks serve as important advocacy tools, evidence increasingly suggests that benchmarks alone are insufficient to ensure quality, equitable and inclusive public education, particularly in contexts where education systems are expanding rapidly, and historical underinvestment remains severe.

Chronic issues such as overcrowded classrooms, teacher shortages, inadequate inclusion support, shortages of learning materials and geographical inequalities continue to affect many education systems, including in countries that may be close to or meet one of the international financing targets. Spending benchmarks matter, but they do not in themselves guarantee the minimum conditions necessary for meaningful teaching and learning.

The African Education Financing Learning Collaborative, funded by Education Out Loud (EOL) and supported by ActionAid International as the learning partner, sought to pilot alternative approaches to understanding the financing requirements for delivering quality education for all learners by focusing more directly on per-student costs.

In this context, the Learning Collaborative drew lessons from Brazil's Custo Aluno-Qualidade Inicial (CAQi) and Custo Aluno-Qualidade (CAQ), developed by the Brazilian Campaign for the Right to Education.² The intention was not to replicate the Brazilian model mechanically, but rather to explore whether aspects of a rights-based, adequacy-oriented costing approach could help strengthen discussions on educational quality, equity, and public financing across different African contexts.

The following sections present reflections on the CAQi/CAQ approach, lessons emerging from pilot processes in several African countries, and an adapted guide for organisations interested in developing rights-based costing approaches within their own contexts.

The action research pilot countries learning from each other.



1. CAQi (Custo Aluno-Qualidade Inicial) is a rights-based education costing methodology developed by the Brazilian Campaign for the Right to Education. It identifies the minimum conditions required for quality education and estimates the financing necessary to provide them equitably.
2. Custo Aluno-Qualidade (CAQ; Student Cost-Quality) is a Brazilian constitutional educational funding mechanism. It uses a two-step framework: CAQi (initial) establishes a baseline minimum standard for public schools, while CAQ is the more developed version which serves as the long-term target to elevate per-student spending to OECD standards.

Part 1. Understanding CAQi/CAQ: principles, politics and methodology

What does quality education require?

Brazil's Custo Aluno-Qualidade Inicial (CAQi) and Custo Aluno-Qualidade (CAQ) are among the few examples of rights-based education costing in practice. Developed by the Brazilian Campaign for the Right to Education from 2002 onwards, the approach begins with a simple but politically important question: *What conditions must exist in every school for quality education to be possible, and how much would that cost?*

Although this seems straightforward, it represents a significant departure from many traditional approaches to education financing. In many countries, education budgets are shaped primarily by what governments believe they can afford within existing fiscal envelopes. CAQi/CAQ reverses this logic. It begins with the minimum conditions necessary to realise the right to education and then asks what financing would be required to make those conditions possible.

This shift — from available resources to the resources necessary to guarantee minimum quality conditions — is one among the defining features of the CAQi approach. It is also aligned with obligations under Article 2(1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and General Comment No. 13 on the Right to Education, which emphasises progressive realisation using the maximum available resources.³

For more than two decades, the Brazilian Campaign has worked to make the idea of “quality education” a concrete, publicly accountable concept. Rather than treating quality largely in terms of test scores or learning outcomes, CAQi/CAQ sought to define the minimum educational conditions necessary for meaningful teaching and learning.

These included adequate teacher salaries and training, manageable class sizes, support staff, safe and accessible infrastructure, water and sanitation, learning materials and digital resources, school feeding, psychosocial support and wider conditions necessary for learners to participate meaningfully in education.

The approach is intentionally input-oriented. It starts from the premise that quality education requires identifiable material and structural conditions.

CAQi/CAQ does not argue that educational quality can be reduced entirely to measurable inputs alone. Relationships, dignity, belonging, curriculum relevance and the wider educational experience all matter deeply. However, the framework recognises that meaningful teaching and learning become extremely difficult where schools lack the basic material conditions necessary for education.

The process, therefore, becomes more than a technical costing. Defining a minimum standard of quality opens broader debates about inequality, redistribution, public responsibility and the political choices embedded within education financing systems.

Rights cannot be realised through policy commitments alone. The right to education requires the financing of the material, human, and institutional conditions necessary for meaningful teaching and learning.

Principles and ideas underpinning CAQi/CAQ

The CAQi/CAQ approach is underpinned by several important ideas and principles.

One important principle is that the methodology begins with the educational conditions experienced by learners, education professionals and schools.

Another is recognition that education systems operate under unequal financing conditions. In Brazil's federal system, municipalities, states, and the Union possess very different fiscal capacities. CAQi/CAQ, therefore, became closely linked to broader debates about redistribution and the role of public financing in reducing historical inequalities.

The approach also positions education financing within wider struggles over inequality, exclusion and democratic citizenship. CAQi/CAQ treats educational inequality as a financing issue. Education systems cannot become more equitable if financing systems continue to reproduce existing inequalities between regions, schools, and learners.

The Brazilian approach recognises that schools and municipalities operate under very unequal conditions and therefore require differentiated levels of support. Some schools need additional investment because of poverty, infrastructure deficits, disability inclusion needs or wider structural inequalities.

Importantly, the methodology establishes a minimum national floor for quality while still recognising differences between educational stages, modalities and local realities.

This reflects a broader understanding of education financing as both a redistributive question and a public good.

Another important feature of the approach is that it grounds discussions of adequacy within existing constitutional and legal commitments, education policies and public obligations. Rather than inventing entirely new standards, CAQi/CAQ sought to translate already recognised commitments around educational quality and equity into more concrete financing requirements.

This helped shift debates from abstract policy commitments towards discussion of the actual resources required to realise them in practice.

A central feature of the CAQi/CAQ approach is its emphasis on the ongoing conditions required to sustain quality education systems over time.

Teachers, support staff, school feeding, maintenance, inclusion measures and pedagogical support – all require recurrent and predictable financing year after year.

This focus on adequacy raises difficult political questions. Once countries begin estimating the actual recurrent costs associated with minimum quality standards, financing gaps can become very large, particularly in contexts of chronic underinvestment.

Another very important feature of the Brazilian process was that the Campaign deliberately built collectively and opened its methodology to public scrutiny, debate, and refinement over time. The framework evolved not simply through technical modelling, but through sustained interaction between civil society, researchers, educators, policymakers and public institutions.

Importantly, the process also involved going out to schools and communities and listening to teachers, learners and families, so that discussions of “quality” are embedded in lived educational realities rather than abstract policy assumptions alone. This helped ensure that debates around adequacy and quality remained connected to the actual conditions experienced within schools and classrooms. This helped ensure that the resulting proposals were socially legitimised and grounded in the realities of schools and communities.

From a methodological model to an institutional model

One of the strongest ideas emerging from CAQi/CAQ is that stakeholders increasingly “see themselves” within the framework. The process gained legitimacy because it was collectively debated, contested and shaped over time.

One of the most important lessons from the Brazilian experience is that CAQi/CAQ became influential not simply because the methodology existed, but because it was gradually institutionalised through long-term organising, coalition-building, legal advocacy, and public mobilisation, and was gradually built into national legislative commitments over time.

Important milestones included:



2002 – Idea launched

The Brazilian Campaign for the Right to Education launches the idea of CAQi.



2002–2010 – Collective development and consultation

A nationwide process of research, consultation and debate involving educators, communities, researchers, civil society organisations and public institutions helps define minimum quality standards and build social, political and technical legitimacy for the proposal.



2010 – Policy endorsement

CAQi receives endorsement from Brazil’s National Education Council, marking its first formal policy recognition.



2014 – National Education Plan

CAQi and CAQ are incorporated into Brazil’s National Education Plan, linking minimum quality standards to national education policy.



2020 – Constitutional recognition

Constitutional Amendment 108 recognises CAQ as a guiding principle for education financing and educational equity.



2025 – Legal regulation and institutionalisation

The National Education System Law (LCP 220/2025) further embeds CAQ within Brazil’s education governance and financing architecture.

The CAQi/CAQ became influential because it simultaneously built social, political, legal and evidence legitimacy over time.

The process combined technical work, movement-building, public campaigning, political negotiation, legal advocacy, research partnerships and sustained mobilisation around education rights and financing.

Over time, the Brazilian process also evolved beyond advocacy into more institutionalised financing tools and modelling systems, including SIMCAQ (Simulador de Custo-Aluno Qualidade), which allows policymakers, researchers and advocates to model different education financing scenarios linked to minimum quality standards.



The CAQi pilot research learning team in action.



The teams debating methodological conclusions.

Part 2. Early reflections from piloting and adapting CAQi approaches in sub-Saharan African contexts

The reflections presented in this section are drawn from Learning Collaborative workshops, draft reports, presentations and action research processes developed by participating organisations between late 2025 and early 2026. The country processes were at different stages of development and should be understood as exploratory and evolving rather than directly comparable national models.

The action research process

The Education Financing Learning Collaborative provided an opportunity for civil society organisations across Eastern, Southern, Western and Central Africa to explore and adapt elements of the CAQi approach within their own national contexts.

Participating organisations were from:

1. Civil Society Budget Advocacy Group (CSBAG) from Uganda;
2. Movimento de Educação Para Todos (MEPT) from Mozambique;
3. Rede Nacional da Campanha de Educação para Todos de Cabo Verde (RNCEPT-CV); and,
4. Swaziland Network Campaign for Education for All (SWANCEFA) from the Kingdom of Eswatini

The intention was not to mechanically replicate the Brazilian model, but to explore how aspects of a rights-based, adequacy-oriented financing approach might be adapted to different fiscal, institutional, political and educational realities.

Countries engaged with the framework in different ways depending on institutional context, technical capacity, available data, political priorities and the stage of national education financing debates. One of the clearest lessons emerging from the process itself was that rights-based costing approaches evolve over time through technical work, institutional engagement, political negotiation and iterative adaptation.

Uganda: CSBAG

CSBAG had developed the most structured costing and financing model linked to national commitments and minimum quality standards for primary education.

The Ugandan process examined infrastructure, teaching and learning conditions, governance, health and WASH, co-curricular activities and human resources, while also considering differentiated support needs for children with disabilities and other marginalised learners.

Importantly, the process distinguished between the capitation grant as one component of education financing and the broader recurrent and structural costs associated with delivering quality primary education.



It started with the capitation grant, with estimates of how much was required for this. It also looked at how to incorporate wage bills beyond this per-pupil spending at school level. But as the work evolved, attempts to incorporate fuller adequacy costing — including staffing, school feeding, and wider quality inputs — generated financing estimates far beyond current spending levels. Uganda remains among the lowest public spenders on education per learner globally, and once more comprehensive assumptions about staffing and minimum quality standards were incorporated, financing gaps increased dramatically.

The scale of financing gaps shaped the discussion around sequencing and feasibility. The process increasingly focused on how rights-based financing principles could still inform reform and advocacy strategies even where the full estimated costs initially appeared politically difficult to absorb within existing fiscal debates.

The Uganda process contributed important reflections on the political economy of educational adequacy in contexts of chronic underinvestment and highlighted how rights-based costing approaches may evolve through negotiation between normative ambition, technical modelling and political strategy.

Eswatini: **SWANCEFA**

SWANCEFA focused on secondary education, where education costs remain a major barrier for many households despite progress towards free primary education.

The process benefited from strong institutional engagement and close collaboration with government actors. A steering committee, including representatives from both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance, helped strengthen ownership and policy traction from an early stage.

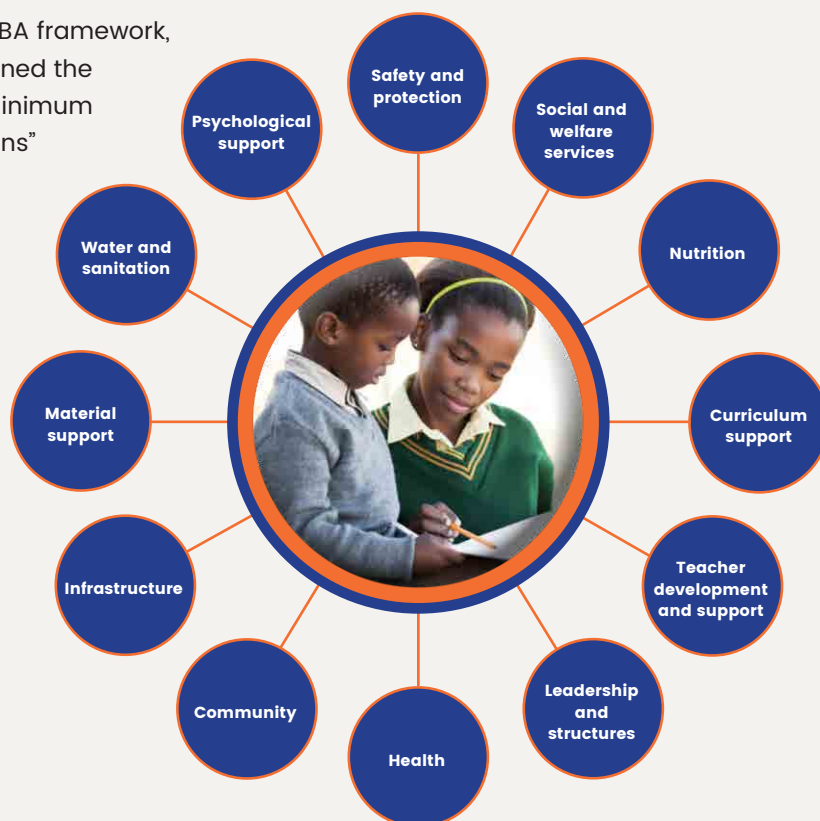
The work was also grounded within the SADC Care and Support for Teaching and Learning framework, known as INQABA.

The Eswatini process moved towards developing a relatively detailed minimum conditions package linked to minimum quality standards for secondary education. These included teacher salaries, science and ICT laboratories, WASH facilities, school feeding, counselling services, support staff, accessible infrastructure, learning materials and governance mechanisms.

One of the key methodological discussions concerned how to incorporate infrastructure and capital investment appropriately within the costing model. This included questions around annualising infrastructure expenditure and distinguishing between longer-term capital investment and recurrent operational financing.

The Eswatini process offered important reflections on the practical application of adequacy-oriented financing approaches, while also demonstrating the importance of institutional engagement and policy ownership in such work.

The SADC INQABA framework, which underpinned the SWANCEFA’s “minimum quality conditions” package to be financed.



Mozambique: MEPT

MEPT approached the process primarily through school-level engagement and diagnostic work focused on understanding the material conditions affecting equitable and inclusive basic education.

They conducted primary data collection across 39 schools in Maputo Province and Maputo City, placing particular emphasis on girls’ education, disability inclusion, staffing shortages and wider educational inequalities.



Luis Mutondo explaining the MEPT approach.

A major focus of the process was engaging directly with schools and communities to better understand the realities shaping educational quality and exclusion in practice.

Rather than beginning with a fully developed costing model, the Mozambique process focused heavily on documenting systemic barriers to equitable quality education and on exploring how this community-level data could be incorporated into the development of the minimum quality package.

The research highlighted high pupil-teacher ratios, shortages of learning materials, infrastructure deficits, overcrowded classrooms and under-resourced support

systems. It also pointed to tensions between recurrent expenditure pressures and the wider investments required to support equitable and inclusive quality education.

Particularly important was the strong emphasis on differentiated need and inclusion. School-level findings suggested that many schools enrolling children with disabilities lacked adequate support materials, specialised staff or accessibility measures despite formal commitments to inclusive education.

The process also linked education financing debates to wider discussions around public revenue, including calls for greater investment of extractive wealth into education financing.

At the time of collective reflection, the Mozambique process remained iterative and evolving. However, it pointed strongly towards how adequacy-oriented financing analysis might help expose structural barriers to equitable public education.

Cabo Verde: RNCEPT-CV

RNCEPT-CV focused on early childhood education and worked closely with the University of Cabo Verde and other national stakeholders.

Compared with other countries' processes, Cabo Verde's work focused more heavily on conceptual adaptation and governance framing at the time of the collective reflection rather than on detailed empirical costing.

The process placed particular emphasis on the idea that education financing debates should move beyond "what can be afforded" towards a discussion of the investment necessary to guarantee minimum conditions for quality education.

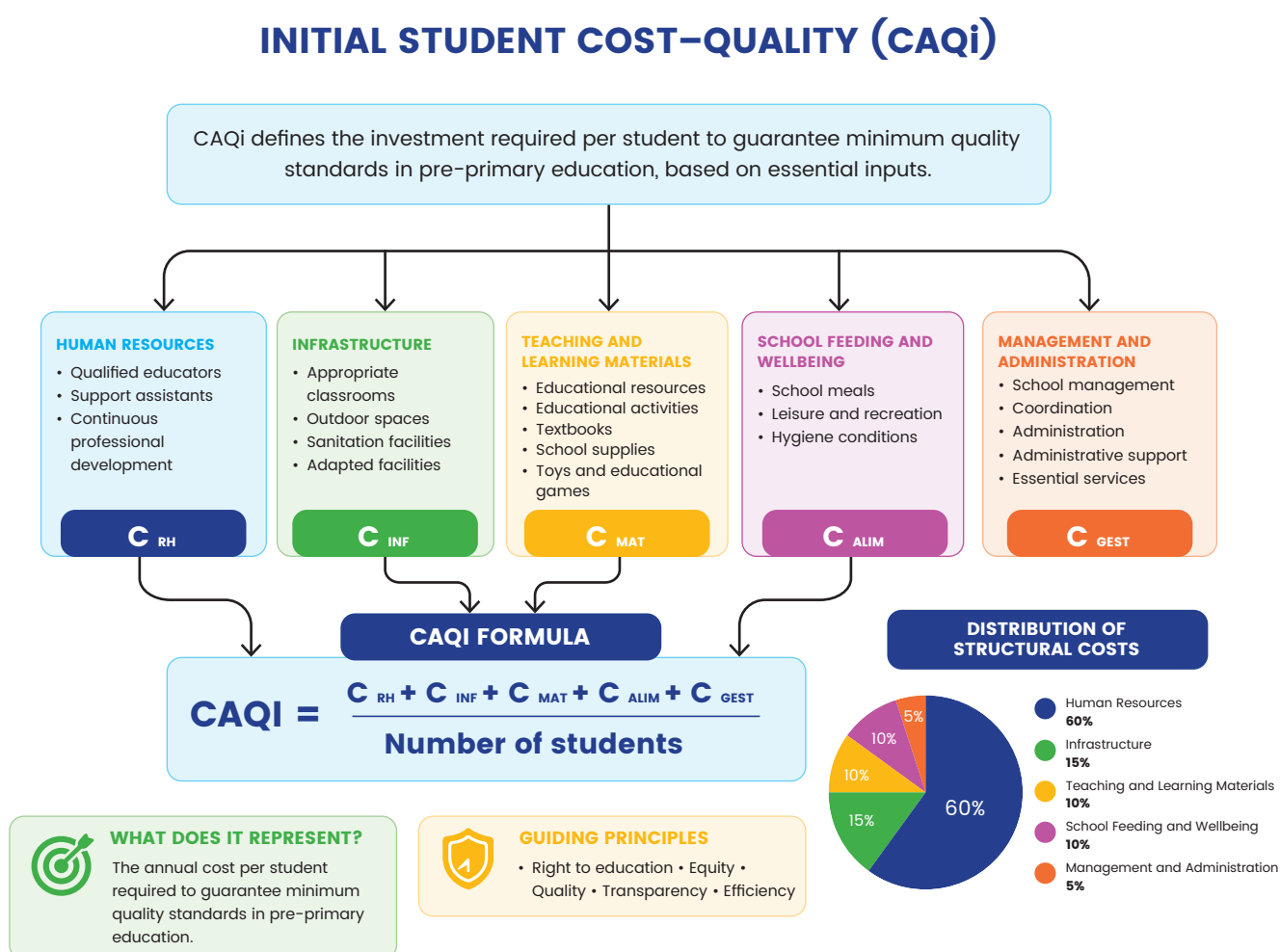


The work also highlighted geographical inequalities in Cabo Verde's island context, including differences between municipalities and unequal costs of educational provision across different islands.

Another important contribution concerned governance and accountability. The process framed CAQi not only as a costing methodology but also as a potential instrument for planning, monitoring, and accountability, capable of supporting stronger public oversight of educational quality and financing commitments.

At the time of collective reflection, the process remained at an earlier stage of methodological development, with more detailed costing work still intended as a later phase. However, Cabo Verde contributed important conceptual and policy framing to the wider Learning Collaborative, particularly around adequacy, legal guarantees, spatial inequality and public accountability.

The CAQi methodology and model adapted to the Cabo Verde context



Part 3. Cross-cutting lessons from the Learning Collaborative

One of the most valuable aspects of the action research process was the opportunity to reflect collectively not only on technical questions but also on the wider political, institutional, and methodological issues that emerged during implementation.

Across countries, some important tensions and insights emerged — despite very different educational systems and political contexts.

Collectively, these reflections reinforced the idea that rights-based costing approaches are not simply technical exercises focused on calculating per-pupil amounts. They involve defining what quality education requires, making inequalities visible and strengthening discussion around the financing conditions necessary to support equitable public education.

It takes time

One of the clearest lessons from both Brazil and the country processes is that rights-based financing approaches take time.

From defining minimum standards and building costing models, through to influencing policy, legislation and budgets, these processes unfold over years — and often decades.

The Brazilian experience itself reflects more than 20 years of organising, technical refinement, and political advocacy before CAQ became embedded in national legislation and financing debates.

Context matters

The action research reinforced that there is no single model for adapting CAQi approaches across contexts.

Although core principles around rights, adequacy, equity and minimum standards remained important, countries adapted the framework differently depending on their political systems, institutional realities, fiscal conditions and advocacy opportunities.

The process, therefore, reinforced that adaptation, rather than replication, lies at the centre of rights-based costing approaches.

Participation and ownership matter

One of the strongest lessons emerging from both Brazil and the pilot processes was that participation cannot be treated as an optional add-on.

Questions about what learners should be guaranteed, what conditions are acceptable or necessary for quality, and what governments should finance are ultimately political and social questions. Several countries highlighted the importance of directly engaging teachers, communities, learners and

schools throughout the process. School visits and community engagement helped ground discussions of adequacy and quality in lived educational realities rather than abstract policy assumptions alone.

The Brazilian experience demonstrated particularly clearly that methodologies become stronger where assumptions, standards and approaches remain open to public debate, contestation and revision over time — when people can see themselves in the process.

Partnerships and political strategy matter

Strong partnerships repeatedly emerged as critical throughout the action research process. Country experiences highlighted the importance of identifying credible partners and allies early, including universities, researchers, government actors and civil society organisations. These partnerships helped strengthen technical credibility, improve access to data, build ownership and create greater opportunities for policy engagement and influence.

Several organisations also highlighted the importance of grounding advocacy strategies in strong evidence, while adapting messaging to different political and institutional contexts. Compelling data, accessible communication, and audience-specific framing all helped adequacy-oriented financing arguments gain traction.

The process also reinforced the importance of linking discussions of adequacy to existing constitutional guarantees, education sector plans and wider commitments that governments had already endorsed. This helped shift the debate towards the resources required to realise commitments already recognised publicly.

Different countries approached these political and advocacy questions in different ways depending on context, but across the Learning Collaborative, there was broad recognition that these approaches are not simply technical exercises. They also involve processes of coalition-building, political engagement, and negotiation over what governments should guarantee as part of the right to education.

Inputs are necessary, but not sufficient

One of the central ideas underpinning both CAQi and the action research process is that quality education requires identifiable material conditions.

CAQi/CAQ does not argue that educational quality can be reduced entirely to measurable inputs alone. Relationships, dignity, belonging, curriculum relevance and the wider educational experience all matter deeply. However, the framework recognises that meaningful teaching and learning become extremely difficult where schools lack the basic material conditions necessary for education. As such, inputs are necessary, but not sufficient.

Don't forget the wage bill

One of the strongest methodological lessons emerging from the pilots concerned the centrality of staffing costs.

Teachers and support staff remain the single largest and most important component of education financing. Attempts to cost quality education without adequately accounting for staffing requirements risk significantly understating the true cost of quality provision.

Quality costs money

The action research repeatedly reinforced an important reality: quality education requires sustained public investment. Chronic teacher shortages, overcrowded classrooms, inadequate inclusion support, poor infrastructure and under-resourced schools reflect long-term underinvestment.

African countries cannot hope to deliver quality education with current per-pupil spending levels in many systems, with an average per pupil spending across sub-Saharan Africa of just US\$100.³ Quality and equitable education cannot be delivered for these sums.

Rights-based costing approaches help make visible the gap between educational commitments and the financing required to realise them. The process reinforced the importance of continued advocacy for domestic resource mobilisation and for wider fiscal justice debates.

However, identifying financing gaps is only part of the challenge. Rights-based costing approaches also require consideration of how governments can mobilise and allocate the maximum available resources for education. This connects directly to broader questions of budget size, education's share of public expenditure, the equity and inclusiveness of spending decisions, and public scrutiny of how resources are used.

US\$100 Average annual public spending per learner in sub-Saharan Africa

While needs and costs vary across contexts, such low levels of investment make it extremely difficult to provide even the minimum conditions necessary for equitable, inclusive and quality education.



Teacher salaries



Learning materials



WASH



Inclusion support



Infrastructure



School feeding

Quality education requires financing the conditions necessary for teaching and learning – which requires mobilising more domestic resources.

3. World Bank, & UNESCO. (2024). Education Finance Watch 2024. World Bank Group & Global Education Monitoring Report. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/publication/education-finance-watch>

Part 4. Towards an adapted guide for rights-based costing approaches

Introduction

This guide builds on an earlier practical framework developed at the beginning of the action research process. As organisations began adapting elements of Brazil's CAQi/CAQ approach across different contexts, additional political, methodological and advocacy lessons emerged.

The guide does not present a fixed model or technical formula to be replicated. Instead, it offers a flexible, rights-based approach that can be adapted to different education systems, political contexts, fiscal realities and advocacy opportunities.

At the centre of the approach is a simple core assumption of this model: it always starts from the assumption that this is a process to move away from the logic of “available resources” towards the logic of the resources necessary to guarantee minimum conditions for quality education.

This means beginning not with existing budgets, but with the conditions necessary for meaningful teaching and learning and asking what it would cost to provide them equitably.

The guide is also grounded in the understanding that defining “quality” is not a neutral technical exercise. Decisions about what counts as a minimum acceptable standard are shaped by social priorities, educational values, rights frameworks and political choices.

As such, the phases below are overlapping and iterative rather than strictly linear.

Core methodological logic

Although approaches differed across contexts, the experiences explored through the action research broadly followed a similar sequence:

- 1. defining minimum conditions for quality education;**
- 2. identifying the inputs and resources necessary to deliver those conditions;**
- 3. distinguishing between recurrent and capital costs;**
- 4. estimating financing requirements;**
- 5. comparing current financing against estimated needs;**
- 6. identifying equity gaps and differentiated financing needs;**
- 7. and developing advocacy and progressive realisation pathways.**

At every stage, participation, legitimacy and political engagement remain central.

Phases in more detail:

Phase 1. Establishing principles, purpose and legitimacy

Before beginning technical work, it is important to establish why the process is being undertaken, what it is intended to influence and whose perspectives will shape it. Participation, ownership and collective debate are central to the methodology itself. This stage involves building a shared understanding of educational quality, adequacy and equity, major inequalities within the education system, and the wider financing and political context.

It may also entail identifying pre-existing national commitments, such as national legal commitments, that underlie and guide the Right to Education provision in such a way that national preexisting commitments can add legitimacy to calls.

Phase 2. Defining minimum conditions for quality education

At the centre of rights-based costing approaches is the discussion around the conditions necessary for meaningful teaching and learning. This means identifying a minimum threshold below which the right to education is unlikely to be realised adequately.

Different contexts, education levels and learner populations may require different forms and levels of support. Equal rights do not imply identical resource needs.

Countries explored issues such as: teacher salaries and qualifications; class sizes and staffing ratios; support staff and pedagogical support systems; infrastructure and accessibility; WASH facilities; learning materials; school feeding; psychosocial support; and disability inclusion.

Phase 3. Identifying inequities and differentiated need

Rights-based costing approaches are concerned not only with overall financing levels, but also with how inequalities shape educational access and quality across different groups and locations.

Several country processes highlighted the importance of identifying where learners and schools experience very different conditions and therefore require differentiated forms of support.

These inequalities may relate to poverty, disability, geography, gender, language, infrastructure deficits or wider structural inequalities.

Phase 4. Gathering and working with data

Data collection is often one of the most difficult aspects of this work. Countries drew on a range of sources, including education management information systems, budgets, payroll data, infrastructure databases, school visits, policy documents and consultations with educators and communities. School visits and qualitative engagement revealed realities not easily visible through administrative datasets alone.

Importantly, incomplete data should not prevent the process from moving forward. The aim is not perfect data sets, but transparent and credible estimates capable of supporting analysis, advocacy and future refinement.

Phase 5. Translating standards into costing models

Once the minimum conditions and key inputs have been identified, the next stage is to translate them into financing estimates.

Approaches differed across contexts, but generally involved:

- identifying minimum resource packages;
- estimating staffing requirements;
- developing per-pupil calculations;
- and modelling different implementation scenarios.

The country processes highlighted the importance of distinguishing carefully between recurrent operational expenditure and longer-term capital investment.

Educational quality depends not only on classroom teachers, but also on wider systems of pedagogical support, school leadership, administration, maintenance and other forms of labour necessary for schools to function effectively.

Phase 6. Analysing adequacy, financing gaps and redistribution

Rights-based costing approaches are concerned not only with how much is spent on education overall, but also with whether financing is adequate to provide minimum acceptable conditions for quality education.

This involves comparing existing financing levels against estimated requirements and identifying where major gaps persist.

Identifying financing gaps is only part of the challenge. Rights-based costing approaches also raise questions about how governments can mobilise and allocate the maximum available resources for education. This connects directly to broader questions of budget size, education's share of public expenditure, the equity and inclusiveness of spending decisions, and public scrutiny of how resources are used.

Phase 7. Advocacy, political strategy and progressive realisation

One of the clearest lessons emerging from the action research was that technical evidence alone is rarely sufficient to influence financing decisions.

Costing exercises become more powerful when combined with strong advocacy strategies, coalition-building, accessible communication and sustained political engagement.

Several organisations also reflected on the importance of balancing ambition with strategic realism. In some contexts, presenting the full estimated cost of quality education immediately risked disengagement or dismissal from decision-makers.

This reinforced the importance of phased implementation pathways, prioritisation and progressive realisation.

Ultimately, rights-based costing approaches are not simply technical tools. They are mechanisms for making educational inequalities visible, defining minimum social guarantees and strengthening accountability around the financing of the right to education.

Annex 1 — Illustrative example of minimum quality conditions

This example is illustrative only and should be adapted to national context, education level and policy priorities.

Minimum quality condition	Why it matters	Illustrative budget components
Teaching staff	Adequate teacher availability	Teacher salaries, deployment, substitute teachers
Class size	Manageable learner–teacher ratios	Additional teachers, expanded classroom space
Support staff	Holistic school functioning	Counsellors, teaching assistants, administrators, cleaners
Infrastructure	Safe and dignified learning environment	Classrooms, desks, roofing, accessibility adaptations
WASH	Minimum health and dignity standards	Toilets, handwashing facilities, water supply
Learning materials	Access to core teaching and learning resources	Textbooks, workbooks, digital resources
ICT and connectivity	Basic digital inclusion	Computers, internet access, electricity
Inclusion support	Equitable access for all learners	Assistive devices, specialised staff, ramps
School feeding	Learner wellbeing and participation	Meals, kitchens, food storage
Psychosocial support	Safe and supportive learning environment	Counselling services, safeguarding structures
School management	Effective school functioning	School leadership, administration
Maintenance	Sustainability of infrastructure	Repairs, cleaning, utilities

This framework is intended to support discussion around the minimum conditions required for meaningful teaching and learning. It should not be treated as a rigid blueprint.

Annex 2 — Annualising infrastructure costs

One methodological issue that emerged during the action research was how to treat infrastructure costs in rights-based costing models.

Infrastructure investments such as classrooms, laboratories, WASH facilities, or accessibility modifications may involve substantial upfront expenditure but should not necessarily be treated as recurring annual costs alongside salaries, school feeding, or maintenance.

Country processes raised the importance of distinguishing between recurrent operational expenditure and longer-term capital investment.

This became particularly important when estimating annual per-pupil financing requirements linked to minimum quality standards.

Cost item	Suggested treatment in CAQ costing
Teacher salaries	Recurrent annual expenditure
School feeding	Recurrent annual expenditure
Classroom construction	Longer-term capital investment, potentially annualised over multiple years
WASH infrastructure	Capital investment plus ongoing maintenance costs
Accessibility modifications	Upfront infrastructure investment plus periodic maintenance

Costing exercises may therefore need to consider:

- how infrastructure investments can be annualised appropriately over time;
- how to distinguish implementation costs from ongoing operational costs;
- and how phased infrastructure expansion might be incorporated within longer-term financing pathways.

In some contexts, organisations found it useful to first establish clearer recurrent financing estimates linked to minimum quality conditions before incorporating broader capital expansion requirements into longer-term modelling.

References

1. UNESCO (2015), Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for SDG 4.
2. CAQi (Custo Aluno–Qualidade Inicial) and its later development, CAQ (Custo Aluno–Qualidade), are rights-based education costing frameworks developed by the Brazilian Campaign for the Right to Education. You can read more about this approach here: <https://campanha.org.br/caqi-caq/>
3. UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), 'General Comment No. 13: The Right to Education (Art. 13 of the Covenant)' (21 December 1999) UN Doc E/C.12/1999/10.
4. The World Bank and UNESCO (2024). Education Finance Watch 2023: Special Edition for the African Union Year of Education 2024. Washington D.C., Paris: The World Bank and UNESCO. Government education spending per capita has remained stagnant in the past 10 years. In Africa, the median public education spending per capita stagnated at around US\$100 in the past 10 years.

About the Education Financing Learning Collaborative

This publication emerged from the Education Financing Learning Collaborative, a multi-country initiative supported by Education Out Loud (EOL) and coordinated by ActionAid International.

The Learning Collaborative brought together civil society organisations from across Africa to explore approaches for strengthening education financing advocacy and advancing the right to quality education. Drawing on ActionAid's 4S framework for education financing –Size, Share, Sensitivity and Scrutiny –the initiative supported participating organisations to analyse education financing systems, share experiences, test new approaches and develop collective learning.

As part of this process, participating organisations explored how rights-based costing approaches, including lessons from Brazil's CAQi and CAQ experience, might be adapted to different national contexts. ActionAid also drafted a short guide to support this, which also framed some aspects of this publication. Through workshops, peer learning, action research and technical support, the Learning Collaborative helped coalitions conceptualise, test and refine approaches for linking educational quality, equity and financing.

The experiences and reflections presented in this publication represent one contribution to broader efforts to strengthen equitable, inclusive and adequately financed public education systems across Africa.

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