COVID-19 and Education Delivery in Africa
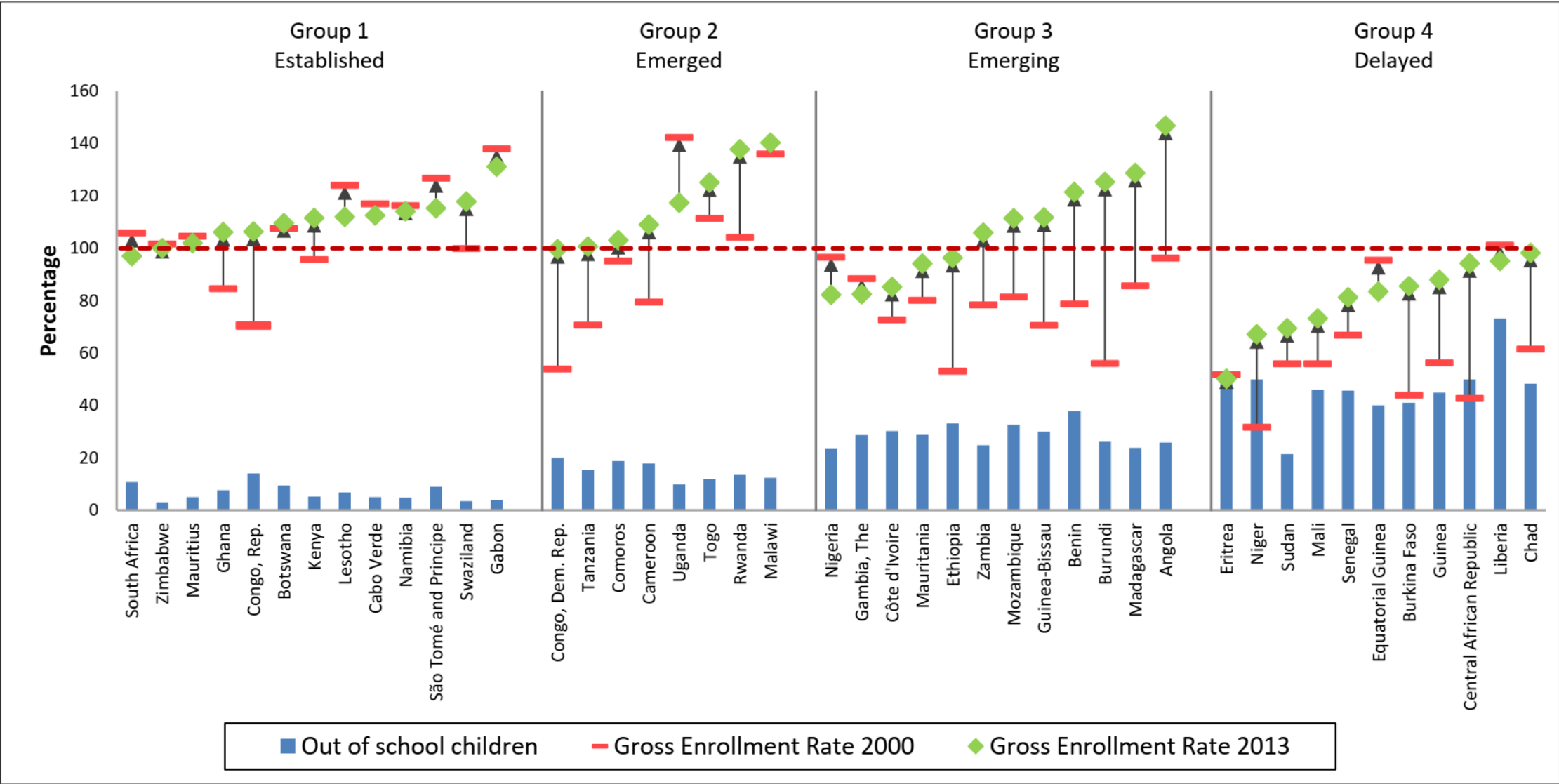
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# Part 1: Synopsis of the Status of Education in Africa

Africa has not finished the agenda of achieving universal primary education

Notes: $GER_{primary} = \left(\dfrac{Children\ enrolled\ in\ primary\ irrespective\ of\ age}{Children\ of\ primary\ school\ going\ age\ in\ the\ country} \right) * 100$
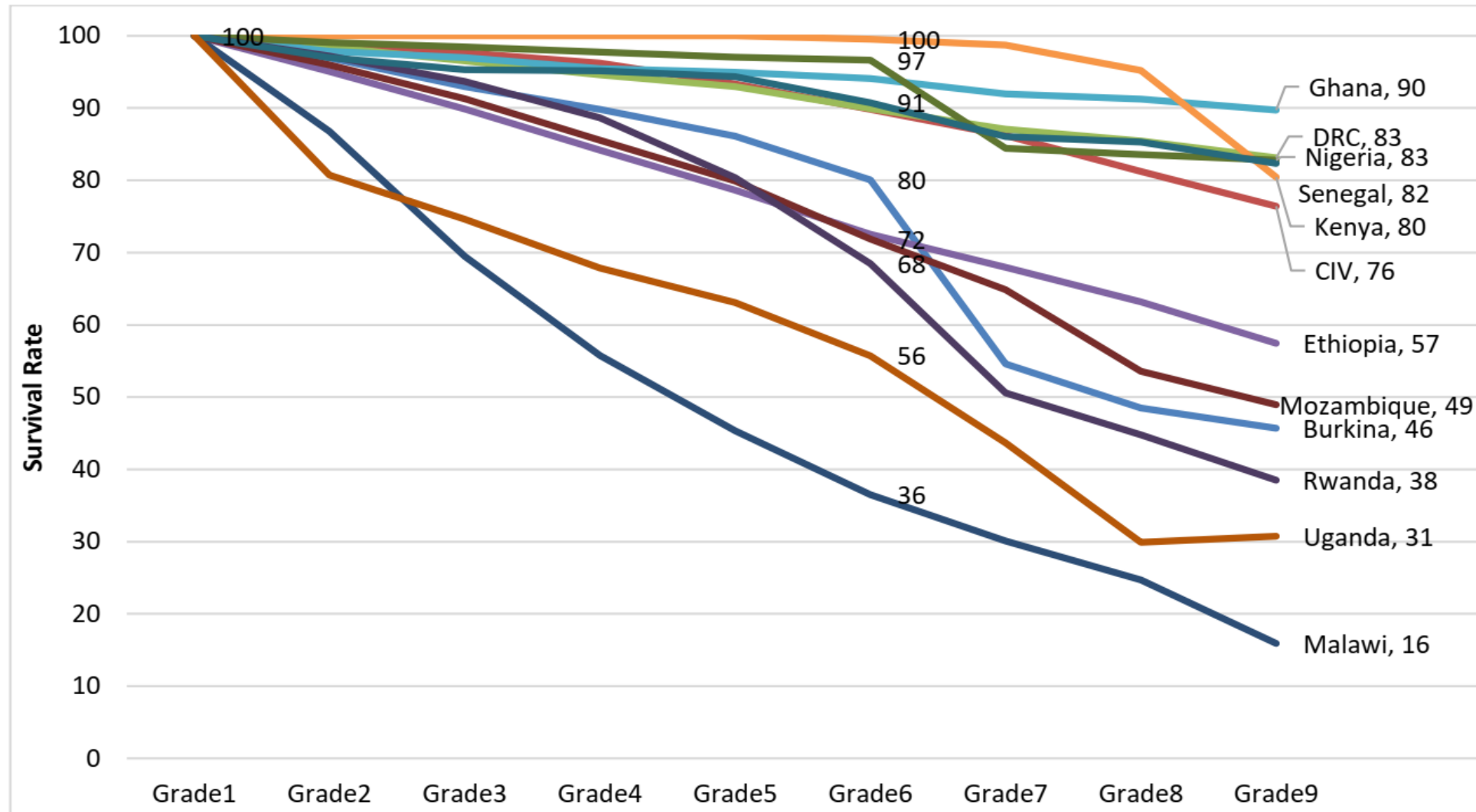
Source: Sajitha et al. 2018

Given the unfinished 'universal primary education agenda', it is not surprising that access to secondary education in Africa remains very far from being reached...
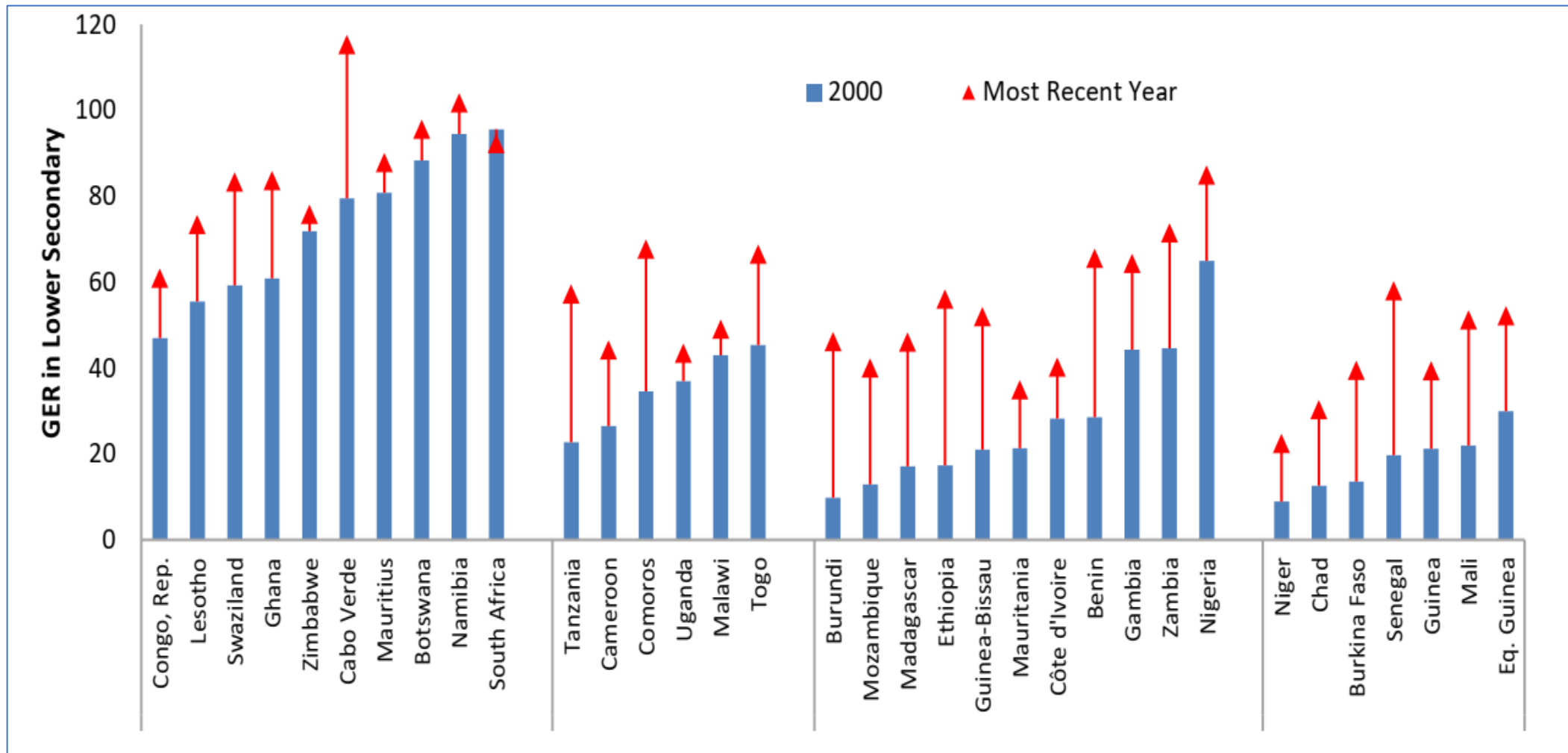
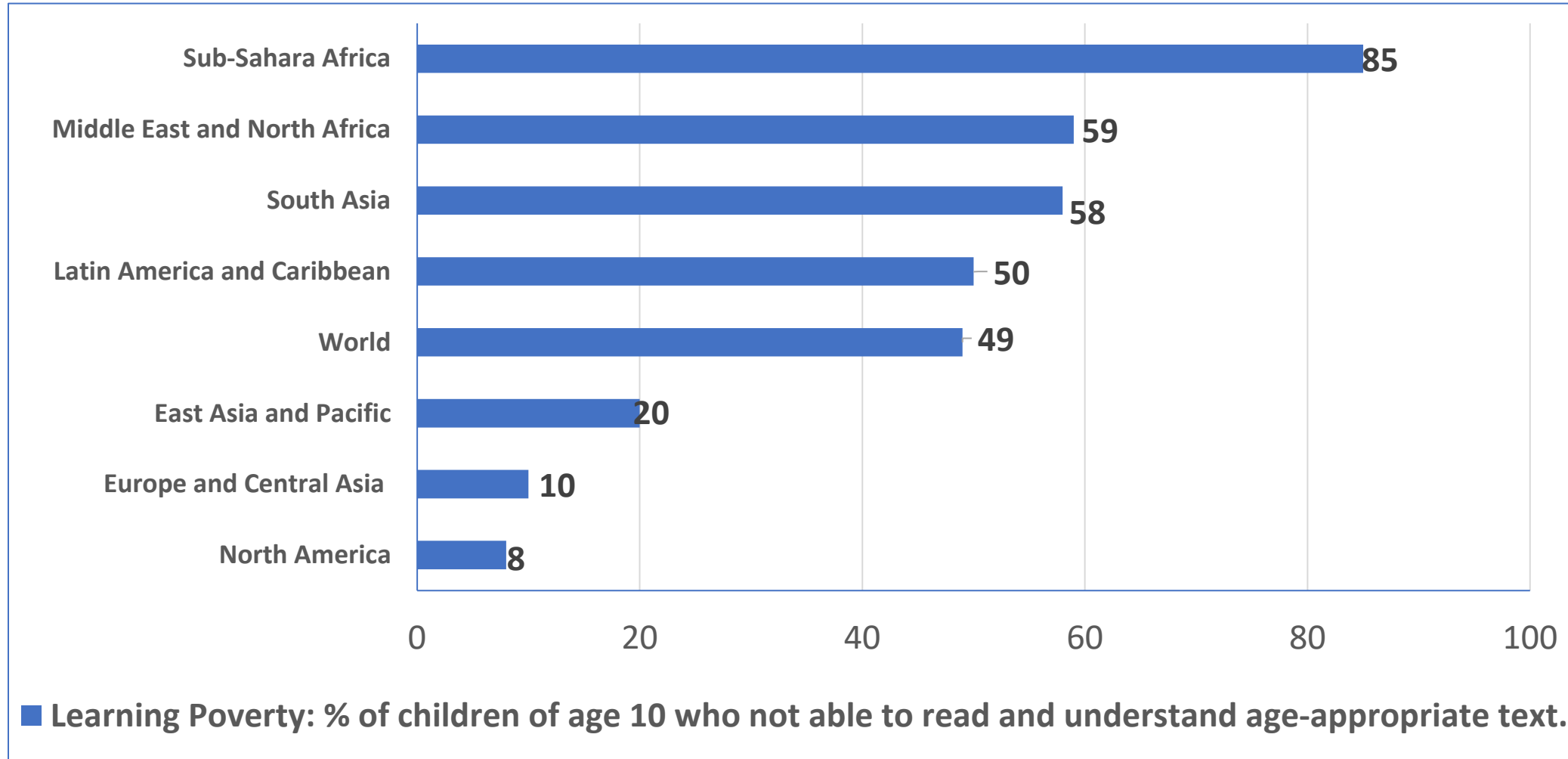Notes: Low GER due to delays or drop-outs.

The low access is mainly due to *high dropouts* and *low survival rates,* especially among girls, children from poor & rural households & those from conflict prone countries.

Source: Sajitha et al 2018

Unfortunately, a large share of children in Africa who are lucky to remain in school are not adequately learning and are considered to be in Learning Poverty

Sub-Sahara Africa — 85
Middle East and North Africa — 59
South Asia — 58
Latin America and Caribbean — 50
World — 49
East Asia and Pacific — 20
Europe and Central Asia — 10
North America — 8

■ Learning Poverty: % of children of age 10 who not able to read and understand age-appropriate text.

Part 2: Education Status in Africa during COVID-19

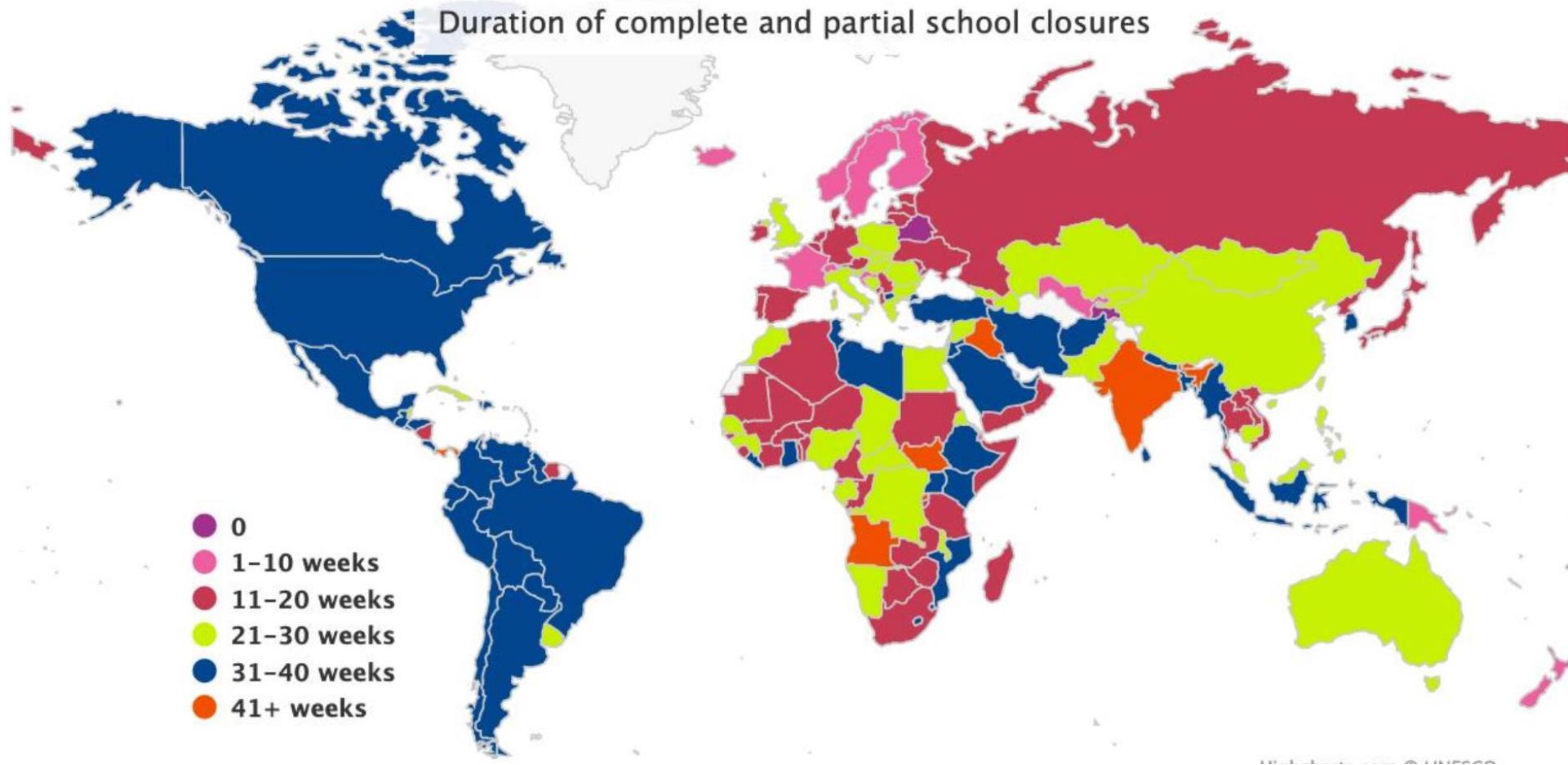At least 53 out of 54 African states, at one point, shut down learning institutions due to COVID-19, leaving close to 260 million learners with no access to continued learning and teaching.
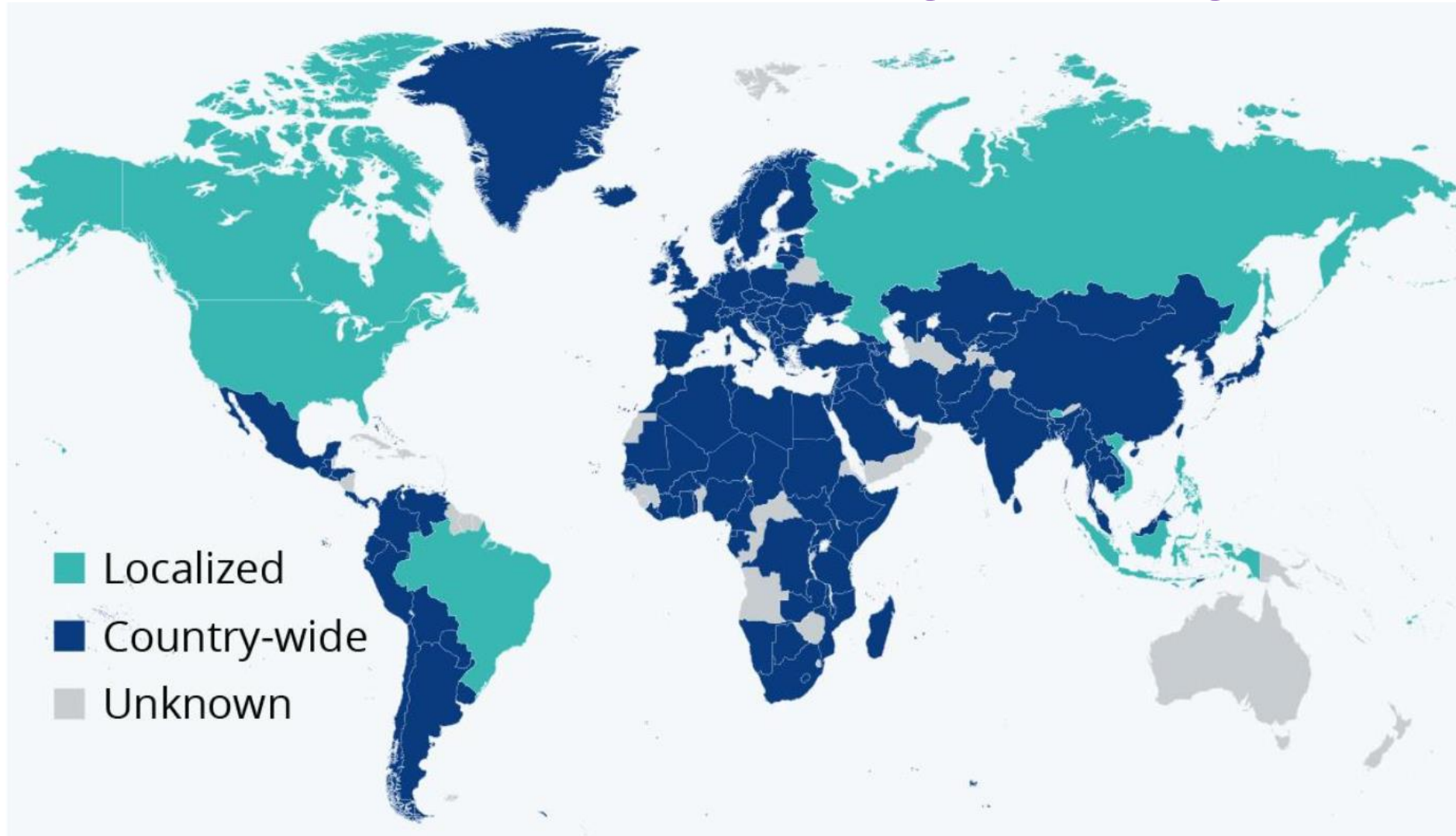
Source: UNESCO, 23 March 2020

On average 25 weeks of the 2020 academic year in Africa was lost due to complete and partial lockdowns.

Duration of complete and partial school closures

- 0
- 1–10 weeks
- 11–20 weeks
- 21–30 weeks
- 31–40 weeks
- 41+ weeks

Source: UNESCO, 2021

The number of weeks lost, due to full or partial lockdowns, ranges from about 4 in Burundi to about 50 in Uganda

Duration of FULL and PARTIAL school closures (in weeks)
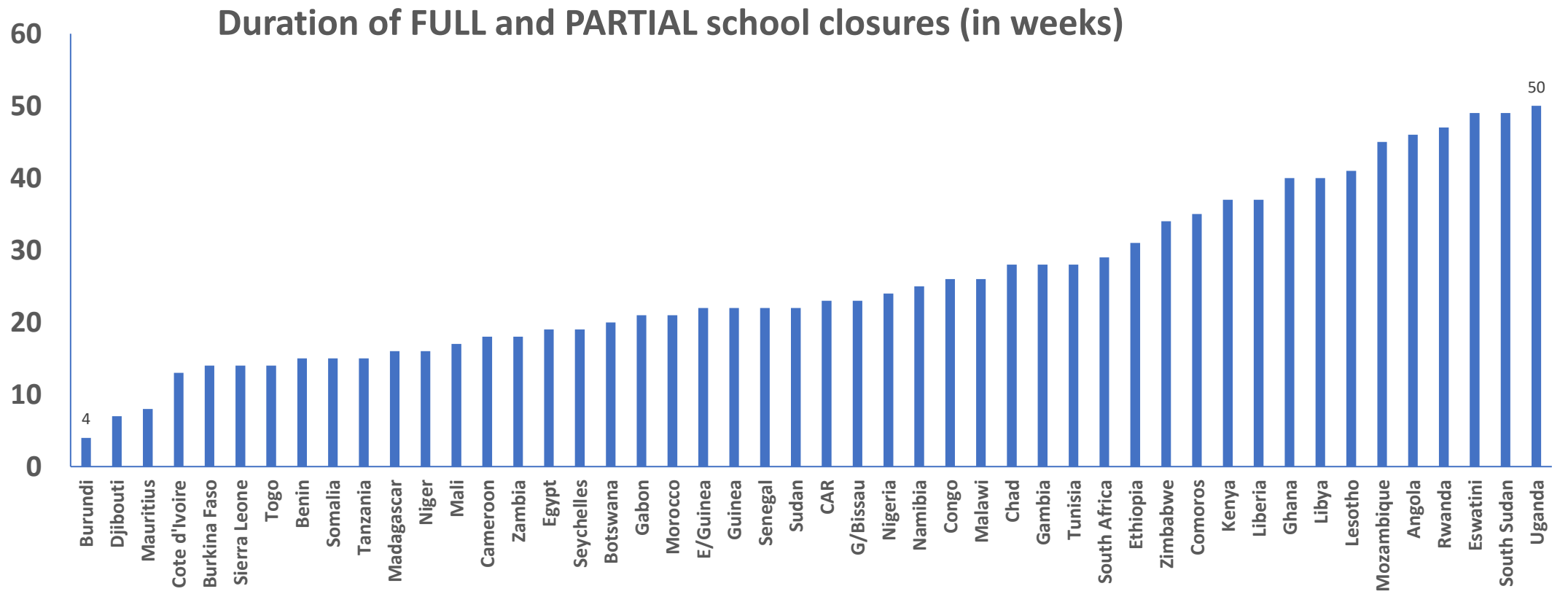
Source: UNESCO, 2021

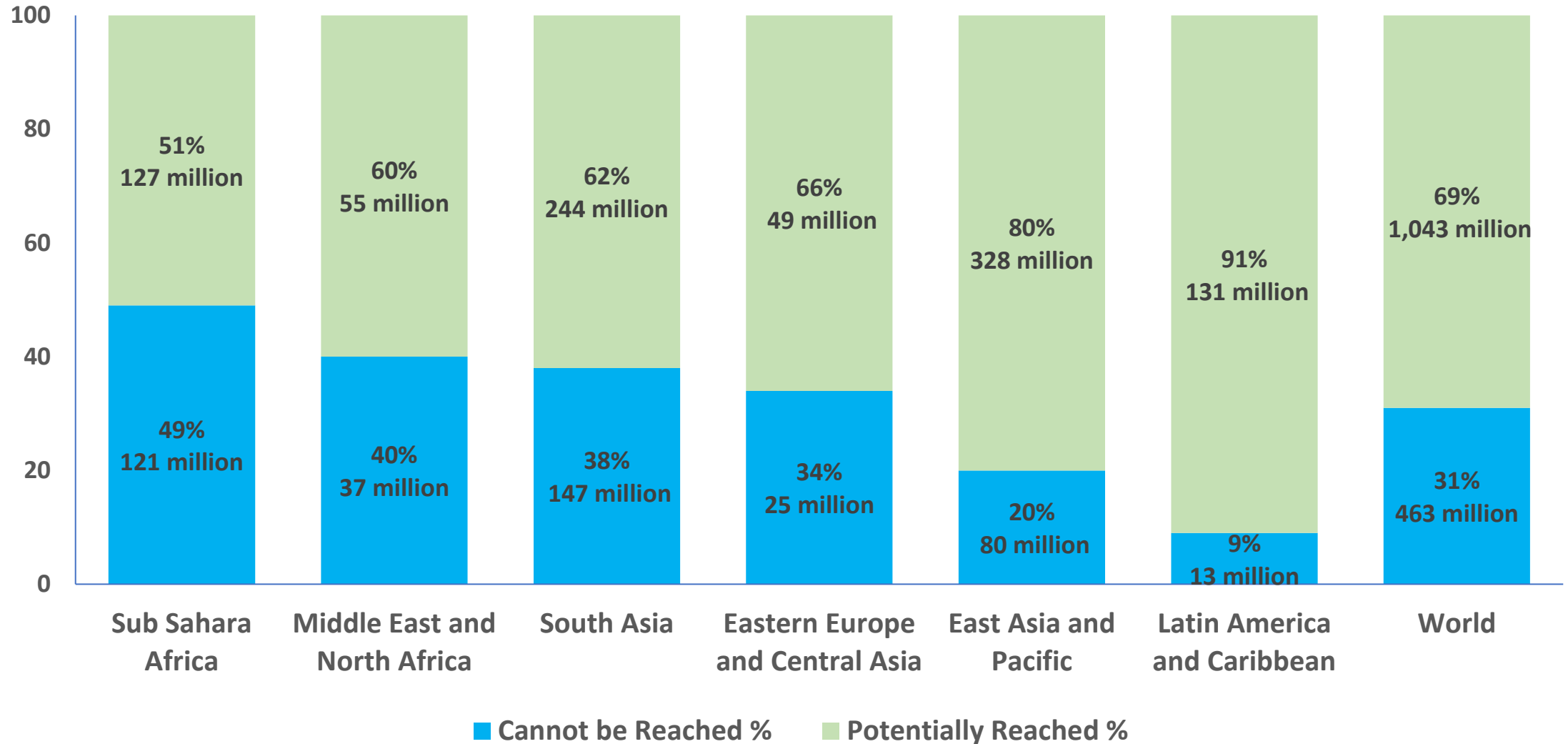# Unfortunately, close to 121 million (49%) schoolchildren in Sub-Sahara Africa could not be reached by digital and broadcast remote learning programs enacted to counter school closures.

	Sub Sahara Africa	Middle East and North Africa	South Asia	Eastern Europe and Central Asia	East Asia and Pacific	Latin America and Caribbean	World
Potentially Reached %	51% 127 million	60% 55 million	62% 244 million	66% 49 million	80% 328 million	91% 131 million	69% 1,043 million
Cannot be Reached %	49% 121 million	40% 37 million	38% 147 million	34% 25 million	20% 80 million	9% 13 million	31% 463 million

■ Cannot be Reached %   ■ Potentially Reached %

The inability to reach children in Africa with digital and broadcast remote learning programs is due to low access to infrastructure to support technology-enabled learning.


Access to electricity (% of population)
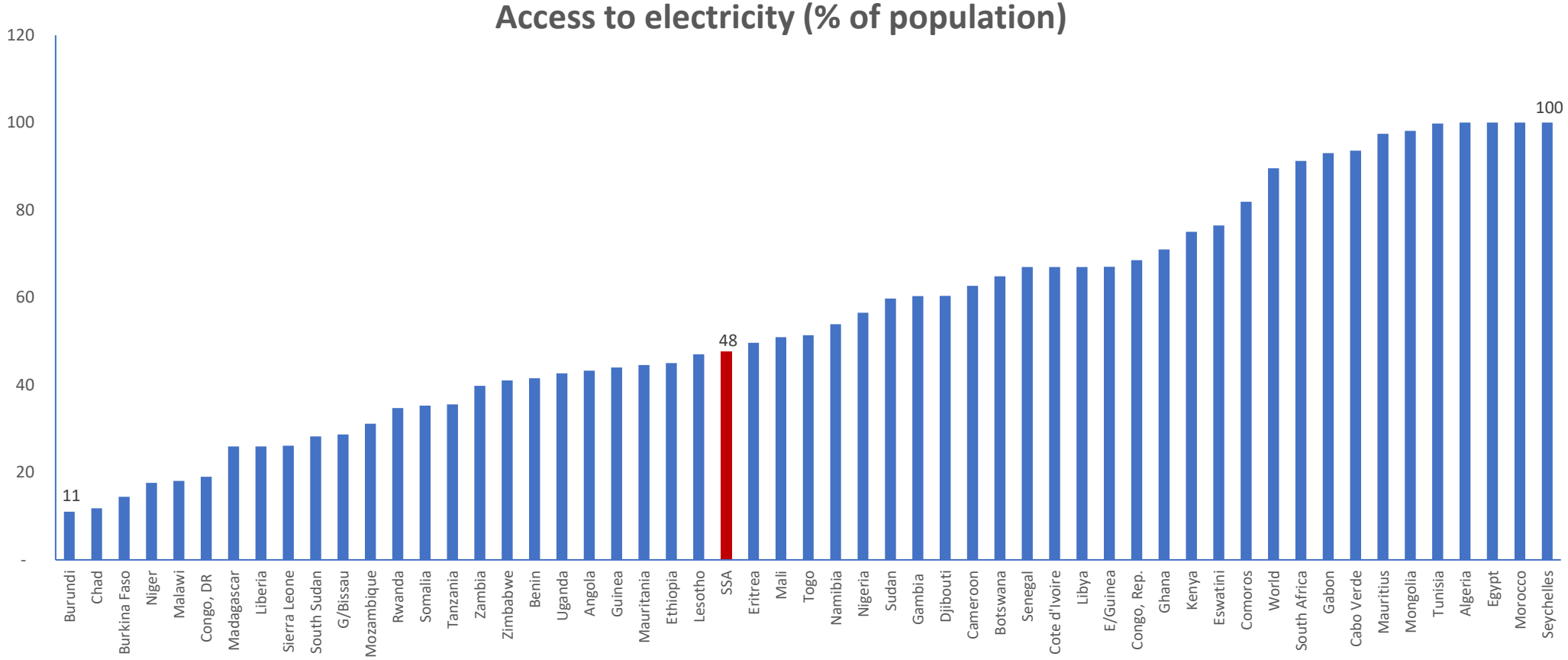
Source: World Bank, 2020

Access to digital infrastructure in Africa also remains very low, especially in rural areas. For instance, in Sub Sahara Africa, 89% of learners have no access to household computers, 82% lack internet access, and around 28 million live in locations not reliably served with mobile networks.

Individuals using the Internet (% of population)
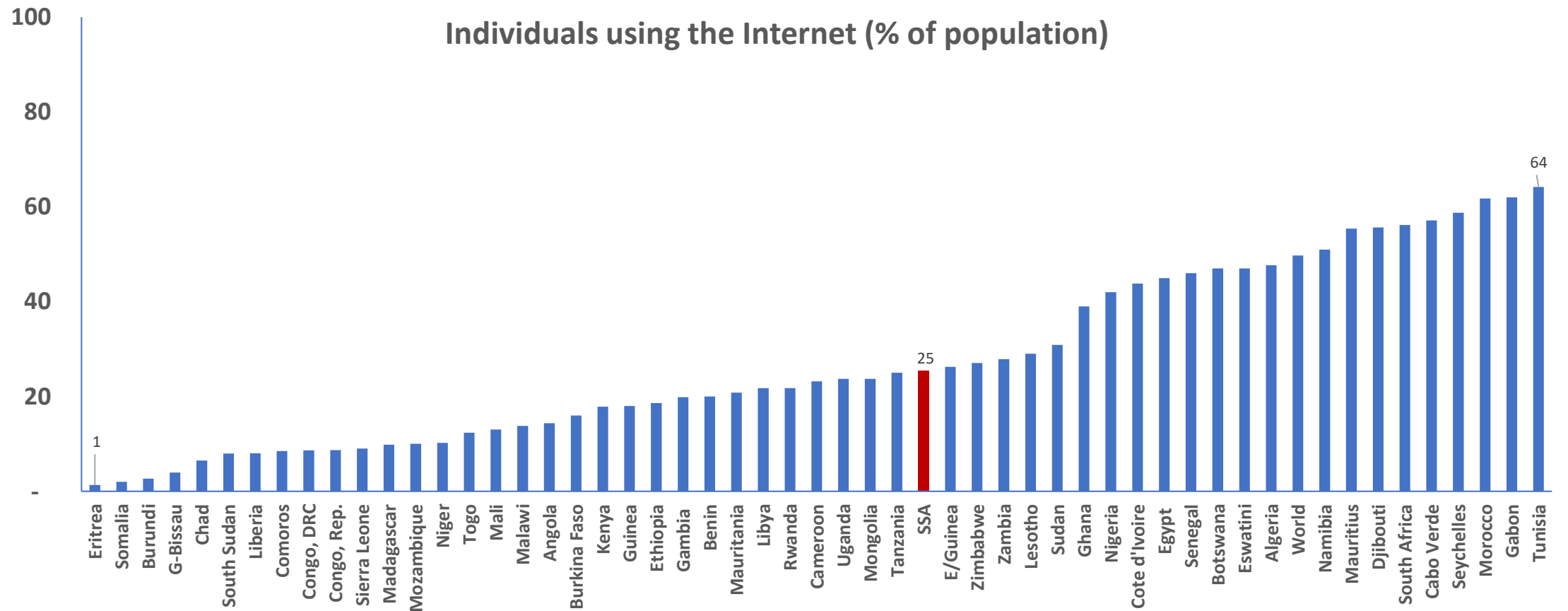
Source: World Bank, 2019

...and now, due to losses in academic year and inability to learn, the levels of learning poverty are hypothesized to increase.....
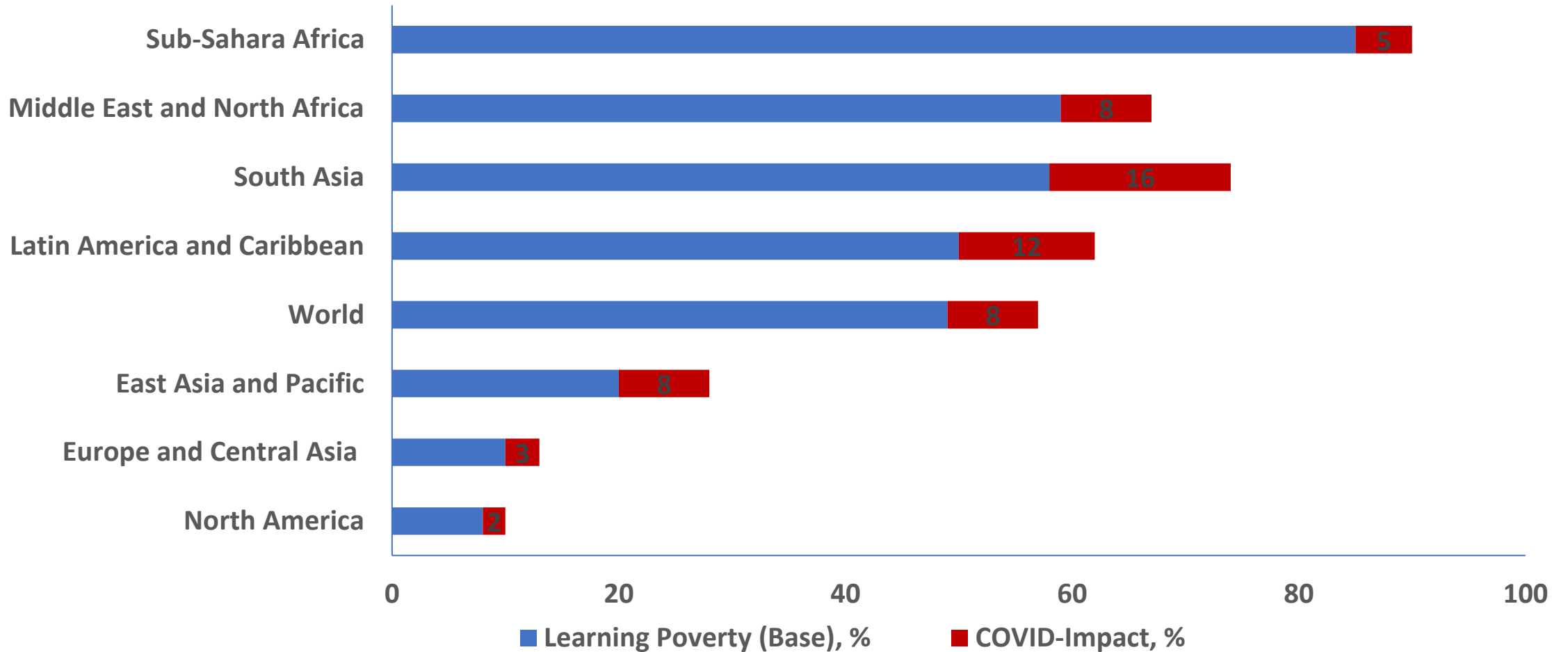
Source: World Bank, 2020

Schools provide children with not just a space to learn, but space: for security, to receive meals, to access healthcare and to play with their friends.

Notes: This is a google image and it is only for illustration purposes.

Implication of school closures………

- **Children are now missing out on school meals, for some, this is the only source of nutrition:**
  - Close to 368.5 million children across 143 countries, mostly from Eastern and Southern African Africa, are missing out on school meals that are a reliable source of their daily nutrition.
  - This is huge implications on their foundational growth and learning.

- **Prolonged school closures also fuel gender-based violence, early marriages and teenage pregnancies**
  - As of March 2020, estimates show that over 20 million more secondary school girls, mostly from developing countries, may not return to school following the pandemic due to sexual violence (Malala Fund, 2020).
  - As of April 2020, UNFPA projected that if COVID-19 related lockdown continued for 6 months, 31 million additional gender-based violence cases were expected, of which, girls and female are the victims (UNFPA, 2020).
  - Close to 14,000 grade 8 children in Kenya could not be accounted for following school closures

Part 3: What is the way forward for Africa?

The Way Forward……

- **Deal with the unfinished agenda of *access* and *progression* through education** (especially among vulnerable children, girls, those from poor backgrounds, conflict areas) and ***learning poverty*** (right from foundational levels).

- **Prioritize the reopening of schools and delivery of vital services to children**, such as:
  - nutrition (school feeding program)
  - mental health services
  - WASH services
  - child protection services.

- **Ensure effective support is given to the education workforce, especially frontline workers like teachers**:
  - health services: vaccination
  - mental health services
  - Pedagogical support

The Way Forward……

- **Time to protect education budgets and ensure public spending in education is well targeted.**
  - Government need to mobilize resources from development partners, private sector etc.
  - Stakeholders including Pax Romana should ensure that:
    - Education is prioritized in national recovery strategies, plans and budgets
    - Ensure effective and efficient use of resources in the education sector (ensuring resources reach children at the margins of society).

- **Focusing on education technology(EdTech):**
  - Invest in
  - build the capacity of the general education workforce (especially teachers) in education technology
  - promote inclusivity and equity in access to technology that supports learning

The Way Forward……

- **Reform education curricula to ensure youth graduate with a broad set of skills, especially skills that computers cannot replicate.**
  - New entrants into the labour market now need *cognitive* skills (critical thinking, creative thinking, learning to learn and self-regulation); *social* and *emotional skills* (empathy, self-efficacy and collaboration); and *practical* and *digital skills* (using new ICT devices).
  - The use of this broader range of skills will be mediated by *attitudes* and *values* (resilience, adaptability, motivation, trust, respect for diversity and virtue).

- **Invest in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) as well as entrepreneurship skills.**
  - STEM skills create workers with a more flexible career especially in the unknown world of work.
  - STEM professionals attract more critical thinking, problem solving
  - Entrepreneurship skills, can equip young people facing the bleak prospect of unemployment, especially at this time when many jobs are being displaced.

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