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**THE PROMOTION OF KEY COMPETENCES FOR THE
ACCELERATED AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICA**
(Item proposed by Burkina Faso)

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. From 13 to 17 February 2012, Ouagadougou hosted the Triennial Meeting on education and vocational training. Organized by the Government of Burkina Faso in collaboration with the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), it aimed at deepening discussions on the key competences for the promotion of the accelerated development and sustainable development in Africa.

2. The Heads of State and Government of Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and the Representative of the President of Rwanda graced the opening ceremony of the Triennial and participated in a panel discussion on the above-mentioned theme. More than thousand (1000) delegates from the educational and vocational training sector participated in the meeting.

3. At the end of the deliberations the President of Burkina Faso, His Excellency Blaise COMPAORE was requested to submit the conclusions of the Triennial to his Peers.

4. The Conference the conclusions of which are meant to inspire the African political leadership at the highest level, focused on the building of the vision of the future of Africa (I), the critical competences to be promoted (II) by way of recommendations, the paradigm shifts and the necessary reforms of the education and training system (III).

II. BUILDING THE VISION OF THE FUTURE OF AFRICA

5. *“A peaceful, prosperous and integrated Africa run by citizens and which represents a dynamic force on the international scene”*, this is the vision of the future adopted by the Heads of State of the African Union in 2009. To build this future, Africa has at its disposal numerous advantages and many opportunities but faces serious challenges.

A. AFRICA will be the continent of the XXI century: opportunities and advantages

6. Since the mid-nineties, Africa has been bouncing back with economic growth of 5%, thus bringing an end to three decades of recession and stagnation. To sustain and give a boost to the dynamic, Africa enjoys exceptional opportunities and advantages that can be summarized as follows:

- i) *Enormous natural potential* of land and forest, biodiversity, mineral resources and clean energy deposits;
- ii) *An exceptional population bonus* with the rise in the young and urban population, the active population and middle class whereas other regions are confronted with aging population ;

- iii) *Two important development reserves* that have not yet been tapped: the masses of literate and marginalized women as well as African cultures;
- iv) *An attractiveness* fuelled by the increasing geographical importance and a return on investment which is currently the highest in the world.

7. It is this potential that has led many potential specialists to conclude that it is now the turn of Africa and that it will be the continent of the 21st Century.

8. The future of Africa will depend on the capacity of its population to tap the available opportunities and advantages. However, Africa is facing many human development challenges.

B. Persisting and new challenges

9. The persisting challenges are as follows: subsistence economies with low value addition, endemic poverty, epidemic and pandemics, illiteracy, armed conflicts, democratic deficit, bad governance. In addition to these are new challenges such as climate change and the increasing scientific and technological gap which separates the continent from the rest of the world. To address these challenges, it is necessary to concurrently ensure accelerated and sustained development.

10. Given the fact that it lags far behind, Africa must « run whilst the others are walking ». However, acceleration demands :

- i) *Structural transformation* of economies based on the exploitation of mineral resources into high value addition efficient economies;
- ii) *Economic diversification* through the promotion of agriculture, industrialization, modernization of infrastructure and services in order to increase productivity and make the economies more competitive;
- iii) *Regional and continental integration* in order to overcome the limitations of competitiveness and growth imposed by the small size of national markets.

11. To avoid the environmental and social disasters experienced elsewhere, the acceleration must go hand in hand with sustainability:

- i) *Protection of the environment and natural resources* : environmentally friendly production and consumption patterns, efficient agriculture and clean industries and energies;
- ii) *Pursuit of an inclusive model of development* that ensures equity and social cohesion through food security, social protection, fair taxation and the removal of all the limits to the social mobility of the poor;

- iii) *Laying of the foundation for peace building:* democratization of States and societies, cultural understanding and peaceful coexistence among different peoples.

12. The success of the acceleration as well as that of sustainability is contingent upon the availability of human capital capable of effecting the needed transformations. Consequently, there is the need to identify and promote the relevant critical skills.

III. CRITICAL KNOWLEDGE FOR ACCELERATED AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

13. To build the vision of the future through accelerated and sustainable development there is the need to craft education policies and systems that will be able to turn out: i) a human being who is proud of his/her African identity and who is committed to the renaissance of Africa; ii) an African citizen who is conscious, demanding and actively engaged in democracy and sustainable development; iii) a competent, productive worker willing to embrace technological changes and iv) a visionary and transformational leader.

14. The profiles take the form of critical skills, namely:

- i) *The common basic skills* to promote the emergence of the type of human being and citizen mentioned above. It comprises linguistic and digital skills as well as the cognitive skills that will enable him/her to continue to learn, the skills for successful integration into society and into the labour world, the skills for personal development and the promotion of a new Pan-Africanism;
- ii) *The technical and professional skills* are to be developed mainly to i) create a pool of labour force prepared for economic emergence; ii) promote the employability and the employment of the youth; iii) empower women as major actors of development; iv) meet the challenge of training high level technicians capable of monitoring and anticipating technological transformations in order to sustain the structural transformation of the economy;
- iii) *The scientific and technological skills* aim at i) the broad dissemination of scientific culture in education and in society; ii) the search for solutions to the problems of the development of African societies and economies; iii) the translation of research into concrete products and innovative technologies for the productive sectors; iv) the creation of transformational leadership or “creative” class; v) the emergence of knowledge-based African societies and economies.

15. In the light of the current situation of the educational system of Africa and the needed skills to be acquired by the population, one may wonder whether the current educational system can turn out people with such skills in quantity and quality.

16. In actual fact the comparison of the rates of school enrolment shows clearly that at all levels Africa records very low performance compared to the rest of the world. Furthermore, assessments carried out point to mediocre quality in terms of results of learning, internal efficiency, relevance, general and individual performance. This situation makes a compelling case for *major overhaul of the system*.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS : PARADIGM SHIFT AND NECESSARY REFORMS

17. It is worth pointing out that two paradigm shifts are urgent and critical to addressing the massive needs and enhancing the relevance of education.

- (a) **Adopt a holistic vision that transcends formal education** so as to identify the educational resources and opportunities in the economy, society, media, communities, families, religious congregations, NGOs, sports associations. Recognizing, developing and mobilizing all the potential in the formal, non-formal and informal education enables the promotion of a comprehensive, diversified, integrated, flexible and open system that offers each and every one learning opportunities that fit his/her situation.

Such system provides the possibility of:

- (i) Guaranteeing to all access to the core skills by virtue of the support to the formal, non-formal and informal mechanisms of civil society and communities for children who are not in school, second chance education for young school drop-outs and literacy programmes for adults;
- (ii) Training and qualifying a maximum number of persons through partnerships with companies, professional groups, master-craftsmen and professional bodies, by means of academic work combined with work experience and apprenticeship rather than confining the development of vocational and professional skills to costly, under-utilized and the limiting classic vocational training;
- (iii) Making it possible for all to continue learning at any age and at any place, including distance education and open learning.

- (b) **Adopt a strategic approach to education: shift from a functional logic to development logic, from the logic of supply to that of demand.**

Building the vision means tailoring the training of skilled and qualified manpower to meet the specific needs of the drivers of accelerated economic growth and the basis of sustainable economic development. The strategic planning of skilled and qualified manpower is to be carried out by each country based on the national development programme, the strengths and the specific potential and comparative advantages to be developed.

To attain the two objectives, what are the reforms and changes that Africa must embark on? The participants concluded that Africa must:

(c) Undertake the qualitative reforms necessary for the overhaul of the African educational systems through :

- (i) *The integration of the historic, linguistic and cultural heritage of Africa into the education system in order to lay the foundation for African renaissance and to facilitate the acceptance and internalizing of external contributions, especially foreign languages, science and technology;*
- (ii) *The broad dissemination of scientific culture into the systems in order to position mathematics, science and technology at the centre of educational curriculum and enable all to understand and to use the interactions of science with political, cultural, economic and social life to clarify and strengthen representations, decision-making, projects and actions. Interactions with African cultures are expected to make them more open and dynamic;*
- (iii) *The promotion of life-long learning is absolutely necessary to facilitate adaptation to rapid and profound changes brought about by scientific and technological revolution in all sectors of life, work, and leisure;*
- (iv) *Integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into the education system in order to open up new possibilities for expanding and improving upon education and vocational training by enriching the curricula, improving the learning environment, reinforcing the training of teachers and providing more opportunities such as distance education and open learning.*

(d) Support for the successful implementation of reforms

The shift from the definition of reforms to their successful implementation on the ground raises technical challenges stemming from the systematic breakdown of the objective and aims defined at the political level up to the education-learning-training process. It also relates to the determination of political leadership which must be reflected in decision-making, the choice of financing priorities, the mobilization of the State and society to ensure the success of the reforms.

Among the factors that are critical to the success of the reforms are:

- (i) *The building of broad national consensus for strong social and political support and to ensure that the reforms survives beyond ministerial reshuffle and the democratic cycle of political alternation;*

- (ii) *The introduction of partnership-based and participative form of governance* that prolongs and reinforces the consensus by involving stakeholders at the various stages of implementation;
- (iii) *The mobilization and the efficient allocation of additional resources* designed to backstop the change;
- (iv) *The motivation and the empowerment of the actors of the reform, especially teachers and other key actors;*
- (v) *Support of the reform by means of expert analysis and research* that offer a prospective vision, provide guidance in decision-making and serve as tool to support monitoring-evaluation and supervision mechanisms.

(e) Develop effective strategies for cooperation and exchange in order to develop knowledge

African countries should adopt cooperation strategies that reinforce their policies and enhances their resources for the promotion of the desired skills. This basically involves: :

- (i) *The pooling of resources* to finance sub-regional, regional and continental programmes and institutions in order to acquire knowledge together, address common challenges or finance specialized training or training in specific areas that cannot be borne by one country;
- (ii) *Adequate funding of the AU-NEPAD consolidated action plan for science and technology* for the development of high level scientific and technological skills;
- (iii) *The mobilization and the involvement of the African diaspora* through appropriate mechanisms to enable them to participate in developing skills;
- (iv) *The effective positioning of South/South and North/South exchanges in capacity building, especially through technology transfer and expertise to support African professionals in search of solutions to the challenges and specific development challenges encountered on the ground;*
- (v) *Involving multinational companies based in Africa* to contribute to the development of local skills on contractual basis.

V. CONCLUSION

18. Africa has a vision for the future which must guide the transformation to be carried out, especially the acceleration and sustainability of development.

- 19.** Education and vocational training must serve as the vehicle for building the future by facilitating the training of the large number of people with the critical skills.
- 20.** It is incumbent on African leaders to formulate the appropriate policies on education and training.

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