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**REPORT OF THE 1<sup>ST</sup> EXTRA-ORDINARY SESSION OF  
THE CONFERENCE OF AFRICAN MINISTERS OF  
EDUCATION**

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## **1. Introduction**

The vision of the African Union is predicated on the development of its human resources. The African Union has a shared vision of an Africa that is driven by its own citizens to take their rightful place in the global community. Education is seen as a means for preparing its citizenry for their respective roles in development and empowering them as determinants of a desired destiny; and drivers of the means to attain it.

The Declaration of the Decade for Education for Africa is one testimony to Africa's commitment to harness Education to achieve its vision of prosperity, peace and integration. The 4<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session of the Summit of the African Union endorsed the Algiers Declaration of Ministers of Education of the African Union, in which the AUC was requested to carry out an evaluation of the Decade of Education, and propose a new plan of action for a second decade of education. The present Report outlines the process and outcome of the evaluation of the Decade of Education which was declared in 1996.

## **2. Background Information**

The Decade of Education had its genesis in the *Segou Perspectives* of 1994, a forum at which eight African Ministers of Education, conscious of the critical role that education can play in the transformation of the continent in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, decided to launch a coordinated African vision of Education within the broader perspective of Africa's future development, and to involve the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in the development and implementation of the vision.

A proposal to this effect was subsequently submitted to the OAU by the President of Mali in 1996 and was adopted in pursuit of resolution AHG/De.251 (XXXII) in June 1996 by the 32<sup>nd</sup> Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of States and Governments. The resolution proclaimed the period 1997 – 2006 the *Decade of Education in Africa*, and called upon the Secretariat of the OAU to convene a Pan-African Ministerial Conference to develop and adopt the Decade's Programme of Action.

The Secretary-General of the OAU in Addis Ababa formally launched the Decade on 22 November 1997. A follow-up Conference of African Ministers of Education (COMEDAF I) was convened in 1999, in Harare-Zimbabwe and came up with a Declaration urging "African States, individually and collectively, to work towards sub-regional and pan-African integration and harmonization of programmes and

strategies within the framework of the OAU and Regional Economic Communities for improved African educational systems”

The 38th Ordinary Session of Heads of States and Government meeting in Lomé in July 2000 took the following decisions:

- To henceforth include an item on the Decade in the agenda of every Summit
- Establish a Group of Eminent Personalities and give them the responsibility for sensitizing decision-makers to the priority to be given to education
- Establish an Education Development Fund in Africa
- Examine the possibility of converting the African debt in favour of education;
- Harmonize the various plans, programmes and strategies of the OAU, UNESCO, ADEA and other agencies and organizations intended for Africa, to enable the member countries to find their place in the various initiatives so that the necessary synergies can be harnessed and used coherently and in harmony.

These recommendations were further re-affirmed in subsequent meetings of the Steering Committee: Dakar (2002) and Tripoli (2002).

The Second Conference of Ministers of Education of the African Union, COMEDAF II, was held in Algiers in April 2005. At this Conference, the AU/NEPAD Framework for Education and Human Resource Development was adopted, and the Algiers Declaration was signed, pointing out key challenges and areas of focus for implementation. The declaration called upon the AUC to carry out an evaluation of the Decade of Education for Africa and propose a plan of action for a Second Decade. The Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the African Union endorsed the Algiers Declaration in July 2005 in Sirte.

## **1. Evaluation of the Second Decade of Education for Africa**

With technical support from UNESCO, and with the assistance of two consultants, the Commission carried out an in-depth evaluation of the Decade of Education for Africa.

### **3.1 Evaluation Methodology**

The evaluation process involved literature surveys and mailed questionnaires. Questionnaires were prepared and sent out to every Member State, and eight Regional Economic Communities. The questions sought to determine quantity and quality developments in the education sector, which occurred during the Decade. Other data was collected through review of official documents of

Member States as well as through Internet web search for statistical and non-statistical information.

The evaluation questions covered the following specific issues:

### **For Member States**

- The extent to which 15 specific actions in the Decade's action plan were undertaken
- Major highlights of developments in education during the Decade
- Five specific areas on which to build the activities of the next Decade (with justifications)

### **For Regional Economic Commissions**

- Specific structures for the Decade – programs, achievements, lessons
- Interesting education initiatives in the region during the Decade
- Future directions for regional integration through the instrumentality of education

A number of Member States and RECs have returned completed questionnaires. An evaluation report and a draft Plan of Action for the Second Decade of Education for Africa have been produced, including an interview with His Excellency the Chairperson of the African Union Commission who was one of the champions for the declaration of the Decade of Education.

A Technical Committee of the Decade of Education critically discussed the outputs of the evaluation exercise, in a meeting held in Addis Ababa from October 20-21 2005. The document has been distributed to the Steering Committee of the Decade as well as to Ministers of Education of the African Union.

## **3.2 Results of the Evaluation**

According to the evaluation report, much has been done towards increasing access to basic education in Africa, although most of the targets set in the Plan of Action have not yet been attained. There are a number of notable achievements, in spite of a multitude of challenges.

### **3.2.1 Achievements**

Regional Seminars to promote and implement the Decade were held in every region, including West Africa, 2000; Central Africa, 2000; East Africa, 2000; and North Africa, 2002; and Southern Africa, 2002. The objectives of these workshops included to disseminate information on the Decade; to allow Member States to share ideas and experiences. The Regional Seminars were well supported by partners including ADEA, ADB, CODESRIA, the Commonwealth

Secretariat, ECA, ECOWAS, Education International, FAWE, ICRC, IDRC, International Francophone Agency, ROCARE/ERNWACA, UNESCO, UNHCR, UNICEF, and the WFP.

Progress has been made towards establishment of Regional Protocols in Education and Training, although the regions are at different levels.

There have been a number of regional initiatives with major positive impact. These include PASEC (Programme d'Analyse des Systèmes éducatifs de la CONFEMEN) that covers five countries; SACMEQ, which covers 15 countries.

The Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) has made much contribution towards assisting a number of Member States in the attainment of gender goals in education. FAWE was created in 1992, and has a network of 33 National Chapters with a wide range of Membership that includes women policy makers and male ministers of education who are associate members. FAWE seeks to ensure that girls have access to school, complete their studies and perform well at all levels.

A number of publications to promote the Decade were produced by the OAU, with support from UNESCO IICBA from 1999 to 2003.

There were modest increases in Gross Enrolment ratios for Early Childhood, Secondary and Tertiary education; with significant increase recorded in primary education.

Adult literacy levels increased from 52.4% in 1990 to 62.9% in 2000/2004 for adults and from 69% to 74.6% for youths.

### **3.2.2 Challenges**

Although the Decade for Education for Africa was declared at the Heads of State Summit in Yaounde in 1996, the plan of action was adopted by the Heads of State Summit in July 1999. This had a significant impact on the progress in implementation of the Decade, and on achievements.

Many goals of the first Decade have not been achieved. Furthermore, the Decade did not receive due recognition, because it was not adequately promoted.

The Decade was set within a context of several other well-funded educational initiatives, including EFA, MDGs and NEPAD. The same period also witnessed conflict situations in 21 African countries, which negatively affected gains made in education. Structural adjustment programmes also had their toll in many Member States.

Contrary to expectations, the Decade of Education in Africa did not appear to have much support from major international agencies and Africa's development partners. UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, and other Jomtien partners developed Africa-specific programs during the period, but there was no evidence that these were ever linked with the Decade. At the national level, Member States negotiated their education sector development programs with development partners, but this was not explicitly (or even implicitly) done within the overall context of achieving the goals of the Decade.

Funding was a major challenge at all levels. The OAU was not sufficiently equipped financially and structurally to cope with the execution of programs of the Decade. At the regional level, there is no evidence of any additional resourcing to meet the challenges of the Decade. This is also true of individual Member States, where budgets for education effectively declined during the period covered by the Decade. Even pledged external funding for education came only in trickles during the period

The Plan of Action had recommended that Member States should spend 6% of Gross National Produce (GNP) on education. The evaluation revealed that spending on education decreased in all five regions of the African Union, from an average of 5.1% in 1995 to 4.1% in 2000. Government budget spent on primary education has, on average, not yet reached the recommended target of 20-25%.

The average education expenditure per student fell from \$40 in 1980 to \$25 in 2001. Indeed, some countries spent less than 3% of their GNP on education in 2001.

Repayment of external debt absorbed more than one quarter of government revenue in countries like Ethiopia and Niger, rising to over half of revenue in Tanzania.

Primary school repetition rates decreased, while drop out rates increased significantly.

Although enrolment in Primary education has increased tremendously, this has been at the expense of quality, and without commensurate investments in secondary and tertiary education, and teacher training.

## **2. Proposal for a Second Decade of Education for Africa**

A good start has been made in addressing education in Africa. A second opportunity for a Decade of Education is necessary. The Second Decade will endeavour to capitalise on the gains made in the first decade, while seeking to

avoid the pitfalls. Challenges in the first Decade should be converted to opportunities in a second Decade of Education.

The overall GOAL of the Second Decade of Education for Africa is to get Africa out of the 'education deficit' with which the Continent has entered the twenty-first century by according special attention to strategic areas of educational development, which will be closely linked with Culture and all other development sectors being promoted by the African Union, in line with the AU Vision and Mission.

#### **4.1 A Plan of Action**

A plan of action for the second decade of education for Africa has been developed. This will avoid the delays occasioned in the first decade whereby the Plan of Action was only adopted two years after the decade had been declared. This plan of Action has been discussed and adopted by the Extra-ordinary Conference of Ministers of Education held in Addis Ababa in January 2006.

##### **4.1.1 Objectives of the Plan of Action**

It is envisaged that at the end of the Second Decade of Education, Africa will have addressed key issues hindering its educational development thereby achieving the following:

- Developed functional national Educational Management Information Systems (EMIS), inter-connected to regional and continental EMIS networks, thus reversing the current phenomenon of 'data blank', which has inhibited systematic planning, monitoring and evaluation.
- Mainstreamed Education fully into the policies, program activities, and organisational structures of the African Union Commission and the Regional Economic Communities.
- Significantly raised educational achievement (Access, Quality, Efficiency, Relevance), while addressing teacher education and education for development' concerns.
- Attained full gender equality in primary and secondary education
- Fully institutionalised systematic exchange of experiences and mutual assistance for educational development,
- Developed functioning mechanisms for harnessing the forces of Education for regional integration.

The Plan of Action addresses a deliberately limited number of areas, to be interpreted to cover all levels from early childhood education to higher education and research. These areas are:

- Educational Statistics
- Quality in all dimensions
- Gender Equality and all it implies

- Science and Technology, and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET).

#### **4.1.2 Guiding Principles for the Second Decade**

The Second Decade of Education will be designed to enhance the chances for success. The following principles will guide the implementation of the Decade:

- (i) Enhanced Political Support will be necessary, and will require distinct education programmes within both the AUC and the RECs
- (ii) Concentration on Strategic Issues
- (iii) Enhancing Mutual Assistance among African States
- (iv) Enhancing the Capacities of Regional Economic Communities
- (v) Strong and Effective Mechanisms for Monitoring
- (vi) Avoiding creation of new structures, capitalising on existing structures, supporting their capacity building and reform to accommodate new imperatives.

## **5. Way Forward**

Planning for an education Decade should be structurally and systemically integrated into the other political and socio-economic programs of the AU. This would ensure that the promotion of education on the continent is also integrated into work in other development areas that impact strongly on education –the economy, health, youth development, political stability, infrastructure, health, food security, and so on. The planning should also take due cognisance of the priorities and capacities of member States, as a means of ensuring their total adherence to the programs of the Decade.

To keep the Second Decade alive will require appropriate resource allocation and a strong media back up at all levels. It would also require concrete and visible activities and celebrations at all levels, to keep stakeholders permanently mobilized. An integral part of the work here would be the regular dissemination of lessons from on-going experiences and experiments.

To follow up this programme activity, focus for the Commission's education activities in 2006 will be on strengthening RECs to implement and monitor the Second Decade of Education for Africa. This will involve a needs assessment and appropriate capacity building in such areas as programme cycle management, monitoring and evaluation, data gathering and statistics. Other areas include Technical and Vocational Education and Training, Revitalisation of

Higher Education including universities and Teacher Education, and a Scholarship Scheme to support production of a cadre of high calibre human resources for development.

Collaboration will be sought and strengthened with such institutions as the Association of African Universities, UNESCO's IICBA and UIS, in the areas of higher education, capacity building in teacher education and education statistics. UIS can assist in providing much needed capacity building in statistical databases, as long as Member States define their own vision and needs. This will be essential for the implementation of the Second Decade of Education for Africa. (Report of the Extraordinary Meeting of Ministers of Education is attached).

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# Report of the 1st extra-ordinary session of the conference of African ministers of education

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