
UNESCO AND UPE IN AFRICA

LEAD PAPER BY DR AKO D MENGOT

Nineteen years ago, at the dawn of political independence of most African countries, delegates of 39 African States and five European States (Belgium, France, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom), met in Addis Ababa to discuss education in Africa. This Conference was a turning point in the development of education in Africa. It was the first time in Africa that Education of Africans was discussed essentially by Africans at a continental level. In essence, the Conference was the "beginning of the future", because the targets that were set by it will, for many years to come, be the yard-stick for measuring achievement (in quantitative terms) of educational development in African countries.

The Addis Ababa Conference gave formal expression to the educational consciousness that began in the 1950s in many parts of Africa for, generally speaking, the 1950s witnessed a change in the attitude of African peoples towards education.

"A world of people, previously immobilised, got hold of a liberating idea that knowledge is the key to a whole family of powers - political, social and economic; that a monopoly of knowledge in the hands of the few is but another name for the rule of the few over the many and that any people who wish to be authors of their own history and to develop in their own way, must break up the existing monopoly of knowledge. They must make the right of access to education the common property of everyone and, by extension, must also democratize the right of access progressively to higher levels of education."⁽¹⁾

This was the beginning of what Professor Harbison describes as the "Revolution of Rising Expectations".⁽²⁾

The task of this Conference,⁽³⁾ convened jointly by UNESCO and the Economic Commission for Africa, was to make an outline of an educational development plan keyed to provide economic growth and social progress in African countries. After studying the situation existing in each State, the Conference adopted a certain number of recommendations concerning the relationship between economics and education, the objectives of education, financing and planning of education, curricula reforms and adult education.

The final report and the recommendations stipulate that "the development of human resources is as urgent and essential as the development of natural resources ... that the content of education should be related to economic needs, greater weight being given to science, and its applications ... that African countries should aim at providing universal primary education; at the same time special attention should be given to adult education and on-the-job training ...".

For the 1961-80 period, the Conference determined the following long-term objectives for the whole continent:

- universal free and compulsory primary education;

- education at the second level for 30 per cent of the children who complete primary school, that is, 23 per cent of the corresponding age group;
- higher education provided, mostly in Africa itself, to about 20 per cent of those who complete secondary education, that is 2 per cent of the corresponding age group;
- constant improvement of the quality of African schools and universities.

The enrolment rates to be attained by 1970-71 for the corresponding age group were as follows:

- primary level: 71%
- secondary level: 15%
- higher level: 0.4%

The Conference furthermore recommended that the African States increase the percentage of national revenue devoted to financing education from 3.4 per cent in 1965 to 6 per cent in 1980. In order to increase the internal productivity and the external efficiency of the educational systems, it especially recommended "that teacher training and the adaptation and reform of the content of education should be regarded as priorities and the principle of priority should extend to both qualitative and quantitative requirements".

The Addis Ababa Conference was the first evidence of African solidarity in the field of education. It accurately identified situations of the African countries as a whole and the need for each of them to make special efforts to accelerate the modernization of its people needed to develop a yet under-exploited economic potential. But there is one fact that is worth emphasizing: the main problems of education in the world of today and especially in the developing countries had already been accurately and realistically perceived and analysed.

Also it was of great importance that heavy stress was laid on the economic and social function of education on the one hand and, on the other, the overall and forward-looking view of the development of education, requiring tightknit planning of educational activities as part of general development activities and the constant need to adapt the educational structures to African realities and requirements.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE RAPID EXPANSION OF THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

The immediate consequence of the Addis Ababa Conference was therefore the unprecedented expansion of the educational system at all levels. The leaders of the African nations emerging from colonial rule were determined to translate into practical policy the aspirations of their peoples. Education was seen as the effective weapon in the fight against illiteracy, ignorance and a lever of overall economic and social advancement and, as such, was to be given top priority in national development programmes.

"The passionate desire of common men and women to give their own children a better chance in life, gave the demand for education its explosive quality, and made it a political force that no democratic government could long resist. Since many of the parents were themselves illiterate, the pressure was for more education rather than better education and it was too much to expect them to be very concerned whether their demand for more primary schools represented

the best use that could be made of the country's meagre funds for education. Nor can they have been prepared for the educational inflation that rendered graduation from primary school, by the time their children achieved it, no longer sufficient to buy the white-collar jobs for which they had sought it. (4) Five main factors contributed to the spectacular results achieved:

(a) The need for educated and trained manpower at all levels for the rapidly expanding economic and social institutions that were created after the attainment of political independence as well as the compelling political necessity to satisfy the legitimate aspirations of the people who wanted schools for their children since they regarded education as the key to progress and social advancement.

(b) The sense of international solidarity and the framework of international co-operation which made available a substantial (although still inadequate) amount of external resources for the purpose of educational development in Africa. At the same time, inter-African co-operation with its expression in the establishment of the Organisation of African Unity (O.A.U.) was considerably strengthened.

(c) The Addis Ababa Conference accepted the concept of "education as a productive investment" and as a major factor of economic, social and technological development. This last factor explains why educational development has come to be almost equated with educational planning, which in turn is closely related to overall economic planning.

To help African countries to plan their educational systems, UNESCO established a Regional Group for Educational Planning and Administration in Africa (1962-68) which was later expanded to become the UNESCO Regional Centre for Educational Planning and Administration in Africa (1968-70). In 1970, as a result of UNESCO's decentralization policy, the Centre became the UNESCO Regional Office for Education in Africa.

(d) Education planning, pursuant to the recommendations of the Addis Ababa Conference, gained full acceptance in Africa. As the Director General of UNESCO pointed out in his speech at the 1968 Nairobi Conference on Education and Scientific and Technical Training in relation to Development in Africa: "Educational planning is not the effect of a passing infatuation with a new idea, but results from the clear recognition that it meets the need to bring educational systems up to maximum efficiency while, at the same time, ensuring the balanced development of the individual".

(e) The realisation that education is no longer a privilege of the few but a fundamental right of all the people, and that the guarantee for such a right is compulsory free primary education and equal opportunities for access to higher levels of education.

ENROLMENT (5)

Statistics for enrolment reveal the substantial advances over the past 19 years in the development of schools and universities, representing progress without historical precedent in so short a period.

Between 1960 and 1972, enrolment rose in primary education from 16 to 32 million, in secondary education from 1,400,000 to over five million, and in higher education from 138,000 to over half a million. Percentages of the school age population attending school increased respectively, from 41.5 to 59.5 per cent, from 4.4 to 11.9 per cent and from 0.6 to 1.7 per cent. The proportion of girls enrolled has also shown an increase, from 34.8 to 39.9 per cent in primary education, from 25.8 to 30.7 per cent in secondary, and from 16.9 to 24.2 per cent in higher education. Over the same period, public expenditure on education has risen, at present values, from \$866 million to 2.8 milliard or, to put it another way, from an average of 2.8 to 4.7 per cent of the Gross National Product.

UNESCO'S CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS THE REALISATION OF THE ADDIS ABABA TARGET

It can be said that the goal of Universal Free and Compulsory Primary Education (UPE) in 1980 was the central objective of educational development in African countries since primary education is the foundation of any educational system and secondary and higher education depend on the output of primary schools. It follows that any contribution made to the planning and development of secondary and higher education directly affects the development and effectiveness of the primary education in the context of overall national development. It is in this light that UNESCO's contribution towards the realisation of the goal of UPE should be appreciated.

UNESCO's contribution has been very succinctly and lucidly stated by the Director-General of UNESCO, Mr Amadou Mahtar M'BOW, as follows⁽⁶⁾:

At the outset the Addis Ababa Plan might have appeared utopian, based more on an ideal than on an analysis of the real possibilities existing in the countries which designed the Plan. Yet it reflected above all the determination of peoples to march forward unhesitatingly and hasten the course of history. The Plan's promoters were well aware of the massive resources required, but many felt that after centuries of often painful history, African countries could count on the solidarity and the assistance of the wealthier countries as well as of the international organisations, in their efforts to modernize.

UNESCO, as the Conference's co-organiser with the Economic Commission for Africa, and because its Constitution so recommends, made special efforts together with bilateral aid sources, to bring the maximum amount of co-operation possible to the African countries in the fields defined in the Addis Ababa Plan. Thus, in 1961, a special three-year programme was launched, financed by voluntary contributions, the aim of which was to help the countries increase their scholastic capacity by building schools, producing educational materials, improving teacher training and educational planning which enrolled the capacities of 87 specialists by 1962. UNESCO provided equipment and materials and granted many scholarships to train national cadres both within the countries and abroad, thanks especially to support from the United Nations Development Programme, UNICEF, the World Food Programme, the World Bank and a few countries which set up funds-in-trust administered by UNESCO.

In Africa itself, UNESCO created a number of institutions to help governments solve the many problems they faced and to train badly needed specialized personnel. Some of these institutions, in line with a policy to rationalize the Organisation's activities, were grouped together under the Regional Office for Education set up in Dakar in 1970. Teams of specialists using an inter-disciplinary approach now train educational planners and

administrators and help Member States in carrying out studies, planning and training.

But UNESCO's action is best known because of the role played by the teacher training colleges and institutes set up under the United Nations Development Programme, in co-operation with the countries concerned, for the purpose of developing secondary education. At the beginning of the 60s, there were very few African secondary school teachers. UNESCO contributed to training some 10,000 teachers locally in ten years, mainly to teach in the first level of secondary education. At present, the higher teacher training colleges established with the help of UNESCO turn out 2,000 graduates every year. These are students who have received a general education as well as teacher training to enable them to teach at all levels of secondary schools.

Thanks to this action and especially to the efforts deployed by the States themselves, considerable progress has been made during the last decade. The funds allocated to education have varied between 2 and 6.8 per cent of the GNP and between 7 and 30 per cent of the public expenditure, depending on the country. It is interesting to note that in 1969, the African countries devoted an average 4.2 per cent of the GNP to education, as against 3.3 per cent for the developing countries as a whole and 5.4 per cent for the developed countries. African governments themselves devoted a large percentage of their national budgets (15 per cent - 40 per cent) on education alone.

Such is the magnitude of the financial burden entailed that the Conference of African Ministers of Education meeting here in Nairobi in July 1968 noted that:

"the expenditures on education of most African States represent a very high proportion of their national budgets and incomes and that in present circumstances it would be difficult to exceed those percentages without endangering the entire economic and social development of these countries".

The Second United Nations Development Decade has been characterised by a marked expansion of the base of the school pyramid which is due to the increased access to education as well as to demographic growth...

But it is a well-known fact that the mere expansion of the existing education systems has exacerbated, rather than attenuated, differences in the level of educational attainment between different countries, and often within one and the same country.⁽⁷⁾ As a result, there is, therefore, an increasingly keen awareness of the need to broaden the traditional framework of formal education and to replace it by a global system incorporating school and out-of-school education, the teaching of children and that of adults. This fact was very clearly and emphatically brought out during the Lagos Conference of Ministers of Education of African Member States.

The Fourth Regional Conference of Ministers of Education of African Member States (known for short as MINEDAF) held in Lagos, Nigeria (27 January to 4 February 1976) had the following terms of reference:

- (a) to review the development of education since the Conference of Ministers of Education held in Nairobi in 1968;
- (b) to study the present trends in education in the region and problems raised by the renewal of education systems, giving due consideration to social, economic and cultural development needs and in the context of life-long education;

(e) to define the problems callings for priority treatment and to establish guidelines for activities in the field of educational development and renewal, both at the level of the Member States and in the framework of regional and international co-operation.

For the Lagos Conference, very detailed statistical studies were prepared, and in particular in the following documents: "Educational Development in Africa: Trends and Projection until 1985" (ED-76/MINEDAF/REF.1); "Regional Educational Targets and Achievements in Africa, 1965-72" (ED-76/MINEDAF/REF.6). From these documents it was clear that the forty-four countries which participated in the conference fell into four relatively homogenous groups from the point of view of overall participation in the educational process as illustrated by the following table. (8)

Table: Net Enrolment Ratios (6-11) (boys and girls) according to Reference Documents of the Lagos Conference (22)

	1960	1965	1970	1972
AFRICA	30,9	37,6	41,7	44,2
<u>Group 1:</u> Ethiopia, Upper Volta, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Somalia, Chad (7 countries)	5,5	8,9	11,4	12,5
<u>Group 2:</u> Angola, Benin, Burundi, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Malawi, Morocco, Mozambique, Nigeria, Uganda, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Tanzania (17 countries)	24,9	27,5	30,8	34,0
<u>Group 3:</u> Algeria, Botswana, Ivory Coast, Egypt, Ghana, Equatorial Guinea, Kenya, Madagascar, Central African Empire, Togo (10 countries)	45,4	58,2	60,3	63,4
<u>Group 4:</u> Cameroon, Congo, Gabon, Lesotho, Lybia, Mauritius, Swaziland, Tunisia, Zaire, Zambia (10 countries)	54,9	67,6	79,9	79,9

If the grouping of countries according to a single criterion (certainly very limited) does not ignore, the many differences which exist within the one group, it reveals the inevitable differences in the strategies of educational expansion.

To sum up, the brief diagnosis reveals two facts: in the first place, the considerable gaps which exist between the countries of the region as regards the participation in the educational process, and in the second place, generally speaking, the pressure which is building more and more as concerns the demand for secondary and higher education. In the face of these facts, what is the progress made and the problems encountered in democratizing education from the quantitative point of view and in the first place, in terms of policy and strategy?

Looking at the table of primary schools enrolments of the 44 African States against the background of the Addis Ababa target of "Universal, Compulsory and Free Primary Education" one cannot deny the conclusion that:

"Beautiful illusions now seem to belong to the past. There is no longer any question of the majority of African countries achieving the Addis Ababa objectives, for many of them will have difficulty in maintaining their present school enrolment even at its still very low level".

The logical question that follows this rather depressing conclusion is, if expansion of the primary school system, the sine qua non of democratization, is proving difficult what hope can there be of improving the quality of education?

It is important to draw attention to the fact that the table cited above refers to primary enrolments in 1972 and that since that time many countries in the region have embarked on very vigorous, and in some cases revolutionary reforms of their educational systems aimed at achieving, 'in the nearest future' the goals of the Addis Ababa target of universal primary education. Nigeria, for example, launched its UPE programme in 1976, Tanzania, "by 1974, before the end of the Second Five-Year Plan in education, decided that universal primary education (UPE) was to come by 1977."⁽⁹⁾ Sierra Leone's Education Review (1973) recommended that⁽¹⁰⁾:

"Primary school places expand two-and-half times, so that by 1990, 78 per cent of 7-year olds are entering schools and that the existing secondary schools expand by 50 per cent to a population of approximately 66,000...".

In Ethiopia and Somalia quite revolutionary reforms are taking place. The educational reforms in the Republics of Benin, Ivory Coast, Madagascar and Guinea are well-known documented case studies. These are just a few examples from the Anglophone and Francophone countries of the Region. The Portuguese-speaking Republics of Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique, Sao Tome and Principe, at their Conference of Ministers of Education and Senior Government Officials held in Bissau in February 1978 demonstrated in an equally determined manner that their governments were committed to the task of raising their people from the ravages of a bitter and protracted war of liberation from Portuguese colonial rule to a state of assertion of their rights and aspirations as free and independent people and that education (woefully neglected under Portuguese rule) is the main lever of social progress and economic development.

Why Universal Primary Education (UPE)?

But one is inclined to ask the question "Why all this fuss about UPE?"

There are many reasons for the drive towards UPE in Africa; among these are:

- (a) The "international consensus" reached at the Addis Ababa Conference of 1961.
- (b) The Declaration of the African Heads of State and Heads of Government in Addis Ababa in May, 1971 (exactly ten years after the Addis Ababa Conference), which states inter alia:

"We, Heads of African States and Governments... are convinced that the mobilising of the immense human resources of the continent in order to stimulate and guide the creative imagination of Africans will accelerate the process of transformation of African economies and will rapidly improve the living conditions of our people... (we commit ourselves) to guarantee to the whole population the right to education and to training within the context of African realities, by providing an education and training adapted to the needs and development goals of Africa".

The right to education proclaimed at the international level, of which the following are most important:

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948);
- Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959);
(Derived largely from the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child approved in 1924 by the Assembly of the League of Nations);
- The Governant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966);
and
- In UNESCO, the Convention and Recommendation against Discrimination in Education;
- In UNESCO, the adoption of resolution 9.11 at the Nineteenth Session of the General Conference, held in Nairobi, Kenya (1976) relating to the New International Economic Order (N.I.E.O.), viz:

"...A human order based on freedom, justice and equity, removal of inequality among nations and peoples, mutual understanding, co-operation in mankind's major common tasks, and the participation of everyone in welfare, education, knowledge and culture..."

Apart from these rather purely legalistic justifications for the right to education, there are social and philosophical reasons justify the necessity for education as a sine qua non to true freedom and liberty. These truths, stated by great philosophers and educationists long ago stand as inevitable reminders to present day rulers:

- Aristotle, with his shrewed common sense fixes upon education as the key to 'wise state craft' when he asserts"... Nobody could possibly doubt that the chief concern of the law-giver must be the education of the young..."
- John Amos Comenius wanted education for all men together as well as for each one individually, that is young and old, rich and poor, noble and common men and women, the point being that the state be able to educate "each and every person whose destiny was to be born a man".
- Locke argued that children's right to be educated is a result of their right to be able to enjoy their freedom to the full in due course, and, likewise, of every human being's vital need to be given an education in order to be able to use his faculties. "All that we lack at birth, and need in adulthood, we owe to education".
- Thomas Jefferson's candid assertion reminds statesmen of the relationship between freedom and education. "If a people expects

to be ignorant and free, it expects what never was, or never will be....".

So, from the foregoing, we can understand why UNESCO supports the objective of Universal Primary Education (UPE). UNESCO, under the terms of its constitution, is responsible for instituting "collaboration among the nations to advance the ideal of equality of educational opportunity without regard to race, sex or any distinctions, economic or social" and for suggesting educational methods best suited to prepare the children of the world for the responsibilities of freedom...".

UNESCO's collaboration among nations is ensured through its two-yearly general conferences, and the resultant programmes and budgets; through Regional Conferences of Ministers of Education and Ministers responsible for Economic Planning; through the two-yearly international conferences organised by the IBE in Geneva; through the organisation of experts' meetings, and seminars/workshops by the staff of the Secretariat in Paris and the UNESCO Regional Offices and through UNESCO's programmes of co-operation with other United Nations Specialized Agencies, notably, UNICEF, ILO, FAO/WFP, WHO and UNHCR.

What UNESCO does not do is to tell any of its Member States whether or not to launch a Universal Primary Education (UPE) programmes because UNESCO fully realises the fact that "all educational systems are now instruments of national policy" and that the national sovereignty of its Member States must be respected.

In conclusion, although some critics see the Addis Ababa Conferences as "a naive expression of an essentially political aspiration coming from a conference whose chief preoccupation was African Unity."

From the African point of view, it is an indisputable fact that the Addis Ababa Conference which met at a time when many African States were emerging from colonial tutelage, by setting the goal of "Universal compulsory and free education by 1980", translated the social awareness of the importance of education and the political options that began at the end of the Second World into a practical programme of action. It is true that the targets of the Addis Ababa have not yet been attained by many countries, but everything considered, a great deal has been accomplished in the face of tremendous economic, social and political obstacles.

UNESCO has an important role to play in giving encouragement and support to, in seeking international aid and co-operation for those States which have freely committed themselves to the realisation of the laudable goal of Universal Primary Education.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Philip Coombs, The World Crisis in Education (Oxford University Press, London, 1968), p.99.
2. The "Revolution of rising expectations" was not a social revolution which occurred in Africa only. The change occurred in the context of world-wide revolutionary developments of several sorts—extraordinary advances in science and technology, the emergence of dozens of newly independent states, a demographic explosion still in process and the "revolution of rising expectations" fired great masses of people everywhere. Long-muted human rights came to be openly declared (as they are today being asserted) and vigorously pursued, including the right to education. Social mobility quickened making headway against age old barriers which could no longer hold against the post Second World War democratic process. See UNESCO Doc.ED/CEP 3 (6-14 August 1968) p.8.
3. See Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, in "UNESCO in the service of Africa", EDUCAFRICA No.1 (published by the UNESCO Regional Office for Education in Africa, Dakar).
4. Clarence Beeby, The Quality of Education in Developing Countries (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. U.S.A., 1966, p.9.
5. UNESCO Chronicle, Dec. 1975, Vol.XXI, No.12, p.345.
6. Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, op. cit.
7. See Educational Reforms: Experiences and Prospects (UNESCO, Paris, 1979), p.9.
8. See the Working Document: Regional Meeting of Heads of Educational Planning and Administrative Services (Regional Office of UNESCO, Dakar, 17-21 September 1979), pp.12-13.
9. Educational Reforms: Experiences and Prospects. op.cit. p.149.
10. Sierra Leone Education Review - All Our Future (1973), p.2.
11. The Declaration of the Heads of African States and Governments, quoted at p.11 of this paper, can be found in the Editorial of the bulletin, Development Rural (in French), Vol.II, No.2, June 1974.