



ADEA Biennial Meeting Ends in Arusha

The sixth Biennial Meeting of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) closed at the International Conference Center in Arusha, Tanzania on Thursday October 11. Among the decisions taken at the meeting were the election of a new Bureau of the Caucus of African Ministers of Education. The end of the Biennial Meeting also saw a changing of the guard at the ADEA's Executive Secretariat.

A new Chair of the Caucus of Ministers and a new Executive Secretary for ADEA

Lesotho's Minister of Education, Lesae Archibald Lehohla is the new Chair of the Ministers' Bureau. He had been Vice Chair, and succeeds Minister Bireme Abderahim Hamid of Chad. The Bureau's new Vice Chair is Gabon's Minister of Education, Andre Mba Obame.

ADEA's new Executive Secretary is Mamadou Ndoeye of Senegal. An experienced educationist, Ndoeye has been a school teacher, a university lecturer, a Teachers' Union leader and Senegal's Minister of Education. Just before assuming his new duties, Mr. Ndoeye was the World Bank Coordinator for the United Nations Special Initiative for Africa (UNSI) in Washington. He replaces Richard Sack from the US, an education specialist with vast experience in African education and international cooperation, who held the position for the past six years.

Reaching Out, Reaching All

The meeting examined the scaling up of educational innovations and pilot initiatives. ADEA and its partners have been concerned about how to generalize successful experiences into system-wide activities in order to capitalize on what works. Major issues discussed included the mobilization of latent resources, communication in support of education, the use of networks, and nonformal education. Participants also had a chance to examine experiences in El Salvador and Guatemala, India, and Bangladesh that have successfully brought to scale innovations and reforms in basic education. HIV/AIDS, which is taking a heavy toll on education systems in Africa was also discussed.

Discussions on these topics produced many interesting ideas and proposals. It was suggested, for example, that nonformal education be regarded as not just an alternative to formal education, but as a strategy in its own right to provide education for those not within regular schools, and that perhaps the name be changed to reflect that idea and its relationship to life-long learning.

The discussion on HIV/AIDS stressed that there was now internationally available knowledge and understanding of various approaches that have worked in the fight against HIV/AIDS. One such approach is advocacy using leadership groups, such as Ministers, so that the pandemic can be effectively addressed within education systems. Such leadership, it was argued, is most effective when its actions are based on accurate and reliable information, as well as awareness



of the existing viewpoints on controversial aspects of HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment and care. It was therefore suggested that advocacy programs for HIV/AIDS in education include basic factual information packages for leaders.

Another effective strategy is speaking out about HIV/AIDS at every appropriate opportunity to break the existing 'conspiracy of silence'. Participants said they also found peer education to be effective, as well as curriculum-based initiatives which integrated HIV/AIDS knowledge into various school subjects such as languages and mathematics, and sports.

Participants also observed that there is often tension between what schools try to teach about HIV/AIDS related issues, and what the media, especially entertainment television, portrays about sexuality and sexual relations. The media in some countries, it was alleged, tends to portray values which provide unsuitable models for children. It was therefore suggested that a study of media's impact on education be undertaken, looking at both African and international media.

On another topic, the participants agreed on the importance and relevance of using communication in support of education policies, programs and activities. They however stressed the need for communication structures and approaches to be democratic, to include all stakeholders and partners, and to use local languages to the extent possible. It was also suggested that since effective communication is based on good strategies, ministries of education should base their internal and external communication on clear strategies. In that connection, education ministries should provide adequate resources to support special information and communication units, staffed with professionals in institutional communication.

On regional and national networks to support education, participants suggested that alternative ways of funding be found, especially through using resources available at country level.

During the session that explored experiences in Asia and Latin America, participants noted that some innovations need to be scaled up gradually, while others could be generalized all at once, depending on the availability of resources and capacities for managing and spreading innovations within the system.

In his speech to the closing plenary, outgoing Executive Secretary, Richard Sack, referred to ADEA as 'a necessary experiment', which had enabled forward movement. He said that ADEA had promoted 'a willingness to adapt, to change and to admit failure and to learn from it.' According to Mr. Sack, ADEA 'is an experiment that arrived at the right time', an experiment for building social capital for the development of education in Africa. Incoming ADEA Executive Secretary Mamadou Ndoeye stressed the need for ADEA to remain flexible and to orient actions for the development of education at the national level. He added that education is a process of social change and that ADEA would continue to bring its contribution to this process. For this, he highlighted the importance of developing a knowledge base of use to decision-makers. He also said that ADEA would continue its capacity building efforts to enable actors in education to engage in the process of change in an efficient way. ADEA will also reach out to parents and teacher unions in order to foster new partnerships for the development of education.