

ADEA

CONCEPT NOTE ON AFRICAN UNION'S OBERVATORY FOR EDUCATION IN AFRICA

WORKING DOCUMENT DRAFT ONE

PREPARED BY THE WORKING GROUP ON EDUCATION STATISTICS

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I. INTRODUCTION

Typically, an **observatory** is a location used for observing terrestrial and/or celestial events. Historically, observatories were as simple as containing a sextant (for measuring the distance between stars) or the Pyramids (which have some alignments on astronomical phenomena). Essentially an observatory is an institution or mechanism involved in the research, measuring and monitoring of a particular activity. The African Union and its Ministers of Education propose to establish an observatory of continental education and training so as to provide a platform to monitor Africa's education achievements, to allow for informed policy debate on its development agendas and to promote a guided pan-African vision of education.

II. RATIONALE

A key challenge facing Africa's ability to report on its human resource development achievements and challenges is information gaps or "data blanks". Many African countries neither have coherent educational policies nor effective education information systems to support the efficient management, monitoring and evaluation of its policy implementation. This then confounds the optimal use of resources for the alleviation of poverty through education and training redress. All countries are committed to a set of international goals on Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals, as well as other regional and national education objectives. A number of African countries, however, are not likely to achieve the agreed targets by 2015.

In the light of this and wanting to consolidate a continent wide plan of action for education, the Education Ministers of Africa believe that a key area of intervention for the African Union and its Observatory would be in the area of Education Management Information Systems (EMIS). Africa needs integrated regional and continental networks where EMIS is harmonized and standardized across countries. This will create the preliminary basis for comprehensive

analyses of education challenges and allow the dialogue on continent's challenges to be based on sound technical grounds. It is also essential that a continent-wide system be in place to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the African Union's Plan of Action for the Second Decade of Education.

By identifying, collecting, processing and distributing a continental wide education database, by recording and evaluating activities of the African educational networks, by promoting research and training activities, the Observatory would facilitate improvements in understanding and address knowledge gaps which hinder the development of educational policies on the continent.

It would also contribute to the building of national capacities necessary for the more efficient elaboration and implementation of educational development policies, programmes and projects. It would also optimize exchange of experience, partnerships and effective cooperation between decision makers, researchers and practitioners at the national, regional and continental levels. Promising practices, generic templates, ODL materials and manuals, technical instruments and indicators would be products made available to member states to accelerate the development of educational processes and deliveries.

III. FUNCTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

It is intended that the Observatory should guide a common African perspective and position in education policy development as well as spur regional integration.

It should coordinate or undertake, the following, among others:

- Managing a portal for continent wide education and training statistics, policy and research.
- Ensuring timely delivery of accurate education statistics and indicators from all member states to improve continental knowledge bases and facilitate harmonization of policies.

- Facilitating the updating of educational policies and their adaptation to recent cultural, scientific, technological, economic and geopolitical changes through research studies and internships for research.
- Facilitating capacity building in policy, planning and management through
 - o Technical advisory missions to countries and regional organizations,
 - o training of trainers to build national and regional networks or pools of trainers and experts,
 - o and the provision of appropriate materials, templates and other resources.
- Networking and facilitating regional and international cooperation.
- Monitoring and evaluation of the AU's Plan of Action and serving as an early warning system in relation to the problems observed.
- Facilitating Peer Reviews of countries education and training sectors
- Periodically producing continental reports on the state of education and training in Africa and its various dimensions.
- Mobilizing skills and provide consultancy services and technical assistance.

A key function would be to monitor the development of educational systems and policies in Africa. It would take into account a number of issues such as:

- global educational trends (under the impact of technological development and globalization);
- Development of African educational systems (situation and prospects and specified problems, unity and diversity, tradition and modernity,

local development and globalization, identity and intercultural dialogue, etc)

- Cultural diversity, pluralism and inter cultural dialogue (cultural rights, cultural coexistence, governance, cultural tolerance and understanding, culture of peace, cultural conflicts and conflict prevention etc)
- Education and economy (industries and educational enterprises, employment market, employment generation, management and enhancement of human resources, etc.
- Education and development (education and African integration, poverty eradication, quality of life, place and role of education in development, educational process in the context of development etc).

Under the aegis of the African Union Commission Department responsible for Human Resources, Science and Technology, the Observatory could also serve as a coordination organ for cooperation in Education in Africa with the assistance of its partners' network.

VI.CONDITIONS FOR THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE OBJECTIVES.

1. The Observatory will seek to stimulate initiatives that support education capacity development of African countries in policy formulation, management, delivery and monitoring.
2. It will look to analyze problems relating to educational policies in the context of international relations, globalization and new technologies as well as political and development issues peculiar to African societies.
3. It will establish continental and regional guidelines and infrastructure to support its programme of action with regard to education information collection, analysis and dissemination.
4. It will establish a framework for partners to engage in its cooperative research and publication program.

5. It will adapt, develop, test and distribute methodological tools with the view to devising, updating, supervising and evaluating educational policies, programs and projects in Africa and integrating them in development strategies.
6. The Observatory will establish a network of information, research, training and cooperation among national and regional institutions, professional associations as well as experts and individual scientists concerned with issues related to educational policies in Africa. By resorting to these resources, it will develop regional capacities for analysis, supervision and forecasting of educational processes.
7. The Observatory will serve as a permanent monitoring and evaluation mechanism of educational programs of the African Union.

V. WORKING PRINCIPLES

The Observatory will endeavor to use the following principles in implementing its programmatic activities:

- Economies of Scale: activities and services will be primarily directed where the use of the resources can be optimized through regionalization or continent wide strategies rather than individual country attention.
- Strengthening existing African capacities: wherever possible the activities of the Observatory will seek to strengthen existing African institutions and expertise.
- Relevance: As a priority, activities will target real problems of the society and African educational systems, specific situations and priorities of the African people and governments as directed by COMEDAF or the AUC;
- Complementarily and efficiency: a key focus will be to identify modes of cooperation, active partnership, and sharing of efforts and resources so as to maximize self sufficiency and sustainability.

- Participation: programmes and activities will be planned and implemented with the participation and active contribution of partners and beneficiaries of the Observatory.
- Interdisciplinary approach: educational policy problems in Africa will be tackled by adopting a multidisciplinary and diversified approach, which takes into account interactions between education and development as well as between socio-economic, cultural, and educational development strategies and policies.
- Unity and diversity: the Observatory's action will contribute to the creation of a pan-African vision of educational issues while taking into account the diversity of situations and needs.

VI. EXPECTED RESULTS

The main results expected would be:

- Production and distribution of new knowledge on key issues related to educational policies;
- Better integration of education in development programs;
- Encouragement of cooperation among states at the regional and continental levels to update educational policies;

Supplementary results could also be expected:

- Optimization of research in educational policies;
- Better shared and documented practice;
- Stimulation of educational enterprise.

In the short term, the Observatory will create a series of operational services such as:

- An Education Database with key indicators;
- An internet site;
- Publications (bulletin, works, research reports and documents, conference reports, directories, CD, bibliographies, etc.);
- Consultancy services and technical assistance;
- Records on African educational policies

VII. IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH

At the recent COMEDAF 111 meeting, African Ministers of Education resolved that each of its seven priority themes of the Plan of Action on Education is to be co-ordinated by a champion country (a political focal point) and a convening technical body, that is African based and led (COMEDAF 111, August 2007). These focal points would report on progress to the a Steering Committee set up by the AU's Department of Human Resources, Science and Technology. The Observatory, falls under the second Plan of Action priority theme of EMIS and at this initial stage COMEDAF resolutions focused primarily on establishing a continental education database.

The HSRT has pulled two key partners together as the technical coordinating agents for the implementation of its vision for the Observatory. It has adopted a cooperation strategy with institutions specialized in these key areas. The first is IPED, a specialized agency/bureau of the African Union based in Kinshasa, the DRC. The other is ADEA, which has three Working Groups – one on Statistics and Information Systems, another on Finance and a third on Education Sector Analysis – that have the complementary technical and human resource skills necessary to establish the Observatory. They, in turn will link with and develop capacities on the continent to support the activities of the Observatory at national, regional and continental levels.

Within the AU's Plan of Action for the Second Decade of Education framework, African regional economic communities (RECs) have a significant role to play, as they are the main institutions expected to implement it's programmes. They are seen as the building blocks to regional integration and rapid socio-economic development of Africa. In 1980, the OAU Summit of Heads of State and Government adopted the Lagos Plan of Action in 1980. The main strategy of the Plan for accelerating Africa's development involved collective self-reliance, regional cooperation and integration. Africa's drive towards regional integration was given a further boost in 1991 by the adoption of the Abuja Treaty

establishing the African Economic Community (AEC). The primary objective of the AEC as stipulated in the Treaty is “to promote economic, social and cultural development and integration of African economies in order to increase economic self-reliance and promote an endogenous and self-sustained development”. The Treaty provides for the creation of a full Pan-African Economic Community through six stages extending over a period of 34 years, using the RECs as its development bases.

Africa’s major regional integration groupings that are currently in operation include the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), the Community of Sahel – Saharan States (CEN-SAD), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), with memberships of 5, 18, 20, 10, 15, 7 and 14 states, respectively. There are sub-sets of some of these major regional integration schemes which include the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC), the Economic Community of the Great Lake Countries (CEPGL), the East African Community (EAC), the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), the Mano River Union (MRU) and the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA). Membership of regional integration in Africa has become so pervasive that there is no country on the Continent that does not belong to at least one grouping. Twenty-seven of the fifty-three Member States of the AU belong to two or more integration schemes. Among the major regions of the world, Africa has the highest concentration of economic integration and cooperation arrangements (Sako, ACBF, 2006).

Numerous recent reports (ECA, 2006, *Africa Renewal, Vol.18 #3 (October 2004)*), point to the lack of technical and human resource capacity in Africa’s

RECs. This is particularly the case with respect to the education and training sector. With the exception of SADC and ECOWAS, other RECS on the whole do not have a formal structure or officers in their organogram dealing with education and training issues. It would be desirable to have in place a Regional Education and Training Policy Unit or Desk in each of the RECs to deal exclusively with issues of harmonization of education policy and reforms, collection and analysis of education statistics and to provide technical support for sub-regional inputs to a Continental Observatory. At the national level, each country would do well to have a national Regional steering Committee to guide its reforms, assist in preparation for its implementation of the AU's Plan of Action, maintain education-related databases, monitor the implementation of reforms and follow-up regional and international developments.

The technical capacities of IPET and the ADEA Working Groups, thus will initially be focused on the provision of support to REC's education and training desks to strengthen their abilities to support and monitor national reform initiatives within the AU's Plan of Action and move towards policy harmonization at the regional level. The education desks of the RECs will deal largely with issues of policy harmonization, ranking of countries in terms of extent of reform along the various areas that need close monitoring and identifying areas that require interventions.

VIII. METHOD OF FINANCING

The Observatory will be financed through resources from :

- the budget of the African Union Commission;
- Fund raising by the Observatory
- Financial support from cooperating partners.

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¹ Last revised on April 5,2007