



Association
pour le développement
de l'éducation
en Afrique



Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

ADEA and UNESCO launch Bouba and Zaza and “Childhood Cultures”, an intergenerational African series of children’s books

Tunis, 24 June 2011. The Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) and UNESCO’s Regional Office in Dakar are launching “Childhood Cultures”, an intergenerational African series of children’s books. Through the experiences of the main characters Bouba and Zaza, the series seeks to develop life and socialization skills outside the family context among children aged 3 to 8. It is also aimed at older children, parents and teachers.

The series covers topical subjects affecting the lives of African families that parents are sometimes reluctant to address. These include various topics such as war and conflict, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the issue of water resources and environmental protection.

The books are designed to help children debate these problems. Addressing them will help children to better adapt to their environment and to become active members of it. Through Bouba and Zaza, they develop their sense of responsibility and their ideas of justice, of “good” and “bad”, and improve their communication skills and their proficiency with oral and written language.

For educators, “Bouba and Zaza” is a resource for teaching life skills and a tool to support the structuring and use of language.

For older children (9 to 15 years of age), the “Childhood Cultures” series is a useful tool for consolidating their knowledge and applying their acquired reading and comprehension skills, as well as their ability to pass on information to younger children.

For parents, grandparents and the community, “Bouba and Zaza” forms a bridge between school, family and the local environment. The books facilitate dialogue and discussion of current topics that are important but sensitive.

The concept of “Bouba and Zaza” was developed by ADEA’s Working Group on Early Childhood Development (WGECD) and UNESCO’s Regional Office in Dakar, in collaboration with education specialists in Africa from ADEA and UNESCO, the Publisher Michel Lafon Education and African illustrators.

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The book series addresses the glaring shortage of children's books adapted to African contexts. A study conducted in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Sierra Leone and Togo on child-rearing resources available to parents shows that children from 0 to 4 years of age generally have no books at home, especially in rural areas.

"Childhood Cultures" will initially be published in English, French, Portuguese and Kiswahili.

Early childhood development (ECD) programs in Africa

Africa has the youngest population in the world, with 130 million children (20% of the total population) under the age of 6. Out of the 49 countries worldwide where 38% of children under 5 are affected by severe or chronic malnutrition, 30 are in Africa. According to the 2009 World Report on the situation of children in the world, infant mortality before 5 in Africa reached 158 deaths per thousand live births (vs. 71 deaths per thousand live births worldwide).

Furthermore, as a direct outcome of HIV/AIDS, war and conflict, a large number of African children are either orphaned or refugees (there were 10.6 million orphans and 35 million refugees in 1999).

All of these factors affecting African families and their children point to the need to stress the importance of, and give priority to, early childhood care and education programs.

International research findings show that appropriate food, medical care and intellectual stimulation during the early years of life improve children's aptitude and learning capability throughout their lives. Such research also indicates that the availability of books in the family environment has an incidence on children's level of educational attainment and that children who have many books at home stay in school about three years longer than those who do not.

ADEA's Working Group on Early Childhood Development (WGECD) was created to encourage the adoption by policy-makers of policies and programs that favor the development of young children. WGECD works through advocacy, research and support to countries in the development of holistic and integrated ECD policies and programs.

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