The Second Decade of Education aims to develop Africa’s human resources.

Africais has re-committed itself to education as the means to develop the continent’s human resources. The declaration of a Second Decade of Education by African Union (AU) Heads of State and the adoption of a Plan of Action by Ministers of Education last year reflects this commitment.

With a clearer focus on seven specific focus areas (see page 3), which involve coordinated efforts of all the key stakeholders in education, the implementation of the Plan of Action by Ministers of Education is expected to have a greater impact than that of the First Decade.

Ministers in all the African Union (AU) member states including the African Union (AU), Regional Economic Communities (RECs), individual countries, specialist education organisations and donor agencies.

To prevent the creation of more problems, the implementation of the Plan of Action will not be possible, as all the technical expertise and capacity in existing specialist organisations such as the Association for African Universities (AAU), the Forum for Women Educationalists (FAWE), which deals with gender awareness and ADEA with its 11 working groups of experts in specific fields (see Page 2).

Education experts pointed out potential problem areas, relating to:
- Integrating the Plan of Action into national country plans; and
- Capacity building within Regional Economic Communities (RECs).

Executive Secretary of ADEA Madame Ndoye said ownership of the Plan of Action was important on a country level. The objectives of the plan had to be integrated into national plans to ensure successful implementation of the Second Decade.

In some countries, such as Ghana, the national plan already included all the priority areas in the Plan.

As a result, said J.O. Afrani, the Director of Planning, Budgeting, Monitoring and Evaluation in the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports, “we don’t talk about the Second Decade of Education specifically”. But, he said, for the sake of the region and the continent it was important that countries supported the Plan of Action.

At a next level, RECs had been tasked under the Plan to implement activities regionally.

But ADEA’s Ndoye said some RECs had to be sensitised first about the importance of education for the integration of economies and for regional consciousness, but awareness alone was not adequate. Capacity was also necessary.

“Why is this one of ADEA’s roles could be to develop capacity in the RECs to handle the integration of education into programmes,” he said.

RECs, for instance, could have programmes on language in education.

One country may have a few learners who required instruction in a particular language, but across they could be accommodated across a border where there were more speakers of a language. Similarly 10 to 15 countries using the same learning materials could drive down costs.

Ndoye said the AU, working on a continental level, could play a role in comparing education on the continent and could use these results to sensitise Heads of State to priority areas.

“The main role of the AU is to access Heads of State and advocate for education.” Professor Nagia Essayed, the AU Commissioner for Human Resources, Science and Technology, also emphasised the role of RECs in the execution of the Plan of Action.

“We hope the RECs will play their role. This will help to involve members. We asked the RECs to co-ordinate with members on monitoring the implementation process itself.”

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) has made a promising start, with an integrated regional plan for education and a common reporting mechanism.

Lomthandazo Mavimbela, SADC’s Senior Programme Manager of Education Skills Development and Capacity Building, said, as a REC, SADC saw its role as coordinating implementation, facilitating dialogue, establishing programmes in the seven priority areas, supporting countries and reporting to the AU on what the region is doing.

“We have already started to implement the Plan of Action. In the field of Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) we have already looked at activities to inform us about the countries that have already developed EMIS, and those that have not,” said Mavimbela.

But she pointed out that RECs’ faced their own challenges. With SADC there was limited human resource capacity, while there was also a need for additional resource mobilisation for the Plan of Action. Education is competing with other areas, such as health, for finance.

“We must ensure that there is no duplication. It is therefore paramount for us to find a mechanism to do our planning together — it must be a practical, workable way of doing things,” she said.

Ann Thérése Ndong-Jatta, Director of the Division of Basic Education at Unesco, said Unesco was looking at how it could mobilise support for the Plan of Action on a regional, sub-regional and local level.

“The emphasis should be on follow-up mechanisms and technical assistance to ensure success. The Second Decade is not about mobilisation, it is about finding the right responses to educational challenges and making declarations, ADEA rather provided a platform for policy dialogue, facilitating interaction between Ministers and experts and allowing Ministers to take only what they deem applicable in their countries.”

“ADEA’s role is to facilitate and to”

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ADEA Working Group targets ministry communication units and officers, media and journalists

A communication, sharing information, building trust and strengthening education and development cooperation is crucial to support the partnerships that promote educational development.

With the need to seek broader social support for education policies and reforms, and especially to promote the involvement of civil society, parents, teachers, students and donors, the role of communication for education is slowly gaining recognition in Africa. Ministries need to carry these varied groups along, in developing and implementing education reforms, in a process that is destined to become more participatory, democratic and accountable.

Ministers, the MINEDAF, the last one held its biennial conference of ministers in the management of the Africa Education Union. These are: books and learning, communication and open learning, communication for education and development, education and policy dialogue, information systems and designing communication structures within ministries of education and supporting the professional development of communication officers and journalists are major endeavours.

The working group's major thrusts are in three areas: training and capacity building, networking, and advisory services.

Sub-regional and national level training workshops have been organised for communication officers and journalists to enhance their professional skills, bringing them together to encourage working relationships between journalists and ministerial communication officers. Because of mutual suspicion, frustration and hostility which generally exists between journalists and communication officers, WGCOMED decided to train the two groups together in order to increase mutual understanding and build trust.

For instance, the Working Group on Education and policy dialogue has championed girl's education and non-formal education, have a capacity-building role to assist in the development of a media-mobilisation strategy to accompany implementation of the Plan of Action for the Second Decade of Education for Africa.

In March the ADEA Steering Committee responded favourably to this request by officially approving the project, which is currently facilitating peer learning on several African countries, he said.

**Unifying African leadership in education**

The envisaged merger of the offices of the ministers of COMEDAF and the ADEA only the organisation invites, if it so determines, all the African Ministers of Education to come together. One year after launching the Plan of Action for the Second Decade of Education for Africa (2006 to 2015), the merger of the Bureau of Ministers of Education of the African Union and the ADEA may be envisaged. Various steps had to be taken before this project could be envisaged. In September last year, parallel to the launching of the Plan of Action for the Second Decade of Education for Africa, the African Union asked ADEA to consider the extension of its field of action to the countries of North Africa.

African governments and education specialists have a rich experience of niche expertise providing a unique perspective on specific issues. They have covered a wide range of topics, which have been identified by African Ministers of Education. The working groups have experience in setting up observation systems for education in key fields of education which could be mobilised to provide technical experience in the seven priority areas of the Action. According to Ndiaye, also had a capacity-building role to play in the ADEA, the working group was seen to be underdeveloped.

There is also the Working Group on Education Finance, which has done work in the field of budgeting and resource mobilisation, and the Working Group on Sector Analysis, which is currently facilitating peer learning on several African countries.

**A key player in the Plan of Action**

From Page 10

ask whether countries have already initiated the Second Decade of Education in their country plans, what form this may take and information about the National Plan of Action was sent to all countries which had planned to participate in the project.

Professor Najjara Issayaj, the ADEA Commissioner, said that a fund would be created for the fund and that they would know where to go if they needed to access funds for activities.
A session of the Conference of Ministers of Education of the African Union (COMEDAF) in Johannes-
burg considered progress made in the implementation of the Plan of Action for the Second Decade of Education for Africa (2006-2015). This plan (Partnership in the Global Knowledge Economy and for Africa) was adopted at the African Union (AU) meeting in Accra in September last year in the context of the implementation of the Plan of Action for the Second Decade of Education for Africa (2006-2015).

The AU has a vision of an integrated, peaceful, prosperous Africa, developed by its own people to take its rightful place in the global community and the knowledge economy. This vision is predicated upon the development of Africa’s human resources. Education forms the basis for developing innovation, science and technology to harness our resources, develop innovation, science and technology; and provide education for displaced communities; assisting member states to domesticate plans of action at various levels; curriculum development and related issues of teaching-learning; and quality management.

Programme activities for 2007 and 2008

The focus in all areas during the 2007-2008 period is to lay the foundations for the implementation of the Decade of Education in Africa did not appear promising progress has been made in establishing partner collaboration and support, notably from the African Union and UNESCO and the African Development Bank and ADEA. The merging of Ministers of Education of African States (MINEDAF) and COMEDAF means that the AU and UNESCO have a single major forum for bringing together African ministers responsible for education. This will be key in harmonising and coordinating education programmes and avoiding unnecessary parallelism. Further concrete demonstration of collaboration lies in the fact that Unesco has integrated the Plan of Action into its Priority Africa programme in education.

ADEA is working with the AU Commission to integrate its bureau of ministers of education into the AU structure. ADEA has included support of the Plan of Action within its strategic plan. The extent of funding also proved to be a challenge. It is therefore important to develop a certain amount of self-reliance, while also welcoming support from partners who take Africa’s initiatives seriously. For this reason, the summit of heads of state and government of the AU meeting in Accra in July 2007 decided to establish an African Education Fund. The African Development Bank has committed to facilitating this fund, the first contributors of which will be African member states themselves. The extent to which the first Decade was known, accepted and owned by key stakeholders and kept alive at all levels was particularly inadequate. The evaluation report locates the reasons for this within the limited capacity of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) to mount adequate publicity campaigns and monitor implementation. Indeed, the period covered by the first Decade coincided with the OAU’s transformation to the AU, which might have resulted in the loss of focus on the OAU programmes. This time, a publicity strategy will be one of the early programmes at continental and regional levels. RECs have taken up their role in the implementation of the Plan of Action already, with the South African Development Community having completed the integration of the plan into its regional education programme early in August. Furthermore, leading institutions working in the area of education will be approached to act as “lead implementing agencies” to support the Plan of Action. In this regard, the Association of African Universities has signed a memorandum of agreement with the AU Commission to be the lead implementing agency in the area of higher education.

At the current session of COMEDAF III, ministers considered the way forward in terms of monitoring and follow up of the implementation of the Plan of Action. They and their senior officials have provided input in continuing work on the Plan of Action, particularly in the areas of: quality assurance and harmonisation of higher education in Africa to revitalise African universities; technical and vocational education and training, with special reference to post-conflict situations; education for displaced communities; enhancing the teaching and learning of science, mathematics and technology; and teacher development.

They considered issues around the establishment of an African Education Fund and agreed to monitor and form a follow-up mechanism for the decade. Formalisation of working relations between the AU commission and ADEA were discussed. It has been a busy session and its outcomes will affect the foundation of the Second Decade of Education for Africa. Beatrice Khamati Njenga is the head of the AU commission’s education department and acting director of the department of human resources, science and technology.

The performance of education in Africa is critically linked to the continent’s future ability to partake in the global knowledge economy. Partnership is key to the success of the Decade.

Learning from past mistakes

The report of the evaluation of the first Decade of Education for Africa showed several challenges which constrained implementation and led to inadequate performance in education in Africa.

The first challenge was the fact that there was a time lag of two years between the declaration of the decade and the development of its Plan of Action. This time, the Plan of Action was completed and launched within the same year as the declaration of the Second Decade.

The second pitfall was a lack of support from international partners. As the report points out: “Contrary to expectations, the Decade of Education in Africa did not appear to have been bought into by major international agencies and Africa’s development partners.” Thus member states were implementing a multiplicity of parallel programmes, while partners provided minimal or no support to the Plan of Action they had helped develop.

Africa’s relationship with its partners needs to be managed. So far, promising progress has been made in establishing partner collaboration and support, notably from Unesco and the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA).

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Angela Arnott on why education management information systems are desperately needed

"W could you tell me please, which way I ought to go from here?" asked Alice.

"That depends a great deal on where you want to go," said the Cat.

"I don't know where," said Alice.

"Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the Cat.

(Extract from Alice in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll)

If you can't measure it, you can't manage it," said South African Finance Minister Trevor Manuel a while back.

Determining and implementing changes to an education system is a complex and important exercise. If you don't know where you want to go, it is difficult to manage a means of getting there.

This is why it's important that education systems are governed by policies and even if you do know where you want to go, if you cannot measure your progress, it's likely you will get lost or side-tracked.

An education system might have the most advanced policies, but unless government is tracking the performance of these policies, the system is likely to fail.

With changes related to increasing demand for education and constrained resources, which education systems are increasingly aimed at improving access, equity, quality, relevance and efficiency, obtaining the right information at the right time is crucial.

Education management information systems (EMIS) involve gathering the required education data, analysing it and turning it into information to be used by education management in decision-making, tracking, planning and policy development (policy-making, adherence, compliance and strategic decision-making).

Quantitative indicators and statistics act both as early warning measures of progress and as information on which interventions can be taken. They are required to provide education authorities with monitoring reports on global progress made in terms of the Dakar objectives.

Education statistics and indicators are crucial to hold governments, institutions and decision-makers accountable for their policy plans.

This is a key reason why the African Union (AU) has indicated that EMIS is a critical priority in its Second Decade Education Action Plan. It plans to set up an African education observatory to coordinate EMIS activities on the continent.

AU to establish observatory

An African Education Observatory will be established as a vehicle for coordinating the Second Decade’s EAP (Education Management Information Systems) activities. The African Union Commission, which will manage the observatory, has approached ADEA and its Working Group on Education Statistics and National Educational Statistical Information Systems (NESIS) programme to assist it in establishing the observatory.

EMIS is a critical priority in its Second Decade Education Action Plan. At a meeting in Lesotho last month, Southern African Development Community ministers of education endorsed EMIS capacity-building as a strategic area for intervention and support.

The observatory will be set up with its own data, with comprehensive databases that are comparable across countries, and integrated continental and regional networks and a move towards harmonised education systems. At the same time, at grassroots, it is essential that countries become learning organisations that use information to track their performance and progress against the global policy goals that seek to empower the weak, the disadvantaged and the vulnerable — children, youth, etc.

Effective education systems are critical for developing countries to achieve their economic potential and boost the global economy on a strong footing.

Angela Arnott is the coordinator of ADEA’s Working Group on Statistics

Keeping track is vital

A free market for textbooks

Public-private partnerships could help Africa’s books sector, writes Carew Treffgarne

The Association for the Development of Education in Africa’s (ADEA) Working Group on Books and Learning Materials has published a number of books recently that aim to stimulate the writing and publishing of better books for young people inside and outside school.

Three of its guidelines for developing better books have been written by South African experts in their field:

- Crossing Borders – Adapting Educational Materials for Other Countries: The Soul City Choose Life Project by Harriet Perlman;
- Making Reading Matter: Guidelines for selecting, developing and disseminating easy readers for adults by Bridal Thabanebudwa; and
- Bringing The Story Home – A guide for developing and selecting materials for Early Childhood educa- tion by the South African perspective by Nadine Hugo.

The group believes that this is ‘an important step forward. It builds on the work of the past and takes forward the critical work that many South African policy makers have been doing for some time to improve the quality of the educational materials available in classrooms.’

A free market for textbooks, they argue, would benefit both children and book publishers.

The working group’s guidelines include making it easier for non-governmental organisations and other partners to develop their own educational resources; creating a more open environment for the development of books for children in the primary school level that are free of commercial pressures; and encouraging a free market for textbooks.

An education system might have the most advanced policies, but unless government is tracking the performance of these policies, the system is likely to fail.

Africa, however, has the worst profile in these reports — both in terms of its educational achievements and in terms of missing key information. Many of the African states that struggle to produce educational statistics are post-conflict countries with vulnerable or marginalised populations, such as Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Liberia and Guinea Bissau. But there are others, which are relatively stable and resourced, that fail to produce comprehensive education information on the young child, the youth and the adult.

This is a critical challenge for a continent that is unable to measure its progress towards the achievement of key education goals. And though statistics are not necessary to establish priorities and determine programme areas, they are required increasingly to identify the weaknesses and bottlenecks with which development programmes that seek to promote equity, access and quality of education for all.

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Effective education systems are critical for developing countries to achieve their economic potential and boost the global economy on a strong footing.