

President Guebuza's message to the Biennale on Education in Africa: keep investing in human capital formation

Maputo, May 6, 2008 – The head of state of Mozambique, President Armando Emilio Guebuza, inaugurated the Biennale on Education in Africa on Monday, May 5, at the Joaquim Chissano International Conference Center, with a strong appeal for continued and increased investment in human capital for the development of African countries. In this respect, he offered his congratulations to the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), “this network which encompasses governments, civil society and international partners”, encouraging it “to soldier on with its difficult but noble task for several years yet”.

Addressing the 600 participants in the most important meeting in Africa in the field of educational cooperation, President Guebuza declared that, with regard to post-primary education, the theme of the Biennale, the government of his country is giving special attention to technical and vocational education. For example, he noted, an integrated program of vocational education reform has been launched to give fresh impetus to the training of human resources for the country. This program, he explained, is based on the principle of greater flexibility and versatility and of training for life based on skills acquisition, with the aim of educating citizens who can take a more active part in the production and judicious management of wealth.

According to the president of Mozambique, “we must absolutely keep investing in human capital formation, keep introducing significant improvements in quality and in the capacity of our compatriots, and encourage and support efforts to reach out to girls”. Concerning girls, he emphasized that it was necessary not only to encourage their enrollment and survival in the school system until they have completed their education, but also to offer them higher education and technical and vocational education as attainable objectives.

President Guebuza also stressed the importance of research in science and technology and of exchanges of ideas among African scientists, and between African scientists and their colleagues on other continents – a process in which, he said, ADEA can continue to play a leading role.

In the name of the current Chairperson of the African Union (AU), Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, Tanzanian Prime Minister Mizengo Peter Pinda suggested that the pan-African organization draft an annual report on education, presenting the progress made by and the constraints facing each country and allowing African countries to draw inspiration from experiences close to home, instead of always looking to the models of other continents. In this respect, he noted, “ADEA has much to offer and we should have our own plans for achieving our own goals”. He stressed the anchoring of the Association in Africa and the enhanced partnership with the AU.

In a message read by Boubekeur Benbouzid, Algeria's minister of education President Abdelaziz Bouteflika of Algeria, guest of honor of the Biennale, noted the efforts made by African countries: the literacy rate has risen from 10% in the 1960s to 70% today, and school enrollments from 57% in 1999 to 70% in 2005. Nevertheless, continued the Algerian head of state, "30% of young Africans are not in school, at a time when the number of school-age children is rising appreciably. The number of Africans under 14 years of age rose from 273 million in 1990 to 348 million in 2007; it will be 403 million in 2015."

After recalling the commitments given at the 2nd Conference of African Ministers of Education held in Algeria in April 2005, as well as the United Nations Secretary-General's creation of a steering group to coordinate efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, President Bouteflika drew attention to the factors that can annihilate any effort to develop the education sector, namely "political and military conflicts, threats to peace and stability, mismanagement and waste".

The Director General of UNESCO, Koichiro Matsuura, emphasized the contrasting picture presented by Africa in terms of progress in education. Sub-Saharan Africa, he noted, has been the region in which the primary school enrollment rate has increased the most rapidly. From 1999 to 2005, the number of children in school increased by 36%, or about 29 million. Another significant development, he continued, has been "the extension of primary education in order to include the first years of secondary school, thus offering children and teenagers a better chance of leaving compulsory schooling with the skills needed to participate fully in their societies".

Despite these very positive trends, noted Mr. Matsuura, dropout rates in Africa are the highest in the world. Of the 72 million children in sub-Saharan Africa, 45% – about 33 million – are still out of school. Of these, in turn, some 54% are girls. Furthermore, quality is still a major concern, notably because of the shortage of qualified teachers. Africa will need 3.8 million additional teachers by 2015.

Having noted that 150 million adults in sub-Saharan Africa, two-thirds of whom are women, lack basic literacy skills, the UNESCO Director-General evoked the threats posed by the growing food crisis, the ravages of HIV/AIDS and the downward trend in education funding. He exhorted donors to keep the promises made at the Dakar Forum in April 2000, emphasizing that UNESCO will engage in advocacy on this subject at the G8 summit in Hokkaido in July 2008 and at the 4th Tokyo International Conference on the Development of Africa, a month later.

In his welcoming address, Mozambique's Minister of Education and Culture Bonifacio Aires Ali stated: "Thinking about post-primary education is a matter of urgency and of ensuring our survival as sovereign states; thinking about post-primary education today means thinking about developing the human resources that will bring victory in the fight against poverty tomorrow; thinking about post-primary education means thinking that our young people, children, men and women must have scientific knowledge and must master technology; it means ensuring the sustainable development of Africa."

ADEA Chair Dzingai Mutumbuka expressed his satisfaction that the Biennale was so well attended, with some 60 ministers, that it was being held for the first time in a Lusophone African country and that it marked the first participation by the countries of North Africa. He said that the theme of the Biennale was wholly appropriate, since it concerns development of the skills that Africa needs and the reconstruction of education systems, which is a major challenge.

The Chairperson of the ADEA Bureau of African Ministers, Rosalie Kama-Niamayoua, minister of primary and secondary education of Congo, noted that “all components of the African education community – policy makers, education professionals and researchers, civil society organizations, technical and financial partners – have come together in Maputo to identify ways to accelerate the progress of education in our continent, at a time when everyone is talking about the knowledge economy”.

She stated that a thorough overhaul of our education systems is needed if we wish to make up the gaps that separate them from the more efficient education systems of other continents. This is by no means a form of Afro-pessimism, she observed, but rather an invitation to proactive commitment to tackle the challenges raised by education in Africa. Ms. Kama-Niamayoua stressed: “We must dare to stop copying other models, dare to invent models suited to our contexts and make a success of African educational models.”

The Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), founded to promote and improve education for girls, has identified “new avenues for better understanding the obstacles” that stand between it and its goals. Simone de Comarmond, chairperson of FAWE, announced an initiative to steer a larger number of girls toward teaching careers. She also indicated that FAWE has initiated in three countries – Burundi, Liberia and Sierra Leone – a program to empower women and develop their economic autonomy through technical and vocational training in order to “include girls who are out of school or failing in school owing to conflicts”.

Vice-President Zeinab El Bakri of the African Development Bank focused on skills development in her address. Having emphasized the unprecedented increase in the economic growth rates of many African countries, she explained that these outcomes were also due to factors such as peace and stability, improved governance and economic reform. However, she warned, growth may be held back by the lack of skilled human resources in many sectors and at various educational levels. These are challenges that require appropriate responses in line with production sectors.

Ms. El Bakri selected the current example of the food crisis to advocate agricultural education, at both the vocational training and university levels. In this respect, she mentioned the adoption of innovative approaches aimed at combining agronomical research and entrepreneurship, quickening the introduction of modern farming technology in local farming systems, and bringing this technology to small farmers and other agricultural operators. A similar train of thought indicates the need to accelerate skills development in other sectors, because the existence of well-trained human capital is a pre-requisite for growth and sustainable social and economic development.

Yaw Ansu, the World Bank representative, acknowledged that all African countries were under pressure to expand learning opportunities in post-primary education. Meeting this demand will place African countries in a position to take up and adapt new technology more easily, in order to make their economies more competitive in the context of globalization. This is a necessity, considering the changes occurring in the economic arena and the emergence of major new players on the world market, such as China and India.

Mr. Ansu highlighted the work performed by ADEA in creating a strong market in ideas and experiences, thus fulfilling its function as a network of networks. This, he said, is why the World Bank provides unflinching support to this one-of-a-kind organization.

The main theme, “Beyond Primary Education: Challenges and Approaches to Expanding Learning Opportunities in Africa”, will be addressed through three broad sub-themes: the extension of compulsory schooling for all to 9-10 years; the challenge of skills development, to prepare young people better for integration into social and working life; linkages between senior secondary education and higher education, with a view to building human resources for Africa’s development.

The Maputo meeting, the first Biennale hosted by a Lusophone country, will be noteworthy for the commemoration of the 20th anniversary of ADEA. The Association will celebrate the consolidation of ADEA’s anchoring in Africa through the transferring of its Secretariat to Tunis, within its new host institution, the AfdB, and the strengthening of its partnership with the African Union.

About ADEA

Since its founding in 1988, ADEA has become a leader in the processes of dialogue, sharing and learning for the qualitative transformation of education to promote African development.

Its mission is to act as a catalyst for innovative policies and practices for change in education through the pooling of thinking, experience, lessons learned and knowledge.

As a partnership between education ministries and development cooperation bodies, ADEA is a forum for policy dialogue on education in Africa; a network of education professionals, practitioners and academics; and a catalyst for educational reform.

Maputo, May 6, 2008

For further information, please visit the ADEA Web site: www.ADEAnet.org or contact:

Thanh-Hoa Desruelles, Publications and Communication Officer, ADEA

In Paris: Tel.: +33 (0)145037769; cell phone: +33 (0) 684497395; th.desruelles@iiep.unesco.org

Lawalley Cole, Coordinator, ADEA Working Group on Communication for Education and Development (WG COMED)

In Cotonou: +229 21 31 24 45; l.cole@unesco.org

Alcinou Da Costa, ADEA Press Relations Consultant

In Paris: Tel. +33(0)149803482 cell phone: +33(0)6 09617527; alcinou@orange.fr