



Association for the Development of Education in Africa

Press release

The Libreville Biennale on Education calls on Africa to establish a new social contract for education

Libreville, March 31, 2006 – Africa today should undertake to formulate a new social contract for education in order to meet the major challenge of African development. This is the message conveyed by the 7th Biennale on Education in Africa, which was opened on March 27 at the International Conference Center in Libreville by the head of state of Gabon, President Omar Bongo Ondimba, and his guest of honor, the head of state of Cape Verde, President Pedro Pires.

At the invitation of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), over 400 participants spent a week discussing ways and means of providing more and better education, while trying to answer the crucial question of how to ensure effective learning in schools, literacy programs and early childhood development programs.

The discussions gave rise to a series of recommendations based on the central assumption that successful education depends not only on financial resources, but also on effective and ongoing advocacy work, the establishment of strategic partnerships and, most important, political will. This conviction underlies all the recommendations and lessons presented on March 31 at the general summing-up that preceded the closing session.

The Biennale on Education recognized the remarkable progress recorded in school enrollments, literacy rates, the political commitment of countries and development agencies, cooperation among countries, and public awareness concerning AIDS. At the same time, it noted the low level of education, overcrowded classrooms, insufficient training of teachers, the use of ineffective teaching methods, and the lack of teaching and learning materials.

In laying strong emphasis on the strategic necessity of investing in quality, the participants gave priority to the fundamental requirement of equity, which will entail the redressing of inequalities, if need be through positive discrimination. Participants recognized the complexity of all these problems but asserted that they can be solved and reaffirmed the importance of sharing experiences. All contributions are helpful in reaching the best possible solution, they declared, since learning is a process rather than a fixed outcome.

The Biennale stated that all individuals are educable and recommended that early childhood development, literacy training and other forms of non-formal education be included in the normal school cycle. It called for appropriate training of teachers and encouraged the use and promotion of national languages. A very strong case was made not only for increasing the resources allocated to education but also for continuity in this investment in order to ensure the effectiveness of programs. The aim, in addition to calling for increased financial commitment on the part of governments and development partners, is to firm up budgets over the long term.

What comes after the Biennale? In responding to this question at the conclusion of the meeting characterized by strong participation and great intellectual richness, ADEA Executive Secretary Mamadou Ndoeye stressed the shared responsibility of participants for promoting policy dialogue

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and strengthening leadership and reform capacities. This should influence decision-making processes in favor of reforming inadequate education policies and the gradual empowerment of schools and stakeholders in the education system.

"The Biennale" he continued, "adopts neither a declaration nor any resolutions. This is not our role. At ADEA, we have neither educational projects nor programs. Rather, on the basis of the analytical work carried out, on lessons learned and on the recommendations made by participants, individually and collectively, we will continue to develop communication and sharing of ideas on professional matters among ministries, development cooperation agencies, academic institutions and civil society."

He added that ADEA will disseminate the lessons learned at Libreville on its web site and through video-conferencing and will also publish the proceedings of the Biennale. Its newsletters will continue and extend this work of dissemination; publication of the series "African Experiences – Country Case Studies" will continue; and a new series, "What Do We Know About?" will be launched.

The Executive Secretary added: "We will promote ownership by African countries, partnership among countries, and the emergence of a transformational leadership in order to bring about the changes hoped for at both the strategic and planning levels, as well as that of policy vision and the trade-offs involved in managing systems. It is crucial for education policy to be linked to national development plans."

Ahlin Byll-Cataria, outgoing Chair of ADEA, who led the debate in the final session, thanked the government of Gabon for "its substantial human, material, technical and financial investment." He stressed the need to share the lessons learned from the Biennial Meeting and to disseminate all the documentation produced for the occasion.

The outgoing Chair pointed out that the country case studies should serve as models; governments can draw on them to develop frameworks corresponding to their individual situations. He asked whether it would not be possible to promote within our countries the same intensity of dialogue and debate that marked the Biennale on Education in Africa, which would be helpful in reaching a dynamic consensus. "Our Association", he remarked, "must also take into account the changes occurring in Africa, particularly the debate over education initiated by the African Union, to which ADEA has offered its support and cooperation."

In closing the deliberations of the Biennial Meeting, Gabon's Minister of National Education and Higher Education, Albert Ondo Ossa, expressed the hope that "the results of the Libreville meeting will help provide our education systems with better intelligence, improve educational practice in ADEA member countries, and stimulate sub-regional, regional and international cooperation in education."

The 12th meeting of the ADEA Caucus of Ministers, held in conjunction with the Biennial Meeting, confirmed the appointments of Rosalie Kama-Niamayoua, Congo's Minister of Primary and Secondary Education with Responsibility for Literacy, as Chair of the Caucus of Ministers, and of Jeanne d'Arc Mujawamariya, Rwanda's Minister of Education, Science, Technology and Research, as Alternate Chair.

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About ADEA

Since its founding in 1988, ADEA has become a partnership between African ministers of education and cooperation and development agencies.

One of the principles underlying ADEA's philosophy is to consider that the responsibility for educational development falls to African governments. For this reason, it strives to encourage a process that fully empowers African ministers of education. ADEA's activities focus on policy dialogue between governments and funding agencies, among African governments themselves and among development organizations. They are also aimed at building institutional capacity in Africa by developing technical skills, establishing networks for information exchange and encouraging the sharing of successful strategies and experiences.

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