ADEA Newsletter
Association for the Development of Education in Africa

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Mail&Guardian

Committed to education

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

Africa has recommitted 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 Plan is expected to have a greater impact than that of the First Decade.
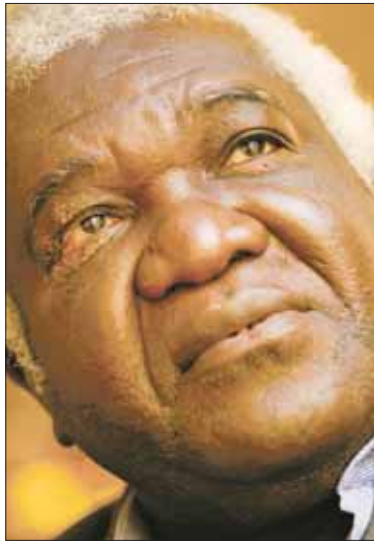
Stakeholders include the AU, Regional Economic Communities (RECs), individual countries, specialist education organisations and donor agencies.

To prevent the creation of more structures, the implementation of the Plan of Action will, for instance, rely on the technical expertise and capacity in existing specialist organisations such as the Association for African Universities (AAU), in the field of higher education, 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
● Building capacity within Regional Economic Communities (RECs).

Executive Secretary of ADEA Mamadou 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

Mamadou Ndoye, Ann Thérése Ndong-Jatta and Nagia Essayed. Photographs: Paul Botes

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 of Action.

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.

"This is why 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 only 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 cost.

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. Within 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 chal-

ADEA Biennale to take place in Maputo

ADEA is pleased to announce that the Biennale on Education in Africa will take place in Maputo, Mozambique, in May 2008.

The Biennale will focus on Post-Primary Education, one of the greatest challenges facing education systems in Africa today. Three major areas will be explored: extension of basic education to include lower secondary education, technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and labour markets in urban and rural settings and articulation between upper secondary and higher education.

Initial exploration of the topic began with the Ad Hoc Working Group on Post-Primary Education (WGPPE), established in November 2004 to address the growing needs in light of achievements of universal primary education. Since then, education specialists, researchers and practitioners have been working to prepare the Biennale. A wealth of studies are under way in African Ministries of Education, development agencies and research networks in Africa and other regions thereby ensuring that the policy dialogue on post-primary education in Maputo will be grounded in research, practice and experience.

The Biennale on Education in Africa, which unites nearly 500 participants, serves as the most significant educational event for the African region. Ministers of Education from all the African continent, bilateral and multilateral development agencies, experts from Ministries and universities, as well as representatives from civil society attend each invited to participate in the Biennale. The 2008 Biennale seeks to provide the educational community of Africa with the research, tools and capacity to advance post-primary education across the continent.

lenges," she said.

One such a response is the creation of a specialised fund for education. Zeinab El Bakri, Vice-President of the African Development Bank, said the AU has asked the bank to look into the feasability of such as fund and how it would work.

A key player in the Plan of Action

The Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) is ideally positioned to play a critical role in the implementation of the Plan of Action for the Second Decade of Education in Africa, said Executive Secretary Mamadou Ndoye.

Heads of State of the African Union (AU) last year accepted a proposal by COMEDAF II to declare a Second Decade of Education for the period 2006 to 2015. AU Ministers of Education subsequently approved the Plan of Action.

ADEA's role, however, has only been recently clarified.

Speaking at COMEDAF III in Johannesburg during August, Ndoye said the AU, which historically focused more strongly on peace and conflict resolution rather than on developmental issues, initially approached UNESCO for support on the Plan of Action.

"This is normal. UNESCO is a UN organ. The AU was not aware

of ADEA and what it is about. So when ADEA approached them for cooperation they were sceptical. But now they know and are more open," said Ndoye.

He said the AU and ADEA's roles in education were markedly different.

Whereas the AU is a political organisation accepting resolutions

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 **To Page 2**

Communication for education

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

Communication, sharing information, building trust and confidence, sustaining goodwill and reinforcing 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 must seek 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.

Much remains to be done, however. Experiences from Africa and elsewhere point strongly to the importance of systematic, sustained and strategic communication as a major tool for ensuring successful education reforms. Yet the evidence so far is that few African education ministries have invested in institutionalising strategic communication activities. Ministerial communication units, where they exist, are weak, perform mostly protocol and peripheral management functions and rarely have designated budgets or identified communication staff trained in relevant professional skills. Much of what is currently implemented is episodic and media related: ministers giving press conferences or appearing on television visiting communities, ministries refuting negative press reports, occasional announcements through radio and television, some coverage of project activities or celebration of specific education events.
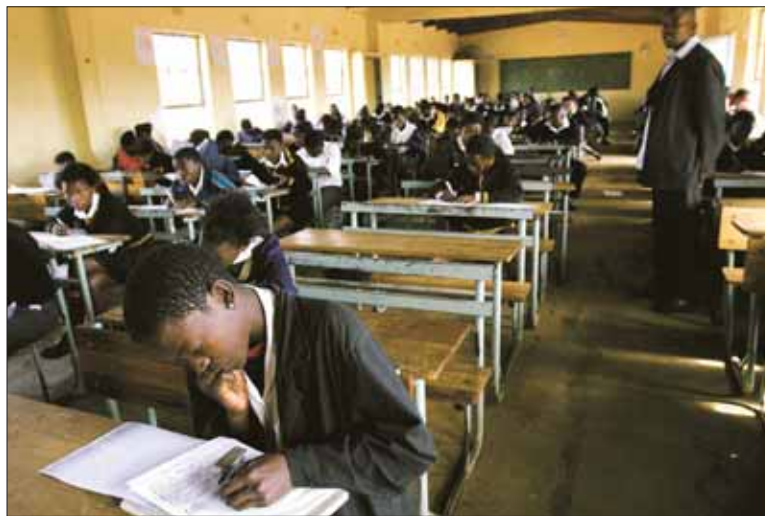
ADEA's Working Group on Communication for Education and Development (WGCOMED) seeks specifically to strengthen institutional communication capacities in ministries of education, to develop a network of trained African reporting on education and to enhance the exchange of news and information among African education journalists, communication officers in education ministries and other relevant stakeholders. Hence mainstreaming strategic communication approaches, assisting in the design of 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.

Past activities include sponsoring journalists to attend and cover major conference and events related to education, training courses in the use of education statistics for journalists, technical assistance to the Parliament of Benin during the national consultations prior to introduction of legislation on educational reform, assistance to the Federation

Africaine des Associations des Parents d'Eleves (FAPE) in creating a communication strategy for its network and a radio programme, l'Ecole des parents, and assisting Ministries of Education to develop communication units and strategies.

The Working Group is also involved in the management of the Africa Education Journalism Award, in existence since 2001. The objectives of the award are to encourage African journalists to write relevant articles on education,

to encourage African newspapers to publish regular columns and supplements on education and to foster the development of a network of African journalists specialising in covering education topics.

WGCOMED has also been approached by the African Union to assist in the development of a communication strategy to accompany implementation of the Plan of Action for the Second Decade of Education for Africa.

Education in Africa faces many challenges. Photo: Nadine Hutton

ADEA invites articles for the Akintola Fatoyinbo Journalism Award

ADEA calls African journalists to compete in the fifth edition of the Akintola Fatoyinbo Africa Education Journalism Award. The award recognises the most outstanding articles on education in Africa, authored by African journalists and published in the African press. It seeks to encourage the development of both quality education journalism and public debates in this domain. Articles should be sent to ADEA, 7-9 rue Eugene-Delacroix, 75016 Paris, France, before November 2007. For more information see the ADEA website at www.adeanet.org.

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ask whether coutries have already integrated the Second Decade of Education in their country plans, what they learnt, how to share information and feed the AU with analytical work based on best practices," he said.

Ndoye said there was "no time to waste on implementation", which was why ADEA's wide-ranging work in the field of education during the past 20 years was a valuable resource as the Plan of Action unfolds.

The association had accumulated a vast number of studies and was privy to the most current thinking in areas such as the quality of education, education statistics, text books, teacher development and higher education in Africa.

"We also have networks of education experts in Africa. If any organisation wants to do work in a specific area, we have a database to identify the best people with the best knowledge on a specific topic," Ndoye said.

He added that ADEA also had 11 working groups — networks of education specialists with expertise in key fields of education — which could be mobilised to provide technical experience in the seven priority areas of the Plan of Action.

According to Ndoye, ADEA also had a capacity-building role to play. For instance, the AU plans to set up an observatory to monitor the implementation of the Second Decade of Education. ADEA could assist.

"In this area we already have the ADEA Working Group on Statistics, which has experience in setting up EMIS systems throughout Africa and could help to compile statistics at national and continental levels. 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 reviews in several African countries," he said.

Unifying African leadership in education

The envisaged merger of the offices of the ministers of COMEDAF and the ADEA

During the Conference of African Ministers of Education Meeting that took place in Algiers in March 2005 (COMEDAF II), the question of the parallel existence of two conferences of African Ministers of Education, that of UNESCO's — the MINEDAF — and that of the African Union's — the COMEDAF — was seen to be problematic and taken up for discussion. UNESCO then agreed to no longer hold its biennial conference of ministers, the MINEDAF, the last one having taken place in 2005. Now MINEDAF no longer exists and the UNESCO General Conference is the

only time 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 Bureaus of Ministers of ADEA and the African Union can now be foreseen. 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 of 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.

In March the ADEA Steering Committee responded favourably to this request by officially approving the extension of the geographic coverage of ADEA to the countries of North Africa, which, up to then, had been limited to sub-Saharan African. As the African Union and ADEA now cover the same field of action, the main obstacle to the merger of the two Bureaus of Ministers no longer exists.

If the merger between the two offices of ministers takes place, various advantages will ensue: the unifying of ministerial leadership at the continental level, strengthening the legitimacy and representational

capacity of the leadership, reinforcement of the decision-making weight of the Bureau in its dialogue with external partners, and the consolidation of the collaboration between the African Union and ADEA.

The ADEA Bureau of Ministers comprises 10 African Ministers of Education who are nominated by the Caucus of African Ministers of Education to represent the five regions of sub-Saharan Africa on the ADEA Steering Committee. The latter is composed of the Ministers who are members of the Bureau of Ministers and 20 development and cooperation agencies.

Niches of expertise

ADEA's 11 working groups and three ad hoc working groups are niches of expertise providing a unique perspective on specific issues. The themes they address cover a wide range of topics, which have been identified by African Ministries of Education as being crucial for the development of education in Africa. These are: books and learning materials, distance education and open learning, communication for education and development, early childhood development, education statistics, education sector

analysis, finance and education, the teaching profession, higher education, non-formal education, mathematics and science education, HIV/Aids and education, post-primary education and policy dialogue.

Most working groups' activities are coordinated and implemented by specialised agencies, in several cases African institutions. All strive to involve a wide range of organisations and stakeholders to ensure policy coordination and coherence. Activities carried out include research and analytical work, capacity build-

ing, advocacy and networking.

Some groups, such as higher education and non-formal education, have redefined the policy debate among governments and agencies in entire sub-sectors. Others have brought to the forefront of ministers' thinking essential issues such as gender equality, the importance of communication, early childhood development and books and learning materials.

The Forum of African Women Educationists, which was created by ADEA's now graduated Working Group on Female Participa-

tion, has championed girl's education throughout the continent. In the area of capacity building, the working groups have also assisted ministries in setting up statistical information systems and designing instruments to follow up on budgetary processes. They are also helping countries to strengthen policy dialogue competencies and develop communication policies. All working groups have contributed to the development of networks of specialists most equipped to address the many education challenges.

Fund for learning

The African Union (AU) has asked the African Development Bank (AfDB) to investigate the feasibility of an education fund and how such a fund will work, said Zeinab El Bakri, vice-president of the AfDB.

Asked about how the AfDB would align its work with the Second Decade of Education's Plan of Action, she said the AfDB has been financing education for 30 years and the fund was a continuation of that.

"The only difference is that we are shifting more to science, technology and higher education," she said.

The AfDB works through countries and Regional Economic Communities to fund activities aimed at achieving the Millenium Goals and reducing poverty.

Professor Nagia Essayed, the AU Commissioner, said that a fund would help member states of the AU, and they would know where to go to if they needed to access funding for activities.

Partnering for success

Beatrice Khamati Njenga considers ways to take the Second Decade of Education's Plan of Action forward

At a session of the Conference of Ministers of Education of the African Union (COMEDAF) in Johannesburg considered progress made in the implementation of the Plan of Action for the Second Decade of Education for Africa (2006-2007). This plan articulates the collective vision of African Union (AU) member states in the area of education.

The AU has a vision of an integrated, peaceful, prosperous Africa, driven 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 is a critical sector, the performance of which directly affects and even determines the quality and magnitude of Africa's development. It is the most important means we have at our disposal to develop human resources and impart appropriate skills, knowledge and attitudes.

Education forms the basis for developing innovation, science and technology to harness our resources, industrialise, participate in the global knowledge economy and for Africa to take its rightful place in the global community.

An evaluation of the first Decade of Education for Africa (1997 to 2006) showed that most of the goals set in the Plan of Action had not been achieved, despite valiant efforts by member states.

In recognition of the importance of getting it right in education in Africa, the sixth ordinary session of the assembly of heads of state and government of the AU decided last year to launch a Second Decade of Education for Africa (2006 to 2015).

COMEDAF, in its extraordinary meeting in September last year in Maputo, launched the Plan of Action for the Second Decade of Education for Africa.

Sharing the responsibilities

Continental, regional and national authorities will play distinct roles in the execution of the Plan of Action. These role are dictated by the nature of their specific mandates:

● The AU commission will provide political oversight functions; advocacy at national and international levels; coordination of regional economic communities; management of the continental education observatory; organisation of biannual review conferences; and publication of continental overview reports.

● Regional Economic Communities (RECs) are responsible for the coordination and monitoring of country-level activities; development of regional programmes and projects; assisting member states to domesticate the Plan of Action; facilitation of regional consultative meetings and regional collaborative programmes and sharing of experiences; provision of country and regional reports to the AU commission; and publication of region-specific reports.

● Member states (governments through education ministries, agencies and civil society) will direct implementation of the Second Decade programme in the overall context of national education and development agenda; exchange experiences and collaborate with countries within and outside the region; national level monitoring; and reporting to national and regional coordinating bodies.

The following are areas on which AU member states have agreed to focus their collective efforts in the Second Decade:

● gender and culture;
● education management information systems;
● teacher development;
● higher education;
● technical-vocational education and training;
● curriculum development and related issues of teaching-learning materials; and
● quality management.

Programme activities for 2007 and 2008

The focus in all areas during the 2007-2008 period is to lay the foundation for full-blown implementation through the following:

● developing implementation strategies;
● establishing partnerships for implementation;
● launching a publicity strategy;
● establishing the education observatory;
● domestication of plans of action at various levels;
● baseline surveys and needs assessments; and
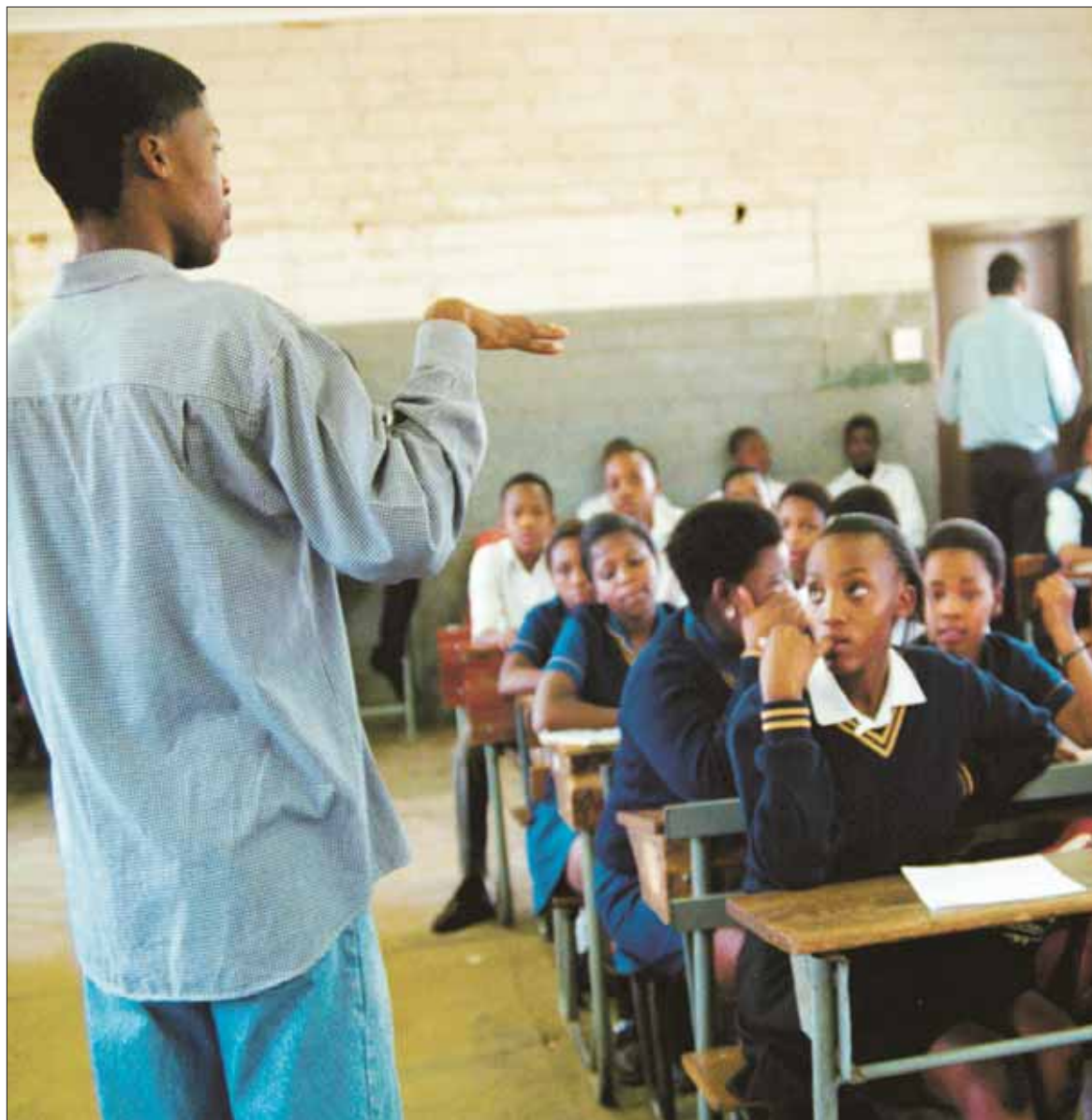● capacity-building of implementing stakeholders, especially at REC levels.

These activities are designed in form and content to avoid the pitfalls of the first Decade, while maximising on the gains.

The performance of education in Africa is critically linked to the continent's future ability to partake in the global knowledge economy. Photograph: Nadine Hutton

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).

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 parallel-ism. 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 issue of financing 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 reason 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 protocol 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

Mobilising regional players

The Regional Economic Communities (RECs) are essential pillars for the successful implementation of the Second Decade's Plan of Action and ADEA has taken the initiative of convening a meeting that will bring them together wth the African Union, UNESCO, the African Development Bank and ADEA. The meeting will be held in Tunis in the first weeks of November.

Eight RECs will be invited to the meeting: the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Union du Maghreb Arabe (UMA) and the African Economic Community (AEC).

The involvement of the RECs as major actors in the implementation of the Second Decade of Education for Africa will be at the centre of discussions. The challenges posed in terms of policies, capacities and mobilisation of resources, as well as the role of the RECs in relation to national policies and the African Union, will also be issues on the agenda.

Keeping track is vital

Anglela Arnott on why education management information systems are desperately needed

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

"That depends a great deal on where you want to get to," 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. But 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 and where 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, adherences, compliance and strategic intervention).

Quantitative indicators and statistics act both as early warning measures of system dysfunction and benchmarks against which progress is assessed.

There is growing awareness among policy-makers in Africa that well-managed and responsive statis-

tical information services are essential to viable policy formulation and efficient investments in education.

This is why the working group on education statistics (WGES) was formed in 1989 by the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA). Based in Harare, Zimbabwe, it focuses on developing and institutionalising EMIS capacity-building in African countries. It works with the UNESCO Institute of Statistics to ensure countries can produce regular and accurate statistics on all levels of their education systems from early childhood centres to universities.

WGES supported the Education For All initiative with statistics when country leaders met in Dakar in 2000 to endorse global education objectives on literacy, access to basic education and early childhood education, gender parity and quality of learning.

Every year since then, all countries have been required to provide educational statistics for a monitoring report on global progress made in terms of the Dakar objectives.

Many of the African states that struggle to produce educational statistics are post-conflict countries with vulnerable or marginalised populations. Photo: Oupa Nkosi

AU to establish observatory

An African Education Observatory will be established as a vehicle for coordinating the Second Decade's EMIS (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 Education Statiscal Information Systems (NESIS) programme to assist it in establishing the observatory. Responsibilities of the observatory will include:

• Developing and maintaining an Internet portal;

• Updating and promoting the EMIS assessment/diagnostics reports;

• Managing documentation (including training materials, research reports, ongoing EMIS projects, technical partners, catalogue and agenda of regional and continental capacity building and training);

• Developing and updating the African indicators database;

• Promoting the network of experiences and expertise; and

• Developing and maintaining a continental EMIS.

• The AU has chosen the Institute for Partner Education and Development (IPED) to host the observatory.

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 development agendas, they are required increasingly to identify the weaknesses and blind spots within development programmes that seek to promote equity, access and quality of education for all.

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

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.

The goal is to reverse the phenomenon of missing educational statistics in global education reports and improve educational planning, monitoring and evaluation.

There has been a call for harmonised and integrated education systems across the continent. The AU plans to develop appropriate common indicators as instruments for monitoring the level of each country's compliance with the continental 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.

Africa needs to come up with its own data, with comprehensive databases that are comparable across countries. This calls for 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, girls, youth and the illiterate.

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

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

A free market for textbooks

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

T he Association for the Development of Education in Africa's (ADEA) Working Group on Books and Learning Materials has published a number of books recently which 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:

● C *rossing 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 Beulah Thumbadoo; and*

● *Bringing the Story Home — A guide for developing and selecting materials for Early Childhood education: The South African perspective* by Nadine Hugo.

A key piece of research, undertaken by Zambian/Zimbabwean consultants for the Working Group, describes the increasing trend towards the liberalisation of textbook authorship and publishing in Africa, and the decentralisation of textbook procurement and distribution at district and school levels.

Changing Public/Private Partnerships in the African Book Sector (No 15 in ADEA's Perspectives on African Book Development), demonstrates how many Anglophone

countries in Africa have moved from state monopoly of textbook provision to various kinds of liberalised, market-based, decentralised systems (examples are Tanzania and Zambia in 1991, Uganda in 1993, Kenya in 1998).

Some countries, such as Nigeria and Zimbabwe, have gone even further in enabling free-market textbook provision, with several choices of textbooks per subject for each grade and minimal state involvement.

In Francophone African countries, the picture is different. The trend has been to move away from importing all textbooks for primary school from France towards using National Curriculum Institutes to develop single titles (for example, in Senegal, Guinea, Mali). But international competitive bidding for large publishing contracts for school books

tends to work against the participation of the local publishing industry because national publishing firms cannot meet the criteria in terms of scope and scale.

The challenge for governments that want to make more books available for children to read for pleasure as well as learning is how to reconcile educational concerns for quality, relevance and choice with fledging book-industry publishing capacity. Many African countries also need to address the uneven book access problem through engaging in public-private partnerships that encourage the development of countrywide bookselling networks (rather than using private sector distribution companies that undercut the growth of bookselling).

South Africa has rich experience in the book sector which can be shared with other countries to

help stimulate the growth of the book industry across the continent. South African involvement in the Working Group, under the leadership of the Department of Education, with coordination from READ Educational Trust, is seen by ADEA as the way forward, in tandem with key partners such as the African Publishers' Network (APNET) and the Pan African Booksellers' Association (PABA). In this way, the ADEA Books Working Group hopes to work alongside COMEDAF in the implementation of the African Union Second Decade for Education in Africa to overcome the continuing problem of the shortage of good-quality materials for our children to read and enjoy.

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