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**Preparatory Conference of the African region for the 48th
session of the International Conference on Education (ICE)**

"Inclusive Education: Major issues and Priorities in Africa"

17 and 18 September 2008, Yaounde, Cameroon

CONCEPT PAPER

September 2008

Preparatory Conference of the African region for the 48th session of the International Conference on Education (ICE)

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I. The International Conference on Education (ICE)¹

Since 1934, the International Bureau of Education has been in charge of organizing the International Conference on Education, thus creating a forum for dialogue among Ministers of Education. The International Conference on Education is a major forum in the world for education policy dialogue among Ministers of Education and other stakeholders (researchers, practitioners, representatives of intergovernmental organizations and civil society).

Themes of the 48th session of the ICE

The 48th session of the International Conference on Education will be held from 25 to 28 November 2008 in Geneva on *"Inclusive Education: the Way of the Future"*.

The themes adopted for the workshops are:

- 1- Inclusive Education: **approaches, scope and content**
- 2- Inclusive Education: **public policies**
- 3- Inclusive Education: **systems, links and transitions**
- 4- Inclusive Education: **learners and teachers**

¹ Information in this section is extracted from the General presentation of the 48th session of the ICE, ED/BIE/CONFINTED 48/4, Geneva, IBE, 2008, available on <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fr/ice/48th-session-2008/working-documents.html>

According to the General presentation of the 48th session of ICE:

"Inclusion is more about respect of Human Rights than an issue of education or pedagogy that mostly affects the public policies of a country. In this way, it is inseparable from the manner in which we design the type of society and wellbeing we desire and the manner by which we consider 'life together'. Social justice, social inclusion and inclusive education therefore seem closely linked...."

(...) To maintain, as the Dakar Forum did, that 'education is for all' is more than just a slogan or a well thought out concept. It is a reality and we are increasingly realizing that, in countries where investment in education constitutes a firm commitment not only of the ministry in charge of education but of all stakeholders: governments as a whole – at national, regional and local level – teachers, parents, civil society, religious authorities, world economy, media, partners in development, etc., progress in terms of access, equity, quality and competence is the most significant and more lasting.

(...) In terms of policy, the objective of inclusive education calls for the adoption of a holistic view to change and reform of the manner in which education systems face exclusion. This implies a multisectoral or systemic approach to education and the introduction of consistent strategies to ensure a lasting change at three key levels: (a) policy and legislation; (b) attitudes within the society and communities, and (c) teaching and learning practices, including management and evaluation. This is a global strategy, aimed to inter-link erstwhile compartmentalized sources of exclusion such as poverty, social and cultural marginalization, discrimination based on gender, linguistic or ethnic origin, disability and HIV/AIDS".

By proposing inclusive education as central theme, the IBE Council, the Executive Council and the UNESCO General Conference hoped to transmit a double message to the world education community: i) on the one hand, a world, societies and education systems marked by many forms of exclusion are neither acceptable nor reasonable; ii) on the other hand, faced with these problems, even if answers and solutions exist, they require a real "paradigm shift", in conception and long term vision to elaborate and implement new policies.

Objectives of the 48th session of the ICE

The main objectives of the 48th session of the ICE are:

- foster and support international dialogue on education policies and practices; hold open and profound discussions and share experiences in key inclusive education issues on a wider horizon and their implication in the elaboration and implementation of equal, effective, quality and democratic education policies;
- forge a common reference framework taking into account recent developments in the concept of inclusive education; look more carefully into the role of governments in the development and implementation of policies on inclusive

- education; draw attention to education systems that offer opportunities for lifelong learning and emphasize the role of teachers to meet the learners' diverse expectations and needs;
- pay attention to issues of consensus or controversy and lessons to be drawn from education policies;
 - adopt Conclusions and Recommendations enabling to build individual and mostly collective, national and international capacities, elaborate short and long term visions on these issues for the purpose of adopting, across the world, education policies better adapted to the needs of individuals and societies and to the socioeconomic realities of the beginning of this 21st century.

II. Preparatory Conferences and Workshops of the ICE

In conformity with the decision of ICE Council, three regional conferences on inclusive education were organized within 2008, for the Europe and North America region (Riga, February 2008), the Asia region (Bali, May 2008), the Arab region (Beirut, August 2008).

The Yaounde Preparatory Conference of the African region is the fourth of its kind. These regional conferences enjoy the participation of policymakers and high level experts and help, inter alia, to:

- involve interested parties in the preparatory process of the 48th session of the ICE;
- obtain a mutual understanding of inclusive education from a broader perspective (address the diversity of students for equal access to quality education) and priorities specific to regional contexts;
- share developments, experiences and challenges in inclusive education;
- formulate proposals for promoting and implementing inclusive education via joint actions and effective partnerships;
- adopt outcomes of the Conference for publication and diffusion to a wide range of persons.

Similar to these four regional conferences, the IBE also jointly organized nine regional workshops in 2007 and 2008 on inclusive education² .

² Information on the ten regional workshops on inclusive education is available on:
<http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fr/ice/48th-session-2008/pre-meetings/regional-workshops.html>

These workshops basically mobilized the community of practice for curriculum development (COP)³ of the IBE, dealing in detail with various aspects of inclusive education at national and regional level, gathering a good quantity of relevant material and leading notably to the elaboration of regional "road maps", which consist in carrying out concrete actions for the development of inclusive education.

III. Relevance of inclusive education in the African context

What is inclusive education?

According to UNESCO guidelines for inclusion, inclusive education *"is considered as a process that takes into account the diverse needs of all learners and meets them thanks to a growing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and curbs the practice of exclusion in education. It presumes the transformation and modification of contents, approaches, structures and strategies; with a common vision that includes all children of the age group concerned, and the conviction that it is the responsibility of the public education system to educate all children. Inclusion is expected to provide proper solutions to the highly diverse learning needs in formal and informal education. Far from being a marginal issue, notably: how to absorb some learners into general education, the approach of inclusive education consists in finding a way to transform the education systems and the other learning structures to adapt them to the diversity of students. Inclusive education is meant to make teachers and learners comfortable with this diversity and consider it a challenge and enrichment for the learning environment rather than a problem."*⁴.

Inclusive education can be considered as the main guideline for supporting the accomplishment of the objectives of Education for All (EFA)

Who are the excluded?

Exclusion in education can assume more or less obvious or "subtle" diverse forms. The excluded, are all children and youths having no access to education, early drop-outs from the system before acquiring skills and knowledge, those having difficulties in learning or having "special needs". According to the terminology of OECD, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, "children and teenagers at risk" are those that often make up marginalized and mostly vulnerable groups (migrants, minority ethnic, linguistic, cultural or religious groups, victims of poverty, street children, working children, refugee or displaced children, nomadic children, HIV and AIDS orphans, children who are victims of violence, child soldiers, parent children, children under detention, etc.). finally, the excluded at various levels are youths for whom, even in the most organized and developed systems, teaching and learning does not meet their needs,

³ The community of practice (COP) for curriculum development can be tackled together and applied as part of a holistic approach aimed to specify and implement the objectives of Education for All (EFA). It was put in place in July 2005 by IBE, with the help of specialists in curriculum design from diverse regions of the world.

⁴ Guidelines for inclusion: Ensuring access to 'Education for All', Paris, UNESCO, 2006

aspirations, challenges, and the opportunities of today's world and has, because of that, no meaning in their life⁵.

Relevance of inclusive education in Africa

Since Dakar (2000), progress has been made towards Universal Primary Education (UPE). For the world as a whole, the net enrolment ratio (NER) in primary education evolved from 83 per cent in 1999 to 86 per cent in 2004. The average NER in primary education evolved from 55 to 65 per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Following the primary education development drive, policies to abolish school fees, encourage and train teachers, incentive measures for the teaching profession as well as marginalised youths, have already yielded fruits, which correspond fully to the spirit of inclusive education, crucial to African countries, inasmuch as:

- Education, in general, faces challenges in terms of human, material and financial resources. In 2007, despite numerous efforts by a majority of African states, 16 among them still devoted less than 2 per cent of their GDP to primary education⁶. A significant number of countries risk not achieving universal basic education by 2015.
- Education was basically designed to create an educated elite (e.g. with conventional curricula, mainly full of academic knowledge and based on exams) and from this view, it has remained fundamentally unchanged throughout generations.
- Since Jomtien (1990) and following the Dakar Forum (2000) on Education for All (EFA), most stakeholders in Africa invested first and foremost in primary education, and introduced reforms at various levels of secondary education, at the expense of a holistic vision of education⁷.
- Only less than 10 per cent of learners today attain higher learning; the rest join the job market with the little education acquired. In the next twenty years, countries may not be able to ensure a lasting supply of post-primary education to more than 15 per cent of schooling children⁸.
- Social and gender inequalities are persistent; family participation is still unsatisfactory; only about 10 per cent of disabled children attend school⁹: inclusive education as such is still to undergo an awareness drive.

⁵ See the General Presentation of the 48th session of ICE, ED/BIE/CONFINTED 48/4, Geneva, BIE, 2008.

⁶ *Rapport mondial de suivi sur l'EPT 2007*, Paris, UNESCO, 2007.

⁷ See *l'Appel à l'action de Kigali*, adopted by participants of the high level regional seminar on basic education in Africa (Kigali, Rwanda, 25-28 September 2007).

⁸ Source: papers and discussions at the high level regional seminar on basic education in Africa (Kigali, Rwanda, 25-28 sept.-08 2007).

⁹ Balescut, J.: Eklinth, K. 2006. *Historical Perspective on Education for Persons with Disabilities*. Reference Document for *le Rapport mondial de suivi sur l'EPT 2006*.

In addition to these realities, the socio-cultural challenges to which Africa is confronted and which have a more or less significant incidence on education systems should be emphasized: population explosion, urban-rural disparities, cultural and religious realities, etc.

Today, more than ever before, countries can take advantage of their current education reforms to integrate principles and sound practices of inclusive education, which will enable them to make the most of and sustain the results already obtained and highlight policies based on access to education and equal learning.

IV. Objectives and results expected of the Yaounde Preparatory Conference of the African region

The Yaounde Preparatory Conference of the African region will bring together senior officials of the Education ministries of 17 African countries: Angola, Benin, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Kenya, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe and South Africa, as well as Latvia (host country of the preparatory conference for Europe and North America) and Ecuador.

The purpose of the Preparatory Conference for the region is to come up with Africa's common and shared vision on inclusive education by considering the needs and specificities of Africa, through:

- discussing and questioning inclusive education;
- specifying issues and priorities for the region of Africa;
- providing ideas for discussion at the 48th session of the ICE.

Results expected of the Conference:

- a deep and shared understanding of inclusive education from a broader perspective and priorities specific to Africa;
- identification of principles and challenges linked to inclusive education in the region on the basis of practices in African countries and at international level;
- collective and deep reflection, as well as proposals, on promoting and implementing inclusive education principles to be considered during the 48th ICE session;
- establishment of concrete contacts for joint actions and satisfactory partnerships, in favour of inclusion; and

- Outcomes of the Conference published and widely distributed.

V. Themes of the Yaounde Preparatory Conference of the African region

Considering the concept frame of the 48th ICE session and the African context, four themes were selected to guide the Preparatory Conference of the African region on inclusive education in Africa:

- 1- Multisectoral public policies, increasing and democratizing basic education within the framework of Education for All (EFA)
- 2- Inclusive education and its implication for curriculum development
- 3- Teachers and student inclusion through interactive pedagogies and the new information and communication technologies (ICT) environment
- 4- Inclusive education: from theory to practice in schools and classrooms

1. Multisectoral public policies, increasing and democratizing basic education within the framework of Education for All (EFA)

This theme will take stock of education policies in general, and those centred on inclusive education in particular, by discussing priorities, actions and perspectives in African countries.

- What are the current priorities and actions of national education policies in Africa on inclusive education?
- How can education systems be put in place to offer relevant lifelong learning opportunities and imply a multisectoral approach of education as social policy?
- What is the role of governments in elaborating and implementing inclusive education policies?
- How can basic education be increased and democratized or how can the transition from primary education to secondary education be made accessible to all?

2. Inclusive education and its implication for curriculum development

Curriculum development in Africa faces a true challenge. Curricula in the region are often academic, focussed on the objective of progression, without sufficiently dealing with issues on building skills and preparation for life, work and sustainable development.¹⁰

- How can curricula favour the designing of pedagogic strategies for inclusion?
- What forms of curriculum innovations and sound practices can be introduced to meet the needs and expectations of children affected by marginalization and exclusion?
- What is the relationship between formal and informal education to achieve the objective of inclusive education?

3. Teacher and student inclusion through interactive pedagogies and the new information and communication technologies

Apart from material and salary constraints, African teachers are still seriously worried by the working environment. NICTs are now an indispensable working tool in the education environment, for learners and teachers alike. It should be noted that very few teachers have access to this tool¹¹ that can no doubt favour better inclusion into the education system, at the level of the teaching/learning process and participation in developing education.

Among the teaching technologies are a good number of effective teaching tools, notably interactive teaching by radio, a teaching/learning medium that resolves the issue of access/distance to school.

- How can an enabling environment for learning be fostered to equip teachers to meet the learners' diverse needs and expectations using teaching/learning technologies (new and traditional)?
- How can the new information and communication technologies be used to better involve teachers in the education system as a whole for the purpose of enabling them to offer quality education to all and also participate actively in the education development process?

¹⁰ Conclusions of the high level seminar on basic education in Africa organized by UNESCO (Kigali, Rwanda, 25-28 September 2007)

¹¹ "This new activity [NICT] cannot be separated from actual efforts at improving the performance of teachers and quality of education. Access to information and knowledge can only have beneficial effects on the profession – professional development through self-training; access to databases, bibliographies and references on a wealth of issues or domains, etc." Task force on the teaching profession. ADEA.

- What are the training needs of teachers in interactive pedagogies and teaching technologies (new and traditional) that can support a better inclusion of learners?

4. Inclusive education: from theory to practice in schools and classrooms

This theme focuses on comprehension from a broader perspective of inclusive education theories and practices or on how to concretely implement inclusive education in schools and classrooms, etc., taking into consideration the constraints, specificities and realities of African countries.

- How can a broader concept of inclusive education be promoted?
- What are the links between inclusive education and inclusive societies?
- How can inclusive education be effective in African countries, while taking into consideration the conditions, needs and educational, social, political, economic and cultural obstacles?
- What are the concrete examples of sound practice in schools and classrooms in other regions of the world?

Organization of themes

The four themes will be introduced by experts in plenary session and discussed in groups in working sessions. The results of discussions and deliberations in the workshops will be presented in plenary sessions, followed by questions and answers.

Conclusions of the conference

The conclusions of the Preparatory Conference of the African region for the 48th session of the International Conference on Education (ICE) will be recorded in a document carrying Africa's common and shared vision on inclusive education:

- the situation of inclusive education in African countries
- priority themes and aspects
- political and major pedagogic issues
- summaries of discussions

VI. Correspondence and contacts

Any enquiries relevant to this conference should be addressed to:

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