



« What basic education for Africa? Project on '9-to-11-year' basic education»

I. CONTEXT

I.1 An urgency:

There are about 100,000 of out-of-school children worldwide, about 38 million of which live in Sub-Saharan Africa¹. In spite of recent progress, enrolment rates in basic education remain alarmingly low², particularly in post-primary education. Furthermore, school retention and completion are still major concerns, since only less than two-thirds of a cohort of pupils who had access to primary education reach the last grade in most African countries. The importance of addressing the urgent problems of basic education in Sub-Saharan Africa is greater now than at any other time. Although there are no magic solutions, certain measures can make significant changes in reversing the negative trends. In an effort to shed light to the implications of an education reform, this workshop will approach the need for expanding and reforming basic education in Africa from three perspectives:

1. Need for a 'holistic' approach to education

Since the World Declaration on Education for All in Jomtien and after Dakar's World Education Forum on EFA, most governments and donors have invested largely in primary education or carried out reforms in lower and upper secondary education without looking at education as a cohesive system and in a holistic manner. Instead, the system has been truncated and institutionally atomized with stakeholders looking at their sub-level without considering the impact each sub-level had on the others.

Promoting access to primary education for all children is the basis for the attainment of all the EFA goals. However, emphasis on primary education in isolation of the need for continuity in education provision that extends to all the other levels, can severely damage the possibilities for children and young people, especially those coming from poor households, for successfully completing at least nine years of basic schooling.

The Global Action Plan³ aimed at greater harmonization and alignment in the approaches of multi-lateral organizations towards EFA, clearly states that the six EFA goals, altogether, form the Basic Education agenda. This reaffirms the

¹ EFA Global Monitoring Report 2007.

² An average Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) of 73% was recorded in 2004, compared to 90% or above in other regions.

³ See UNESCO. 2006. *Education for All (EFA). Global Action Plan: Improving Support to Countries in Achieving the EFA Goals. Edition of 10 July 2006. A basis for enhancing collective effort among the EFA convening agencies.* Paris: UNESCO.

need for a holistic approach to education, well embedded in the conceptualization of the EFA goals. However, a significant cultural and political change of conceptualizing and implementing basic education in Africa, clearly founded on the idea of overcoming a segregated and insulated vision of each educational ladder or sub-system, is indispensable in order to enhance students' learning opportunities.

In this context, the removal of institutional, pedagogical, curricular and teaching barriers between Early Childhood, Primary and Secondary Education, is a critical step in further democratizing basic education in Africa, not only by increasing enrolment and completion rates but mainly by ensuring real access to relevant and useful knowledge and skills.

2. Expanding access to Lower Secondary

While many African countries strive to achieve universal primary education, **the pressure** on the lower secondary level is so heavy that it poses serious problems in terms of availability as well as physical, social and financial sustainability. Expanded enrolment in secondary education will only be limited to access without promising significant improvements in completion rates and quality learning outcomes if it doesn't involve education and curriculum reform in line with stakeholders' expectations and needs coming both within and outside the education system.

There is a major world-wide trend⁴ towards curricular designs which is built up around students, their expectations and their learning needs, openly related to society and based on an epistemological renewal of knowledge boundaries. It is aimed at generating **a pertinent** (= education for what? - the promotion of significant learning in regards to social exigencies and personal development) **and relevant curricula**⁵ (=education for whom? - taking into account the learning differences that are related to the characteristics and needs of each person mediated by the social and cultural contexts).

3. Improving the quality and relevance of education systems: an absolute need⁶.

Despite increasing progress in enrolment rates, a great number of students never complete the primary level of education. Moreover, even among those that successfully complete this cycle the rate of enrolment in post-primary education is still very low. Even worse, if costs for schooling remain at present levels, only less than 10% of the school population will ever achieve tertiary education. In all cases, many students leave school and face the challenges of

⁴ Trends observed not only in Africa but also in North America, Asia and Europe. For example, the reform in China places the student at the centre of the education system with the proposal of universalising nine years of compulsory Basic Education. See Nanzhao, Z. 2005. The Need for Global Networking in Policy Dialogue and Capacity Building for Curriculum Renewal: A Chinese perspective" (ppt, www.ibe.unesco.org/cops/Focal_Points/focal.htm).

⁵ UNESCO Education Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (OREALC) well discusses the concepts of relevant and pertinent curricula in a recent document. OREALC. 2007. *Quality Education for All: a human rights issue. Educational policies within the framework of the II Intergovernmental Meeting of the Regional Project in Education for Latin America and the Caribbean (EFA/PRELAC). Background document.* March 29-30, 2007; Buenos Aires, Argentina. Santiago de Chile: OREALC-UNESCO. Pages 40-44

⁶ « Global Monitoring Report on EFA 2006 (summary) », p2

life and employment without having acquired the necessary competences and skills.

Quality education is more than the sum and the accumulation of conditions and inputs that are relevant in improving the processes of teaching and learning, it is access to and completion of compulsory schooling, with educational processes that respect the learner, with relevant and applicable learning that leads to personal development and enables the learners to participate in social life in an active and constructive manner. This perspective also highlights the need for enabling legislation and policies, a curriculum vision, appropriate teaching and learning methods as well as strategies for teacher professional development.

I.2 A consensual and necessary reform:

For these reasons, different organizations (UNESCO, the African Union, ADEA and the World Bank) have supported different initiatives and regional consultations (NEPAD, the regional Seminar of UNESCO in Addis Ababa for Reforming Secondary education in Africa in November 2005, or more recently SEIA in Accra in April 2007) came to the conclusion that a thorough reform of basic education in a holistic manner is a priority for African countries. This reform contains two major points:

- A necessary **extension** of basic education, for a 9 to 11 years duration with a holistic vision;
- An indispensable **reform** of basic education, in relation with the evolution of the exigencies of our present societies;

Indeed, a remarkable fact⁷ of the contemporary reality is that in most situations, the competences and skills that are expected to perform any job are often common and cross-sectional (for example, among other abilities: analytical and problem-solving skills, initiative, creativity, communication, life skills etc.). These skills come very close to those that any general education curriculum should provide. In this context, UNESCO has recently developed some proposals⁸ for education policy making beyond the primary level taking into consideration the constant need for reviewing and updating the relevance and effectiveness of education systems.

Following five key global human rights treaties, the Dakar Framework for Action adopted at the World Education Forum in 2000 reaffirms education as a fundamental human right. As the lead agency for education, UNESCO actively supports rights-based and country-owned action in the implementation of the Education for All goals, aiming to meet the learning needs of all children, youth and adults by 2015. Moreover, UNESCO underlines the need for a holistic approach to education in order to improve the quality and relevance of education systems.

In this context and acknowledging the urgent attention that educational issues necessitate, UNESCO, in its capacity as the lead agency in EFA and a major actor in international cooperation for education, is organizing this workshop for targeted countries that have embarked or are planning to embark on educational reforms. It

⁷ « Les contenus de l'enseignement secondaire dans le monde : état des lieux et choix stratégiques », Roger-François Gauthier, UNESCO, 2006

⁸ « Secondary Education Reform, Towards a Convergence of Knowledge Acquisition and Skills Development », UNESCO, 2005

will address the need for reform in basic education in a holistic manner promoting the extension of basic education to 9 to 11 years.

II. OBJECTIVES

General objectives of the workshop:

- **Discuss around the scope and main contents** of expanding basic education in Africa.
- **Establish directions, orientations and guidelines** for developing an educational policy and curriculum framework for basic education in Africa.
- **Identify and discuss strategies for implementing** a curriculum for basic education in Africa.

Specific objectives:

- **Contribute to the definition of the objectives, the strategy, the scope, the curricular structures and basic contents as well as provide methodological guidelines** for the elaboration and implementation of new more relevant and pertinent formal curricula for a 9 to 11 years basic education in Africa;
- **Strengthen awareness** of Member States on the crucial role played by education in the EFA context in a holistic/integrated vision as a bridge between basic education and senior and higher education and a solid preparation for citizenship, work and lifelong learning;
- **Facilitate continuous and effective policy dialogue** among and within Sub-Saharan African Member States, generate South-South cooperation, notably by strengthening the network and encouraging the partnerships of government officials, curriculum experts, researchers, development agencies and other partners (note: the global and regional Communities of Practice in Curriculum Development (COP) initiated by the IBE-UNESCO will be an asset (678 members from 82 countries) also a participation of OREALC from Santiago de Chile with their expertise on Secondary Education.
- **Share the experiences** of countries with regards to the educational policies of a 9 to 11 years basic education reform with the integration of competences and skills.

III. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The workshop seeks to address the increasingly important issue of expanding the provisions of basic education in Africa through advocacy and awareness-raising. It will gather ministry officials, decision makers and other targeted education personnel from target countries in order to discuss the imperatives as well as implications and challenges of this expansion. It is expected that at the end of the workshop participants will have acquired and identified:

- **Enhanced understanding of the role and content of basic education** in Africa today;
- **Policy recommendations** identified for addressing the challenge of expanding Basic Education in Africa;
- **Orientations and guidelines** identified for addressing the challenge of designing and implementing a curriculum for basic education in Africa;
- **Knowledge of and commitment to the reform of basic education enhanced** within a consensus on the need to integrate essential generic competencies in a 9-to-11-year basic education as well as the links and the transitions between the different cycles of basic education;
- **Information shared and experience exchanged based on examples of national and innovating practices** from other continents. Particularly from Latin America through the support of UNESCO OREALC Office, concerning policy educational frameworks, population targets, curriculum visions, processes (focus on learning strategies) outcomes, education and professional development for teachers.
- **National experiences on educational policies of basic education reform shared** with a bid towards the integration of essential generic competences (analysis of case studies).

IV. STRATEGY

This workshop has been conceived and planned as the first step of a series of workshops organized within the framework of promoting a holistic approach to the expansion of basic education. It is thus being organised with a view to identifying actions and recommendations that will provide opportunities to the different participants to reflect on **the relevance and effectiveness (issues of equity and quality)** of their formal basic education, in order to find and explore ways and means of integrating « essential generic competencies » (notably those « necessary for survival⁹ » in a 9 to 11 years formal basic education). It is taking place on a pilot basis with the aim that similar activities promoting a holistic approach to basic education will be progressively pursued in all the regions. The main thrusts of this approach are:

- *Level of intervention:* Working at the interregional, regional and national levels through a series of seminars. Profit from using the worldwide Community of Practice in Curriculum Development.
- *Scope of intervention:* Promoting a holistic approach to education, simultaneously addressing the issue of the expansion of basic education through multiple perspectives:
 - √ legal aspect
 - √ policy perspective
 - √ learning processes
 - √ educational content - curriculum
 - √ financial sustainability

⁹ « 33C/5 approved », UNESCO, p55

- *Mode of intervention:* Provide a platform for information exchange, dialogue and policy directives. Operationalization of a comprehensive approach for capacity building through the identification and implementation of national pilot studies. Encourage South-South Cooperation among participants from countries with similar contexts and challenges.
- *Sustainability of intervention:* Following-up, monitoring and evaluation of processes and impacts especially at the operational level through continuous support, dissemination of information and experience sharing to inform similar initiatives in other countries or regions.

V. WORKSHOP MAIN THEMES

1. International perspective

- Tendencies, advances and challenges in the expansion of basic education (years 1 to 9) in **Latin America**, presented by **OREALC**.
- Processes of curriculum development in Basic Education in **South Eastern Europe**, presented by the *Center Education 2000+* (Romania).
- Experiences of **Indonesia (and/or China)** in expanding Basic Education.

2. Regional perspective

- **Africa:** an overview of basic education - tendencies, challenges and opportunities, presented by Teeluck Bhuwanee, BREDA.

3. Policy/Legal framework

- Legal perspective, presented by Kishore Singh, UNESCO HQs.
- Policy perspective, presented by Theophania Chavatzia, UNESCO HQs.

4. Curriculum Framework

- Main issues: foundations, objectives, structure, curriculum trends and approaches;
- Key knowledge areas (development of skills and competencies for life (UNEVOC), technical and vocational education, entrepreneurship learning), presented by Clement Siamatowe, UNESCO HQs;
- Enhancing learning, presented by Maria Malevri, UNESCO HQs;
- Case studies of curriculum development in Basic Education;
- The “New Teacher” for the “Basic Education Curriculum”.

5. Financial sustainability

- Link to broader initiatives, presented by BREDA.

VI. PARTICIPANTS:

Three participants from each of the 15 countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, with the following profile:

- Policy education analysts/ decision-makers of basic education
- Curriculum specialists and developers
- Teacher-trainers

They must be national interveners for formal basic education (9 to 11 years of education) as a 'base of human and social development'¹⁰.

Out of the 15 countries, three will be selected for developing a national pilot experience bases on a comprehensive capacity building approach, with adequate technical and some financial support. UNESCO as a whole commits to assist other interested countries in reforming their basic education curriculum by providing technical assistance and other ways to implement their basic education within a comprehensive vision of curriculum.

Country selection criteria:

- UNESCO Offices present for ease of follow up
- French (6), English (6) and Portuguese (3) speaking countries
- Political will to support the process of expanding basic education
- Post-conflict countries
- Reasonable technical infrastructure sustainability for expanding basic education
- Education reforms currently underway in basic education

VII. PARTNERS

The project is strongly based on promoting the participation of various units within UNESCO, other UN agencies and international donor organizations and countries. The initial list of partners includes UNESCO, Division of the Promotion of Basic Education (Early Childhood through Secondary) BREDA, OREALC, IBE, UNEVOC, IIEP, African Union, and ADEA. Collaboration will also be sought with other partners including:

- African Development Bank;
- World Bank;
- Commonwealth Secretariat;
- Commonwealth of Learning;
- Agence Intergouvernementale de la Francophonie (AIF);
- Specialists of the African concerned countries (researchers/members of universities) working in the field of skills development;
- the government of the host country of the workshop;
- Civil society and socioeconomic stakeholders organizations¹¹;
- Network of UNEVOC Centres.

VIII. PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Duration: 4 days

Dates: 25-28 September

Venue: Kigali, Rwanda


IX. CONTACT

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¹⁰ « 33C/5 approved », UNESCO, p53, paragraph 1

¹¹ For example : 'Comité Paritaire National pour la Form. Prof.' (CPNFP) for Sénégal, Mali and Bénin

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I. Brief notes on curriculum and competences

I.1. A curriculum vision

Curriculum change is a key foundation of educational concerns and reforms around the world. Under a comprehensive view curriculum encompasses foundations and objectives; inputs, processes and contents; and outcomes and evaluations. It can provide the framework, the rationale and the objectives for developing a high-quality equitable education well embedded in what stakeholders expect from the role of education in society.

A broad view of curriculum comprising the analysis of values, skills, knowledge, attitudes, competencies and social and cultural returns could help its role as the hub of educational change (a complex and multidimensional process). As Cecilia Braslavsky (2002) said curriculum can be defined “as a dense and flexible contract between politics/society and teachers”¹². This essentially implies adequate and dynamic combinations of solid universal concepts that substantially support operational procedures (density) as well as clear and real opportunities and margins to choose between options and to be able to implement them (flexibility).

Curriculum issues, either in explicit or implicit way, are inextricably linked to the current thinking and action on educational concerns and reforms around the world. Juan Manuel Moreno (2006) outlines that “Education reform all over the world is increasingly curriculum-based, as mounting pressures and demands for change tend to target and focus on both the structures and the very content of school curriculum”¹³. He also highlights the inextricably political nature of the curriculum debate which is marked by “ideological clashes, conflicts of interest and difficult process of consensus building”. When we discuss curriculum orientations we are contributing to drawing the future of national societies, solid basis for its well-being and its development.

What we outline is the permanent need of a close and careful look at how the curricula are conceptualized and organized as a sound way of designing and implementing reforms linked to core definitions of what we wish and expect of the role of education in society. At least four issues arise as the most significant ones in the current regional debates about educational and curricula transformations well applied to Africa¹⁴:

- i) How to foster the vision of education as a right, an ample and a profound citizenship education, from childhood to the tertiary level covering cultural, political, economic and social aspects;

¹² Braslavsky, C. 2002. *The new century's change: new challenges and curriculum responses*. New Delhi: COBSE-International Conference.

¹³ Moreno, J. M. 2006. *Chapter 11. The Dynamics of Curriculum Design and Development. In School Knowledge in Comparative and Historical Perspective. Changing Curricula in Primary and Secondary Education* (edited by Aaron Benavot and Cecilia Braslavsky). Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre. Pages 195-209.

¹⁴ The IBE worldwide Community of Practice in Curriculum Development (2005 onwards) carry out during this year a series of regional seminars (Asia and Latin America) centered on the issues of Basic Education which contribute to the identification of an inter-regional agenda based on common problems and challenges; see http://www.ibe.unesco.org/cops/workshops/COPs_Workshops.htm

- ii) How to facilitate in education a balanced personal development that could contribute to a happy, healthy and self-rewarding life;
- iii) How to bring to reality the idea of education as a key economic and social policy in promoting national development and in raising economic competitiveness; and
- iv) How to acknowledge and move forward on education as an irreplaceable factor in improving the well-being of the poorest population, in combating exclusion and in contributing to closing the equity gaps in the household income distribution¹⁵.

It is quite difficult to advance in improving the processes and the outcomes of educational quality without developing a comprehensive curriculum vision that justifies why and what is relevant and pertinent (basic and needed) to teach to children and young people according to an overall interpretation of societal expectations and demands. This interpretation is always debatable and controversial, and is deeply grounded on historical, ideological and political concerns and arguments. A good example is the passionate discussions about the objectives and the content of National History programs in Secondary Education, particularly in post-conflict societies¹⁶.

When we approach the need of delimitating and selecting issues to be included in the curricula, we must face the historical problem of an overloaded curriculum and the notorious difficulties in removing contents when new educational reforms are implemented. Cesar Coll and Elena Martín (2006) have outlined in a recent seminar organized by UNESCO Education Regional Office for Latin American and the Caribbean (OREALC), that “the curricula and the school hours are not elastic”¹⁷ disregarding students’ expectations and needs as the central focus of the educational system. Coll and Martín establish the distinction “between what is basic and absolutely necessary and what is basic and desirable in the basic education curriculum”¹⁸. Moreover they point out that the absolutely basic refers to the core learning that is essential to fostering the personal and the social development of the student, allows them to carry out their life projects and facilitates social inclusion.

Frequently, the discussion around what to include or to exclude from the curricula is not aligned with the analysis of the role of education in society but instead, more related to maintaining historical disciplinary identities and traditional forms and contents of knowledge organization as well as to the strong influence of corporative

¹⁵ For example in relation to Latin America and the Caribbean, a good discussion around equity, development and education can be found in: The World Bank. 2003. *Inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean Breaking with History? Chapter 9 Policies on Assets and Services. 9.1 Education*. Washington: World Bank.

In regards to the European educational systems, Denis Meuret thoughtfully discusses the complex relationships between equity and efficiency based on PISA results (2000 and 2003): see Meuret, D. 2005. *The Equity of Educational Systems: A Better Construction of the Concept (original in French)*. Geneva.

¹⁶ IBE has produced a series of country case studies - Bosnia and Herzegovina, Guatemala, Lebanon, Mozambique, Northern Ireland., Rwanda and Sri Lanka - that examine “the role of educational policy change in social and civic reconstruction and the redefinition of national citizenship within the context of identity-based conflicts; see IBE-UNESCO. 2004. *Studies in Comparative Education. Education, Conflict and Social Cohesion (edited by Sobhi Tawil and Alexandra Harley)*. Geneva: IBE-UNESCO.

¹⁷ Coll, C. and Martín, E. 2006. *The curriculum at debate. The Curriculum: the Current Debate, Basic Learning, Competencies and Standards. Document Presented in the Context of the Second Meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee of the Regional Project of Education for Latin America and the Caribbean /PRELAC*. Santiago de Chile: OREALC-UNESCO. See www.unesco.cl/esp/sprensa/noticias/207.act

¹⁸ Ibid. Coll, C. and Martín, E. 2006.

interests around them. Christian Cox (2006) refers to the “cultural hardness of the organizational categories of knowledge and the isomorphism observable between such structuring and teachers’ professional identity”¹⁹.

1.2. The competency-based debate

A good number of educational reforms, particularly in Africa and in Latin America, grounded on different traditions and schools, visualize the competences approaches as a way of conceptualizing and putting into practice significant changes in educational policies, curriculum visions and contents as well as in teachers’ education and professional development. Although the discussion and moreover the confrontation around competences have been intensive, more political than pedagogical, full of prejudice conceptions and weak in theoretical support and in empirical evidences, it opens the way to an overall questioning of the education systems. Principally, the traditional ways of seeing the curriculum and the teachers’ role, which are very much embedded in conservative disciplinary identities, mixed with corporative interests, exclude more than include.

The main concern has been to understand and use the concept of competency as a way of overcoming the idea that curriculum is mainly implemented by repeating theoretical knowledge and by memorizing facts. The application of knowledge to real life situations where the students could experiment and grasp the feedback relationship between knowledge and reality as well as the interfaces between theory and practice, deeply inform the development of new curricular proposals. Bringing the school closer to youth cultures (concerns and expectations), to what occurs in the workplaces and to different social realities, could lead the way to the development of citizenship competences that are deemed as needed in order to have a decent place in today’s world.

The link knowledge – situations is the major concern of the curriculum change as a needed condition in order to improve classroom practices and students’ outcomes.

The process of constructing competences, either the more general ones or those related to specific knowledge domains, implies the articulation between an effective and comprehensive appropriation of knowledge and the development of thinking skills. It aims at achieving knowledge in action as a result of a rigorous knowledge, learning to know very practically and learning to explain what is done. This implies the integration of problem solving, creativity and meta-cognition. This competence approach could be seen as a first stage in trying to break up with a strong ethos disciplinary tradition as the foundation of the curriculum.

Finally, we outline five critical dimensions that can be taken into consideration in developing a competency-based approach within an enlarged Basic Education:

- i) the need of a more profound, serious and frank policy discussion around the competency-based approaches, about their status and role, that should not avoid ideological considerations but be more equipped with information and evidences and finally contribute to the clarification of concepts and alternatives;

¹⁹ Cox, C. 2006. *Chapter 14. Cecilia Braslavsky and the Curriculum: Reflections on a Lifelong Journey in Search of Quality education for All. In School Knowledge in Comparative and Historical Perspective. Changing Curricula in Primary and Secondary Education (edited by Aaron Benavot and Cecilia Braslavsky).* Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre. Pages 245-258.

- ii) the strengthening of the competency-based approach as a critical axis for both the elaboration of subjects programmes as well as the renovation of school and classroom vision and practices, and not only as needed references for conceptualizing and defining macro objectives and components of the curricular structure;
- iii) the conceptualization of the learning situations as both an strategy and an instrument for really implementing a competency-based approach.
- iv) the clarification of the relationships between resources and learning situations, their compatibility and integration under a didactic sequence, the impacts and the validation of different models, and the centrality of students' expectations and needs in the conceptualization and definition of situations (from learning targets to learning actors).
- v) the reforms of Basic Education based on competences should consider from the very beginning of their planning the changes that are deemed as needed in the teachers profile and role as well as in the pre-service education and professional development of teachers.