

DRAFT

GUIDELINES ON THE RENOVATION OF SECONDARY EDUCATION IN AFRICA

This paper begins by looking at the problematic of secondary education in Africa, and uses this as the springboard to propose a new vision for that sub sector of Education. Emanating directly from the new vision are issues related to the practicalities of the task of in depth reform of secondary education in the region: diversification, curriculum issues, teachers, vertical and horizontal linkages with other levels and forms of education, role and place of new information and communication technologies, and anew vision of the ownership and management of secondary education. The paper ends with suggestions on the role of sub regional, regional, and international cooperation. Since any serious efforts in renewing secondary education in Africa, in a very profound sense, would require investing in innovations, there are suggestions on possible pilot projects, as a means of actualising inter- African cooperation of reaping the best fruits of international solidarity.

The Problematic

The last decade of the twenty-first century was characterised by world summits on Education. These gave some boost to primary education, literacy and adult education, technical and vocational education, as well as higher education, while virtually living the ‘middle child’ (secondary education) out of consideration. With the pursuit of EFA, and the increased move to universalise access to basic education by the year 2015, there is likely going to be a multi-fold increase in the number of eligible candidates for secondary education.

That sub-sector of education has, in the past, not been adequately provided for in many of the countries in the region. Yet, it is the level of education that should cater for the learning needs of adolescents and young adults, who would form the strong link in the population chain of African countries in the twenty-first century.

This age-bracket is growing up in a time of unparalleled crisis and challenges in the history of Africa. The region has entered the twenty-first century with a huge human development deficit: internal conflicts, wars, large-scale displacement of populations, political instability, rapid population growth, the debt burden, dwindling economic fortunes, bad governance, the scourge of HIV/AIDS, etc

The period was also characterised, in Africa, by genuine efforts at moving the society forward in a number of countries that have been able to consolidate democracy and lay the foundations for socio-economic take-off. It was also a period marked by a great upsurge of awareness within the civil society. Therefore, in spite of Africa’s well known and well orchestrated problems, there is cause to hope for a better future in the second decade of the present century, especially if the tremendous human and natural resource potentials of the region are developed through education and properly harnessed through improved political processes and sound management.

While Africa is battling with these problems, the rest of the world is moving fast in various domains of human development: more functional educational systems, dominance in economic matters, more functional regional cooperation mechanisms, stronger partakers of the benefits of the digital revolution, and more forceful contributors to, and beneficiaries of the world pool of scientific and technological knowledge.

For secondary education in Africa in the twenty-first century to contribute to meeting the learning needs of the adolescents and youths who will not only fit into the current ‘African dilemma’ but who should also play a critical role in resolving the dilemma, there has to be very profound reforms, which should be guided by an entirely new vision.

Towards A New Vision

A new vision for secondary education in Africa will of necessity be dictated by *the nature of the times*, as seen in emerging global and regional socio-political trends, in the evolution of educational systems in

Africa, and in the entire world, in the changing needs of adolescents, and in rapidly evolving nature of the world of work. These considerations call for fundamental reforms, which should obey a number of ground rules:

- i. Using the learning needs of adolescents and youths as the guiding principle.
 - ii. Broadening of access, through the provision of widely diversified learning opportunities
 - iii. Eliminating all forms of inequities, in terms of gender, geographical/social/physical conditions
 - iv. Broadening the scope of the goals of secondary of the goals of secondary education to include:
 - Consolidation of learning to learn skills,
 - Improved self and social awareness,
 - Vocational and life skills reinforcement,
 - Preparation for conventional forms of tertiary education.
 - v. Flexible (and more responsive) curriculum provisions, teaching, examining and certification methods that reflect the diversity in learning needs and aspirations
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- vi. Close linkages between secondary education and the emerging world of work, burning socio-economic and political issues, and developments in other parts of the world.
 - vii. A management approach that ensures full involvement of all stakeholders, including the direct beneficiaries (youths and adolescents, their parents, their teachers, their local communities) in all manners of initiatives concerning the development of secondary education.

Diversification of Opportunities

African countries would have to create an absorptive capacity in their national educational systems for the products of the universal primary education programmes, which should yield their fruits by the year 2015. Conventional approaches to the provision of secondary education will not satisfy the needs of the diverse groups of adolescents that will be leaving primary schools. It would therefore be necessary for every country, every administrative and political unit within a country, every local community to strive to provide secondary education, if not for All, at least for a progressively increasing proportion of the products of universal primary education.

While each country and each subunit within a country will have to plan this 'progressive absorption' according to its special circumstances, it would be necessary to provide for as wide a variety of situations and aspirations as possible:

- An enriched conventional ('academic'-orientation) pattern of secondary education for a given proportion of secondary school leavers.
- A broad-based (academic/social- orientation) option for a larger bulk of primary school leavers.
- A variety of vocational-based (hands-on productive activity dominated) options for yet a wider spectrum of adolescents and youths.
- Non-formal alternatives, supported by open learning programmes.

Diversification in terms of meeting the special requirements of various societies and groups of learners should however be construed to mean *comparative* and not *relative* opportunities for secondary education. In other words, it is not a question of the academic option being superior

to the other options, but a question of there being a variety of approaches to attaining the same goal of meeting the learning needs of adolescents and youths.

The major advantages of diversification of opportunities for secondary education are that

- The conventional option is enriched (its scope expanded) to take care of the psychosocial needs of the beneficiaries
- Access is guaranteed for all categories of beneficiaries
- In the process, Equity is also guaranteed, since the emphasis is on catering for the special requirements of various groups
- Relevance is better assured, since the various options take care of differences in motivations for seeking secondary education
- Quality is built in, since the major goal is to ensure the full actualisation of the potentials of every group of beneficiaries.

Curriculum, Teaching, Examinations, and Certification

The new vision of secondary education, and especially the need to diversify its modes of provision to meet diverse needs, calls for a radical rethinking of secondary school curricula. The starting point here would be to strive to relate the goals of curriculum as closely as possible to the new vision of secondary education. Thus, secondary school curriculum for the future in Africa, should aim at consolidating the intellectual and psychosocial gains of primary education, and, in addition, strive towards:

- Developing a deeper awareness, understanding and control of one's self
- Developing the skills of social analysis for social belonging
- Developing vocational and recreational interests
- Expanding social and geographical horizons, through improved global awareness
- Consolidating the skills of learning how to learn, and
- Preparation for formal forms of higher education.

These new curriculum goals require a drastic shift in curriculum offerings and curriculum organisation at the secondary level. In terms of curriculum offerings, the new vision and the envisaged curriculum goals would require equitable exposure in the early years of secondary education to a common core programme that neatly blends academic, pre-vocational, and personal-social awareness disciplines. The early years of secondary education would also require more integrated approaches to curriculum organisation. This means a shift from multiple subjects on the school timetable to a limited group of structurally related disciplines.

The later years of secondary education can then emphasise more of differentiation (NOT specialisation), allowing groups of students, or different communities to opt for curriculum offerings that expose learners to their areas of special interests, or to the society's special circumstances.

The secondary school of the future in Africa should also lay a solid foundation for bridging the science/technology/and informatics gap between Africa and the rest of the world. These should also become core (possibly, integrated) disciplines and equitably accessible to boys and girls, as well as to the different 'options' of secondary education.

This new vision of the curriculum can only survive in a situation, which also encourages a new vision of teaching. Since the African adolescent and youth of the twenty-first century will be part of a global community of restless young persons, who belong to a 'questioning

generation' and who will have sources of information and seeking knowledge other than parents and teachers, teaching at the secondary level will have to move from mere telling to guiding, from passively listening to teachers to the teacher joining the learners in exploring, and from blind acceptance of handed down knowledge to discovery through creative inquiry.

This also means that learners should always be made to appreciate the relevance of what they are learning. Thus, teaching-learning materials will cease to be mainly textbooks, but will become life itself.

The selective and competitive examination systems now prevalent in the African school system will accordingly have to be replaced by a stronger emphasis on nurturing the potentials of all categories of learners, as well as helping the educational system to continuously seek to improve its services to the learner and the wider society.

Thus, guidance and counselling should move from being a mere co-curricular activity to becoming a full-fledged curriculum affair. Whole school assessment programmes will have to be developed to help to reduce learner failure and frustration, and to help the system to continuously regenerate itself.

The new vision also means a move away from using certification for 'branding' learners. Since the results of examinations will no longer be 'pass' or 'fail', but a clear description of what the learner has been able to achieve and a clear indication of potentials, certification in secondary education will need to take more of the form of testimonials than of certificates.

Teachers

This new way of looking at the secondary level curriculum would require a new type of teachers. The problems here are multi-faceted. There is a severe shortage of qualified secondary teachers. Teacher morale and motivation are major problems everywhere. Retraining, re-orienting, and re-tooling teachers has never been an easy task.

These are issues to be addressed in the forward thinking needed for the renovation of secondary education in Africa. The issue is not simply recruiting more teachers, not merely training more of the conventional type of teachers, but making teaching revolution an integral part of profound reforms through recruiting, re-educating, motivating, and retaining a critical mass of the revolutionary type of teacher.

This revolutionary type of teacher would be a person:

- Who has wholeheartedly accepted the new vision of secondary education and who has internalised the underlying principles of its new pedagogy
- Whose teaching style is governed by flexibility and who can experiment in the face of new challenges
- Whose approach to specialisation is sufficiently broad to emphasise understanding and solving teaching-learning problems, in favour of merely distilling codified knowledge.
- Who will be a willing participant in the task of continuously improving the delivery of secondary education.

For the system to have this type of teacher, teacher education programmes at the secondary school level would need to de-emphasize narrow specialisation (in terms of conventional

subject disciplines). Broad-based curricula should become the norm, at least for junior secondary teachers. In addition, teacher-training curriculum in the orthodox disciplines will have to emphasize more of the life-issues related nature of every area of learning and academic inquiry. Thus, the impact of science on society, the real life applications of mathematical and scientific concepts and principles, technology and improved quality of life, etc should take prominence over 'pure' science, mathematics, and technology.

The foundation disciplines of education should also emphasise adolescent and youth issues, especially the crisis of values and of identity facing African youths and their contemporary society.

Emerging societal problems like HIV/Aids, the environment, population issues, participatory democracy, and guidance/counselling should become the object of intensive practical activity in the course of teacher education, to prepare teachers adequately for the integration of these concerns into the secondary school curriculum.

Teacher professional associations will, in addition, have to become more intimately involved in the development of teacher education programmes that would address the special requirements of every country, and of every community. This should include special programmes for the reorientation of serving teachers, as well as programmes of systematic career-long, continuous education of teachers.

Vertical and Horizontal Linkages

Any meaningful renovation of secondary education should take due account of the systemic linkages between the secondary level and other levels of education. This also applies to the close linkages between formal secondary education and other complementary possibilities, as in non-formal secondary education.

Secondary education reform should impact on primary education, in the form of the backlash effect of the innovative practices at the secondary level on practices at the primary level. Tertiary education will also have to adapt to the envisaged changes in practices in the area of secondary education. For example, tertiary education may have to adopt more flexible curricula, become more flexible in admission and course requirements, etc, to provide opportunities for products of the non-conventional 'options' of secondary education.

One very likely 'options' for the future is non-formal secondary education, which could be a logical continuation of non-formal basic education, or a form of secondary education for persons who cannot be provided for by the conventional model. The envisaged reform of secondary education in Africa will have to provide appropriate 'bridges and ladders' to facilitate people crossing over from one form of secondary education to another.

The implication of all this is that persons working at the other levels and types of education (policy makers, planners, teachers, and community members) should also be intimately involved in the renovation of secondary education. This would be a way of ensuring that reform efforts at this level is seen and considered in the context of overall enrichment of the entire educational system.

New Information and Communication Technologies

It has rightly been said, “What is wrong with education cannot be fixed with technology”. All the same, life today is dominated by information technology, and, since a major aspect of the new vision for secondary education is seeking close articulation with the emergent world, the reform of secondary education should take information technology in its stride.

Thus, information technology, in its various manifestations (as a discipline, as a tool for teaching and management, and a way of life) has to come forcefully into secondary education in Africa. The three aspects have to go together for information technology to impact meaningfully on the lives of institutions, the overall education system, teachers and learners.

The problem is how best to bring information technology into secondary education in situations in which the basic infrastructures (electricity, telecommunication facilities, the technical expertise for routine maintenance, etc) are not readily available. Or, how best can this be done in a society that is still on the wrong side of the international digital divide?

What this means is that the issue of information technology for the enrichment of secondary education will have to be taken together with overall national information technology plans and policies.

One sure area of great potentials for information technology would be in the non-formal ‘option’ for the provision of secondary education. It is an area that very serious attention. It is also a good candidate for regional cooperation, with a good appeal potential for international solidarity.

Ownership and Management

The new vision of secondary education, and the challenges posed by the innovative efforts needed for its implementation, would require taking a second look at the way secondary education has been managed in the past in many of the countries of the Africa region. Top-down approaches to decision-making, to policy formulation, and educational governance are not likely to help the spread and appropriation of the new vision by stakeholders. Neither would such approaches ever succeed in ensuring that the envisaged reforms take due account of the needs and aspirations of diverse types of learners and of communities.

There is therefore the need to broaden participation, at all levels of national political and administrative organisations to include the most educational significant groups: structures within local communities, parent-teacher organisations, teachers, and more particularly, youth organisations.

It will not be a question of the authorities taking all the initiatives and simply setting up committees and working groups on which various civil society groups are represented. What is expected is the consolidation of experiences in local community full ownership of educational reform initiatives, as already tried out in many places in the area of primary education.

With full ownership by local communities as the general guideline, Member States will have to develop the most appropriate methods of empowering local communities to take up the challenge of taking the full initiative in deciding on the exact nature of secondary education reforms in their localities and of playing the dominant role in the all aspects of the management of such reforms, in the context of an overall national vision.

Sub-regional, Regional and International Cooperation

In addition to mobilising all internal expertise for the development and management of the envisaged reforms in secondary education, African countries would need to harness all the possibilities of inter-African and international cooperation to be able to meet all the challenges posed by the innovation efforts embodied in the envisaged reforms.

A combination of four major approaches to cooperation easily comes to mind:

- Taking full advantage of regional existing collaboration arrangements (e.g. the OAU Decade of Education in Africa, which specifically targeted secondary education)
- Broadening the scope of extant sub-regional education protocols (e.g. the SADC education protocols)
- Absorbing secondary education into the work of an existing regional network e.g. creating a working group on secondary education within ADEA)
- Considering secondary education as an entirely new and independent effort and establishing a completely new mechanism (or a set of mechanisms) for regional and sub-regional cooperation on the renovation of secondary education.

The precise manner and type of collaboration arrangements will be determined by a variety of other considerations. Of greater importance is a determination of areas that constitute pressing needs, in which African Member States would derive the maximum benefit learning together with one another and also benefiting from international technical and financial assistance. A close look at the tasks and challenges ahead would suggest the following specific areas:

- Diversification of Opportunities for Secondary Education, with special emphasis on:
 - Development of non-formal and open learning options
 - Curriculum development
 - Teacher education
- Special Needs, with special emphasis on:
 - Secondary education for Girls
 - Information technology in secondary education
 - Guidance and counselling as a full-fledged curriculum activity

Project I: Regional Cooperation Project on the Diversification of Secondary Education

PROJECT I: could start as a cooperative pilot project among countries that have made considerable progress in the generalisation of basic education, countries which have defined basic education as nine years of schooling, countries with long-standing successful experiences in the promotion of non-formal basic education, and countries with special programmes for youth and adolescents education.

The three components of the project (open learning, curriculum development, and teacher education) represent areas in with great potentials for innovation. There will be a regional cooperation framework to guide work at the country level, while each participating country will be expected to adapt this to its specific requirements.

The project will be regarded as a learning-by-doing activity, and should include a considerable amount of action research, networking, and regular exchange of information. Its major objective will be to develop national and local level capacities

for the development and management of innovations in matters related to the diversification of secondary education.

The project has potential (and willing?) partners in such institutions as The Commonwealth of Learning, CONFEMEN, IICIBA, the development banks and bilateral organisations.

Project II: Regional Cooperation for the Development of Special Need Areas in Secondary Education

This project is closely related to the first one, except that it addresses problem areas of secondary education, which could interest ALL categories of countries.

Component I (Secondary education for Girls) will draw from the work of FAWE, which should be its major network promoter. This component will seek to assist participating countries in formulating secondary education policies, and in developing special programmes that actively encourage the access of girls to secondary education, that take due account of the special needs of girls in the organisation of schooling, in curriculum and teaching issues (with special emphasis on girls appropriating science, mathematics, and technology)

The component will go beyond assistance with the formulation of policies, and the development of programmes, to build up national capacity in monitoring the implementation of secondary education programmes for girls. It will also create a strong regional mechanism for the exchange of information and experiences

Component II is a relatively cost intensive activity and may need to be restricted to countries with relatively developed telecommunications infrastructure. The component should address IT as a tool for educational management, as a tool for improving the quality of teaching and learning, and as a conscious curriculum activity.

Component III (Guidance and Counselling) should be seen as an extension of the girls' counselling programme already begun by UNESCO. Its extension will be in two main directions: broadening the coverage to include boys, and extending its scope to the secondary level.

The major objective of the activity is equip national education systems to be able to take adequate account and care of the psycho-social crises facing adolescents in the process of renovation of secondary education. The component will also address the scourge of HIV/Aids, as a major threat to the actualisation of hopes and aspirations of adolescents in Africa.

The above projects could help to consolidate some of the on-going cooperative and networking arrangements for the development of education in the region. They also stand to gain from the multitude of experiences acquired in Africa since the 1990 decade on innovations in the pursuit of EFA. Above all, they should help Africa to evolve a proactive approach to the renovation of secondary education, by foreseeing problem areas and taking appropriate steps (through regional cooperation pilot projects) to learn to tackle these problems in a systematic manner.

One new dimension that must be built into Africa's collective efforts this time is reaching out forcefully to developing countries outside the Africa region. These countries have been confronted by educational problems that are very similar to those Africa is currently facing. A good number of them have taken innovative steps to tackle such problems. Africa certainly has a lot to learn from these innovative efforts, in Asia, in the Caribbean, in the Arab States, in Latin America.