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Djénéba Traoré
**Will Africa be Left Behind
on the Education for All
(EFA) Trail?**

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Introduction

It is generally admitted that education is one of the major keys to sustainable development. Thus, the concept of education has grown worldwide to a tool for enhancing equality and justice for all. African states in particular need relevant and effective education systems that can benefit every single child in order to assure better social and economic life for the citizens. In its many declarations, the United Nations emphasize the right to education as one of the fundamental human rights. Furthermore, the UN declares that illiteracy is one of the most important obstacles to economic, political and social development. Education as a universal right has occupied a major place in international agreements and conferences since 1945 (International Declaration of Human Rights). The International Decade of Women (1975-1985) aimed to address issues impeding progress of women especially those relating to education. Noteworthy also is the Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 20 November, 1989 in sections 28 and 29. The African Charter on the Rights and Wellbeing of the Child adopted by the Organisation of African Unity (section 11), reinforced the above resolutions with the call to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and girls. In 1990, four affiliate organisations of the United Nations (UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP and the World Bank) organised a meeting in Jomtien, Thailand, to reach an understanding which translated to a world declaration, namely, the commitment of intergovernmental organisations, NGOs and individuals, to the right to education for all. This paper begins by taking a hindsight perspective on EFA. This is followed by a status report on achievements on the quest to attain EFA. The concluding section focuses on the challenges and the road ahead.

Djénéba Traoré

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An Optimistic but Wobbly Beginning

In March 1990, the Jomtien (Thailand) World Conference on Education for All (EFA), adopted the historic decision to universalise primary education and eradicate illiteracy before the year 2000. Given that this resolution remained for 10 years at the level of good intentions, UNESCO organised in Dakar, in April 2000, a World Forum on Education which adopted an Action Framework committing the governments of 181 countries that were present, to create conditions for quality basic education for all before the year 2015.

Education for All aims at providing access to quality education and training to all by the year 2015. EFA has the following six objectives:

1. Develop and improve in every way, the protection and education of little children and notably, the most vulnerable and disadvantaged.
2. Ensure that by 2015 all children, especially girls and children in difficulties and those belonging to ethnic minority groups, should have the possibility to access compulsory free, quality, primary education and to go through right to completion.
3. Meet the educational needs of all youths by ensuring an equitable access to adequate programmes with the objective of acquiring knowledge as well as necessary skills to cope with everyday life and participate as active citizens.
4. Improve adult literacy rate by 50%, and notably that of women, by 2015, and ensure for all adults an equitable access to basic and permanent educational programmes.
5. Eliminate disparities between genders in primary and secondary education by 2005 and institute equality in this domain in 2015 by ensuring especially for girls, a balanced and unrestricted access to an efficient and quality basic education.
6. Improve in all aspects, the quality of education such as to obtain for all recognised and quantifiable learning results - especially in reading, writing and arithmetic, indispensable skills for everyday life.

Ten years after Dakar, the Summit on Millennium Development Goals held in New York from 20 to 22 September 2010. In an optimistic view, the Summit indicated that 13 African countries had already attained or would achieve Universal Primary Education (UPE) by 2015. In spite of this optimism, it is becoming increasingly clear that at the approach of the 2015 deadline, progress made by Sub-Sahara African countries at the basic education level appears to be precarious given dwindling financial resources. What are the causes of this situation and how can the difficulties be handled? If a critical analysis of the level of achievement of EFA in Africa is undertaken, it would be easy to observe that many factors related mainly to history, geopolitics, economics and culture are at the heart of this state of affairs.

The objectives of Education for All (EFA) fall within the framework of the main recommendations of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which provide that education is an individual right, and quality education a basic right (UNESCO, 2008; 2011). Following these declarations and given the commitments taken by states, it could be observed that the number of children attending primary school has significantly increased since the year 2000. The enrolment rate of girls in schools is higher than ever, the budgets allocated to education have increased significantly. Yet, there are other gains. The number of children who have never attended school in the world has dropped significantly, from 96 million in 1999 to 72 million in 2010. Countries that have witnessed the highest school attendance rates in primary education are those that generally increased public spending in education. Indeed public spending on education has increased by more than 5% a year in Sub-Sahara Africa and South and West Asia, two regions which were the farthest from meeting the objectives of EFA.

Some Contending Issues

Education For All in terms of access, retention and completion at the primary level is difficult to achieve on the African continent, just as many other rights especially in situations where there is shortage of human, material and financial resources. Furthermore, it has been observed in many African countries that there is a certain delay in the introduction of the true practice of democracy, good governance and transparency in public management. Obviously, there is a real lack of political will in many African countries with regard to EFA. The ratification of international agreements by African Heads of State would have been

an opportunity for them to make their presence felt on the world political scene but this is not the case. It is equally observed that legislative texts in African countries are well conceived and drafted according to international expectations, but their application remains highly problematic. Thus, it is not surprising that despite the good intentions shown by many Heads of State to universalize primary education, there are still in many countries in the world and notably, in developing countries, a net drop in school output through indices such as a high rate of repetition, poor performance in public examinations and a wide disparity in performance between rural and urban areas (UNESCO, 2011).

It is unpleasant to note that in 2012, there were still over 70 million children, mostly girls, who were deprived of primary education. UNESCO envisages that in 2015, there shall still be 56 million children who will be excluded from basic education. Given that today about 70 million children are not attending school, with decreasing national budgets and plummeting bilateral and international aid, the achievement of Universal Primary Education (UPE) by 2015, which is one of the Millennium Development Goals fixed by the United Nations, will be almost out of reach. Still with regard to negative trends, the poor nature of educational services, the high rate of school fees as well as the high rate of adult illiteracy, are some of the factors that limit the chances of achieving EFA by 2015. In spite of the progress so far realised in this domain, it is important to note that equity between girls and boys is still a serious concern, as well as disparities between urban and rural areas. In addition, in most public schools, the teacher/pupil ratio is equal to or more than 1/100. The above report also assesses the progress made in order to achieve the six objectives of EFA as defined in Dakar, in 2000. Meanwhile, the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) which is a key member of the EFA monitoring team, has provided statistics and analyses that constitute the basis of this paper.

The Burden of the Colonial Past

Although, it is frequently cautioned that Africa should desist from laying blame for its under-development on its colonial heritage, such ascription cannot be altogether avoided. In Africa, the concept of “modern school” is closely related to the colonial period. One of the reasons why many Africans have for long rejected what they called “white man’s school” is certainly due to the fact that this institution imported from the West was considered as means of acculturation

linked with cruel moral and physical repression for African children. This trauma which was still alive in the minds of Africans during the early years of independence and long after, led to the design and implementation of educational reforms that aimed to “Africanise” school curricula by including national languages as the means of teaching and enhancing African history and culture. To measure the extent and sense of these reforms, we should recall that in the former colonies, particularly the French, the use of mother tongue was forbidden by school rules, subject to indepth corporal punishment and serious humiliations. Furthermore, the history and culture of the African continent was repudiated by the colonial masters who, it should be recalled, had invaded Africa under the cover of a civilisation mission that aimed to save the “lost souls” of “these poor savages”. During the colonial times, the few Africans who had been to school (for the most part through force), were basically taught the history of the colonial masters, who in turn considered school a “necessary evil”, given that school could cause a change in mentalities and lead to an uprising against established order. In order to get back their bearings, it is vital for Africans to “get rid of their old demons” and turn to the realities of today, in order to build a better future for the next generations. Africans have to stop behaving as helpless victims and as of necessity, come out of the vicious circle of lamentations and fruitless accusations of the colonial period. The past should serve as experience and be used as a springboard for progress and not seen as an impediment (Ki-Zerbo, 1976; Kake, 1978).

Supply and Demand Gap of Teachers

A formidable impediment to achieving EFA targets in Africa is teacher quantity and quality. One of the main causes of the shortage of teachers in schools is that in very many African countries, mostly Francophone, the recruitment of teachers from pre-school to higher education was from 1980, subjected to a highly selective and restrictive competitive entrance examination. This was necessary to meet the requirements of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) through the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). The national education budget for the training of teachers in many African countries is still too little.

Thus, the ADEA Bamako+5 conference held at the end of 2009 placed emphasis on the need to train an additional 4 million contract teachers to fill the

gap at the level of basic education. The world today needs about 11 billion US dollars a year to meet EFA objectives. Due to economic and financial crisis, it is obvious that rich countries will not continue to provide the necessary financial support. It is difficult to make people understand that expenditure on education should not be considered as a burden, but as an investment in the future. Even though it is unanimously recognised that education is the key to development and that access to education is an inalienable right for all human beings, still many countries do not devote enough financial resources to attain EFA objectives especially the improvement in the quantity and quality of teachers. The sharp increase in school enrolment which was the logical consequence of the Jomtien and Dakar conferences occurred to the detriment of quality educational systems. The acute shortage of teachers has led governments to take alternative decisions not based on sound pedagogic principles, such as double division, double part-time teaching and recruitment of part-time teachers without any initial training. The abandonment of quality has led to an abnormally high rate of failure, exacerbated in many countries by a high percentage of obligatory promotion to the next class at the level of basic education. In some instances, governments fix the number of pupils that should move to the next class each year at 85% no matter their class performance.

Another impediment to educational progress especially towards attaining EFA is dilapidated infrastructure. In spite of the efforts of African governments and technical and financial partners to develop school and university infrastructure, dilapidated buildings and school plants remain a major challenge. In addition, we notice in many African countries, a tremendous shortage in quality teachers. The economic crisis of the 1960s caused a brain drain of the best African teachers towards Western countries where they can get better opportunities than in their countries of origin. We also noticed poor internal and external efficiencies. As for internal efficiency, blame has been levied on the lack of school teachers and senior lecturers, the lack of classrooms, of amphitheatres and didactic materials, poorly equipped laboratories and a lax administration. In the case of external efficiency, many degree holders are unable to find jobs due to the fact that course contents do not take into consideration the issue of professionalisation. Finally, the lack of finance provided to state universities poses enormous problems. In many African countries, the state is the only source of finance, which in large part is inadequate and universities are left to generate the necessary financial resources to ensure their operation. The globalisation of education at all levels of the educational system requires the rethinking of pe-

dagogies, methodologies, curricula as well as the methods of imparting knowledge. It is unquestionable that we are presently living in a knowledge-based society where competition is the watchword. Importance is accorded to those who possess knowledge and who especially know how to impart it.

Poor School Attendance by Girls

There can be no development without the effective participation of women in the process of wealth creation. In the 1980s, enrolment of girls witnessed an unprecedented growth. In effect, everywhere in Africa, we noticed a strong mobilisation for girl/boy parity, especially at the primary level. The level of enrolment of girls increased considerably between 1990 and 2000 in regions where gender inequality was most pronounced, such as in Sub-Sahara Africa, Arab countries and South and West Asia. However, this quantitative development of school enrolment of girls is limited to basic education, beyond which inequalities between sexes remain. We should point out various dimensions of inequality with regard to the exercise of the right to education for girls such as some family, social and cultural constraints. In many African countries, there is still a strong cultural preference for boys with a serious negative impact on gender equality. Early marriage is a hindrance which retards the education of girls. HIV/AIDS epidemic, wars and poverty are equally important as factors to be considered in the rights to girls' education (UNESCO, EFA GLOBAL Monitoring Report: Gender and Education for All, 2003/4).

Private Participation

Private participation in education is a worthwhile issue in discussions on EFA in Africa. In the 1980s to 1990, Africa witnessed a quantitative leap in the privatisation of the educational system. Privatisation contributed on the one hand to absorb a significant part of those that public schools lacked the capacity to admit. On the other hand, it enabled teaching conditions to be improved, offering to learners a more appropriate environment in terms of enrolment and didactic materials. However, in some African countries notably, Francophone, the private sector has not been able to develop itself autonomously due to a lack of initiative, innovative spirit and the fear of taking risk and as such the growth of private schools still largely depends on state financing.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)

Our stress in this section is on the role of ICT in enhancing efficiency of the educational system for the attainment of EFA goals. The 21st century is undoubtedly marked by the emergence of knowledge-based society, born of the technological revolution, especially in the domain of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). The manner and rapidity, with which knowledge is produced, configured and disseminated plays a key role in innovation and competitiveness. A redefinition of education, knowledge and development adds to this transition towards a knowledge society. What does it mean to be learned today? Emerging knowledge society requires a close link between the various forms of education and development in the local, national, and global contexts. ICT integration in education can significantly improve the quality of teaching and learning. The World Summit on Information Technology (WSIS) organised in November 2005 in Tunis and in February 2013 in Paris by the United Nations aimed in a large measure to demonstrate that the African continent is basically part of this major evolution which is transforming our current civilisation into an information and knowledge society.

Computers have and are changing the way we live, learn and work. In effect, no technological innovation in the world has been able to change our way of life and work as rapidly and radically as computers. Today it is no longer an issue of proving whether the inclusion of ICT may contribute to the improvement of the quality of education in Africa, for no scientific study puts such into question, but to determine the ways and means for the sustainable pedagogic use of ICT in schools. This is equally a way to open and adapt schools to the job market wherein the computer has become indispensable (Traoré, 2008). Despite the positive impact of the computer, its use is still facing resistance from many people and the educational system as a whole. Some of the skeptics underestimate and even deny the positive impact of computers in the improvement of the quality of education. On this basis, the following question comes to mind: How can an educational system ignore the importance of these innovative machines?

Efforts of the African Union

In an important document titled “Second Decade of Education for Africa (2006-2015)”, the African Union describes its vision of Africa, which is that of an “in-

tegrated, peaceful, prosperous continent that manages its own initiatives in order to occupy its rightful place in the world community and in the knowledge economy.” According to this pan-African organisation, the concretisation of this vision as a necessity, demands the development of African human resources, a process that must be based on the establishment of quality Education For All, in order that each African citizen should fully contribute within the means available to him/her, to the economic and sociocultural development of his/her country and the continent. The Second Decade of Education Action Plan underscores the necessity to strengthen mutual collaboration between African States, in order to ensure, at the end of the Second Decade of Education, the establishment of efficient information management systems in education at the national, regional and continental levels. Other major results expected include, the significant improvement on educational indicators notably access, quality, efficiency and relevance. The Action Plan focuses on other issues such as the training of teachers and higher education at the service of development; the achievement of gender equality in primary and secondary education; the institution of systematic experience-sharing and mutual assistance for the promotion of education.

The conference of Ministers of Education of the African Union adopted the following priority domains: gender and culture; educational information management systems; development of teachers; higher education; teacher technical and professional training, especially education in difficult circumstances; curriculum and didactic materials; and quality management. In addition, the examination of the quality of education shall be based on the following approaches: establishment of standards for the quality management of education in Africa; and systematic monitoring and evaluation of the progress of the learner, and the quality of teaching and learning.

Conclusion

In this paper, we reviewed progress of Africa on the path to achieving EFA. We identified major obstacles to progress while noting gains made in the area of access. To answer the cardinal question: will Africa meet the expectations of EFA 2015?, it is first of all important to point out that enormous progress has been made in EFA, and that there is an urgent need to continue the effort of consolidating what has been achieved by placing particular emphasis on quality

while not neglecting quantity. In this light, it would be important to make allusion to the capacity of an educational system to handle innovations and social changes. Scientific research is indispensable for change and many reflections in this regard have enabled the introduction of strategic innovations at the primary level in order to improve the quality of education. For instance, people are increasingly talking of the New Pedagogic Approach (NPA), Competence-Based Approach (CBA) and Compensatory Teaching as new elements in the fight against the internal inefficiency of primary education. For an emerging Africa, it is crucial to take into consideration in research programmes, African realities in the social, cultural, economic, linguistic and psychological contexts with emphasis on application. Professionalism has become sine qua non to render education more attractive. For quality education, we are obliged to take teachers into consideration for they occupy an important place in the delivery of quality education. Such would ensure an improved internal efficiency of the educational system. Lastly, in order to ensure success at the level of consolidation of what has been achieved and to reach the goals of EFA by 2015, it would be important to include in the educational process, a quality monitoring and evaluation mechanism. Will Africa be able to rise to this huge challenge by the deadline of 2015? We will have to wait and see.

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