

The Time for Reform is Now

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In most African countries, secondary education systems have remained virtually unchanged over the past 20 to 30 years. It is time to initiate sweeping reform, with a clear definition of competencies as the key to success.

In 2002 the World Bank's Africa Human Development Department (AFTHD) began a regional study, Secondary Education in Africa (SEIA). This multi-year study (2002-2005) is being undertaken with sub-Saharan African countries and public and private African educators and stakeholders. SEIA study outcomes have been presented at regional conferences attended by some 40 African countries and representatives of NGOs, governments, civil society and development agencies. The first conference was organized by the AFTHD SEIA core team, ADEA, the World Bank Institute (WBIHD), and the Academy for Educational Development (AED). The second conference was held in Dakar, Senegal, in June 2004 and was organized by the AFTHD SEIA core team, ADEA and WBI. A final regional conference is planned for next year. It is intended to mobilize politicians and stakeholder organizations. SEIA activities are financed by the World Bank and by trust funds managed by the World Bank from Norway (Norwegian Education Trust Fund), Ireland (Irish Education Trust Fund), France and the Netherlands.

The messages from these events have been clear: Although primary Education for All (EFA) remains top priority, it is not enough to respond to the need for economic and social growth in Africa.

As most countries are struggling with serious shortages of qualified teachers, achieving the goals for primary EFA requires reinforcing secondary education as the last step before teacher training.

Reform is essential

OECD countries are continuously reforming their education systems.

The pace of these reforms is rapid, since economic changes, increasing globalization of labor markets (which causes increasing competition for quality and efficiency in all aspects) and demands for a secondary education curriculum that relates to these changes force countries to face up to more flexibility and higher quality and relevance of outcomes.

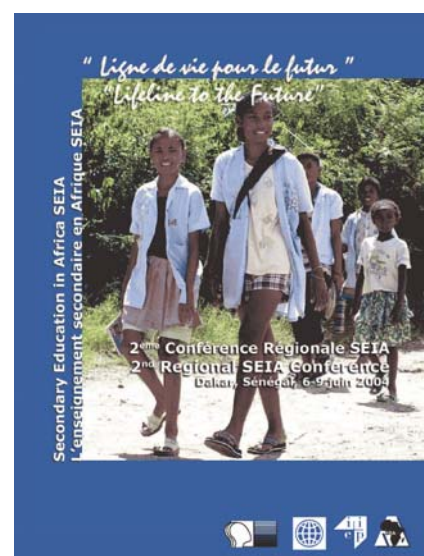
Africa cannot stay behind. Secondary education systems in Africa have remained virtually unchanged over the past 20 to 30 years, and secondary completion rates are low. Old syllabi are still in effect. National norms and standards, expressed through curriculum goals and targets, have not been developed. Both junior and senior secondary education programs are overloaded, because most changes have been simply to add more content. New subjects, including ICT and civic awareness, must be introduced. Education systems in countries successfully approaching EFA

The time has come for sub-Saharan Africa to renew its secondary education programs and to create the critical mass of skilled workers and youth necessary for the continent's economic and social development. Education for All at the primary level should remain the priority, but it is not enough. Enlarging the focus to include secondary education will require national debates, intensified regional cooperation, and a fundamental restructuring of current systems.

goals are unable to deal with the flood of primary graduates knocking at the doors. Regulating access into secondary school through a selection process at the end of primary is incompatible with the goal of having all children complete primary education. In some countries (South Africa, Uganda and Tanzania) there are "waking up" signs, but a crisis is brewing in most countries.

Donors are part of the problem. Many continue to hammer exclusively on primary-level EFA, without recognizing the need for access to secondary school. One might ask how donor agencies of countries where systems have nine to ten years of compulsory schooling are reluctant to fund a reasonable expansion of secondary education in Africa. In some cases donors even agree to fund higher education activities but not secondary.

Including junior secondary education in the definition of basic education is a logical step, but it may require restructuring the post-primary tiers of the education system and adding to the grade levels that aim to reach universal enrolment. Education systems cannot be expanded on their current inefficient basis. High repetition and drop out rates, inefficient use of the allocated school time rates, comparatively short time-on-task, convoluted syllabi and overloaded programs, ill-equipped teachers, and weak management capacity and communication all contribute to the weak and costly sector performance. Public financing is



2nd SEIA Regional Conference poster.

Difficult choices

Developing sustainable strategies for secondary education will require African countries to make some tough choices. These include:

- **Deciding what coverage levels for junior, senior secondary cycles can be sustainably financed;**
- **Finding a balance between general, technical and vocational education;**
- **Developing plans for improving both curricular content and monitoring;**
- **Anticipating and developing the capacities needed while respecting the budgetary constraints; and**
- **Establishing effective partnerships – with the private sector in particular – so that needs can be adequately met.**

constrained and will remain so for many years to come.

Many countries have not yet abandoned the practice of selection in favor of certification. The move from selecting primary graduates based on norms rather than on competence has taken place in Asia and Latin America. Why should the majority of African youth fail their junior secondary school exams, while their counterparts in OECD countries succeed at the rate of over 60 to 70 %?

Review the programs, build a new model

What are the goals of secondary education, and why is the public investing in it? Stakeholders include not only communities and parents, but also enterprises and industry. NGOs, churches and special interest groups representing non-religious cultural, ethnic and scientific interests also have a stake in secondary education.

Sub-Saharan Africa needs a model of sustainable primary and junior secondary education. A high-quality junior secondary education should include subjects in four areas of knowledge and skills: science and mathematics; social,

life, and “geo-world” skills; ICT and technology; and language and communication. At the senior secondary education level the picture becomes more complex, and a menu of demand-driven provisions needs to be established. Lessons from South Korea, Chile, Scotland, Denmark, and the Netherlands can be applied to the African context. In these countries vocational and technical education and training have merged into flexible pathways, where the student can choose an orientation based on emerging job or professional needs and interests. The concept of key skills or competencies is now generally accepted in OECD countries. These countries have also answered the question of “what degree of vocational orientation?” Junior secondary education should allow students to master general pre-vocational skills. Training for specific jobs should take place later and be directed by employers and enterprises. Senior secondary school should be close to the world of work and prepare youngsters for the transition. But this is not identical to “job-training.”

This debate has just started in Africa, and there is a need to adapt the OECD model of secondary education to the specific needs of the region. African secondary schools should begin by making more flexible the transitions between levels and by developing structured and relevant curricula. International trends indicate the need for vocational and technical options, using modern and cost-saving ICT technologies. These changes will have a significant impact on the market for textbooks and learning materials and equipment in Africa.

Promote national consultations and debate

Instituting these reforms will require national debate and training and support for teachers, school managers and non-teaching staff. They will not succeed if teachers and parents have not bought into the change. Africans will need to rethink their approach to education and disconnect from traditional post-colonial systems. This is no easy task. For example, achieving scientific and technological literacy requires more than understanding concepts and processes of science and technology. Students need to gain an understanding of how science and technology shape their

environment and life. This means that these subjects should be learned in different ways. Simple memorization and factual learning do not lead to scientific and technological literacy. The most common approach in OECD countries is to focus on science- and technology-related social and economic problems, such as environmentally sustainable strategies, healthy lifestyles, HIV/AIDS and disease risks, public resource use, and population growth. This includes a general understanding of the nature and history of science and technology.

The physical school environment requires our specific attention as well. Most boarding facilities in Africa’s secondary schools are neglected. When adolescents live in undignified conditions, it is unlikely they will gain self-respect and respect for others, develop healthy life styles, and make a smooth transition to the world of work.

There is also a need to institute new teaching and learning mechanisms for the large proportion of sub-Saharan Africa’s out-of-school youth, who require alternative pathways to productive lives.

The time has come for sub-Saharan Africa to renew its secondary education programs and to create the critical mass of skilled workers and youth necessary for the continent’s economic and social development. Education for All at the primary level should remain the priority, but it is not enough. Enlarging the focus to include secondary education will require national debates, intensified regional cooperation, and a fundamental restructuring of current systems. It will also require all African countries to revisit their systems’ cost-efficiency, quality, and relevance of output. These reforms will take time, probably no less than eight to ten years. Therefore we must start now and not wait until the numbers of primary graduates swell even more.

The SEIA study aims to help this process and to stimulate the dialogue between African stakeholders and the donor community. ▼



**For more information on SEIA:
www.worldbank.org/afr/seia**

New Goals, New Curricula

by Pai Obanya, Education Consultant

What is secondary education's ultimate goal? To prepare students for life? For higher education? Contemporary reality clearly calls for a complete overhaul of both the objectives and the content.

Until now the goal of secondary education has been simply preparation for tertiary education, which in the minds of most people means strictly a university education. Even though most of the post-independence reforms of education in Africa recognized the need to move away from the grammar school type of secondary education to something more comprehensive, caring for the diversified needs of more learners and supported by a differentiated curriculum, not much real change was effected.

Contemporary realities, including the on-going focus on primary education (in the context of EFA), the need to provide secondary education for a greater number of adolescents, the changing profile of the African adolescent population, the dynamic nature of the world of work, new demands on higher education, and the exigencies of globalization call for a radical redirection of secondary education in Africa, both in its goals and in the learning opportunities that it offers to Africa's youth.

Within the overall context of "life-long and life-wide education," secondary education in Africa will continue to prepare adolescents for further education. The only difference is that "further" education will no longer be limited to formal university education. Secondary education should address the three "P's" identified at the first conference on secondary education in Africa (SEIA), held in Kampala in June 2003.

The three Ps are:

- ▶ Personality development;
- ▶ Preparation for life;
- ▶ Preparation for formal tertiary education.

These goals are not mutually exclusive. Taken together they ensure that adolescents who have benefited from secondary education can continue the process of self-development and self-directed learning. They can also be better prepared to adapt to life's challenges. If they do continue on, they should become prepared for the intellectual and other demands of higher education.

A new curriculum

In the coming years, with most African countries adopting a nine-year basic education cycle, there will be the need to devote the lower secondary years to consolidating the basic life skills so dear to the Jomtien and Dakar EFA declarations. This would require a broad-based curriculum, with due emphasis on life-related skills and basic competences, in the following distinct but closely interwoven areas:

- ▶ Intra-personal skills: Self-knowledge, self-awareness, assertiveness and confidence-building;
- ▶ Inter-personal skills: Team spirit, developed through group activities as a method of teaching and learning, not a distinct subject area;
- ▶ Language and communication: Stressing the communication dimensions of existing language programs;
- ▶ Quantitative reasoning: Emphasis on the reasoning aspects of existing mathematics programs, with teaching and learning closer to life situations;
- ▶ Technical aptitude development: An awareness-raising program, not a technical specialization program;

- ▶ IT-fluency: Familiarity with and interest in the workings of IT;
- ▶ Social sense: Learning to survive in the social milieu;
- ▶ Scientific literacy: emphasis on the ways and methods of scientific enquiry, closely related to life situations;
- ▶ Physical development and personal health.

The major challenge for the immediate future is how best to effect a shift in attitudes — how to ensure that stakeholders realize the need for new curricular goals that respect today's realities and prepare adolescents for contemporary and future challenges and opportunities.

Upper secondary school should continue to reinforce these skills at the same time as it lays the foundations for "academic" studies. World Bank-sponsored studies in Nigeria have drawn attention to the need for non-academic alternative curricula to cater to the needs of students who may not be academically inclined. This does not

necessarily mean a vocationally-oriented curriculum for "those who cannot." It simply means a judicious combination of the following:

- ▶ A less overloaded curriculum, in terms of the sheer number of subjects and topics to be studied;
- ▶ A more integrated and broadly based curriculum organization;
- ▶ A more active curriculum, in terms of the range of activities;
- ▶ An assessment method that emphasizes what is most needed today: creativity, adaptability, team spirit, analytical skill, open-mindedness, and communicative competence;
- ▶ A stronger emphasis on developing the person, through improved personal counseling;
- ▶ Doing away with specialization at the secondary level.

Challenges ahead

The major curriculum challenge for the immediate future is how best to effect a shift in attitudes—how to ensure that stakeholders realize the need for new curricular goals that respect today's realities and prepare adolescents for contemporary and future challenges and opportunities. Then all stakeholders should join forces in translating the new goals of secondary education into school, community, and classroom "do-ables," a hard but ultimately a rewarding task.▼