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**AFRICAN EDUCATIONAL RESPONSES TO THE CHALLENGES OF
GLOBALISATION**

a presentation by Fay Chung,
Director of the UNESCO International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa

The Situation Today: Problems and Potential

Sub-Saharan Africa suffers from low enrolments at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Net enrolment at primary school level was around 61% for boys and 57% for girls during the 1993-95 period¹. At secondary level the situation was worse, with only 9 African countries having achieved secondary education for over 50%, the majority having less than the 20% considered to be essential for modern forms of development. Africa's enrolments at tertiary level are the lowest in the world, with only 3.5% of the age group attaining this level, less than a quarter of the level for world as a whole, and less than 5.9% the level for developed countries². Moreover women students comprise only a third of the whole. The small percentage attaining secondary and tertiary education means that the upper and middle levels of society, including the leadership and the entrepreneurial class, may be distressingly small as compared to the larger group of illiterate and semi-literate citizens.

Table 1. Enrolment (in millions) and gross enrolment ratios in primary education, by sex, 1995

	Enrolment			Gross enrolment ratio (%)		
	MF	F	%F	MF	M	F
<i>World Total</i>	<i>650.2</i>	<i>299.9</i>	<i>46</i>	<i>99.6</i>	<i>104.8</i>	<i>94.2</i>
Sub-Saharan Africa	76.5	34.6	45	73.9	80.7	67.1

Source: UNESCO, World Education Report, 1998, UNESCO, Paris, 1998, p. 107.

This means that 27 million primary age children in Sub-Saharan Africa do not have access to primary education, the larger proportion of them girls.

¹ UNICEF, State of the World's Children, 1999, p. 29.

² UNESCO, World Education Report, 1998, UNESCO, Paris, 1998, p. 108.

Table 2. Enrolment (in millions) and gross enrolment ratios in secondary education, by sex, 1995

	Enrolment			Gross enrolment ratio (%)		
	MF	F	%F	MF	M	F
<i>World Total</i>	372.0	168.7	45	58.1	62.5	53.4
Sub-Saharan Africa	18.8	8.4	44	24.3	26.9	21.6

Source: UNESCO, World Education Report, 1998, UNESCO, Paris, 1998, p. 108.

This means that 58.6 million secondary age children in Sub-Saharan Africa do not have access to secondary education, and once again the larger proportion are girls.

Table 1. Enrolment (in millions) and gross enrolment ratios in tertiary education, by sex, 1995

	Enrolment			Gross enrolment ratio (%)		
	MF	F	%F	MF	M	F
<i>World Total</i>	81.7	38.4	47	16.2	16.8	15.66
Sub-Saharan Africa	1.9	0.7	35	3.5	4.6	2.5

Source: UNESCO, World Education Report, 1998, UNESCO, Paris, 1998, p. 108.

These low educational levels impact adversely on development, whether this be political and social development, or economic development. Out of 53 African countries (including North Africa), 27 have a per capita income of less than US\$500 per annum³. 140.5 million adults, almost half the population, are illiterate in Sub-Saharan Africa⁴. The majority of these illiterates are women.

Globalization and its Impact on Africa

The increasing democratization of the world in general and of Africa in particular necessitates a higher level of human resource development and a greater understanding of different political and social structures. Democracy entails people being able to control their own destinies, as nations, as communities, and as individuals. In order to exercise their basic democratic rights, a higher level of knowledge, analysis and skills is required. For example total ignorance about the workings of the economy amongst the general population may lead them to support economic policies which may appear attractive, but which may be disastrous on a long term basis.

At the same time the increasing globalization of the world economy makes it essential for Africa to raise its educational and technological levels in order to remain both relevant and competitive. Without an ambitious, even an aggressive, effort to raise its economic level, Africa will remain

³ Source: UNESCO, World Education Report, 1998, UNESCO, Paris, 1998, p. 120-121.

⁴ Ibid, p. 105.

marginalized. Indeed this marginalization may increase. The state of conflict in many African countries is linked to poverty and slow economic development. Economic development in turn depends very much on the level of human resource development in the region, with technology being the key to economic transformation from traditional subsistence economies to industrialized economies. The conquest of poverty requires access to modern science and technology by the majority. This is a challenge to a continent where a quarter of the children do not receive primary education and three quarters do not receive secondary education. At tertiary level the minuscule elite (3.5% of the age group) may not have the critical mass to change institutions and make a difference.

Open learning systems offer a great opportunity for Africa to overcome its inherited disadvantages. Utilizing the available range of technologies, it is possible to envisage a radical change in the educational profile of Africa over the next two decades, provided that the political will and vision are also there. Such a transformation will allow Africa to leapfrog into the 21st Century.

Strong political will and vision have already been developed in some African countries, notably in North and Southern Africa. Egypt's vision of high quality education for all as essential for national security and survival is a case in point. And there are signs that a larger number of countries may undertake a greater commitment to education under the Organization of African Unity's new political initiative entitled the "Decade of Education", which envisions education as an essential foundation for future development in Africa. The OAU envisions the attainment of primary education for all and secondary education for about 50% of the age group within the Decade. It also envisions a higher and more proactive role for higher education in national and regional development than has been the case in the past, where universities have often been seen as the enemies of governments, the repositories of privilege, and the source of cultural alienation. The education of girls and women, who are significantly more deprived than their male counterparts, is a key intervention.

What Modalities?

Raising the professional and academic levels of teachers

What possibilities are there for providing primary education for all within the Decade and how far can open learning systems provide opportunities for greater access and improved quality and relevance?

The major strategy for attaining primary education for all must be through government commitment, leadership and the provision of resources combined with community and parental commitment, participation, and responsibility. Within this partnership of the state and the community, technology can play an important role in improving the quality of primary education, in particular through the upgrading of primary school teachers. Many primary school teachers in Africa may themselves only have primary education. In Togo over one third of primary school teachers themselves possess only a primary-school leavers' certificate, and although data is not available for Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole, this percentage may be representative of many other countries⁵. 25% of Uganda's secondary school teachers have the equivalent of university education, and this figure is probably representative of many other countries⁶. Many do not have a good grasp of science and technology, or of an

⁵ Ibid, p. 44.

⁶ Ibid, p. 45.

international language. They may also not have the skills to develop or adapt a curriculum that can be responsive to local needs and requirements. Teachers' associations and unions as well as teachers' colleges and centres can become centres for the upgrading of teachers, utilizing a variety of instruments which can vary from the simplest technologies of print and radio, to the utilization of videos, internet and intranets.

Utilizing distance education methodologies to increase access

A second opportunity lies in the fact that many African countries are experiencing rapid urbanization, with a shift of population from widely dispersed rural locations to high density urban areas. Whilst rapid urbanization has brought with it new challenges such as street kids and unemployed youths, it has also brought with it new opportunities. A few talented and highly qualified teachers can, through the use of television, video and computers in urban centres which are usually electrified, directly teach a large number of pupils, supported by community monitors or class supervisors. This approach is even more useful for secondary education, making it possible to plan for Africa raising its secondary enrolments from less than 20% to over 50% of the age group within the Decade. Combining distance education technology with kits, such as science kits, would enable pupils to learn through an experiment based approach.

Special focus on girls and women

Girls and women are often deprived of educational opportunities, particularly at secondary and tertiary levels. Critical issues related to women's rights and women's problems receive little focus within many societies. Little is done to redress the problems which the low enrolment statistics are symptomatic of. The development of educational programmes which focus on the developmental problems faced by women as a group provide a challenge which modern technology can address. For example the development of both discussion and creative radio and video programmes on women's rights can help to improve a society's awareness of the issues, and engender a more thoughtful dialogue on women's issues. The challenges facing women in Africa, whether these challenges are in the lack of educational and economic opportunities, or whether they emanate from a contravention of basic human rights, require to be addressed, and open learning systems widen the opportunities for such a dialogue.

Programmes to improve opportunities for girls and women in existing educational institutions can increase access and performance several fold. Such programmes can usefully utilize a mix of face to face and distance education modalities. Where there is a marked deficit in the percentage of women having access to education, such as at secondary and tertiary levels in most countries in Africa, programmes to ensure equal access and equal performance are essential.

Another important area for intervention is the improvement of the technology, management and marketing of products already being produced by women. In general small scale agriculture and handicraft industries are in the hands of women in Africa. These industries receive little or no research, development or training support. Open learning systems utilizing already available technologies or introducing new technologies could transform the productivity of women in Africa, thus enhancing their economic status and strength.

Training women for leadership positions within their own societies is an important area for fruitful intervention utilizing open learning systems. In many African countries there are few women in leadership positions at local or national levels. The percentage of women in Parliament, for example, may be very low, about 13% in Zimbabwe for example, and this may be higher than in many other countries. The effectiveness of this minority of women in leadership position may also be severely compromised because they have been cut off from important educational and experiential opportunities. Linking up women in leadership positions so that they can share experiences and problems can provide an important backup service to strengthen the few women in leadership positions. The African NGO, the Forum for African Women Educationalists, FAWE, provides a suitable institutional basis for such a network.

The education of youths

All over Africa youth under the age of 30 provide on the one hand a powerful force for destabilizing society and on the other hand a potential for the transformation of African society. Examples of their destabilizing power proliferate in countries like Sierra Leone, Rwanda and Mozambique where youths and child soldiers have been recruited to wreak devastation on their own countries. All too often these youths have few future prospects, few educational prospects, no job training other than in the military, and no job prospects. On the other hand young people also embody their countries' hopes for the future, with students being in the forefront of criticism of unjust and corrupt regimes.

Open learning systems offer a potential for expanding educational opportunities for young people, in particular if they are linked to improved occupational opportunities. Urban centres in particular offer opportunities for the establishment of technology centres which can combine learning utilizing media and computer technology to provide wider educational access, job training as well as entertainment.

Adult education

Open learning systems are ideally suited to adult education. Most homes have access to radio, and the provision of area based local radio stations are now within reach of most communities. Certainly they could be a key input by donors, costing in the range of only US\$3000 and receivers being as low cost as US\$10. Mobile and home film and video shows are also already available in many African countries, but they usually show commercially available rather than educationally important ones. There is a dearth of programmes which address the African reality.

An important focus for adult education is that of the growing practice of democracy in Africa. The literacy programme in Nigeria is credited with having built up much popular support for democratic forms of government⁷. Communities which have grown up in feudal obedience and passivity may not be well equipped to cope with modern multi-party democratic systems. The problems are exacerbated by the retention of feudal inheritance systems which do not favour inheritance by women. Thus citizens, in particular women, may not be able to access their basic human rights. Greater access to educational opportunities offers an essential and important support for democratization.

⁷ Informal information from UNICEF Office, Nigeria.

The economic productivity of the population can also be enhanced by the widening and improving educational and training opportunities, for example through the improvement of access to credit or through the improvement of management of resources.

Tertiary education

The demand for tertiary education is very high in Africa. With only 4.6% of men and 2.5% of women having access to tertiary education⁸, there is an unquenchable thirst for higher education all over Africa. Governments of countries with low per capita incomes, averaging US\$528 per annum for Sub-Saharan Africa in 1996⁹, find it difficult to increase tertiary education access even when unit costs are as low as US\$5000 per annum. Yet increasing access at this level is critical for the future development of their countries. Open learning systems offer huge opportunities for the expansion of tertiary education opportunities, and for linking up national systems with their international counterparts, an important exercise in an era of globalization.

In particular internet media offers the opportunity for access to up-to-date research and knowledge globally. The establishment of intranet services within a country could provide the opportunity to upgrade institutions within the country, as well as providing a network for dialogue and the sharing of experiences. In particular the improvement of science and technology of practising teachers as well as teacher trainees is an important service. Unless the level of science and technology is improved in the hundreds of thousands of primary and secondary schools in Africa, mainly through the improvement of the science and technology of their teachers, it is unlikely that Africa will be able to deal with the competitive global market.

Improving institutional capacities: the role of the UNESCO International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa

Institutions, whether these be educational or research institutions, or bureaucratic institutions, are critical to the health of a country. Many institutions in Africa have been isolated from developments in the outside world for decades as a result of situations of conflict and deprivation. Ensuring that such institutions operate at top capacity and provide their services more efficiently requires constant institutional as well as personnel upgrading. Electronic technology provide the opportunity to enhance the development of capacities of existing and new institutions.

The recently established UNESCO International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa will play a cardinal role in strengthening educational planning, management, teacher education and curriculum development institutions in Africa, utilizing open learning as its main modality. The aim is to target governmental and non-governmental institutions within the region, establish practical and virtual networks so that useful experiences in one African country can benefit others facing similar challenges, and link these networks with sister professional and technical institutions outside of Africa. The medium term goal is to ensure that these institutions are updated in terms of the gaining

⁸ UNESCO, World Education Report, 1998, UNESCO, Paris, 1998, p. 108.

⁹ Source, UNICEF, State of the World's Children, 1999: Education, p. 29.

access to the latest research and development in their fields, whilst at the same time helping to implement programmes in practical ways.

Conclusion

Open learning systems can be compared to the invention of the printing press. Whilst they do not provide a panacea for all problems, they certainly can increase access, improve quality and lower the cost of education. Whilst for the developed world electronic access may provide greater diversity and flexibility, for Africa it can be a life line.

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