

RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS

2ND AFRICAN UNION MEETING OF EXPERTS

Accra, 27 – 28 FEBRUARY 2006

Opening Session

In Introductory Remarks:

1. The Chairperson, Dr. Botlhale O. Tema noted that the session was a continuation of the 1st African Union Meeting of Experts held in Midrand, South Africa in October, 2005, as not everybody was present at that first session, participants should seize the present opportunity for fresh inputs.

In Welcoming Statements:

2. Prof. Akilagpa Sawyerr, Secretary General of the AAU, acknowledged the honour done to the AAU for the opportunity to host the Meeting. He noted with regret how higher education's critical role in the continent's revival went unappreciated in the past, noting also that a change of attitudes was now in evidence. Remarkably, the World Bank paper of 2002 articulated best the new thinking, the better also for its appreciation that a systems-wide approach, as opposed to institutional or country support, held the key to the sustained development.
3. Prof. Sawyerr noted also the beginnings of a healthy regard on the part of African governments and the African Union for higher education. The Ministerial Conference in Algeria in recognized higher education as a priority in its final document. Subsequently, the way forward engaged the 1st Meeting of Experts in South Africa, of which the present meeting is a follow-up. There is acknowledgement also in the AU that non higher education organizations must be involved in the consultation for higher education to succeed.
4. Speaking on behalf of DfID, Carew Treffgarne confirmed that the organization she represented was committed to networking with pan-African organization like NEPAD and AU in revitalizing education as a whole, not least the higher education component. Now that the AU's Ministerial Meeting in Algeria had restored higher education to its proper place in the agenda for Africa's revitalization, DfID was interested in working with the AU to discover its role in what to do.

Opening Remarks

The Chairperson made remarks to the effect that:

5. While the OAU was yet to be transformed to AU, the organisation was preoccupied with the political agenda, to the neglect of other critical issues of development. The transformation had resulted in the broader agenda with appropriate structures to reflect the new outlook. The Human Resources, Science and Technology Department of the organization was interested in both formal and non-formal education for the development of the human resource. It is also

interested in retaining at home Africa's youth that otherwise is susceptible to cross-border risks.

6. The 1997-2006 Decade of Education Report had identified initiatives from different parts of the continent, which the organization in the past was in no position to monitor or coordinate. The organization now proposed to work in tandem with all its development partners for the best possible outcomes. But it was important that the continent should have the confidence to pursue its own initiative rather than give up any such for other initiatives that happened to be merely better resourced.
7. Among things gone wrong, now to be put right, to put right in the Second Decade of Education 2006-15, education which in pre-Independence era was seen to be an engine of development seemed to have become an end in itself. To restore the connection to development or harnessing research to Africa's growth, as obtained in Europe, an Action Plan to be put together by a number of Working Groups was necessary, hence the Meeting of Experts. Working such an Action Plan through the AU to its Summit had the advantage of providing a continent-wide mandate.
8. The Chairman's remarks were followed by self-introduction by members. After a brief exchange of ideas, there was agreement that only two Working Groups might be needed.

The meeting next dealt with two reports:

SYNTHESIS REPORT ON REVITALISING HIGHER EDUCATION

9. Professor Sawyerr made a presentation of the Synthesis Report commissioned by the Human Resource, Science and Technology Department of the AU, noting the following high points:
 - Drivers of Revitalisation
 - New vision of the African Union
 - Heightened role of knowledge & innovation in world economy
 - Link between quality of human resources and development/poverty
 - New appreciation of the role of HE in attaining MDGs
 - Relative Neglect of HE
 - Supposed low return on investment in HE - now largely discredited
 - 1990 EFA initiative focused on basic education
 - HE further marginalised by AU's "First Decade of Education for Africa" (1997-2006) + NEPAD

- What is Higher Education?
 - All post secondary education
 - Universities
 - Polytechnics & Technical Colleges
 - Teacher Training Institutions
 - Institutes for medical training, agric, etc
 - Distance education centres
 - Research centres and institutes
 - Others?

- Revitalisation?
 - Institutional & system-wide reforms
 - HE policies
 - Institutional missions and strategies
 - Curricula and programmes
 - Refocus on research & graduate study
 - Governance & management change
 - Institutional capacity development
 - ??
 - Back to the past? Or back to the future?

- Issues and Challenges
 - historic dependence on public subvention & donor support
 - reduced investment in education
 - economic decline
 - changes in donor positions
 - policy change under SAPs; privatisation of services, cost-sharing
 - decline in public spending on HE: 3.8% of GNP in 1970; 3.4% in 1995 – even as enrolment exploded
 - reduced resources vs. new and expanded demands on HE institutions
 - HE spending skewed towards recurrent costs – little for infrastructure, research, staff development & motivation

- Globalisation and Knowledge Economy
 - Challenge of new modes: ICT, short courses, distance, private
 - Cross-border provision – requiring new policies and standards
 - Brain drain – heightened by increased international mobility of high-end labour

- Access and Equity
 - Exponential increases in enrolments post-independence

- Low HE enrolment ratios
- Stagnation in postgraduate studies
- New forms of social exclusion resulting from constricted HE access:
 - Parental status/wealth; geographic location; gender; minority status

- Quality and Relevance
 - Quality is multidimensional
 - Programs and policies
 - Staff numbers, qualifications and working conditions
 - Teaching and learning methods & materials
 - Equipment and facilities
 - Quality assurance systems
 - Status of research
 - Staff quality and motivation: “aging professoriate”
 - “centres of excellence”: opportunities for quality enhancement, or diversion of scarce resources?
 - Relevance
 - To condition and needs of local society – contribution to development, innovation, democracy, peace and social cohesion, etc.
 - To development of other education levels
 - To the market – diversity in student needs, employment opportunities
 - To national competitiveness in global society

- System Differentiation
 - Opening up to private provision
 - Expansion in non-university HE
 - Open and distance education
 - Cross-border provision
 - New challenges and opportunities

- Financing
 - Retreat of State from full funding of HE
 - Reduced provisioning for modern facilities
 - Implications for access, quality and student welfare
 - New challenges and opportunities
 - Innovations in public institutions
 - Variety of cost sharing approaches
 - Admission of privately sponsored students
 - Parallel programs
 - Commercialisation of services

- Purely demand-driven courses
- Governance
 - From state control to state supervision?
 - Institutional development/strategic planning
 - Results-based management
 - Formal and informal systems of authority and accountability
- Other Issues
 - HIV/AIDS
 - Impact on HE institutions
 - Contribution of HE to prevention and management
 - Progress towards addressing this issue: pioneering role of AAU & ADEA/WGHE
 - Brain Drain
 - How convert to “brain gain”
 - Need for strategies for retention
 - ICT
 - Issues of bandwidth and connectivity
 - Infrastructure and appropriate regulatory regimes
 - Use for research and education
 - Key mandate of AAU
- Revitalisation Initiatives
 - Institutional, system, regional, pan-African
 - Curriculum reforms
 - Development of strategic plans
 - Increased inter-institutional collaboration
 - Regional networks
- Way Forward
 - Role of AU
 - Promotion and harmonization of positive continental & regional policies/initiatives
 - Promotion of HE as field of study & research
 - Information and experience sharing – African Observatory of Higher Education?
 - Advocacy & resource mobilization for HE
 - AU “ Strategic Plan 2004 – 2007” : revitalize HE by building on existing initiatives and empowering & working with existing structures – **why invent the wheel?**
 - AU Ministerial “Plan of Action for Second Decade of Education for Africa (2006-2015)” – HE as key

area of focus: need to flesh out and provide direction

- Accra Experts Meeting: one in series of activities
- Contribution: Identification of
 - Focal Areas
 - Pivotal issues
 - Intervention modes
 - Expected outcomes & indicators
 - Agency – by whom? At what level?

REPORT OF THE FIRST AFRICAN UNION MEETING OF EXPERTS ON REVITALISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN AFRICA

Dr. Beatrice Njenga reported that:

10. The 1st Meeting of Experts held in Midrand, October 27 – 28, 2005 endorsed the approach to revitalization of HE as outlined in the Synthesis Report. It also proposed a follow-up programme to involve the following:
 - Identify areas of intervention
 - Formation of an AU Expert Group on HE
 - Propose a Framework of Modalities of Operation
 - Organise a 2nd Meeting of Experts to involve Francophone participants
11. Action has been taken on the follow-up programme up to the 2nd Meeting of the Expert Group now underway.

DISCUSSION

In the discussion that followed the presentation of the two reports, comments made referred to the following:

12. **Terminologies** – Whereas higher education means more than university education, discussion often focuses exclusively on the latter, with the result that many young people who could benefit from other types of higher education think only of university education. It has serious cost implications.
13. **Enrolment** - While more than 50% of the age group is able to enroll in H.E. in Europe and North America, enrolment in Africa obtained in single digit percentages (3% in Senegal). While Africa's youth remains grossly under-represented in HE the view that other levels of education are more important to Africa should be strenuously resisted.
14. **Governance**
 - In the tussle between internal and state control of higher education, sight is easily lost of controls for quality delivery; or who takes that responsibility. The mushrooming of private universities gives cause for worry about quality delivery.
 - Important to look at intra-institutional governance structures which are actually responsible for implementation
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15. **Gender:**
 - Considering that women remain under-represented in the headship of institutions, gender should be receiving more attention than it does.

16. **Brain Drain:**
- There are “push and pull” factors at play in the Brain Drain phenomenon; remuneration is an important aspect to consider
 - For redress, the package of remuneration should be highlighted as happens in Thailand. The AU might also show interest in emerging initiatives to return academics to the continent, even for short-term visits.
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17. **Cooperation** - Linkages to Europe/North America obtains more readily than within the continent. But a consortium involving Burkina Faso has a post-graduate training programme that could be helped by critical funding. Egypt also has offered 200 scholarships tenable in Egypt. Other African governments could make similar gestures to be coordinated by AU.
18. **Health** - Rather than focus on HIV/AIDS exclusively, health generally should engage attention, considering that malaria remains the biggest threat. Government spending that is often directed at Defence might be redirected away to take in more critical concerns including Health.
19. **Infrastructure** - Diversification of infrastructural development to take advantage of facilities in the city must be cost-effective while also minimizing on-campus unrest that arises from lack of appreciation of facilities provided by institutions.
20. **Methodology:**
- It might be useful to have a synthesis of all ideas generated from previous and parallel conferences to date, and in the process provide a response to very fundamental questions around Revitalization including the following:
 - The need for revitalisation
 - What is to be revitalized?
 - Revitalisation for what?
 - How done?
 - The key actors (Including students? Vice Chancellors?)
 - With what instruments?
 - What outcomes, to be followed up by whom, where?
 - What synergies between AU’s programmes and ongoing initiatives like the Global Science Initiative and the World Bank Millennium Science Initiative
 - Can we competently talk about revitalisation of higher education without involving Vice Chancellors? What forum has been created to collect their views?

- There is the need for a database on similar initiatives on the continent
 - The AU must devise a strategy for managing existing and future initiatives and publicising them
 - there is the need to locate this meeting within the stream of events on revitalisation of higher education and to underline the particular questions to which answers are being sought
21. It was urged that whatever revitalisation does, it must address poverty reduction in terms of job creation or creation of wealth, and there must be a time frame. It must contribute to the NEPAD Initiatives, and must be prioritized. It must also aim at creating a knowledge-based society. Experts and stakeholders are both to be engaged in articulating or putting together the concerns over the years, and on the basis of the synthesis, propose a Plan of Action.
22. In further discussion, it was agreed that there was a real danger of a stalled momentum for action while a collation of ideas generated over the years is awaited. On the other hand, it should be possible to devise a plan of action to refer to immediate things to be done, while research on the larger Action Programme proceeds. The Meeting noted that a separate conference of scientists and policy-makers would be considering Poverty Reduction.
23. The meeting finally agreed to form working groups to attend to the following
- Focal areas of HE requiring urgent attention
 - The Issues
 - Interventions
 - Expected Outcomes
 - Role Players