

Rethinking Education in the African Context

Report of a Consultative Meeting held in Dakar, Senegal, 10-11 November, 2016

The role of education as a catalyst for development is acknowledged globally. In a world marked by inequalities and widening disparities, the state of education has ignited a worldwide debate particularly in relation to its management and relevance to the achievement of sustainable development goals by 2030 as well as the ownership and nature of knowledge it imparts to its beneficiaries.

Considering all that, and while building on its seminal publications *Learning to Be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow* (1972), and *Learning: The Treasure Within* (1996), UNESCO published *Rethinking Education* in 2015. This publication aims at broadening and deepening the debate on education in a changing world. As UNESCO observes¹:

Its purpose is to stimulate public policy debate focused specifically on the education in a changing world. It is a call for dialogue inspired by a humanistic vision of education and development based on principles of respect for life and human dignity, equal rights and social justice, for respect for cultural, diversity, and international solidarity, all of which are fundamental aspects of our common unity. It is intended to be both aspirational and inspirational, speaking to new times and to everyone across the world with a stake in education.

CODESRIA, as a leading pan-African organisation whose mandate includes dissemination of knowledge that is relevant to and informs policies on the development of Africa could not ignore the debate initiated by UNESCO. In that context, the two organisations joined hands in a strategic partnership that gave

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birth to a consultative "closed door" meeting under the theme *Rethinking Education in Africa* with a view to deepening the debate on rethinking education in the African context.

The meeting was held in Dakar from 10 to 11 November, 2016. Apart from CODESRIA's personnel, it brought together representatives of UNESCO, the African Union (AU), Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), *Réseau Ouest et Centre Africain de Recherche en Education* (ROCARE), experts in education and culture from Benin, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa as well as a gender and human rights activist/writer from Ethiopia. While considering the goals of Africa's Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) which seeks to *ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all* by 2030, the following sub-themes were selected to guide the debate:

- (1) Rethinking Education: Towards a global common good;
- (2) Education & sustainable emergence for Africa: Situation, Challenges and Prospects;
- (3) Visioning Education for the Future We Want for Africa;
- (4) Knowledge creation/production in Africa;
- (5) Transmission and acquisition of knowledge;

- (6) Governance of education and learning systems; and
- (7) Governance of knowledge

The need and urgency to reshape Africa's education systems whose content is informed and inspired by her own realities as embedded in her culture and languages, while remaining alert to global developments, formed the common denominator of the deep debates on the future of education in Africa during the meeting. However, in order for this to be possible, it is also critical to take into account the fact that education is an ideological struggle for the control of the mind. The experience from African countries is a case in point. After more than fifty years of independence education in Africa has not yet successfully produced citizens with a commonly shared worldview that allows them to collectively rally around common identified goals, which are articulated by a collective discourse expressed in different voices.

There is therefore no doubt that African countries should use education to distil their individual worldviews into a pan-African worldview that would allow the designing of sovereign development agendas in line with the goals of Rethinking Education exercise and the aspirations of Africa's Agenda 2063.

A general report that will lay the foundations for a joint publication by CODESRIA and UNESCO on Rethinking Education in Africa will be finalised and discussed at the second meeting scheduled to take place early next year.

Note

1. UNESCO (2015) *Rethinking Education*. Paris: UNESCO:14