

ENSURING ACCESS AND LEARNING: OPTIMIZING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE AFRICAN TEACHER

A keynote presentation delivered by Irene Duncan-Adanusa, Education International (EI) Vice President for Africa, at the Pan-African Conference on Teacher Development (PACTED III), Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 16-17 July 2013

Chairperson,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a privilege and honour for me to be here today to share my thoughts on how to optimise the effectiveness of the African teacher to ensure access and learning. I would like to express my most profound appreciation to the African Union Commission for inviting Education International (EI) to be part of this important meeting.

For those who may not be aware, EI is the voice of the teaching profession worldwide. We represent over 30 million educators, from early childhood to university, through about 400 national organisations in 171 countries.

Ladies and gentlemen, teachers play a central role in the teaching and learning process. Teachers guide, support and empower children and young people to develop to their full potential and to contribute to the development of society as a whole. However, teachers alone cannot guarantee access and good learning outcomes, including basic numeracy and literacy, problem-solving, creativity and good citizenship, among others. Effective teaching and learning can only take place in safe educational institutions with adequate infrastructure, facilities and resources.

The main challenge of any African state on the eve of the 2015 deadline is the achievement of the goals set in the African Union's Second Decade of Education for Africa, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA). Faced with this emergency and the immensity of the task, in addition to access, many states are now focusing on the quality of teaching and learning, and recognizing the pivotal role of teachers in achieving quality education.

However, teacher shortages continue to confront many countries around the globe. Statistics from the 2012 Education for All Global Monitoring Report show that sub-Saharan African countries must recruit over 2 million teachers to achieve universal primary education by 2015. In addition to teacher shortages, teacher quality, motivation and retention remain some of the major education challenges in Africa today.

The inclusion of a specific goal and teacher development priorities in the Second Decade of Education for Africa is a clear indication of the African Union's commitment to improving teacher quality, motivation and retention. The organization of the 1st Pan-African Conference on Teacher Education and Development (PACTED), which is now in its third edition, is a positive move. Education International welcomes these positive steps which are a tribute to teachers and a recognition of the importance of teacher development as a driver for achieving quality Education for All. EI believes in qualified teachers for quality education for all.

Indeed, education is a human right, and all children and young people must have access to it free of charge. Unfortunately, despite significant progress in enrolment, the rates of attendance, retention ratios, survival to the last primary or secondary grades and quality measures, do not generally give a positive outlook for the continent of Africa.

Access and retention remain a major challenge in Africa

Despite significant progress in access to primary education, recent statistics released by UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) indicate that nearly 30 million out of the 57 million children of primary school going age who are out of school worldwide live in sub-Saharan Africa. According to their new analysis, 22% of African children have never attended primary school or have left school without completing primary education. Many of these children are from poor households, rural, remote and conflict areas. They also include migrants and other disadvantaged groups.

Girls constitute the awful majority of those affected. It is estimated that about 16 million girls in sub-Saharan Africa are not going to school, some of whom may have dropped from school just at the initial level of primary education. This clearly attests to the fact that the global momentum we witnessed in the surge in access to school has slowed down, thus making it unlikely to achieve the commitments the African states and the world made in creating the opportunity of equal and equitable access to education for all children by 2015.

UIS estimates that African countries such as Nigeria, Ethiopia, Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso and Kenya have each recorded more than one million out of school children. It is also noteworthy that even though Africa has recorded marked increase in access, the rate at which children drop out of school has been remarkable. The question that arises therefore is, what can be done to get all children into school and keep them in school?

The factors central to achieving access and good quality education are in the main related to teachers, the curriculum and the teaching and learning environment, including resources, health and safety. Many children are kept out of school or drop out because of poverty, hunger, disease (especially HIV & AIDS), disability, gender, geographical location or other circumstances or characteristics. Lack of toilets and sanitation facilities, including sanitary pads can keep girls out of school. Teacher shortages, large class sizes and poor quality may discourage parents from sending their children to school and keeping them in school.

Ladies and gentlemen, getting children to school and learning in safe, healthy, well-resourced schools and in reasonable class sizes, taught by qualified teachers, is one surest way of keeping them in school. Therefore, attracting children to school and keeping them in school requires, not just a single intervention, but a holistic approach.

Quality education requires quality teachers

In response to the increase in enrolment, many African governments have resorted to recruiting, untrained, contract or para teachers, all in the name of cost containment. In some countries, unqualified teachers constitute the majority of teachers in primary education. This "sacrifice ratio" in which quantity is favoured against quality is one of the biggest threats undermining learning outcomes.

Above everything else, the entire world would benefit from improved societal perceptions of teachers and of teaching. At the moment society accords low social recognition to teachers and does not see teaching as a respectable and rewarding profession. In its 2012 report, the Joint ILO/UNESCO Committee of Experts on the Application of the Recommendations concerning Teaching Personnel noted a general decline in the status of the teaching profession worldwide. Many high school graduates are not coming into the profession, and those who do usually accept teaching only as a stepping-stone to other professions.

Professor Lois Weiner in her writing, *From Crisis To Opportunity*, did not mince her words when she argued that the global project to destroy education as a publicly-funded cornerstone of democracy has been quite public for more than four decades - if one looked for evidence in the right places - reports from the World

Bank, journals of finance and prospectuses for corporations penetrating the “educational market,” and research. For wealthy, powerful elites, public expenditures on educating workers beyond the skill level needed for low paying jobs seems a foolish waste of money. Minimally educated workers need only minimally educated teachers. Despite governments’ talk of making their nations more competitive economically by ratcheting up standards, the impact of their reforms often proves otherwise: a well-educated (and well-paid) teaching force is a wasteful expenditure. They aim to make public education a “free market” open to entrepreneurs; create a revolving door of minimally-trained teachers; reduce the curriculum to basic mathematics and literacy content; control teachers, students, and future citizens with standardized testing; and weaken public oversight of education by breaking up school systems, replacing them with privately operated schools and networks.

Whilst Professor Weiner may have been having in mind what was actually happening today in the United States, we all can admit that the scenario has become global and affected a number of African countries, most of whom are forced to contend with the conditionalities and policies of the IMF, the World Bank and other donors.

It is an undeniable fact that teachers are the main driver of successful teaching and learning. Poor education is usually a result of lack of well qualified and competent teachers. In Mali, for example, where a recent assessment suggests that around 90% of children in grade 2 cannot read at all, more than half of all primary school teachers have had no teacher training at all, and nearly 90% did not complete secondary school. In community schools, only one in thirty teachers completed secondary education. 45,000 more qualified teachers are needed, more than double the number currently in service, and only 25% of teachers are women.

Therefore, the teacher factor must be a cardinal concern for all policy makers whose objective is to promote access and quality by making sure that what obtains in the classroom is sufficient enough to attract, retain and develop learners in ways that can be useful to them and to society. In doing so therefore, attention should be paid to teacher’s recruitment, training and re-training, deployment, their management, motivation, working conditions, recognition and rewards, which all affects their performance and student learning.

In order to optimize teachers’ role in access and learning outcomes, there is need to maximize the contact hours between teachers and learners. Addressing structural causes of teacher absenteeism such as transport, housing, health/HIV and pay- related causes can go a long way towards improving access and learning. In Liberia and D.R. Congo for example, payment of teachers’ salaries would require them to abandon their classrooms for up to a week or more in order to travel to distant paying centres. In countries such as Liberia and Sierra Leone, it can sometimes take one to three years for new recruits to have their names on the pay roll. These teachers often leave their classrooms to go to the head-office of the Ministry of Education to follow up on their employment documents. So it takes an inordinate amount of time for teachers to be recruited and even when it is finally done, it takes another marathon time for them to receive their back log salaries. This has been demoralising to teachers thus affecting their morale and consequently their performance in the classroom.

In a bid to obviate this problem, the Gambia Teachers Union Credit and Cooperative Union has signed a memorandum of Understanding with the government of Gambia to make advance payment of teachers’ salaries, especially in the hard-to-reach areas where there are no banking facilities by the 25th of every month and to be reimbursed by the government at the end of the month. To this extent the Gambia Teachers Union is contributing towards the alleviation of teacher absenteeism caused specifically by the method of salary payment.

Education International and its members are committed to promoting quality education for all in Africa and around the world. As a result of the promotion of Education International's Code of Professional Ethics, many teacher unions in Africa have developed or are now developing professional codes of ethics for their members. For example, the Sierra Leone Teachers Union, in concert with UNICEF and the Ministry of Education partnered to develop one and are currently engaged in workshops to popularise it to their members. The professional codes of ethics clearly define the teachers' responsibilities and obligations to their learners, parents and the profession, among others.

Through the Quality Educators for All project, a joint initiative of EI and Oxfam Novib, we have been promoting the professional development of teachers and school leaders in Mali and Uganda, working collaboratively with the Ministries of Education, local authorities, teacher training institutions and other partners.

On 4 October this year, EI will be launching its *Mobilising for Quality Education* (MQE) initiative in New York, Paris and around the world, in order to raise awareness among governments, inter-governmental organisations, financial institutions, community leaders and the general public about the indomitable role quality education plays in the development of society. It is to also remind decision makers that education is sine-qua-non to development and that it must therefore be the bedrock of any post-2015 development agenda.

The three pillars of MQE are:

Quality teaching – ensured through the recruitment of high calibre candidates to teaching, high quality initial teacher education and continuous professional development and attractive salaries and conditions of service determined through collective bargaining and other forms of social dialogue.

Quality tools – appropriate curricula and inclusive teaching and learning materials and resources, including ICT. A quality curriculum that is flexible and designed through an inclusive process that guarantees teachers participation is highly desirable. Learning tools such as the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction in basic education can be beneficial in ensuring good learning outcomes. ICT can be a powerful tool that can support teaching and learning. However, ICT cannot and must not replace the teacher.

Quality environments – supportive, comfortable, safe and secure teaching and learning environments with the appropriate facilities to support student learning and to enable teachers to teach effectively. We must disabuse our minds in thinking that effective teaching and learning can take place anywhere-under the trees, dilapidated structures sometimes hazardous to teachers and learners. Class sizes of 60 to 150 will never ensure effective teaching and good quality learning.

Pre-requisites for the teacher's maximum impact

Certain conditions need to be in place for teachers to perform at their best level.

- Recruitment

To ensure quality teaching and learning, the teaching profession must attract the best candidates from our high schools. Under normal circumstances, the education system should not allow untrained personnel to operate as teachers. This practice devalues the noble profession. In other professions, such as medicine, and accountancy, non-professionals are not allowed to practise.

- Teacher Education and Development

The training of teachers for all levels of education needs to be professionally determined, and efficiently conducted in well-equipped institutions with highly qualified, motivated, and experienced educators. Desired impacts in the classroom can be realised through induction, continuous professional development and support. The teacher's career path needs to be clearly defined, and must encourage growth in the profession and retention of competent and experienced personnel.

- Motivation

Motivational factors can include fair and rational deployment of personnel, better and commensurate remuneration, housing and other incentives, recognition and appreciation of good performance and timely promotions, among others. Teacher remuneration, conditions of service and education policy should be determined through social dialogue mechanisms, ensuring the full participation of teachers and their representative organisations.

Conclusion

As no nation can rise above the level of its education system, so it is that no educational system can rise above the level of its teachers. Therefore, there can be no genuine transformation of education without a transformation of society's perception of teachers and a revaluing of the work that teachers do. If Africa wants to construct a good education system, it must invest in teachers by way of quality training, respecting their professionalism, rewarding and recognising those who are effective and efficient and improving their morale and motivation. Job security and access to professional growth opportunities are critical. Teaching should be an attractive profession and not just a waiting room for job opportunities. This leads me to an anecdote once given by Professor PAI OBANYA on societal perception of teachers. It is dubbed,

GET OUT OF TEACHING AND LOOK FOR A JOB.

Suitor's family spokesman: Good evening my people. May I introduce my young man, Ahmadu Tijani. Stand and be seen, Tijani.

Tijani (Standing): Good evening, my elders.

Spokesman : As you are well aware, we have come to ask for the hand of your daughter, Amina, in marriage .

Amina's Father: Lord have mercy! Tijani has grown so big! Looks every inch like his grandfather. What do you do for a living?

Tijani (timidly) I TEACH at Government Secondary School, Azare.

Amina's Father: Huum! Well, you are from a good family. I'll give you my daughter, but....LISTEN, LISTEN CAREFULLY : Promise me that you'll LOOK FOR A JOB! Otherwise.....

Ladies and gentlemen, Africa needs to do more to put teachers back into the limelight of respectability. Society needs to value and support teachers in their effort to improve learning and empower our young people to realise their potential and contribute to the development of society.

I thank you.