



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

Meeting of Experts on the elaboration of a 9th Volume of the *General History of Africa* (GHA)

UNESCO/Addis Ababa, 20 - 22 May 2013

Concept Note

The General History of Africa: a monumental achievement

The **General History of Africa** (GHA) started in 1964 in response to the aspirations of the newly independent African states to decolonize their history, and re-appropriate the discourses on their past. Under the scientific and intellectual responsibility of a 39 member International Scientific Committee, two-thirds of whom were scholars from Africa, some three hundred and fifty authors, translators and volume editors from different regions worked together for more than thirty five years in view of the elaboration of the GHA, which resulted in the publication of eight volumes of the main edition in English, Arabic and French. This work currently exists in thirteen languages including three African languages (Kiswahili, Fulfulde, and Hausa). In addition, twelve “*studies and documents*” and twelve volumes on the “*Sources of African history*” were published to accompany and complement the collection.

This monumental undertaking brilliantly challenged the euro centrist vision of history, the racial prejudices, and usual clichés on Africans and established the anteriority and creativity of African cultures and civilizations. It drew on disciplines ranging from history and linguistics to the fine arts, performing arts, musicology, and natural sciences. Using written archives, archaeological discoveries and oral traditions, the authors introduced a new methodology and offered an African perspective highlighting the contribution of African peoples to the general progress of Humanity.

The *GHA* is considered as a major contribution to the knowledge of African history and historiography, viewing Africa as whole and rejecting the artificial but widely entrenched dichotomy between North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa.

The second phase of the General History of Africa: a Pedagogic and Political Challenge

However, to date the *GHA* is neither widely disseminated nor sufficiently used. In most African schools, few history textbooks actually respond to the initial political and educational commitment underlining the drafting of this collection. In many countries throughout the continent, curricula and textbooks on African history are still tainted with euro-centrism. Furthermore, a worrying trend emerged in recent decades as curricula developers in some African countries started moving towards “nationalist” versions of history, overlooking the interactions between African peoples and their common heritage. Africa has engaged in regional integration and sustainable development based on African people’s culture, common heritage and shared values. Hence, the renovation of history education is given a new sense of urgency. Young Africans must be taught to develop a sense of pride in their heritage, self-esteem, and self-confidence which might empower them and help them master their destiny and that of their continent.

To this end, it is important to challenge the negative images of Africa as a continent of poverty, dominated by conflicts and famine, and to draw attention to the different, but commonly rooted African civilizations and their contribution to the general progress of humanity.

It is in response to recurrent African Member States’ requests to assist them in developing History curricula and textbooks on the basis of the GHA that UNESCO decided in 2009 to

undertake the 2nd Phase of the GHA : the **Pedagogical Use of the General History of Africa Project (PUGHA)**

This project is critical for the African Cultural Renaissance, which African Union Member States called upon, acknowledging the fact that history education helps to shape peoples' identities and improve understanding of the values and heritage shared by Africans and people of African descent. It is stated in the *Charter for African Renaissance* adopted by the African Union Summit in Khartoum in 2006 that '*The General History published by UNESCO constitutes a valid base for teaching the history of Africa and (we) recommend its dissemination in many languages*'. The project is also pivotal to the *Second Decade for the Development of Education in Africa (2006 – 2015)*, which in its Action Plan lays emphasis on strengthening the links between education and culture, and improving the quality of pedagogical contents. Against this backdrop, the AU Summit as well as the Conference of Ministers of Education of the African Union (COMEDAF), at several occasions, took decisions commending UNESCO's initiative, reaffirming their support to the PUGHA and requesting African States to provide adequate financial assistance for its implementation. The African Union Commission reaffirmed its support to this Pan-African project, stressing that it will lay the intellectual foundation for the achievement of African unity.

The overall objective of the PUGHA is to use the *General History of Africa* to help renovate history education in Africa, in particular, by highlighting common heritage of African peoples and through this, support mutual understanding, regional integration, peace building and strengthen ties between Africans living in Africa and peoples of African descent in other parts of the world.

In practical terms, the project aims at the following:

- Elaboration of three common contents based on the GHA (namely curricula outlines together with teacher's guides and schools textbooks) for three age groups: less than 12 years old, 13-16 year old and 17-19 year old;
- Development of teacher trainer's guides contributing to the improvement of teacher training in light of the latest findings in historical research, advances made in the methodology and methods of history teaching;
- Elaboration of complementary materials, including a historical Atlas, a glossary of terms and terminology to be used on Africa and a CDROM containing various educational resources;
- Development of a guide to help Member States to introduce the above mentioned contents into their school curricula
- Promotion of the GHA and harmonization of its use in higher education institutions across the continent
- Development of specific contents on African history for the African Diaspora;
- Production of materials for informal and non formal education (films, radio, TV and multimedia programs, animations, cartoons, children's books, educational games etc.) on the basis of the GHA.

Elaboration and publication of a Ninth Volume of the HGA: a new intellectual and scientific enterprise

The second phase of the GHA highlighted to review the content of the published volumes of the GHA in order to take into account the important developments in scientific research that occurred since the completion of the collection as well as the socio-political, economic, cultural and environmental changes that impacted Africa and African Diaspora since the 1990's.

The creation of the African Union and the process of regional integration engaged have raised new dynamics that questioned the divisions of the continent and the model of identity and nation building inherited from colonization. The major shifts in economic cooperation and international relations impacting our globalized world since the late 1990s have opened new opportunities, but also new challenges and threats for Africa. The accelerated urbanization of Africa, its wealth in natural and strategic resources and the aspirations and creativity of its youth raise new challenges for African peoples, thus emphasizing the necessity to regain ownership over their destiny.

Furthermore, people of African descent in South, Central, and North America, in the Caribbean, the Indian Ocean, in the Middle East and elsewhere, are clinging more and more to their ties with Africa and their African heritage. More and more countries which are home for important numbers of Afro descendants are recognizing the significant contribution of these citizens to the construction of their societies. These countries are putting in place public policies aimed at reversing historical distortions, fighting against racism, racial discrimination, and past inequalities, including through affirmative action measures. To this end, the Brazilian initiatives – in particular the adoption of a law making the teaching of the History of Africa compulsory at all levels through the use of the GHA is to be considered as an inspiring reference.

Therefore, the preparation and publication of a 9th volume of the GHA represent a positive response to these trends and to the African Member States' request expressed by at the AU Summit in 2009, in Syrte, Libya. The decision EX.CL/520 (XV) called upon the AU Member States to assist in the drafting of the “*Ninth volume of the GHA covering the recent history since the decolonisation, the end of Apartheid and the place of Africa in the world*”

The objectives of the Ninth Volume are as follows:

- update the knowledge contained in the GHA, in light of the latest development in scientific research in different areas, and of the political, cultural, socioeconomic and ecological changes that occurred in the continent since the publication of the last volume of the collection;
- analyze the different African Diasporas and their diverse contributions to the construction of modern societies and to the emancipation and development of the continent;
- identify and analyze the new challenges faced by Africa including questions of African unity, Pan Africanism, regional integration, education and culture, youth, gender issues, health, cultural diversity, creativity, arts, culture and development, intercultural dialogue within Africa, peace and environment, climate change, urbanization, scientific research and

innovation, health care, sustainable development, good governance, South- South cooperation, relationship with African Diaspora etc.

The Ninth volume attempts to make a significant contribution to the International Decade for People of African Descent which will be proclaimed by the UN General Assembly end 2013. Furthermore, changes that occurred after the Cold War and Apartheid era, but also important challenges taking into account international landmark events have to be analyzed from the African perspective. With regard to the African Diaspora, the new findings concerning the African presence in different parts of the world in ancient time, the deportation of Africans during the slave trade and the migration of Africans during the colonization and after the independence will be taken into account.

The Experts meeting: Objectives and Expected Results

Organized in Addis Ababa on the occasion of the **celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the creation of the OAU** (Organization of the African Unity), the experts meeting will address the above mentioned issues and develop guidelines for the elaboration of the 9th volume. It will bring together 35 to 40 specialists from Africa and other regions of the world, and representing different backgrounds and fields of specialization (history, sociology, anthropology, culture and arts, economy, environment, gender issues, ICTs, politics, endogenous knowledge, African Diaspora, international relations, sustainable development, health, education, etc.)

4

To sum up, the participants will be invited to take part in a brain storming session and exchange their views in an open but structured manner in order to:

- Explore recent developments in scientific research and the major contributions to the knowledge of Africa and African Diaspora
- Identify the major events that occurred in Africa since 1990s and the new threats, opportunities and challenges faced by the peoples of the continent
- Revisit the concept and definitions of African Diaspora in light of the trends in the different regions of the world and to identify the challenges that they are facing today
- Develop clear guidelines for the elaboration of the 9th volume