

BASIC EDUCATION IN AFRICA PROGRAMME (BEAP)

REVITALIZING BASIC EDUCATION IN AFRICA: OPTING FOR A CONTINUUM

AWARENESS

One of the fundamental problems of ensuring successful basic education in Africa is that education systems do not sufficiently draw on the African context. Beyond the recurring issue of access to education, most Sub-Saharan African countries, in their early years of independence, chose to carry on a truncated system of education with a selective competition to mark the end of the primary school cycle. This causes bottlenecks, which consequently stall the transition to the secondary level.

Most countries thus invested mostly in primary education and implemented reforms in lower and upper secondary education levels without taking a holistic approach to basic education, thereby overlooking three key factors: continuity, completion and exit profile of learners.

Based on this finding, the Kigali regional meeting in 2007 concluded that current efforts towards expansion and improvement needed to be placed within a wider framework of comprehensive reform, based on the principles of social justice, equity and social inclusion, and focussing on three major thrusts:

- a) the extension of quality basic (primary) education to a minimum of nine to ten years, thus including lower secondary education;
- b) the viewing of this cycle in a holistic perspective, ensuring that it is inclusive, coherent and seamless; and
- c) the development of a skills- and competency-based integrated curriculum framework relevant to the expectations and needs of all children and youth in Africa, as a basis for lifelong learning and for their entry into the labour market through an introduction to entrepreneurship.

The Basic Education in Africa Programme (BEAP) directly addresses each of the six EFA goals and has, to date, been launched in eight African countries: Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, the Gambia, Kenya, Seychelles, Tanzania, Uganda and Zanzibar.

The UNESCO Approach

A special initiative was proposed to obtain meaningful results and, especially, to move away from non-integrated educational systems that still prevail. Basic education should consist of an uninterrupted period of learning of at least nine to ten years starting from early childhood. At the end of this cycle, learners will be sure to have acquired the knowledge, skills, attitudes, competencies and values necessary for their integration into society.

Taken as a whole, these principles will facilitate an integrated approach to achieving all of the Education for All (EFA) goals. The philosophy behind BEAP is based on the definition of a basic education offer, building on the principle of the right to education while ensuring "quality, relevance and continuity."

- There are 5 steps in the BEAP implementation process:
- Step 1: Preliminary meetings, advocacy and ownership.
 - Step 2: Needs identification and analysis.
 - Step 3: Formulation of a road map in line with the country's development plan (for funding).
 - Step 4: Technical support for implementation.
 - Step 5: Monitoring and evaluation.

Activities undertaken by the BEAP involve various areas of UNESCO's expertise, such as:

- Advocacy: to develop a stronger commitment of national authorities in reform processes and encourage the mobilization of public resources for this purpose.
 - o *Example of a practical application: curriculum reform was integrated in sectoral plans as a result of advocacy actions conducted.*
- Capacity development: to supplement in-country human resources by providing technical assistance and capacity development tailored to the national context.
 - o *Example of a practical application: capacity-building on curriculum development for thirty-four technicians from nine African countries.*
- South-South cooperation: several projects are being conducted to encourage the sharing of expertise and foster collaboration between organizations in the South on the principles and implementation of the BEAP.
 - o *Example of a practical application: sharing of experiences at seminars on how to implement the BEAP at the sub-regional level for directors of planning, curriculum and teacher training.*

TANGIBLE RESULTS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

With the assistance of UNESCO, several countries have taken initial steps towards reviewing the state of basic education and planning BEAP-sponsored activities, particularly in the area of curriculum development and capacity development.

- In advocacy: In the Gambia, advocacy actions carried out by the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in Africa (UNESCO BREA) facilitated the formulation by the government of a roadmap to determine its priorities and entry points for the implementation of the BEAP. The government was able to link curriculum development to teacher training for the implementation of a competency-based curriculum. This reform, included in the education sector plan of the Gambia, was also of interest to Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Seychelles and Tanzania who adapted it to their national contexts.
- In capacity development: In partnership with the Tanzanian Institute of Education (TIE) and the International Bureau of Education (UNESCO IBE), UNESCO BREA provided support for the organization of capacity-building sessions to develop a competency-based curriculum for African curriculum technicians. These technicians are currently conducting training sessions in the eight African

countries where the BEAP is implemented, as well as in Zambia.

- In knowledge sharing: The eight countries of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) met in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, in 2010 to discuss the implementation modalities of a ten-year basic education cycle. Countries that are well advanced in the process were able to share their experiences with regards to legal and political mechanisms, curriculum development and capacity development. Depending on the national context, guidance was provided for discussions on the competency-based approach and challenges identified.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

To endorse the basic education integrated reform process, the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders in this process will have to be reviewed, notably government, non-government, technical and financial partners and new and workable partnerships forged. In targeting children from 0 to 15 years of age, the BEAP calls for specific skills instruction (nutrition, health, inter-generational learning, parent education, etc.) and therefore relies on a multi-stakeholder partnership. Such types of cooperation can not only bring in additional expertise and capacity, but also mobilize supplementary funding.

Since 2010, support has been focused on countries of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and WAEMU, particularly for curriculum reform which underlies this basic education expansion. UNESCO BREDA will continue to work with IBE and UNESCO offices located in these sub-regions. Like the TIE for English-speaking countries, emphasis will be placed on establishing a regional centre of excellence for French-speaking countries.

A successful reform will depend above all on the firm and clearly expressed willingness of countries to have the courage to think differently from here on in, by embracing new options and agreeing to adopt new solutions.

LESSONS LEARNED

The BEAP targets children from 0 to 15 years. Each stage of their lives calls for specific skills. By bringing together the principles of education, child protection, literacy, teaching and technical and vocational training under one umbrella, the BEAP single-handedly embodies the holistic approach fostered by UNESCO and its partners for the attainment of EFA goals.

LINKS AND GATEWAYS

- Early Childhood Education and Care (ECCE): Is an integral part of the BEAP and its main entry point.
- Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET): With the introduction of entrepreneurship education for the learner, TVET is at the core of the BEAP.
- Teacher Training Initiative for Sub-Saharan Africa (TTISSA): Capacity development activities conducted by the BEAP also aim to stimulate the versatility of teachers.
- Literacy Initiative: for Empowerment (LIFE): Parent education and functional literacy projects are implemented as part of the BEAP.
- Education for Sustainable Development (ESD): Is the cornerstone for the implementation of the BEAP, by targeting citizens able to take informed decisions for themselves and others.

STRATEGIC PARTNERS

The BEAP is an illustration of the close collaboration that has existed since 2006 between the Regional Office for Education in Africa and the following organizations:

- International Bureau of Education (UNESCO IBE): With regard to capacity development for curriculum reform.
- Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA): Through its working groups to carry out further research, develop and scale-up BEAP experiences;
- African Development Bank (ADB): in terms of financial support to accompany the reform process in countries where the BEAP has been launched.
- the Conference of Ministers of Education (CONFEMEN): Within the framework of their support to French-speaking countries for curriculum reform, in particular.
- United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF): For articulation with the essential learning package.