



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

The 2009 World Conference on Higher Education: Reacting to New Dynamics

The World Conference on Higher Education gathered almost 1,000 participants from 148 countries from 5-8 July 2009 at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris to address "The New Dynamics of Higher Education and Research for Societal Change and Development". It closed with a call to governments to increase investment in higher education, encourage diversity and strengthen regional cooperation to serve societal needs.

Higher education is going through a revolution. Four dynamics in particular are transforming the sector. The first is accelerating demand, with an additional 51 million new students enrolled in tertiary education worldwide since 2000. The second is the diversification of providers, with private higher education now accounting for more than 30 per cent of enrolments worldwide. The third is the impact of information and communication technologies; the fourth is globalization which affects teaching, learning, study, research and communication. Many of these dynamics were discussed at the 1998 UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education. But they have all intensified over the last decade, bringing both new opportunities and challenges.



The OECD considers participation of 40 or 50% of young people in higher education as vital for economic growth. Regional participation is 71% in North America and Western Europe, 26% in the East Asia/Pacific region, 23% in the Arab States, 11% in South and West Asia and, despite rapid growth, only 6% in Africa. A child in sub-Saharan Africa today still has less chance of reaching the end of primary school than a European has of entering university. Students are moving around like never before. New data on student mobility released by UNESCO's Global Education Digest (GED) revealed that in 2007, over 2.8 million students were enrolled in higher educational institutions outside their country of origin, a 53% increase since 1999. Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest outbound mobility rate, 5.8% in 2007, compared to the world average of 1.8 %.

A Changing Landscape

The shift to post-industrial economies has led to mass demand for higher education. There were almost 153 million tertiary students worldwide in 2007, a 53% increase since the year 2000 and a fivefold increase in less than 40 years. The demand for higher education is predicted to expand from 97 million students in 2000 to over 262 million students by 2025.

Most countries spend considerably more per student in tertiary education than in primary or secondary education.

Private higher education institutions, some of them for-profit or quasi for-profit, represent the fastest-growing sector worldwide. An estimated 30 % of global higher education enrolment is now private.

Countries with over 70% private enrolment include Indonesia, Japan, the Philippines and the Republic of Korea . In many emerging economies the demand for places in higher education can be 20 to 50 % higher than places available in public institutions.

New technologies have transformed the distance learning landscape. There are 24 mega-universities in the world, ten in Asia and the Pacific alone. Some have over one million students. The African

The 2009 World Conference on Higher Education: Reacting to New Dynamics

IIEP Policy Forum, “Tertiary education in small states: Planning in the context of globalization”

The International Institute for Educational Planning organized this forum in conjunction with the 2009 WCHE. 65 of UNESCO's Member and Associate States have populations below three million. The Policy Forum explored the challenges facing these states in the field of higher education, noting the impact of globalization, technological development and increased pressure to expand access. Participants discussed cost-effective organizational models and selected planning issues including sustainable funding, linking higher education to local and international labour markets, and designing cost-effective systems for quality assurance. The WCHE communiqué stressed the need “to empower small states to benefit from the opportunities offered by globalisation and foster collaboration between them”. More information is available on <http://www.iiep.unesco.org/policy-forum-2009.html>

Virtual University works across borders and language groups in over 27 countries.

Outcomes

The communiqué adopted at the end of the Conference called on governments to devote sufficient resources to higher education. It stresses that “higher education must pursue the goals of equity, relevance and quality simultaneously”, underlining the importance of regulatory and quality assurance mechanisms and the need to enhance the attractiveness of an academic career. It noted that information and communications technologies should be more fully integrated throughout higher education to meet increasing student demand and share the results of scientific research.

Reflecting the Conference's special focus on the revitalization of higher education in Africa, the communiqué called for differentiated approaches to meet rapidly increasing demand; more attention to areas of expertise such as agriculture, the environment and natural resource extraction; and the mobilization of private financing.

The need for strengthened regional cooperation was also stressed, in areas ranging from the recognition of qualifications, quality assurance, governance, research and innovation. The importance of establishing regional higher education and research areas was also recognized.

Drawing attention to the global teacher shortage, the communiqué called for higher education “to scale up pre-service and in-service teacher training with curricula that equip teachers to provide

individuals with the knowledge and skills they need in the 21st century”.

UNESCO's Role

UNESCO's Director-General Koïchiro Matsuura, affirmed that the Organization would “continue to be a strong voice for higher education”. Higher education is vital for scaling up teacher education, reforming curricula and training those who will have the responsibility for implementing education policies tomorrow.

UNESCO has an important role to play in continuing to promote and implement standard-setting instruments, in particular the new generation of regional conventions for the recognition of qualifications, in monitoring trends and encouraging the sharing of knowledge and innovations.

UNESCO has committed itself to working closely with governments and other partners to strengthen their tertiary institutions and policies and to build regional centres of excellence. It is only through establishing such centres in developing regions that higher education will fully play its role as a major agent of social change and empower countries politically, socially and economically.

Contacts:

g.haddad@unesco.org

Link:

<http://www.unesco.org/en/wche2009>