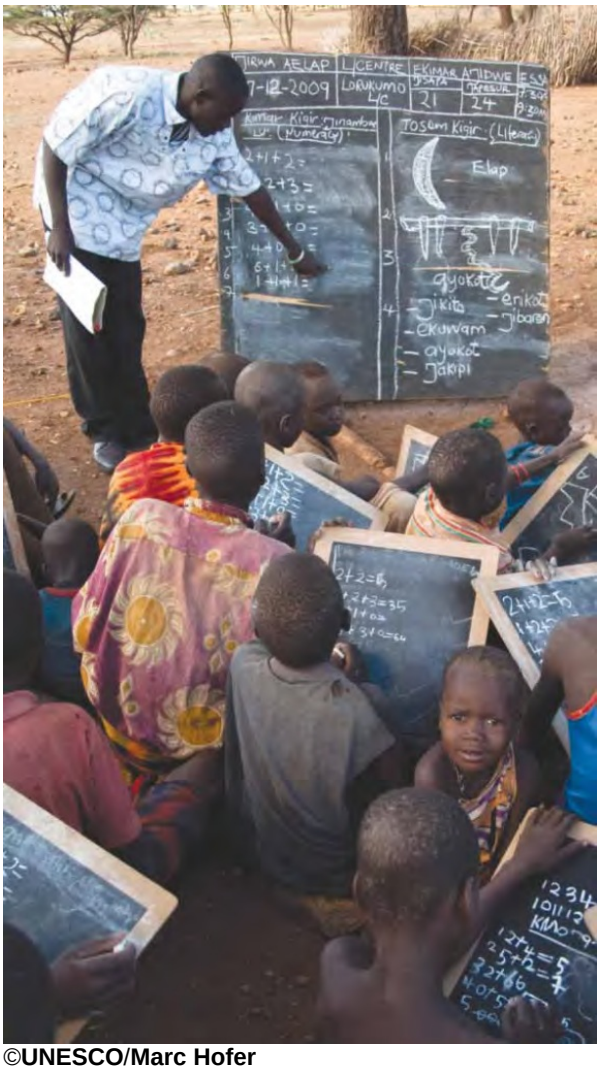

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Flagship Programme 2: Strengthening education systems for sustainable development in Africa: improving equity, quality and relevance

Rationale and background

This programme aims to improve the quality and relevance of education on the African continent by strengthening national capacities to address challenges of teaching and learning; to transform technical vocational education and training (TVET) to make it more relevant to learners and labour market needs; as well as to scale up inclusive gender-responsive quality literacy programmes.

Tracking progress towards the attainment of the EFA goals indicate that the majority of countries in Africa will not achieve the EFA goals by 2015. According to the EFA Global Monitoring Report (GMR) 2013, an estimated 250 million children, the majority of whom are in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), are not able to read, write or count well even after spending at least four years of schooling. This is in addition to the estimated 774 million adults – 64% of whom are women – who lack the most basic reading and writing skills. This implies that there is an education crisis in both formal and non-formal education – a crisis which if left unaddressed will undermine the countries' ability to achieve not only the EFA goals but the overall sustainable development of the countries.

The success of an education system rests largely on the extent to which learning takes place. Teachers are at the heart of this learning. The GMR report 2013/14 asserts that “the quality of education is held back in many of the poorest countries by a lack of teachers which often results in large class sizes in early grades and in the poorest areas.” (p. 222). Of the 1.6 million new teachers required to achieve Universal Primary Education by 2015, over 1.4 million are for Sub-Saharan Africa in addition to the over 2 million teachers that are required to offset attrition.

The issues of qualifications frameworks and capacity building for education personnel have come to the fore as a result of the increasing concerns over the quality of education and the need for qualified and effective school leadership to bring about quality education.

Currently, education on the continent is characterized by myriads of challenges including ineffective policies and inadequate education system planning; limited capacity of education sector managers and specialists; learning outcomes lacking in quality and relevance; limited quantity and quality of the teaching force; weak higher education institutions, including teacher training institutions; and limited capitalization of new information and communications technologies (ICTs) in teaching and learning and management of education systems. In today’s knowledge-based society, learners are expected to acquire relevant knowledge and core skills and competencies as well as attitudes and values for both individual and societal benefits.

Strengthening the capacities of policy makers, education system managers, teachers and teacher training institutions in SSA will enable countries to plan, develop and implement effective policies, plans and programmes to improve quality and relevance of education. For instance, improved capacities of policy makers, system managers and teacher training institutions will facilitate the planning, development and implementation of effective teacher policies and programmes to recruit, train, deploy and effectively manage teachers. The skills sets could be used in both formal and non-formal education contexts. In addition, education system managers, teachers and other stakeholders could develop curricula and programmes that will improve the alignment between what is taught and the needs of learners and their countries. In view of the large population of young people out of school, this applies also to using the capacities to transform Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and to align it with labour market requirements and design and implement inclusive gender-responsive quality literacy programmes.

Supporting countries to strengthen capacities to develop effective policies, including teacher and TVET policies and plans will provide opportunity to address the quality gap and the relevance of education and training to the needs of individuals and society as a whole. Education must be accessible to all, of high quality and relevance and must contribute to changing the way we think and behave in order to achieve a more just, peaceful and sustainable future. In that sense, peace education, global citizenship education and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) must be integral pillars of education systems if sustainable development is to be achieved in all its dimensions, the economic, the social and the environmental.

Why UNESCO?

UNESCO is in a unique position to assist African countries to improve the quality and relevance of education because its mandate covers all dimensions of education in a holistic and interrelated manner. In all its fields of education, UNESCO has developed an expertise that is recognized at all levels of decision-making as well as in civil society at large. The organization has specialized institutes such as the IIEP for sector analyses and educational planning; IBE for curriculum development, IICBA for teacher training and UIL for lifelong learning and UIS for statistics.

These institutes have highly qualified and experienced staffs that have successfully supported countries at global, regional and national levels. Similarly, other departments and sections of UNESCO as well as the International Task Force on Teachers for EFA which secretariat is hosted by UNESCO, have extensive experience around the world and in Africa advising countries on teacher policies and programmes.

In addition, UNESCO has successfully coordinated the implementation of the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD) 2003-2012, the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (2006-2015) , as well as the United Nations Decade for Sustainable Development (2005-2014). Due to its leading role in education globally, the Organization has strong convening power to mobilize its large networks and mobilize resources in support for countries. It also has an important clearing house function - sharing good practices and promoting peer learning and reviews.

This Flagship Programme will build on the successful support UNESCO has provided to countries around the world, especially in Africa. For instance, it can build on teacher diagnostic studies it has been conducting in several countries on the continent with a view to developing effective teacher policies. The number of countries benefitting from this support could be increased with the availability of more resources. The organization can also build on existing structures like the International Task Force on Teachers for EFA and other networks to channel and expand its support to countries.

In the area of curriculum, UNESCO through IBE can build on its experience in strengthening capacities in developing inclusive curriculum frameworks for extended basic education and on the ongoing successful Postgraduate Diploma in Curriculum Design and Development (PGDCDD) to build capacities of curriculum specialists, teacher trainers and assessment specialists. UNESCO's technical support can build on the existing achievements and expand the number of countries benefitting from this support.

In the case of scaling up inclusive gender-responsive quality literacy programmes, the achievements of UIL and the Section for Literacy and NFE of the Education Sector/HQ in Nigeria and elsewhere, will be built on to strengthen capacities of more countries to develop inclusive gender-responsive quality literacy policies, plans and programmes.

The mobilization of partners in TVET by UNESCO (BREDA & Abuja) in collaboration with ECOWAS to create the Inter-Agency Task Team (IATT) for the Revitalization of TVET in the ECOWAS Sub-region could serve as a basis for the expansion of the membership as well as extending it to other Regional Economic Communities (RECs) around the continent. Similarly, ongoing work on the ECOWAS TVET Online Curriculum which is currently for the Anglophone countries could be expanded to include French and Portuguese speaking countries. Continuing work on the Arusha Convention on the recognition of degrees, diplomas and certificates should culminate in the signing and ratification by all Member States of the African Union.

Overall Objective:

Improve the quality and relevance of education

Main actions:

- Provide technical assistance and strengthen national capacities to improve teacher policy formulation, implementation and assessment of teaching needs, with particular focus on policies relating to attracting and retaining those most qualified for the teaching profession and teachers in rural and disadvantaged locations

- Develop capacities of national teacher training institutions to deliver quality training using blended strategies including ICT

- Support the capacity development of head teachers and school principals for effective pedagogical leadership and quality learning outcomes

- Support qualitative policies for teaching and learning environments

- Support the development and harmonization of national and regional qualification frameworks for education personnel

Expected Results:

1. Member States have up to date education sector diagnosis and capacities to develop, implement and monitor strategies and plans in education policies, with particular attention to teachers at all levels, including teaching and learning environments;

2. National and regional qualification frameworks for education personnel developed and effectively implemented;

3. Teacher recruitment, preparation and professional development programmes fully aligned to education and curriculum reforms;

4. National capacities strengthened to develop and implement policies and plans within a lifelong learning framework in Africa;

5. National capacities strengthened to scale up inclusive and gender-responsive quality literacy programmes;

6. Capacities of Member States strengthened to design and implement policies aiming at transforming TVET in Africa; and

7. Member States develop evidence-based higher education policies to address the challenges of equity, quality, inclusion, expansion, mobility and accountability